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The art of advertising

A closer look at how real estate marketers draw in customers, through the lens of the New York by Gehry campaign

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With so many luxury rentals on the market in New York, advertising plays a key role in persuading tenants to pick one building over another. This month, *The Real Deal* dissected an advertisement to find out how marketers of new rental buildings convince potential tenants to click on a website, check out an apartment and (hopefully) sign a lease.

This ad, called “Declare your independence,” is part of the much buzzed-about campaign for New York by Gehry, the 76-story FiDi rental tower at 8 Spruce Street that hit the market in February 2011, and is now almost 80 percent leased.

To rent all 903 units, developer Forest City Ratner enlisted dbox, the London- and New York–based branding firm, and marketing consultant Nancy Packes to craft a campaign that would cast the Frank Gehry–designed tower as a destination address.

While the building is taller than any other residential tower in the city, its most unique selling point is its undulating silver façade. The team also wanted to make sure the campaign felt different from other real estate ads.

“It was really important for us to avoid the cliché of a couple on the terrace with a glass of wine, looking at the beautiful view,” explained dbox associate director Brian Lindvall.

To do that, the team drew inspiration from photographer Julius Shulman’s 1960 shot of a glass-walled Los Angeles bungalow, as well as the film “Lost in Translation,” which evokes “the idea of overlooking a massive city from incredible heights, in total silence,” Lindvall said.

To launch the upper floors of the tower, dbox created two ads. “Declare your independence” first ran in newspapers, websites and magazines over July 4 weekend last year. A second version, still in circulation, has a new tagline —“Take it from the top” — and no fireworks.

Both ads lack the floor plans and full exterior shots common in real estate advertising, but they do highlight the building’s location and view, noted Michel Mein, a partner at Seventh Art, a New York branding firm that focuses on real estate.

“It works,” he said of the campaign. “It absolutely works.”

