

# Raising the bar for real estate in South Africa

 By [Yael Geffen](#)

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Gone are the days when property brokers were mostly stay-at-home moms knocking on doors to sell homes; but despite the industry now being far more sophisticated and bolstered by technology and full-time professionals, its image remains tainted and it has become cluttered with a barrage of tacky messaging.



Yael Geffen, CEO of Lew Geffen Sotheby's International Realty

If industry players want to create the perception that property brokering is a respected trade, this must be reflected in every aspect of the business. Agent and brand advertising on every second dustbin screaming 'pick me, pick me' does not elevate the public's perception of our industry – in fact, it achieves quite the opposite. The same applies to signboards on street posts on every corner which all declare brokers as 'area specialists' because merely popping the term onto a poster does not make it so.

Fighting negative perceptions is vital in an industry that is heavily reliant on reputation and referrals and how we advertise and send our messages is therefore of paramount importance. There are a number of challenges in delivering the correct collective message, not least the sheer size of the industry and the lack of consistency amongst the agents who make up the workforce. Unfortunately, not all property professionals are equal and, while most know their craft inside out, regularly attend courses and are extremely passionate about the industry, there are those who aren't even aware of the latest law changes.

This is exacerbated by the fact that there is also a considerable turnover in the real estate industry as the number of active agents falls and rises with the economy; when times are good, their numbers swell.

The onus also falls to agency owners and principals to institute minimum advertising and marketing standards, not only for the business but for all their listed properties, including using professional photographers and ensuring the copy is engaging and grammatically correct, at the very least.

And when it comes to marketing materials, are folded up photocopied flyers that are stuffed into post boxes really the way we want to be perceived as a brokers? Perhaps as an industry, we just carry on doing things that worked 20 years ago but, as we now have so many more options available to us, we actually have no excuse for poor marketing.

The best way to maintain a positive perception is through consistently high professional standards:

**Don't tolerate average** – always deliver the service that you would expect from a property professional. Identify your weaknesses and strengths and work on the aspects that can elevate your service from mediocre to exceptional. Continually strive to one-up yourself in terms of what you are bringing to the table.

**Always be a true professional** – even when dealing with the most trying clients. And remember that as an industry expert you should always be au fait with the current market trends, fluctuations and legislations.

**Honesty, integrity and transparency are cornerstones** – in every aspect of the business.

**Become a part of the community in which you work** – rather than peppering your neighbourhood with more of the same advertising, invest the money in area community initiatives such as school fundraisers, sports events, dog walks, security etc.

**Stop saying ‘pick me’** – instead show them why they should choose you.



In a recent Gallup poll to assess public opinion about the honesty and ethics of various professions, real estate professionals ranked 13th, just beating lawyers and, whilst by no means the lowest on the scale, this shows that we do have some way to go still to raise the bar.

As Aristotle wisely said, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and every time a property broker delivers poor quality service it reflects on the industry as a whole.

## ABOUT Yael GEFFEN

Yael Geffen is the CEO of Sotheby's International Realty South Africa and a member of the board. Geffen has a BA in Communications and Economics and a Master's Degree in Integrated Marketing and Communications Strategy.

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