

Entrepreneur.

What Entrepreneurs Can Learn From The Couple Who Uses Storytelling Skills to Sell Dream Homes

Their marketing plan is their characters—the story and lifestyle sells itself.

By Lindsay Friedman • June 17, 2016



When creative couple Janus Cercone, a former screenwriter, and Michael Manheim, an ex-producer, decided they'd had enough of the Hollywood-film world, they turned their attention to an unlikely market: real estate.

Opening California real-estate development company, Jaman Properties in 2003, the pair buys forgotten homes — usually in Malibu, Bel Air, Brentwood and Pacific Palisade — and gives them a new life using the biography of a fictional character to lead the way.

Rather than creating for someone else, it's left purely to their own imaginations. "With backgrounds in show business, our strength is storytelling and these homes represent our version of 'set design,'" Cercone says.

This approach — focusing more on the type of person and the life that a specific home is meant for — has buyers flocking to them, typically matching the couple's fictional avatar with an eerie degree of accuracy.

With a reputation for creating exclusive boutique homes from the studs to the furniture, high-end luxury real-estate agents and their high-profile clients are already on the lookout for Jaman's next project.

Below Cercone shares her storytelling vision and offers a few tips entrepreneurs can use to market their own product or service:



1. Own your choices.

The Tigertail Home

Location: Brentwood, California

Selling price: \$10,750,00 in 2008

Their storytelling vision:

"We imagined the buyer for this house would be a large personality—someone who would fill each room with who they are and who they want to be. To accommodate that persona, we designed a two-story high living room", says Cercone.

"We practiced 'the goldfish theory' that you only grow as large as your environment will allow. Most people want to keep evolving and explore new aspects of their lives, so we created a house to encourage that."

"During construction, people told us we were crazy—the house would sell for more if we used the second level of the living room for additional bedrooms. But we knew our imagined buyer needed that volume."

"In walks Conan O'Brien—with his world-class personality—and purchased the home at a record price for the area. He told Michael that, after viewing dozens of other properties, he was thrilled that, 'Finally—there's a house where I don't feel like I'm going to hit my head on the ceiling. It's big enough for me.'"

The take away: If you believe in something, don't let people talk you out of it. Own your choices. Entrepreneur Magazine is about people who are taking the risks themselves. They aren't working for someone else's belief system. If you're taking that risk, you better believe in what you're doing. If you succeed, you succeed because you really believed in yourself. If you fail, you can at least own it. No one thrust it upon you.



3. Maximize your hand.

The Riviera White House

Location: Pacific Palisades

Selling price: \$22,000,000 in 2016.

"The original house was built by Ronald Reagan who lived there with his family till he moved to The White House", says Cercone.

"The first thing we do when we purchase a property is to spend hours just listening to what it has to say. We had an epiphany—envisioning the moment when Reagan was standing on the empty lot—looking at the view that just goes on forever and thinking, 'Wait a minute, there's something bigger out there for me. Something more important that I should be doing.' It was in that house Reagan decided to run for governor and then president.

Using that moment of inspiration, we felt we couldn't build the conservative version of the house, we had to build the optimal version—offering that same kind of motivation to the next family to lived there. A house that would 'reach across the aisle' as Reagan did—and bring people together."

"As such, we wanted to find the best of everything. The range in the kitchen was handmade in Florence for \$80,000 and we created a show garage to highlight a rare car collection. Even that is about bringing people together—featuring a built in beer-bar with a kegerator to make viewing the collection a social event."

The take away: Maximize your hand: If you're playing cards and have a chance to build on kings or fours, you build on the kings.



2. Stick to your narrative.

The Stone Home

Location: Malibu

Selling price: \$9,985,000 in 2014

Their storytelling vision: Cercone explains, "We designed this property for a single occupant—a sexy, young, accomplished woman—seeking a retreat where she could reflect on her successes and imagine her next chapter."

"To fulfill that vision, we actually made the structure smaller so there could be more exterior space. If you go to 'developer university' this breaks every rule in the book. But we knew our character was going to need that outdoor ocean connection."

"Interestingly, there was bidding war between two mature women, one of whom was Diana Ross. In the end, the house sold to a grandmother in her 70's. At first we thought we'd missed our target, but when we got to know her, we realized—we'd hit the bullseye! She's still sexy, uninhibited and utterly childlike in her joy of the beach. It's the same character, just in a different guise."

The take away: Stick to your narrative. The universe will adjust to you.

