

## The Creation of a Real Brand: Real Living Real Estate for Women

### THE MANN REPORT (SOURCE)

In 2001, Kaira Sturdivant Rouda, who was working as a consultant for one of the country's largest residential real estate firms based in Columbus, Ohio, had a goal to create a powerful, passionate brand that would speak to women.

She knew the statistics were telling—that women were (and still are) the key decision-makers in nearly all consumer purchases and represented the fastest-growing segment of homebuyers and 70 percent of the real estate workforce. Yet no one was paying attention to them. She changed all of that by creating the Real Living brand in 2001 and introducing it to consumers the following year.

"When it comes to home buying and selling and all that goes with it—agent selection, neighborhood choice, and home search—it's the woman's call. We built the first women-focused brand in the real estate industry, from the font and logo treatment on up," said Sturdivant Rouda, chief operating officer of Real Living, Inc. The result is marketing that gives women what they want.

In March, Real Living launched a new advertising campaign directed toward women, ages 25-54, and homeowners with a household income of \$75,000. The new campaign features four different consumer types—first-time buyer, growing family buyer, practiced purchaser, and empty nester—and their testimonials, which are based on real life stories Real Living has received.

After Sturdivant Rouda created the Real Living brand, she joined Real Living full time as chief marketing officer responsible for the continued development of the brand, which has received national and industry recognition. In 2005, she was named to her current position and president of Real Living Network Services, adding information technology, agent and customer care centers, franchise sales and services, and human resources among others, to her list of responsibilities.

Real Living is the nation's fourth-largest residential real estate firm nationwide and the largest independently owned firm in the Midwest with nearly 4,000 agents and employees, and more than \$8 billion in annual sales. There are more than 130 offices throughout 10 states and the company is in the process of attracting franchise partners and making acquisitions to expand its national presence.

"Our industry is undergoing tremendous change with much consolidation. We're excited about the response our brand has received nationwide and about the growth potential," Sturdivant Rouda said.

Under Sturdivant Rouda's marketing leadership, Real Living has received numerous awards for its marketing efforts. They include two Telly awards for two different television spots, multiple awards of excellence and distinction from the Communicator Awards, and Standard of Excellence recognition from the WebAwards. Earlier this year, the company's Web site was selected as the Official Honoree of the 10th Annual Webby Awards, ranking in the top 20 percent of all Web site submissions worldwide.

Other national awards include the following: Entrepreneur magazine ranked Real Living 23rd among the Top 50 Best New Franchises in 2005; Inman News also named the company Most Innovative Real Estate Brokerage in 2005.

In the future, marketing efforts will continue to focus on women and technology. "The Internet is an ever-increasing source of information for buyers and sellers, and we're responding," Sturdivant Rouda said. According to industry statistics, more than 80 percent of buyers begin their search online, a number that is expected to grow in the future.

Sturdivant Rouda began her professional career in journalism, moving into public relations and eventually marketing. Before she joined Real Living, she was vice president of marketing for Stanley Steemer International, an Inc. 500 company with more than 230 franchises and 20 company-owned offices in 47 states. In that position, she oversaw the company's national marketing and brand positioning, coordinated more than 20 media co-ops spending more than \$25 million annually in media, and managed the company's annual sales convention.

Community service is also a priority for her. Sturdivant Rouda founded Columbus' first homeless shelter for families in the mid-1980s, Make Room Columbus. She has served on multiple non-profit organizations and has received numerous awards for her service. They include Columbus Board of Realtors Citizen of the Year, Ohio Sertoma Service to Mankind Award, Northwest Rotary's Woman of the Year, and Business First newspaper's 40 under 40. This year, Sturdivant Rouda, and her husband, Harley E. Rouda Jr., are serving as co-chairs of the first-annual Columbus Cattle Baron's Ball, a fund-raiser to support the American Cancer Society's national research programs.