

The New York Times

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2014

Selling Condos With a Tap and a Swipe

By ROBIN FINN

The next incarnation of the offering plan has arrived, and it is paperless. The developers of high-end residential buildings are turning to a smorgasbord of technological innovations to woo and wow potential buyers of condominiums with every bell and whistle except one: the apartments, since they don't yet exist. So developers are finding new ways to simulate them — and stimulate sales.

The sales gallery for the Greenwich Lane, a five-building, five-townhouse, 200-unit residential behemoth taking shape on the site of the former St. Vincent's Hospital in Greenwich Village, is dominated by a technological tool known simply as the Table, which resembles an 84-inch iPad on steroids. Programmed with every ounce of data that went into the development, it is actually a salesman extraordinaire: so convincing was its ability to collate, contrast, and display information — it could juggle four floor plans simultaneously — that it helped sell 100 apartments before the developer, the Rudin family, had even conjured up a single brochure.

“With this technology, we were able to create a customized e-brochure for every client,” said Michael Rudin, a vice president of the Rudin Management Company. “They could flag the building, the floor plans, the views and the finishes they liked the best, and we'd combine it into a custom-tailored presentation and email it to them.” The project, with units from \$2.5 million to more than \$30 million, is 70 percent sold.

At 50 West, a 64-story curved glass tower with 190 units priced from \$1.83 million to more than \$18 million, Time Equities opted for an interactive gallery with a 16-foot-wide screen that provides 180-degree views from every apartment elevation as well as four customizable model interiors, dioramas, floor plans and a scaled building model that illuminates individual units, all operated by touch-screen computers. Drones did much of the view-centric photography.

“The days when people had to buy off a two-dimensional floor plan are past,” said Roberta Axelrod, the director of condo sales and marketing at Time Equities.

At the other end of the spectrum, the sales center for 252 East 57th Street, a 93-unit condominium being developed by the World Wide Group and Rose Associates, says it



Dan Tubb demonstrates how a giant touch screen is used for sales at the Greenwich Lane, a large residential complex rising in Greenwich Village.

offers customers a less technological and more seamless shopping experience. The trick: sophisticated gadgetry that is virtually invisible.

“The goal was to make prospective purchasers feel like they're in a real home where no technology is screaming out at you,” said Julia Hodgson, the project executive for the sponsor.

Rather than giant touch screens or surround-screen immersion, the sales gallery resembles several rooms of a model apartment, and the secret weapon is a wireless coded card system that takes its cues from several disguised boxes in the rooms embedded with data. The technology was customized for the project by Control Group, a company that worked with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to create interactive maps used by riders. “It feels a little like magic,” Ms. Hodgson said. Buyers can sit on a couch and watch multiple versions of a future abode take shape in front of them, controlled by the flip of a coded card.

Here, house hunters can explore a media room, living room, kitchen and bathroom, and use the cards to activate simulations of specific layouts and views for apartments on different floors that are displayed on three large television screens.

“People feel so informed by it that there is a confidence that there will be no surprises,” said Pamela D'Arc of Stribling & Associates, the sales director. The units, expected to be completed by late 2016, range from \$4.5 million to \$40 million for the 65th-floor penthouse. “It translates to people being wowed by an interactive buying experience that leaves nothing to the imagination.”

Nothing but imagining a method of paying for the end-product custom-selected by this army of high-tech helpers. For that, there's usually a low-tech solution: a mortgage.