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This broker struck out on his own to modernize retail leasing in the city

BY NATALIE SACHMECHI



Brandon Singer developed his passion for hustling in college by throwing money-making parties and starting his own laundry business at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

Eventually Singer sold the laundry company to another local business. Between his father's career in real estate and a family friend who worked as a broker, Singer landed a gig after graduation, canvassing properties at brokerage RKF, which is now Newmark.

"I threw parties on the side to support myself," he said. "I'd be out until 4 a.m., go home, shower, sleep for three hours, put my suit on and go to work." Within three years, he was closing up to 20 deals per year.

In 2011 he jumped to Cushman & Wakefield and began working on Joanne Podell's retail brokerage team. After rising through the ranks, he eventually was named an executive director.

What drove him to his current role was his desire to start a new retail brokerage. He started pitching investors on a vision that the industry needed to modernize its marketing and communication.

The idea stuck, and he was able to secure funding to start Mona with co-founder Michael Cody six months into the Covid-19 pandemic. The name, an acronym that stands for “making of a new age,” was inspired by Singer’s belief that retail has entered a renaissance.

During his career, he has represented B8TA, Padel Haus, Warby Parker and other companies.

What’s your secret sauce for getting clients?

I’ll out-hustle anyone, respectfully. I get calls all the time from landlords who are working with other firms and want to try something new. We do things a little differently.

Other brokers put a sign in the window with their contact information, and they sit and wait. Obviously a sign in the window looks great, but in New York so many people walk by, and I thought it was a moment for a landlord to catch their eye. Imagine you see a huge picture of Mona Lisa that says “Text me.”

You can’t text CBRE.

On the tenant side, we invest in brands. If a founder asks me about a location, sometimes I tell them that I’ll use part of my commission to invest in their company. What’s great about it is it shows the founders we have skin in the game.

What was your first big deal?

I was about a year and a half into the business working as a retail broker, but I sold a \$10 million residential penthouse because I was working with a hair salon client. The financial backer of the hair salon loved the building the salon wanted to move to, and she wanted to know about the apartments above the retail space.

I called the developer of the building at 520 W. 19th St., Keith Jacobson, and he said to me that they have a one-bedroom and the penthouse. I called the financial backer and showed her the units.

I sold them the penthouse and realized I have no interest ever in doing residential real estate. Then the developer called me and said he’s firing his agent and asked me to lease the two other retail spaces.

A client is about to walk out the door. What’s your Hail Mary move to keep the deal intact?

It’s similar to dating—if it’s not working it’s probably not going to work. If they walk out the door, it’s probably not a fit. Let them walk out. You don’t want to beg for someone’s business. Why would you do that?

What was your favorite deal?

We were marketing space at 875 Washington St., which is in a watch-heavy area, and I went to the CEO of Breitling. I told him that he should rename the street to Watchington St. A bunch of other watch stores were in the neighborhood, so Breitling was an obvious fit. He signed a 6,000-square-foot lease there in February.

What's a complicated deal you worked on recently?

I'm marketing this Meatpacking District building, owned by Rockfeld, and they had CBRE as their agent. They invited us to pitch them so they could fire CBRE. When I left Cushman, they kept me on as their agent through Mona.

We were negotiating a lease with a high-end brand when I got a text message through our Mona system from the CEO of another luxury brand that was interested in the space.

Note: The luxury brand that took the space is Gucci, which is [public knowledge](#), though Singer was not at liberty to name the tenant.

[Gucci] put an offer in for the space and beat the first offer from the first brand that was already negotiating. Simultaneously, we were planning to lease the second floor of the building to chocolatier Barry Callebaut.

[Gucci] then decided the ground-floor space was too small and wanted to take over the Kiehl's store next door. The landlord said they could only take the space if they also took the second floor, which meant the [Gucci] boutique would comprise the corner, the Kiehl's and the floor above.

We moved the chocolatier to the fifth floor. [Gucci] was looking for a small boutique, then all of a sudden it became 10,000 square feet with three spaces.

One problem with the building was the landlord rented billboard space to Hermès, which [Gucci] didn't like, so we got the billboard, too.