

A New Platform for Development Marketing

An Interview with Susan M. de França,
President and Chief Executive Officer, Douglas Elliman Development Marketing

EDITORS' NOTE Susan de França is President and Chief Executive Officer of Douglas Elliman Development Marketing and a senior member of Prudential Douglas Elliman's management team. Prior to this new position, she presided over \$3 billion worth of sales within The Related Companies' super-luxury condominium portfolio. She has also worked as Executive Vice President of Development and Marketing for Davis & Partners, LLC. and as Managing Director of The Sunshine Group, Ltd. De França began her real estate career at M. J. Raynes Development Corporation.



Susan M. de França

COMPANY BRIEF Prudential Douglas Elliman Real Estate is New York's largest residential brokerage, with over 60 offices in New York City, Long Island, the Hamptons, and Westchester/Putnam; more than 3,800 real estate agents; and a network of national and international affiliates. They are exclusive strategic partners with London-based Knight Frank LLP for residential business in all of their New York markets. The company controls a portfolio of real estate services, including Manhattan's largest residential property manager, Douglas Elliman Property Management, as well as PDE Title and DE Capital Mortgage. Its Douglas Elliman Development Marketing (www.elliman.com) division is distinguished for excellence in real estate development, marketing and sales, and property management, and has represented over \$9 billion in sales.

You have always been focused on bringing in top talent for Prudential Douglas Elliman. What made you feel Susan de França was the right fit?

Dottie Herman, President & CEO, Prudential Douglas Elliman Real Estate: Susan was with Related for more than 10 years and I didn't even think she would consider leaving. I started to get to know her personally outside of work and I asked if she would consider joining us because we had a wonderful opportunity where we were growing locally and internationally. She was the perfect fit to head our Development Marketing division.

Susan had, and continues to have, a wonderful relationship with everyone at Related and is well-respected throughout the real estate and business community. She is a huge asset and we are delighted to have her with us at our firm.

As a veteran leader in residential real estate, what excited you about this opportunity?

de França: Growing up in Manhattan, I always understood that Douglas Elliman stands for the gold seal of approval in residential real estate. I saw the passion that Dottie Herman and Howard Lorber (Chairman, Prudential Douglas Elliman Real Estate) have and their vision for this company as we approached our 100th anniversary. There were parallels to the past 10 years at Related where I had a unique opportunity to join a reputable and solid company and, at the same time, be part of something new and exciting within an established firm. Dottie and Howard have

the largest well-respected brokerage company in New York City, the fourth largest in the country, and this presented an opportunity for me to pursue a different avenue in my career. At Elliman, I'll be working with the brokerage component of our business, which numbers approximately 4,000 agents locally, as well as Knight Frank, our international strategic partners.

I work in collaboration with our top agents and represent a myriad of developers throughout the city. This offers me a new platform to expand my real estate career and allows me to put forth a unique platform for new development marketing that is not conventional development marketing. The platform is that there are several representatives who are experts in a particular project and in the immediate submarket. At Douglas Elliman, we embrace the talent of our agents who are on the street every day, who know the competition, and understand what the buyer really wants, which ties into our Ask Elliman branding campaign.

I had the opportunity at Elliman to come to another established company with a solid platform – a firm that is embracing the next 100 years and growing with a branding campaign, with social media, and with technology. There were a lot of dynamics that made it feel right. And while I rely on empirical data and experience, in the end, I go with my gut.

I hold Related as the single most high profile, well-regarded, and reputable developer, and I take enormous pride in having been a part of that team. I'm not saying goodbye to them, but rather, until later, as this is a small industry. What excites me is that over the past several months since I've been at Douglas Elliman, I've had the opportunity to circle back with agents that work in this office who I worked with at M. J. Raynes more than 20 years ago. I also am collaborating with developers who I worked with in the past and can now work with again.

When you joined the company, how did you engage the team of agents?

Howard and Dottie were incredibly supportive in how they introduced me to the company. I felt I was joining contemporaries who looked at this as an opportunity and felt it was similar to my vision.

I have a hands-on approach and look at new development as part of the whole business; we're a full service real estate company that provides mortgage services, insurance, new development marketing, brokerage, and management.

Our approach parallels Related where a brand comes full circle – it's not just a one-shot deal; it's a more comprehensive and strategic approach. With the new Ask Elliman campaign, we're offering the opportunity for people to engage with the industry leader to seek information – not so we can ask you to buy from us or list with us. We want our clients to understand what is going on in the market, and through those relationships, we'll develop the client base.

Do you foresee the company going into new markets?

Absolutely. Our strategic partnership with Knight Frank International has opened doors for us to see significant growth internationally. We are also extending our expertise into resort marketing by representing the Talisker brand at The Waldorf Astoria in Park City, Utah, a four season mountain resort including The Golden Door Spa. Additionally, we are working on several branded properties in South America and the Caribbean. We are also involved with companies on various levels, whether it's purely on a consultant marketing advice basis or exclusive marketing and sales. Our strategic partnership with Knight Frank International has opened the door for us to see significant growth internationally.

What makes a broker successful today?

With social media, and sites like StreetEasy, Curbed, and Property Shark, if the brokers are not as educated as the consumers, it will be difficult to be successful. Our brokers have to understand what the product is, and most importantly, to listen to the customer. You're not selling to them – you're buying with them; an agent must understand how someone lives. As in many other businesses, ours is referral-based and one grows a business by making people feel important and happy, and by providing a good experience.

Is it tough to find client time in this role?

No, because relationship building with clients is the most important thing I need to do to be successful. I pride myself on having a good reputation relevant to the work I am doing today. ●