

Looking for a second home? Go to Second Life.

Global Condo Center, a Vancouver-based real-estate marketing company, is taking condo shopping into the virtual world to target the "thumb generation."

"It's a new and innovative platform to reach prospective buyers and millions of Second Life residents," said company president Cliff Bowman, 58.

Through an avatar, or online character, potential buyers can view real-world properties around the world -- some with 3-D interactive floor plans.

Avatars can walk through a virtual unit to get a sense of the property's space. They can customize the unit and change flooring or kitchen countertops with a click of a button.

There are currently 40 developments available on the popular online virtual community, which boasts 10 million members.

The presence on Second Life is only one aspect of what Bowman envisions to be a "one stop condo shopping network," a way of bringing residential and recreational developments, wherever they may be in the world, to buyers through a single site.

"The world is an investment opportunity," said Bowman, adding that 77 per cent of buyers begin their search for their next home on the Internet. "But unless you own your private plane, it's not so easy to see these sites."

To bridge this gap, Bowman has created a website -- www.globalcondocenter.com -- that can showcase new developments in 2,200 cities around the world in 17 languages.

He also launched a walk-in retail centre called Urban & Resort Condo Center on Homer Street where developers can lease space to showcase their projects.

The new centre, which replaces an old site on Robson and Homer, has room for 25 projects at a time.

"It's one big open house," said Bowman. "You don't have one salesperson grabbing you by the throat."

The condo centre features sales bays, big LCD monitors and Internet-connected touch-screen TVs that show floor plans, 360-degree views and up-to-date availability charts for properties.

Rates, which include a presence on Second Life, range from \$500 per month for a website listing to \$3,000 for a kiosk and \$6,000 for a micro-sale centre with sales bays.



CREDIT: Gerry Kahrman - The Province

Urban & Resort Condo's Cliff Bowman explains the use of virtual world Second Life to sell real estate.

A second centre is already open in Calgary, with three more set to open in Seattle, Los Angeles and Boston.

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