

## Brand promotes brokers' condo knowledge

BY ALLISON LAMPERT, THE GAZETTE    JANUARY 31, 2013



With condo sales now making up the bulk of her business, real-estate broker Marie-France Vachon said she has evolved by offering clients pointers on everything from condo insurance to the differences between divided and undivided co-ownership.

**Photograph by:** Dario Ayala, The Gazette

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MONTREAL — When real-estate broker Marie-France Vachon sold an occasional condo more than 20 years ago, clients were still counting on her for basic information like descriptions of homes for sale, and the particularities of different neighbourhoods.

But with some of this information now publicly available on the Internet, and condo sales now making up the bulk of her business, Vachon said she has evolved by offering clients pointers on everything from condo insurance to the differences between divided and undivided co-ownership.

“It’s my job to make my clients aware,” said the Via Capitale broker, who works largely in the Plateau and in downtown Montreal. “For me personally, my clients are happy that I continue to take classes, to stay ahead of the curve. For sure I could continue to practise real estate the way I did it years ago, but the industry is changing. Today, clients are ‘over-informed’ because of the Internet.”

Brokers like Vachon — who’ve honed their condo knowledge through a 30-hour professional development course offered through her real-estate board — are being promoted through the new privately-developed Passion Condo brand, which is being unveiled Thursday at the [Salon Habitat](#) home show. The names of Passion Condo property managers, along with real-estate and insurance brokers

who have taken certified courses taught by real-estate attorney Yves Joli-Coeur — through agreements with groups like the Quebec Federation of Real Estate Boards — can now be searched online at the [CondoLégal website](#) run by his law firm, de Grandpré Joli-Coeur.

“We decided to do our own branding,” said the attorney, who specializes in condo law. “We all know that deals involving condos are more complicated than doing a deal for a single-family home. Condos are complicated to manage, to insure and to buy and to sell.”

The launch of Passion Condo comes at a time when Montreal’s real-estate community is already embroiled in a heated debate over whether websites that promote brokers for taking extra classes, or provide ratings of a broker’s services, are creating a two-tier system for Quebec real-estate professionals: one that favours brokers who are willing to be rated and take the courses.

In November 2011, the federation launched the first [real-estate rating site](#) in the country — based on the Quality Service Certification program in the United States — which features brokers who had taken a one-day course promoting good customer service while providing feedback from their clients.

Joli-Coeur said he launched the brand not as a rebuke to brokers’ existing knowledge of condos, but to promote courses that help them do their jobs better. He has seen disciplinary committee decisions where brokers were sanctioned for not correctly measuring a condo’s surface area; balconies, for example, are not included in the size of a condo unit because they are considered part of the building’s common area.

Vachon, who is also listed on the QSC site, says she sees it as a way to promote her own work as opposed to comparing herself to other brokers who haven’t taken these courses.

“For me, it’s another example of added value,” she said. “The way I explain it to clients is that you can rate your doctor, you can rate your lawyer, and in the U.S. you can rate your realtor.”

Such direct comparisons are extremely delicate in Quebec, where the body governing real-estate professionals doesn’t allow the province’s estimated 14,000 brokers to make “subjective claims” like being better or more educated than a competitor.

“A broker can’t say that he or she is better than another broker because that’s too subjective,” said Hélène Morand, chief executive of the Quebec Federation of Real Estate Boards.

While the Formation Condo course — taught either by Joli-Coeur or his colleagues — is accredited by the real-estate watchdog, the Organisme d’autoréglementation du courtage immobilier du Québec, or OACIQ, Passion Condo is not an accredited brand recognized by the federation, Morand said in an interview.

Although the federation started offering Formation Condo six months ago as a form of professional development for its members, Morand said Quebec brokers are already qualified in their basic training to represent clients in the purchase and sale of condos. The OACIQ is currently reviewing its basic real-estate course, which is to become compulsory for all practising brokers taking their exam as of Sept. 1, 2013.

“Brokers in their basic courses are well trained to do condo transactions,” Morand said.

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