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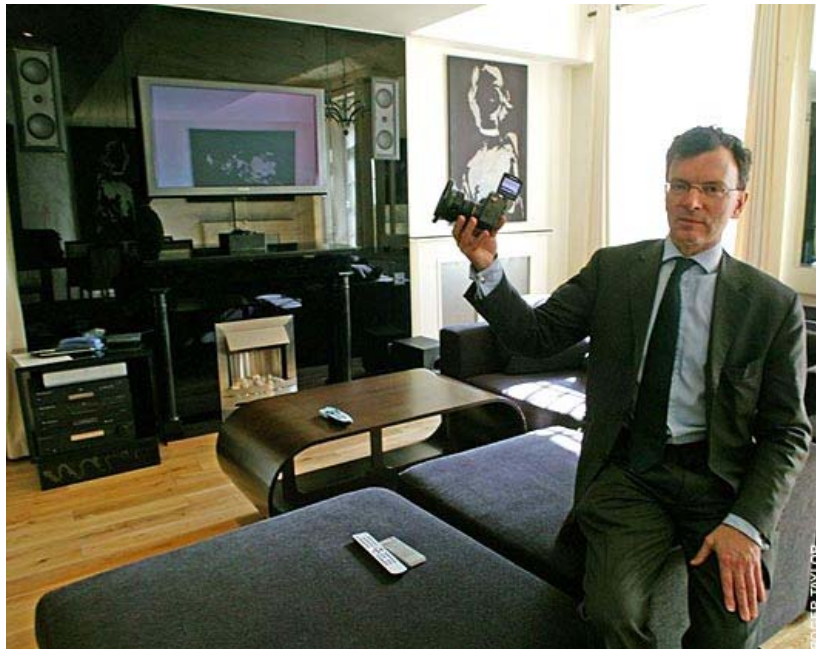
Home movies hit the High Street

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► [Sharp shooting: Ian Shelley's tips on making a property video](#)

Estate agents are increasingly abandoning dry and dowdy particulars in favour of making promotional films of properties for sale. Oliver Bennett reports

The director walks backwards with the camera, zooms on to a chandelier, then slowly tracks into the living room. He frames the fireplace, then pans backwards to the sofa, before ending with a lingering, Bergman-esque shot through the window. "I'm just going to take an establishing shot of the exterior," he says. "Then we'll wrap."



Star treatment: estate agent Ian Shelley

The shoot is in 56 Eaton Place, a maisonette for sale in Belgravia (£3.65million, if you're interested) and this is no lofty auteur but Ian Shelley, director of Brompton Property. Like increasing numbers of estate agents across the country, Mr Shelley has taken to making movies of his instructions for internet browsers. "Once a photograph sufficed," he says. "Then it was 12 images spliced together to make a 'virtual tour'. Now, it has to be video."

Mr Shelley, who uses an ordinary £600 SLR camera with wide-angle lens, is a great advocate. "It's so simple," he says. "I'm almost embarrassed to say how simple it is. It's good, cheap marketing. And it's fun."

I watch him at work, which is instructive. "There's a big temptation to swing the camera from side to side," he says. "Don't. Instead, move slowly forward into the room. Focus on something – flowers in the fireplace, say – then move away. I usually finish at the window, as I've noticed that's where viewers often end up."

When Mr Shelley finishes, he edits the film on an office PC, then puts on a backing track: in this case, Shostakovich's Andante ("slow and elegant, copyrightfree, and a lot of the buyers are Russian"). Et voila... A classy, little film then sits on the website to lure buyers.

advertisement Video-hosting company Mydeo reported a steep rise in property postings last year and internet home-selling site Skip the Middle Man even has on its staff a "camera operator".



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Indeed, the property market is in the process of joining the podcast, YouTube generation. Extate, launched in January, is a new search service designed to facilitate property viewings. "We're calling it the YouTube of real estate," says Extate's Douglas de Jager. "Videos can be uploaded by estate agents or owners on to a PC or a mobile." Soon, he says, home vendors will routinely make their own videos, and the old shoeleather agent will be on the back foot.

Great stuff, but anyone who has suffered a home movie might not take this news with unalloyed joy. "When people do it themselves, it invariably ends up as 'wobble-cam'," says Jonathan Booth, of the Internet Video Company, which started making broadcast-quality videos for the property market three years ago. "Internet video is going to be the main way that property is sold in the next five years, but hardly anybody does it properly. We make films that look like television." With scripts and plummy voiceovers, Mr Booth's videos are certainly polished: one, for an agency on the Isle of Wight, includes local attractions while another, for Swindon's Paramount Building, has "escorted tours" where an agent points out balconies and worktops over a jazzy soundtrack.

Rupert Price, of Paramount Apartments, is happy with his investment. "These videos tell you more than a brochure could," he says.

Still, not everyone is convinced. "We tried video some time ago," says Charlie Ellingworth, of home-finding agency Property Vision. "The internet does make it easier, but there's still a psychological resistance to video, which you don't get with still cameras. My conclusion was that a house is a static thing, and a movie is moving. They don't go together. Viewers get bored." Plus, property has no pedigree of being sold via television in Britain.

Mr Shelley disagrees, and has seen it work for himself. "I've actually had one person offering from the video alone," he says. "I'm not saying it's the be-all and end-all, but it's useful, particularly for people who can't view immediately, such as our international clients." And with that, Mr Shelley leaves Eaton Place, with the air of someone briefly touched by the muse. "It's about as creative as an estate agent can get," he says. "Put it this way: I try not to delegate it."

Sharp shooting: Ian Shelley's tips on making a property video

- Don't swing the camera from side to side – it makes the viewer seasick. And never do a 360-degree turn. Moving backwards and forwards slowly is easier on the eye.
- Start with a focus point – such as a bunch of flowers; then move on to the more general features.
- Match the music to the property. Brompton Property sold a property in Carnaby Street with a 1960s soundtrack.
- Use external context if it will help. Estate agent Ian Shelley sold a property in Ebury Street by including nearby boutiques in the video. "And if there's a garden square, film it."
- Property videos should be easy to watch and brief: two or three minutes at most. Get a program (Mr Shelley uses Pinnacle Systems) and make sure to edit your work.
- Take care in bathrooms – you might film yourself in the mirror. "Most difficult part of the house," admits Mr Shelley. "Make sure you film well under the mirror line."
- Put an opening title on the video so people know what they're looking at.
- Contact: www.brompton-property.com; www.extate.co.uk; www.theinternetvideocompany.com; www.paramount-apartments.co.uk

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