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Brokers urged to take giving to next level

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George Bernard Shaw said progress depends on the unreasonable man. By that standard, real estate broker Michael Pink is about as unreasonable as they come.

Pink has done the grunt work on an organization that's his brain child. It's cost him time away from his occupation. It's also cost him hard cash -- he estimates spending about \$150,000 since 2007 to bring about his philanthropic dream.

He wants to tap into the greatest manmade power on earth, the desire to make a buck, and wed it to support for worthy charities. Pink has built a nonprofit organization, Investing in Communities, endowed it with a small staff and a website and secured support from about 100 charities.

And that's been the easy part for Pink, who helps office users lease space as the owner of MAP Real Estate Inc. Now, for his idea to work, he needs other brokers of any specialty, be it commercial or residential, to pay their cash to solicit business through his nonprofit. He has just starting marketing the website, iiconline.org, to brokers.

Here's his proposition: For \$150 a year, brokers can list their services with the website. For any business they get, the brokers agree to funnel at least 10 percent of their commissions to a charity that Investing in Communities has certified.

The plan is to have brokers advertise their social conscience through his organization's web site. Customers, whether they are companies seeking office space or people looking for a home, could check the site for brokers they want to do business with. The listing fee Pink proposes to charge is far less than the commission on a single deal.

As for the promise to donate at least 10 percent of the commission, Pink describes the appeal this way: "Would the broker rather keep 90 percent of the commission, or get nothing when the deal goes to somebody else?"

Pink has registered Investing in Communities as a nonprofit and promised transparency in its operations. It is separate from his own company, although MAP Real Estate offers an example of the idea in practice. Pink said that since 1995, he's donated about \$320,000 to charities from his own commissions.

To say he has high hopes for the concept is to sell him short. "We will come to change the way the real estate business is conducted so that broker transactions are increasingly events of philanthropy," he said. His goal is to build the idea in Chicago, then bring it to other cities through the website.

IIC at some point has to be self-supporting, and the broker listing fee won't cover costs. Pink proposes that the group would keep a small fee from each donated commission.

The charities that are his partners fall within six broad categories: arts and culture; education; environment; health; social justice and women and families. Bethel New Life, Music of the Baroque and Women Employed are among the groups that have signed on, agreeing to promote the affiliation to their own corporate donors.

But now it's time for the brokers to join in, spending a paltry sum to promote and differentiate themselves from the competition. Pink has talked to a lot of brokers, and while he reports strong interest, many want to wait to see who will jump in first.

A season that reminds us of our blessings is an excellent time for the industry to rally around Pink's project. He's a man on a mission and, with a little help, it could become a crusade for the benefit of charities throughout Chicago and the suburbs.

DOING THE DEALS: Financial services firm International Assets Holdings Corp. doubled its space in the 230 S. La Salle building to 30,000 square feet, with Jones Lang LaSalle Inc. negotiating on its behalf. J.F. McKinney & Associates represented the landlord. . . . The Midwest Division of Ryan Cos. US Inc. has leased about 20,000 in a building it erected at 111 Shuman Blvd. in Naperville. The rest of the 85,000-square-foot building is used by Delta Dental of Illinois. Ryan is moving from a building next door. . . . Calling its work evidence of a revival in retailers' prospects, Lemont-based Englewood Construction said it completed exterior renovations of Sears stores at 1601 N. Harlem and at 239 Golf Mill Center Road, Niles. . . . Inland Real Estate Corp. said Discovery Clothing leased nearly 15,000 square feet at its Rivertree Court shopping center, 701 N. Milwaukee in Vernon Hills. . . . Best Transportation Services leased nearly 17,000 square feet at 1020 Davey Rd., Woodridge, with Lee & Associates of Illinois LLC and Darwin Realty handling the deal.

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