



Talking to Brando's ghost

Facing the demons of failure in today's property market.

I awoke suddenly last night. It wasn't my dog baying at the full moon. Nor was it one of those bandit mosquito's which sound like a revved-up miniature lawn mower dive bombing Pearl Harbor.

It was the voice of the actor Marlon Brando with the anguished cry from the movie 'On the Waterfront' - "I could have been a contender." As some readers will already know, Brando is long dead. For the rest of you: You really do need to get out more.

The sweaty melodrama playing out in my head went on.... "I could've been somebody... instead of a bum which is what I am, let's face it."

Real estate and Marlon Brando's character have a lot of common.

A mythical happy place or never never land, where good ideas roll off the top of developers heads into the toaster oven of marketing, then straight into the honey money pot.

This is no Hundred Acre Wood, though, and there are no Winnie the Pooh bears

here, only high impact property pitches and an endless deal trail.

So what of the ideas, products and properties that fail to live up to their early promise? After the launch and all the hype, what's left over for the scavengers to pick?

Illogical or emotional buying is the answer, and it's no new trend. Look at any consumer product - they wait until they see the whites of their eyes, then go in for the kill. Dealmakers love to create buyer tension - to up the stakes like a high end poker game.

It also thrusts bystanders into the game, off the sideline where they can either experience the thrill of victory or the agony of defeat.

There are no alternatives to the two scenarios. Only remorse, like spilled milk and self loathing for not buying or from actually buying and ending up with a wacked out lemon. Though for the fewer lucky ones there is jubilation and success.

My frightful sleep is interrupted by

Brando whispering in my ear again: "I'm gonna make him an offer he can't refuse". Ah.. the Godfather, how appropriate, Don Vito Corleone would have been massive in this game. As we know the sequel got better, which is sadly not often the case.

Property remains in a frightful state these days as all the rules have been thrown out the window. Kurtz stayed up the river in 'Apocalypse Now' and Brando, as the Coronel says: "I've seen horrors. Horrors that you've seen."

We've all seen the far from sublime subprime and the bottomless pit of the global financial crisis. Currency devaluations and property values have gone deeper underwater then the hole that goes through the center of the earth and comes up somewhere in China.

Covered in sweat, tears building up my eyes, the nightmare won't go away. I croak out..."What would Brando do, buy, sell or head up that river?"

Rewriting the rules is like rewriting a script in the middle of a bad movie. There is the chance to improve or there is just plain stupidity. The latter is similar to a deer caught in the headlights. Impending doom, yet a fatal attraction as the lights grow nearer, and nearer.

Then comes that final moment. What went wrong? If I have to ask that by this point in the article we are all headed up that river to see Kurtz. It's pretty simple, you never did anything, you just stood there, motionless and devoid of any decision other than the speeding sound of a fast car bearing straight down on you until it was too late.

We all have an innate inner voice of survival crying out to flex those muscles, lift one leg at a time and get going- be it forward, backward or sideways. Property in today's market is a journey without maps, but it retains a rich luster and a promise that for all the failures there are still successes. It's those very successes which tame the savage beast and keep the dogs at bay.

Dawn breaks and the alarm bell is ringing in my head, but a fading Brando comes to me one last time... taunting and mesmerising "I have seen the devil in my microscope, and I have chained him."



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