



It was with some trepidation and mounting anticipation, having read one of the large newspaper advertisements entitled “The Inside Secrets of Real Estate Free Consumer Seminar” to be conducted by (self titled) Real Estate Educator and Consumer Advocate Neil Jenman, that I attended the Bessen Theatre for the opening of the Victorian leg of his 40 performance “Don’t Sign Anything” tour.

The brief

The audience were given a brief background, where Neil “opened his own agency in 1984” and was “so successful” that many agents implored him to teach them his secrets. So his “teaching” career began. In 1992, he had “no time to run his own agency” and, after hiring a hall, to enlighten so many Sydney agents, he commenced his career as a “Real Estate Educator”. Neil then began to gain the audience’s attention by issuing challenging statements: “In 1994 I stated that 50 percent of all real estate agents were crooks” (and, soon after he said “50 percent of those remaining weren’t”). I sat bolt upright and wondered if he would be so kind as to name them? He further stated, within two or three breaths, as the audience warmed to the provocative remarks, that “90% of real estate agents were either dishonest or incompetent”. And, “this evening we were going to be shown all the tricks and inside secrets of real estate by somebody who really knew!”

Neil by this stage was warming to the attention of the crowd, who appeared enraptured. His practiced body language, very carefully chosen phraseology, and rehearsed sincerity were beginning to resemble the slightly effeminate gestures that I have seen from film clips of the late Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, combined with the religious stance so common to the southern American evangelists; was beginning to shape up to an entertaining evening, even if it not very factual or informative this far!

Neil continued by saying that as a consumer advocate he was keen to see all receive a fair go, by exposing the fact that the real estate industry was “rotten inside and out”. He was keen to see change and that all people should receive adequate consumer protection.

He canvassed listing techniques and mentioned that some agents actually go through death notices seeking new listings, indeed and that the Real Estate Institutes encourage this in their training courses. As Neil covered such other dastardly deeds as “conditioning”, “kicks backs” (or rebates from advertising) so called “Insider Trading” etc he constantly brought the theme back to “Don’t Sign Anything” until you receive a written guarantee. He showed in a well-practiced manner, alarming quotes (via slides) attributed to other so called “Real Estate Educators” from books and publications that were available he said, from the Real Estate Institutes. Neil claimed the books were used to train Real Estate Agents.

He then invited the audience to conclude that Real Estate Institutes, particularly the Victorian Institute were not protectors of consumers buying or selling real estate, (are they supposed to be?) and were in fact hiding some dark secrets and going to extreme lengths to protect the industry as practiced within this state. Neil neglected to emphasize the fact that the Department of Consumer Affairs (particularly E.A.R.S.) and all of the other relevant State and Federal consumer legislation, especially the Fair Trading Acts were in place to protect consumers. Neil’s further “evidence” encouraged those in the hall to believe that Government and Real Estate Institutes were in a form of conspiracy, to line the pockets of real estate agents. He, as a dedicated consumer crusader would “not rest” until all of the guarantees set out in the “Don’t Sign Anything Guarantee” that he constantly referred to and used by the Jenman System Agents be written into law, ignoring the fact that they already were in the Sale of Land Act, Transfer of Land Act, Estate Agents Act etc. (Neil also doesn’t explain how one would enforce one of his guarantees without the use of existing legislation except by saying “I would back the Guarantee with my house” – substantial indeed as I am lead to believe Neil resides in a multi-million dollar penthouse in the city of Melbourne and a waterfront or near waterfront property in the affluent Eastern suburbs of Sydney.) The audience was really lapping up Neil’s performance and skilful delivery of Neil selling Neil.

Neil had numerous horror stories to illustrate his allegations right throughout. Just as the good evangelists of the deep south of America do, all of these horror stories centred upon disadvantaged, aged or physically ill people who had made the mistake of auctioning their properties or signing bidding agreements with estate agents, without the benefit of the Jenman System, “Don’t Sign Anything Guarantee” and just how much they had lost.

Neil then, through some very questionable logic and rubbery figures went onto “prove” that if you opened your property for inspections you in fact devalued the property considerably! I’m afraid that at this point my powers of logic were somewhat stretched to keep up with his reasoning and conclusions.

He further offered “irrefutable evidence” from, according to Neil, a member of the Victorian Police Force, that opening your house for inspection virtually guaranteed that your property would be burgled and put the fear of God into those attending that this would happen. Neil did not fail to mention the “Jenman System Agents” do not do that. He attacked remorselessly the rebate system, ignoring the fact the REIV authority plainly highlights the ability of a vendor to opt out of the system as well as attacking several other aspects of the Auction method of sale, inviting conclusions that should you auction your property (and fail to use the Jenman “Smart Sale System”) that you will never receive top price for it! Again, my powers of logic were somewhat stretched as was my first hand experience as an auctioneer of over twenty years. It was at this point that I realized the show that I was attending was actually live comedy and a good evening out with some very, very poor logic indeed. Amusing to say the least for an experienced real estate practitioner.

Despite publishing claims “this is a non profit consumer seminar”, I began to wonder, as one does watching the southern evangelists at work, “what’s in it for Neil?” But I had only a little longer to wait. Just before the closing of Act 1, given the crowd of 850-900, Neil without losing breath, asked “all of those who were considering selling in the next 12 months please raise your hand”. Then very quickly followed this request up with “all of those who were considering buying to please do likewise”. A quick count by this agent revealed that 300 of the 900 in attendance were thinking of conducting real estate transactions in the immediate future. Given that all in attendance were fully registered with the Jenman organisation I began to realise that I was witnessing not only an excellent evenings entertainment but also quite possibly the greatest mass listing presentation I had ever seen. I could only wonder at the economies of scale at getting at least two years business done in just two hours.

Schmaltz

The second part of the evening commenced after a ten-minute interval. A quick scanning of the crowd enthused by Neil certainly brought on the schmaltz from this point on. Realising that he had three hundred people in attendance who could possibly be of some financial benefit to him and the three hundred and nine agents within his system (nationally) most especially the local agents who use and subscribe to the Jenman System, Neil ploughed on selling Neil, and what a good and honest man he was. His passion that all real estate systems should be as clean, honest and open as the agents who practiced and financially supported the “Jenman System” knew no bounds. He went on to promote his “Smart Sale System” and I cannot understand why, in my thirty-two years as a licensed real estate agent, I did not stumble on such a system that works so well (according to Neil)! Particularly when it is not put to a competitive test and does not offer an alternative method of sale.

More horror stories of real estate “victims and villains” were told by the prophet, and then good news followed. Neil told us about the “banning” of the promotion of his book “The Eighteen Great Mistakes in Real Estate” (a copy of which appeared later in my show bag) by newspapers, who obviously were in league with the traditional agents?

He then referred to the press publishing ads for sex workers but not his tell all book, and then reminded us of the sanctity of marriage, Neil went down on his knees and informed us all that “we were happiest in 1957” a fact that I wasn’t aware of until being informed by Neil. (I immediately had flash backs of my tenth year and my Mother wearing a floral apron over her frock in the laminex kitchen and the family FJ being parked in the driveway and didn’t realise I was so happy). He slammed consumerism, he slammed people who pursued happiness through wealth generation (hard to reconcile with Neil’s two multi million dollar domiciles) and generally set himself out as a “consumer crusader” who to me would have been more at home with the Fonz and Patsy on the “Happy Days” set.

Neil continued to say (glossing over his pecuniary interests) that the local agents “paid him” to put on these performances. (And no doubt paid Neil handsomely for the show and the contents of the “free” show bags).

A few questions and a little research by me since, having heard such comments by Neil as “if you don’t pay your advertising account agents will put a mortgage on your house” and, that “you could all go out next Saturday and destroy the Victorian auction system by bidding and then refusing to sign”, lead me to rapidly form the conclusion that Mr Jenman, who describes himself as a Real Estate Educator, had never in fact completed the full licensing course or held a Real Estate Licence in any State and therefore I found it difficult to believe that he had opened his own office.

Further, I estimate that of the claimed 309 agents who subscribe to Neil’s “Jenman System” and are members of the “Winners Circle” (or inner circle) or, are “Leaders” etc, and who pay approximately \$25,000 for initiation into the Jenman System (which I have had the privilege of reading in just three full hours as it requires little more); who pay subscription fees each month, who receive subscription material from Rowley Publications (which co-incidentally appears to have common directorships and address as the Jenman Group) and who aspire to be “Jenman Approved” and follow slavishly the dictates of Neil’s system (which does not offer a choice in the method of sale) and, is virtually completely anti auction, probably contribute what I estimate at least millions of dollars to the “Jenman Institute” or “System” (or Cult?) by way of seminars, further education, compulsory sales staff seminars, books, tapes, registration fees, etc per week! (One can only wonder whether the Jenman Organisation receives “Kickbacks” from group travel, group bookings at resort hotels for conventions).

Neil brings the show to a close by borrowing a little from Dame Edna and asking the eldest lady in the audience to identify herself (and her age) and hands here a sheath of flowers followed by the “show bags” which contain a “Don’t Sign Anything” hat “the Guarantee” “Don’t Sign Anything” stickers, and the lauded amongst other Jenman promo material.

“I began to wonder, as one does watching the southern evangelists at work, what’s in it for Neil?”

At the end of the performance whilst, the security guards gather at the front of the hall to assist Neil in not taking questions from the audience, as we leave the theatre to the southern American spiritual “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot”, I could not help but notice that my arthritis had improved, I anticipated piles of crutches and wheel chairs abandoned by the converted.

All in all, it was a very rewarding show. I recommend attendance by all educated and competent agents who will learn that caveats are in fact mortgages according to Neil. Agents will get a giggle and will see Neil who is a skilled actor and a very skilled speaker going from, attempting to “fool some of the people, some of the time”, to attempting to “fool all the people all of the time”. His motivation quite obviously is profit and he fails to convince otherwise. Neil makes his money from the Australian public, for despite his claim that he “loves the real estate industry” I think he leaves out the words he “loves to profit from the real estate industry” and to achieve this he must remain very prominent in the media, denigrating the industry and taking a contrary position on many matters, to ensure that agents who attempt to give their business a competitive “point of difference”, continue to subscribe to his theories and practices by becoming a member of the “Jenman System” and aspiring to be “Jenman Approved” and pay dearly for doing so. (to Neil).

The “Don’t Sign Anything” tour then continues on to such up market venues as South Morang, Hoppers Crossing and Cranbourne where any experienced agent with an open mind would be hard pressed to find more than a hand full of properties that possess enough individual qualities to warrant auctioning. Therefore, I say it is easy to preach to the converted and I could not help but wondering when looking around at the crowd during the performance, was Mr Jenman preaching to a flock or a herd!