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Real deal behind Mr. Hot Property



tion of the campaign."

to be provocative in the least.

No, of course, I say. Your ads aren't meant

But what about those sultry photos of

Chaz staring down the camera? It's hard to

win a G-rating with randy taglines like "Ex-

button. And yet the 42-year-old real estate

slickster I'd always imagined—insists he is

al estate agent, you look at their business

shot. ... So I decided to have an editorial

shot and be dressed casually and cool and

"Hot Property" billboards popped up on

I was in high school when one of the first

make my little statement."

That he did.

card, and it's a nice professional IBM-type

"Everybody and their brother who is a re-

pose Yourself" or that unbuttoned third

entrepreneur—who is hardly the cheesy

all about attracting clients, not dates.

Chicago billboard king Chaz Walters, Mr. Hot Property himself, taps his pen restlessly on the conference room table. "If you want to

make something dirty out of it, you can, that's your prerogative," he says in a squeaky voice, "but that's not the inten-

The photo's GQ styling threw me off, so at first I didn't realize he was selling real estate. Are you kidding? Who is that guy? All my friends wondered the same thing.

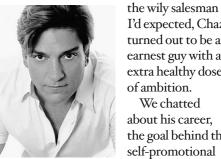
Those were the salad days for Chaz, who was new to the real estate biz and still needed to wait tables to support himself. The billboards? Out of his price range, but he sprang for it, and the vendor agreed to rotate the ad's location monthly. Often the company didn't have another ad to paste over Chaz's mug, and suddenly the Hot Property man seemed to be everywhere.

Then something odd happened. The campaign was eye-catching, sure, but it also generated a strange, unintended buzz among people with no need for a real estate agent and no interest in meeting one.

Now, after 10 years of billboards plastered all over town, Chaz is a bona fide fixture of Chicago pop culture. People throw his name around in conversation, as in "Dude, I'm hotter property than Chaz Walters." A local band titled a song after him-"Hot Property (Chaz Walters 3)." And the Lincoln Park Trixie Society, a spoof Web site, named him as the model dinner party guest. (See lptrixie.com/lifestyles, one of the last live pages on the group's facetious Web site.)

Property logo on a building in my neighborhood and pulled to a stop. Are you kidding? That guy is still at it. Really, what's his deal? On the day of our interview he looked

the part: Tan, dressed in black head-to-toe with gelled, spiky hair, Chaz crossed his legs and leaned back in his chair. But instead of



I'd expected, Chaz turned out to be an earnest guy with an extra healthy dose of ambition. We chatted about his career, the goal behind the

campaign, blah,

here's what I really

blah, blah. But

Chaz gets razzed for his glamor shots.

wanted to know: Does he realize how he's perceived? That Mr. Hot Property has taken on a life of its own?

Not really. If Chaz has built himself into a Chicago caricature, he claims not to see it. He's genuinely tickled that strangers recognize him on the street or in restaurants.

Most likely, he's pretending not to notice the ridicule.

How else to survive it? People, especially other real estate agents, razz him about the campaign, Chaz says, but look where he is now-a top real estate agent with his own company who gets invited all over town and generates millions of dollars in sales.

"What did I have to lose?" he told me. "I had everything to gain." asneumer@tribune.com

Recently I noticed the familiar Hot



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