



Retail Executive of the Month: Kirsch, REFM's founder/president - A start in N.Y.C. real estate sparked a journey to create smarter software

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Bruce Kirsch is the founder and president of Real Estate Financial Modeling (REFM). While pursuing his MBA at Wharton, Kirsch got a taste for the world of New York City high-rise real estate, where his passion for making financial modeling more accessible began. Ten years and many spreadsheets later, Kirsch's company has an office in Midtown South and is set to launch a new web-based tool that he says will make property analysis easier than ever.

Q: How did you start your career in real estate?

A: One month before enrolling in the MBA program at Wharton, I came to the stark realization that I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life professionally. This was a major problem! So I sat in my shoebox studio apartment in Philadelphia and started making lists of all of the things that I would be qualified to do two years from then.

Partly through a process of elimination and partly through luck, I eventually landed on real estate. Having grown up just outside of New York City, I reconnected with my childhood awe of gleaming Manhattan skyscrapers and got excited about now being able to understand them from a financial perspective.

My MBA at Wharton entailed me spending a lot of "quality time" in Microsoft Excel. I was initially petrified at the thought of performing even basic real estate financial analyses, but many spreadsheet-filled all-nighters later I began to get the hang of it.

I took my newly acquired skills to my first real estate job - a summer internship marketing high-rise New York City office buildings for re-development for CB Richard Ellis. I felt like I had hit the jackpot as my very first job in real estate was with Darcy Stacom and her team. In the short period of one summer I learned a tremendous amount and at one point even considered dropping out of business school to stay in the job.

Over the next several years working in real estate I gained as much practical and technical knowledge as I could about Excel - but always came back to the same thought - there has got to be an easier way to learn this stuff and perform financial analyses that yielded insights more quickly.

My desire to equip real estate professionals with the best training and tools to help save them time and frustration and give them clarity in their analyses was all the excuse I needed to launch REFM, which I did in 2009.

Q: What impact has REFM made in the real estate world?

A: REFM's training, services and products are leveraged by companies and professionals in New York, across North America and around the world, including some of the most well-known names in the real estate business.

Overall, REFM has helped teams get smart and principals get transactions done with more

confidence and speed of execution on the financial modeling front.

Q: What has been your most exciting real estate financial modeling project to date?

A: The Wharf - a major mixed-use project on the southwest waterfront in Washington, D.C. for a PN Hoffman and Madison Marquette joint venture. We constructed a clear analysis for them to raise hundreds of millions of dollars in a combination of debt and equity. There were over a dozen major cash flow streams to model - it wasn't for the faint of heart.

Q: This year at ICSC you are launching Valuate - what you say is the ultimate cash flow projection companion - what should our readers know about it?

A: Valuate offers a new and exciting approach towards real estate financial projections. Right now, most industry professionals use Excel files or software suites with expensive licenses. During my training sessions, real estate industry professionals often express frustration regarding using these tools, which are tedious and confusing. In addition, collaboration and file version control with these solutions is really difficult.

Valuate is a web-based platform designed to allow real-time, online collaboration for investment sales brokers, asset managers, and owners to execute and share real estate analyses, simplify their workflows, lower costs and increase productivity. It's going to change the way we think about this whole process and make us wonder how we ever got work done without it. We recommend your readers sign up for more information at valuate-it.com and visit us at ICSC Recon on May 19-21 in Las Vegas at Marketplace Mall, at Booth 628!

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