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Who the F*** Is Jay Luchs? How One Man Became L.A.'s Biggest Player in Commercial Real Estate

Nicole Behnam · June 4, 2018



Jay Luchs in his West Hollywood home. Photo by Dara Danenberg

The signs are everywhere. More specifically, his signs.

His name can be found on so many buildings in Los Angeles that it perplexes people. In fact, many aren't quite sure if [Jay Luchs](#) is a company or a person. In the commercial real estate world, his name is iconic, leaving agents and brokers alike wondering how one man has the time to acquire so many listings in a city that covers a total area of 503 square miles.



If you frequent Malibu, Brentwood, Beverly Hills, West Hollywood, or Downtown L.A., you've probably seen him around in jeans and a T-shirt—you just don't know it.

Introducing Jay Luchs, the most successful, and arguably the most mysterious commercial real estate broker in Los Angeles.

But let's get into it, because we know you've been wondering:

WHO THE F*** IS JAY LUCHS?!

When he met us at the Brentwood Country Mart, Luchs had already shown properties to clients in Malibu and Downtown earlier that day, and was on his way to WeHo next.

Luchs, who says his days are "beyond insane," wants to get married someday and admits to having a sensitive side, but right now, he just doesn't have the time. "I don't want to be a bad dad," he says.

"I joke about my maturity level," he tells *Beyond The Interview*. "I'm 46, but I wear clothes like I'm 25," says the broker, who also watches high-speed car chases during his leisure time.

LUCHS' PHONE RINGS EVERY SEVEN MINUTES, ON AVERAGE.

He picks up almost every time, and ensures that he will call back "in five minutes." It usually takes a little longer than that, but being Jay Luchs, there's a tacit understanding that there will be a wait.

"When I start seeing missed emails, that's scary to me," he says. "They could be important. I want to answer every email and call throughout the day, so I make a list of the things that clients say, and I get them done." He also corresponds daily with a five person team.

"I don't ever take anything for granted, I really truly live slightly in paranoia," he says.

“I DON’T THINK THIS IS FOREVER. I DON’T SIT AROUND THINKING THAT I MADE IT. ALL I CAN THINK ABOUT IS ALL THE CALLS I HAVE TO RETURN AND GETTING THIS DEAL SIGNED FOR EVERYBODY.”

Luchs, who now serves as vice chairman at [Newmark Knight Frank](#), says most of his clients become like his kids or his best friends, and he feels like he can’t let them down.

“If you’re too busy for someone, you’re letting them down. They have a business to run. You’re hoarding deals and you have to get everything down. And then you gotta just move on to the next deal.”

While it may seem like his wild success was achieved overnight, Luchs discloses that it has actually taken many years, and that real estate was not his first career choice. “I moved to L.A. to be in entertainment. I didn’t know what I was gonna do,” says the Maryland native, who graduated from the University of Virginia.

“I’m also not good at taking vacations,” he says. “I’m not that guy, but I love L.A. It’s my vacation. I’m okay with not going to Europe and these places. 23 years later, I still feel like I’m really lucky to live here.”

Upon touchdown in L.A., Luchs wanted to be on the TV-business side of entertainment. “I wanted to be on the programming side,” he says. “I thought it would be cool to run a network or run a station. Back then it was 1995, and the Internet wasn’t what it is. It was just TV, Radio, and Film.”

TODAY? IT’S JUST PROPERTIES, FOR LEASE, AND SOLD.

Luchs has secured deals with the likes of Louis Vuitton Moet Hennessy, Eataly, Gucci, Blue Bottle Coffee, Intelligentsia, McConnell’s Fine Ice Creams, Mr. Brainwash, and James Perse, who Luchs says has developed into one of the most dynamic and interesting brands because Perse “doesn’t like to go into every mall, and he likes to go into cool, off-locations instead of cookie-cutter spaces.”

Recently, Perse and Luchs flew to Seattle to look around for store locations. While there, he learned more in four hours than he ever thought he would.

Luchs, who works with brokers nationally and loves learning about the different markets, says there’s really no limit to where he is willing to take his clients. “I like to take tenants to the best location they could be in,” he says. “Simply put, it’s where are they going to make the most money and be the happiest.”

As he quietly expands into San Francisco, Georgetown, and Miami, he’s also growing in New York, where he holds his license.

One of Luchs’s trademark skills is predicting which tenant will do well in which area.

“You have to be a little bit in-the-know of fashion, and the different areas,” he says. “If you know that Venice is more hipster and Brentwood is more upscale and West Hollywood is more everything, you start to hear how tenants are doing in certain areas, and I keep in touch with them, so if I know someone’s sales are high, that’s good, or if it’s low, I know to stay away or I determine that it’s not working for a specific sector.”

For example, Malibu isn’t known as the money-making place for retailers as it is for restaurants, he says, though a few retail stores in Malibu have been able to break this mold.

Sometimes, the deals can be short-lived. “A landlord can get rid of you,” Luchs says. “You’re only as good as your last deal—you have to keep busting your butt.”

These days, Luchs likes to show his clientele around Malibu, Abbott Kinney, Venice Beach, Brentwood, Beverly Hills, West Hollywood, Robertson, Melrose, Downtown, and Hollywood.

He explains that Fairfax is the perfect location for [Jon & Vinny’s](#), and for the popular clothing brand, [Supreme](#): “Supreme was also smart, because they didn’t do 50 stores.”

Luchs says West Hollywood is unlike anywhere in the United States, or the world, because it’s “the one mecca where fashion meets entertainment meets wealthy upscale meets young and hip meets everything.”

Any tenant could be in West Hollywood and do well, he says: “Rent’s a little high right now, but it’s all there. It doesn’t matter who you are or what you do. It’s special for all people that way.”

With the demise of fashion-favorite [Robertson Boulevard](#), many have since wondered about the demise of brick-and-mortar retail. “Robertson has been dying, but we’re gonna make it come back, I hope,” he adds.

Luchs acknowledges that sales have declined due to online shopping, but says that lifestyle is a very important factor. “Ice cream and food and smoothies and coffee places, mixed in with boxing and SoulCycle types, create a lifestyle that people can’t escape,” he says. “I do still think retail should be mixed in with it all, and I don’t think retail is going away. I actually think certain brands are evolving now.”

“EVEN AS WE ARE SITTING HERE, SOMEONE IS DEVELOPING SOMETHING REALLY COOL THAT’S GOING TO BE TURNED INTO A STORE, AND IT’S GOING TO BE POPULAR, AND THEY CAN MAKE MONEY.”

So, where did retailers go wrong?

Luchs says a lot of stores over the years built out so many locations per year as part of their plan, and never expected things to change. “Next thing you know they have 400 stores—and now they’re in trouble.”

“It’s really about fewer stores, but still doing a store,” he says. “It helps your online business to have your own look. How would you know that James Perse is James Perse without going in that store and at least getting a feel?”

He also cites [Gwyneth Paltrow’s lifestyle brand, Goop](#).

“Now [Goop has] two locations, and they’re blowing up even more, because they have a physical store in Los Angeles, in the [Brentwood Country Mart](#), and in the Hamptons. If they did 50 stores, it wouldn’t be as cool.”

Plus, in today’s market, rent is sky-high. How does L.A. commercial real estate determine its rent?

“In L.A. we speak price-per-foot per month,” he says. “Let’s say the Goop store location is 1,000-square-feet, and they’re paying \$10 per foot, that’s \$10,000 per month. But most cities speak per annum, which means per year.”

Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills, where Luchs has leased over 50 locations, is the most expensive street for tenants. “A 50-foot lot on Rodeo Drive usually generates an income of \$3-4 million per year,” he says. A brand like Gucci pays about \$4 million per annum to lease on Rodeo, but they make in excess of \$50 million per year, he divulges.

Good for Gucci, but what about the clients who can’t afford spaces in this market?

Enter the pop-up shop, a short-term, temporary retail event that uses prime locations to create long-term, lasting impressions with potential customers. Luchs facilitates many of them, but only if he believes in the brand.

“My business is made by doing long-term deals with tenants and driving them around for hours, curating their own brand with them,” he says.

“I LOVE A LOT OF MY CLIENTS THAT ARE DOING POP-UPS, BUT THAT’S WHAT WE CALL A FAVOR. YOU DON’T MAKE MONEY, AND IT TAKES UP A LOT OF TIME.”

“I may never get anything back out of it, but if I like them, I help them. It really just comes down to: ‘What do I have enough time in a day to do?’”

If Luchs believes in the brand, he tries to talk the landlord into signing a deal by explaining that the brand could be really good for the property. “It might bring a different kind of customer to the property that’s never been here. It might lead to a better vibe.”

Luchs, who has facilitated several deals with Louis Vuitton, did the [Supreme/Louis Vuitton collaboration](#) pop-up deal in L.A.’s Arts District.

“They were selling Louis Vuitton/Supreme merchandise. People freak out over that stuff,” he says. “Those are fun deals, but I didn’t make much off of it.”

That didn’t matter though, because learning is primary for Luchs, and from the Louis deal he learned how collaborations between brands can be extremely effective.

“You learn what people are thinking in their minds at these corporations,” he says. “Right there alone, I learned how good it was for both brands to do that together, because what they did put them both on another level. Nobody thought they needed each other, but then they collabed, and now look at them. That’s where it’s at.”

Luchs’s knowledge of fashion shouldn’t come as a surprise. He’s also an art aficionado, and a member of MOCA Museum’s Acquisitions and Collection Committee.

In his West Hollywood home—previously owned by Coco Chanel’s ex-beau, [Igor Stravinsky](#)—every wall in the house is covered with art. While there are some classically cool Warhol prints (from [The Kennedy Assassination portfolio](#), known as “Flash”), Luchs also owns works by [Barbara Kruger](#) and [Ed Ruscha](#), including some of the artist’s rare drawings from the 1970s.

Recently, Luchs has expanded more than just his collection of art. With his growing list of clientele, he now adds residential properties to his budding empire. He recently brought on Steven Schaefer as a residential partner, and together they sold a \$26 million-dollar-home to Simon Cowell.

Luchs, who maintains many friendships and mingles regularly outside of work, can be found at Dan Tana’s or Craig’s for dinner on any given night of the week. “I love my restaurants, and I’m a creature of habit that way,” he says.

Even though he’s the busiest man in real estate, Luchs still makes time to socialize with people of all ages, and he stops to ask detailed questions about their families and lives.

“I JUST AM MYSELF, WHATEVER THAT MEANS. AND PEOPLE MEET ME AND THEY SAY I THOUGHT YOU WERE GOING TO BE LIKE THIS, OR OLDER, OR DIFFERENT.”

“I don’t try to put on any façade—I’m just me,” he says. “Maybe that’s a good thing, maybe not; some days you have to wear a suit, some days you wear sneakers and a T-shirt.”



Photo by Dara Danenberg