



by rob honeycomb

the brand meets your buyers

Much of the development community's focus on marketing is directed to the creation and promotion of project brands. Who hasn't sat around for hours struggling for a simple name? But are we really focusing on the right issues?

Development managers, marketing staff, ad agencies and selling agents all fret over the choice of a couple of words and their embodiment in a logo. Even the engineers usually have a go – consumer behaviour and waste-water design apparently being closely aligned sciences!

We are continually told of the value of creating the right brand in the buyer's mind, and the ability to create a more emotional bond with your development can add crucial margins.

Where many of us take our eye off the "brand ball" is at the human end of the delivery. For those who take the time to look, it is obvious our sales teams are not always completing the brand experience in the way we would either wish or expect. In fact, most developers have no idea what has been said to their prospects.

The best (or worst) non-property example of prospect neglect was the full-page Visa advert that ran in a major Australian business magazine in the 1990s, with a response phone number that was entirely unmanned.

None of us can believe this is possible, but when was the last time you checked on the handling of your project's enquiry?

So while McDonald's mystery shops its drive-through teams, it is still rare to hear of property developers giving their sales teams any regular review, support or scrutiny.

It is recommended that every project sales appointment starts with agreement on what sort of experience will be delivered to each and every buyer who calls, emails or visits.

BRAND EXPERIENCE CHECKLIST

The following checklist should be used as a minimum starting point in establishing your brand experience:

- What prospect details are most important to you – name, phone, email or postal?
- How will you handle a visitor who wants a sales kit, but won't provide their details?
- What will your salespeople be wearing?
- Where will prospect information be recorded and who owns that data – agent or developer?
- How will calls and emails be answered and in what timeframe?
- How much qualifying of a buyer's needs is to be done prior to specific project information being given out?
- Will prospects be accompanied through the display or on to the estate, or will they be invited to choose their own pace?
- How many days following the enquiry will they be followed up and will it be by phone or email?
- Will you have further information or updates to send in coming weeks and how will you keep in touch with the "not no, but not yet" crowd who are starting to swamp your databases?
- Will the agent be permitted to send them information on other projects?

RETHINKING THE SALES PROCESS

Each project should have a clearly defined and agreed sales process that you and your marketing team believe is most effective and reflects the brand personality of your project.

If you're in a regional community, salespeople in open-neck shirts may be appropriate. Buyers like to deal with people they can feel comfortable with, so their dress and approach needs to reflect your brand environment.

Last year I paid a visit to a luxurious Gold Coast waterfront tower, where the sales rep was busy eating his pasta lunch in the middle of the display suite – sloppy sauce and pungent garlic thrown in for a complete buyer experience.

I have heard developers say they don't need to be too concerned about their sales approach when they only have on-staff teams. Somehow they better understand what is expected

and have greater concern for the project's interests.

The developer-employed sales manager of a major south-east Queensland master-planned community told me recently that he didn't want his team asking prospects for their name and number. He felt it was "far too intrusive" and wasn't in keeping with the project's "style" (read brand). This gentleman was clearly still living in 2003 when we struggled to handle the tsunami of enquiry.

It is easy to blame the agents – some developers have made it a spectator sport in the past 18 months! For any employee we set out a job specification – our engineers and architects have clear briefs and our finance and accounts team have more process and systemisation that you can poke a bank manager's finger at.

Why is it we expect our sales team to read our minds and deliver a buyer service we have not even defined?



IT IS RARE TO HEAR OF PROPERTY DEVELOPERS GIVING THEIR SALES TEAMS ANY REGULAR REVIEW, SUPPORT OR SCRUTINY.

REVISIT YOUR BRAND

Regardless of the stage your current project is at, it is time to revisit the “pointy end” of your brand. Map out what you and your agent agree is important. Then, and only then, test the current approach.

Mystery shopping is easy to organise, used extensively in plenty of industries in Australia and needn't fill the sales team with fear and dread. And it will give you some immediate truths about the experience your buyers are having.

Introduce the idea to your whole

sales team in advance – if they are genuine about lifting their game they will see opportunities to improve. Some will be confident of their own results and eagerly await public floggings of the team slacker who never makes follow-up calls! Some will resist. Some will resign. But you will soon know their level of commitment to your project.

Importantly, mystery shopping should be explained as a long-term process. Reassure them there won't be recriminations based on one mystery visit.

Even the best sales reps have

down days, days of self-doubt, when ringing 30 people who say “no” can be more than a fragile ego might cope with. You are looking for patterns in behaviour, weaknesses in process and ultimately, the total effectiveness of your sales presentation.

Implementing regular review of your buyers' brand experience is still a good deal easier than choosing those project names! ✦



ROB HONEYCOMBE IS MANAGING DIRECTOR OF BEES NEES CITY REALTY, A SPECIALIST INNER-BRISBANE RESIDENTIAL AGENCY. PHONE 07 3214 6988 OR EMAIL ROBHI@BEESNEES.COM.AU