



by rob honeycomb

Wallpaper in cyberspace

Does your project's website pass the relevance test?

None of us deliberately set out to frustrate our buyers and make it hard for them to learn about and purchase in our projects... But if you haven't done an honest assessment of your website lately you might be guilty of doing just that.

We know the importance of branding, every industry article reminds us of the growth of online marketing, and we happily (or at least begrudgingly!) spend good money on our websites as a key piece of our marketing armoury. Yet despite the Flash imagery, the looping music and the seductive copywriting, a large majority of project websites completely fail their audience.

Usually during the set-up of each apartment development and land estate, developers hand the marketing preparation over to an ad agency. And while these guys generally excel at the emotive part of building your project's brand, they need you (and your sales teams') input to understand the relevance to buyers of specific product details. And that's where we're missing the mark – in most cases by a country mile. Often our websites are scarcely more than a template created by the agencies awaiting your meaningful details.

Puffery, meaningless generalities, vague promises. In a boom market we might get away with some simple branding and the obligatory pics of a smiling couple. In today's marketplace your prospects want solid facts and a very good reason before they'll get in the car, pick up the phone or email you. Take a moment to step into "prospect land" and consider what they really want to know. What's the special appeal of your apartment or allotment? What

buyer benefits are we selling exactly? Then consider what we put up on our sites:

- "The finishes set a new benchmark." Do we really even believe this ourselves?! If they are different to what's usually expected for this sort of property, tell them how.
- "It's an easy stroll to shops." How far is it exactly? And what sort of shops?
- "... featuring a fully equipped gym." They suspect you're going to dump a couple of budget treadmills and your wife's unused bike in the basement... Why not say it will be "a rowing machine and a multi-stage electronic treadmill?"
- "... showcasing a six star lobby". Tell them about a special piece of art you've chosen or a tile that's coming from Spain.
- "The estate has acres of open space". How much exactly? Is it snake-ridden goat country or can I take my kids walking there?
- "...all luxuriously appointed." Are you getting an idea of how your prospects might be feeling about now?! Why not name a brand for some of the appliances or fittings? Define luxury – e.g. "the same tiles as chosen for the penthouse suite of XYZ Hotel."
- "...near a feast of dining delights." Be specific – what sort of cuisine for example? The dessert special from one restaurant might make enticing reading.

The above are all examples from live project sites at the time of writing and in my opinion they're the industry standard. Asking a buyer to make a commitment to your product (especially off the plan) means establishing massive credibility, and



WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTIC DEVELOPMENT? TH IN THE DETAILS - MARKET WITH INFO



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even the big brands cannot rely entirely on reputations. The more information and the more detail, the more comfort your prospect has that you will deliver. And without it they mightn't leave their lounge chair to visit your display. In many cases we make product decisions after marketing launch, but neglect to inform the ad agent. Websites are dynamic, so as soon as you know the specifics – have it updated.

In this time-poor world it's tempting to think prospects won't want too much info. The truth is they want all they can find that is relevant to them. One of the great successes of the major real estate portals is their search engines. This is buyer-talk for "show me only the stuff I want and not a thing more". In project marketing we insist on loading more floorplans, stage maps, building covenants, masterplans



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and basement plans than you can poke a stick at. But we don't give our web visitors an easy way to plough through and interpret. They don't know whether they should be interested in stage 16c or 19a. They won't spend the time downloading one-bedroom floorplan Types F, G, H, J, K and L. They simply want a one-bed between \$400,000 and \$450,000 – what have you got that fits their bill?

Building a simple search engine into your site isn't expensive, and the immediate benefit to you is your prospects have a much smaller list to choose from. It's quicker for them and they'll have a greater sense of urgency. Another benefit is you can fit product to prospects' price ranges without giving out full price details. There's information for them, but still with reasons to call your sales team.

While it's easy to argue established real estate is overly price driven, a whopping 92% of prospects in that market say they're unlikely to enquire about a property where there's no price indication on the web ad. With 1000 respondents

this recent survey by www.realestate.com.au was substantial and has some chilling truths for project marketing. Flowery language, limited photos and out-of-date info were also top complaints. A quick check of 10 new apartment-project websites showed only two that had any prices, and even then one described only a very broad range. What is it we're trying to hide?!

Some last suggestions:

- Keep the menu headings simple. Now that a familiar "language" has been established try to stick to it, but don't be afraid to try new things. See: www.visionbrisbane.com.au for an excellent example of a virtual host.
- It's rare to make a sale by phone or email. Give them a reason to visit the display/estate and put contact details on every page. Have clear open times (and make sure your sales team adhere to them!)
- Have a "home of the week".
- Add pics of construction and project progress every couple of

weeks. Keeps it current and "real".

- Have another think about what info you really need to capture from prospects. Those little red stars on a contact form can be a real irritant. And would you use language like "This is a compulsory field" if you were asking them face-to-face?!

The massive improvement in compression technologies and broadband access speeds means we have growing options for building our project brands. Attention spans are short and entertaining them while we inform will become critical. Playing strongly to the emotions of buyers, expect to see mini-movies, virtual hosts and advanced fly-throughs become standard fare.

But don't be dazzled by IT science – if we don't give our prospects the real info they're hunting for it's all just expensive wallpaper in cyberspace. +

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