

BY ROB HONEYCOMBE



Salespeople for hire: highly motivated, amazingly persuasive and.... absolutely free!

In every corner of this vast nation, whether it's a 1000-lot subdivision, high-rise apartment tower or a suburban townhouse project, all developers have an often overlooked but invaluable sales force at their disposal. And their tireless help in making sales needn't cost you a cent!

Once you've made one sale you have a committed fan of your project. For you that sale is one less lot to sell, one less apartment on the sales matrix, one more reason to generate a smile from the financier. For the buyer of course it's far more – this is one of the biggest financial investments they've made in their life. If it's to be their own home then it also says a lot about who they are or, more often, who they want to be. Your parcel of suburban land, your apartment, your semi-detached home is about to change the way they live. And they're excited!

Harnessing this extraordinarily positive energy is one of the simplest tools in the project-marketing handbook. Keeping them informed AFTER the sale is the key. Your salespeople (the official ones) are usually rewarded once each sale becomes unconditional and that's where most sales processes end. "The solicitors deal with the contracts, see you in six weeks, six months or six years on settlement." (If they're not lying on the beaches of the world spending their commission by then.)

So how does your organisation communicate with buyers during that time? They're sitting at home staring at your glossy brochure wishing it was time to move, they're wondering how many more of their neighbouring lots have sold and they're worrying about whether they

made the right decision.

The great developers send a regular newsletter with all the latest project updates. Tell them about recent sales, construction timings, any tidbits of info they might not know (did you realise the lifts we've ordered will travel at three metres per second?), interviews with people who've bought (people love to hear/read about other people), quotes from the architect, planner or builder and some insight into why the project looks the way it does, tell them details of an award your consultant won for this or even another job, it's all about taking your greatest fans and turning them into a walking, talking sales force.

How often you send an update depends of course on your project timeline. Once every two months might be enough if it's a couple of years in the process, but we'd suggest there be at least six communications every year. And don't stop once they've moved into their new home/apartment. Keep it up as long as you've got something of interest to tell them about their new neighbourhood.

Your buyers want this to be the most successful project there's ever been, they're on your side and are already boring their friends senseless with stories about how well they've bought. So give them all the ammunition you can to go out there and spread the good word.

They don't look for spotter's fees or

incentives for sending you a lead (although a bunch of flowers or dinner somewhere nearby will naturally go down well). They're doing this because they've made your estate, building or community a part of their own life and they want to share it.

So what else can you do to encourage word-of-mouth sales? All forms of community events are a great way to encourage residents to invite their friends into the project. Delfin Lend Lease have been expert at doing this for years with concerts in parks and a myriad of family events, with more face-painting, sausage-sizzling and dancing kids characters than

you can probably imagine. It generates enormous goodwill and community spirit. And they make sales.

Your residents know this isn't "life as normal" and it'll stop once you've sold your last lot. But they'll still love the opportunity to show off their neighbourhood. So if it's that easy why don't developers do this more? Because there may not be a sale on the day of the event and it can be hard to measure the short-term impact. You do need to look at the big picture.

One large master-planned estate in Southeast Queensland had a major carols by candlelight concert planned leading into



ABOVE: THE GREAT DEVELOPERS SEND A REGULAR NEWSLETTER WITH ALL THE LATEST PROJECT UPDATES



Christmas a couple of years back. The marketing team had a nationally recognised singer/entertainer proposed, the developer would fund the night, residents would have free seats with tickets to give to friends and the local Rotary club would sell the drinks. And all in that wonderful Christmas spirit, at a time of each year when people are often reviewing where they're at with life and where they're living. It was another great idea that didn't happen. The doubting development manager's response? People sitting out in the open on dusk would get eaten to death by mosquitoes. "Can't possibly hold that event."

Stockland's "Allisee" apartments have been recording great sales rates at this northern Gold Coast project. With a staged development that'll take three years to complete they could well have had whinging buyers from early stages, upset with construction and intrusion on their lives. Instead, through some clever community marketing, they've held several resident events, including cocktail parties where they unleash their current residents on unsuspecting prospects with devastating effect. Each new buyer has a small welcome barbecue hosted for them (and six of their friends) and along with Melbourne Cup lunches, Clean Up Australia Day get-togethers and twilight penthouse viewings, there's a co-ordinated program of events.

And these events have been their most cost-effective sales tool with enormous support from current buyers. They have an almost fanatical passion for the project and will tell anyone that stands still long enough to listen!

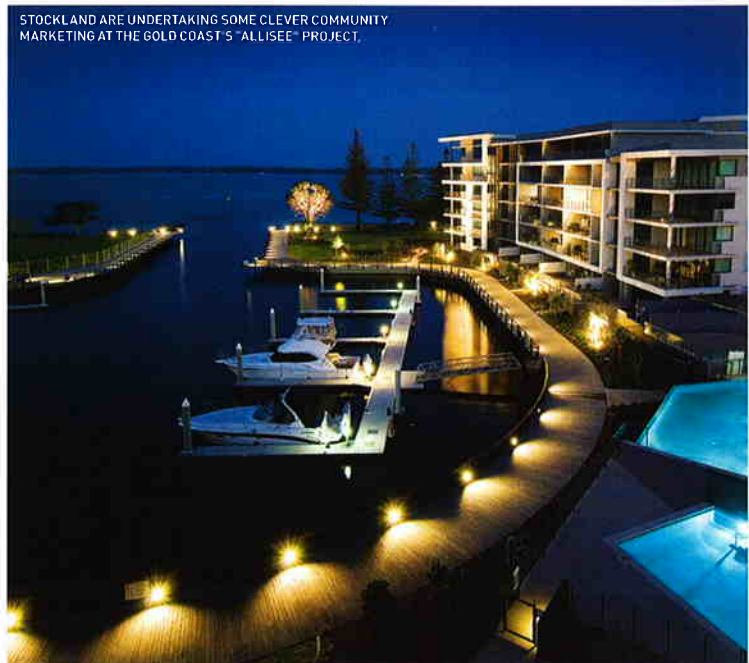
If your project has a long lead time with no opportunity for onsite events, try another tack. One Brisbane apartment tower sponsored Queensland Ballet and held a private event where buyers and prospects were treated to a "money can't buy" evening. The artistic director talked the small audience through dance steps and an intimate show, they met and mingled with the stars and they sipped champagne over a project model. The apartments' buyer profile had a good "fit"

with theatre-goers and the event allowed prospects to get a sense of the exclusive life the apartments offered. And current buyers chatted with those who were yet to make their choice.

Your project's marketing is a multi-faceted beast with clever consultants proposing ever-increasing ways for you to spend a motza. Maybe though it's time to think a little more about the buyers we already have. When did we last say hi? Are they enjoying it here and walking the streets as product magnets? Or are they costing us sales?

And of course if you've sold out the project you should still keep in touch. Who knows when they'll be ready to move, and your next project has those pony rides in the park on a Sunday! 🐾

STOCKLAND ARE UNDERTAKING SOME CLEVER COMMUNITY MARKETING AT THE GOLD COAST'S "ALLISEE" PROJECT.



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