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public relations

Mixing it up with public relations: Utilizing it as strategic communication tool will pay off

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Successfully marketing a new property is no longer a case of simply putting into place the right sales team, supported by the right advertising campaign and broker incentive program. Today's real estate marketing programs are an integrated and dynamic communications mix, and one of the most influential of its components is public relations.

Public relations has come into its own. Marketers with limited budgets that may not accommodate a full blown advertising schedule look to public relations as a less costly way to build visibility and market demand. For companies fortunate enough to have the financial resources for a fully integrated communications program, public relations is oftentimes the first discipline on the line up.

Why? Because public relations brings with it something no other communications tool can offer. Third party credibility. If your ad tells me your building is the pinnacle of full-service luxury, your self interest is transparent. If this newspaper reports on your project's unique features and attributes, I know that the information has been filtered by a disinterested party who has no vested interest in the outcome. That's public relations.

Finding aspects of your project that point to new trends or that correlate to current news is one way to drive editorial interest. Every project has a story. Uncovering the nuggets and delivering them to the right reporters is a baseline for any successful publicity program. But publicity is not always a straight pitch. Sometimes, it is most effective as a by-product of other public relations initiatives designed to attract market interest.

Special events that give prospective buyers or renters the opportunity to experience the property, either directly or indirectly, fall within the domain of public relations. An awards program that recognizes and celebrates your project is the ultimate seal of approval. Bringing your project to the attention of awards producers is the job of public relations. Sometimes, it is a matter of submitting a nomination. Other times, it is the challenge of proposing an awards program to a well positioned publication or organization. Either way, the benefit to the property owner is a wealth of opportunities to lever-

age the industry recognition for the benefit of the sales program.

Beyond the immediate gratification of the award ceremony or editorial feature, the honor provides a multitude of remerchandising opportunities that allow you to exploit the distinction for all it's worth. Website content, direct mailers, press releases and by-invitation-only celebration events are just a few of the ways you can leverage an award to keep the momentum going and retain the spotlight on your project.

Technical articles discussing the scientific side of what distinguishes your development from others in the field are another way to drive visibility. Once they are published, you can gain additional mileage by reprinting them as white papers that can be posted on your website, included in your sales kit, or mailed

to brokers or prospects.

The goal of public relations during the sales process is to keep your project front-of-mind with prospects, brokers and other key influentials. Sometimes the most effective tactic is to look for ways for your target audience to experience the project before they buy.

If a state-of-the-art clubhouse is the centerpiece of your luxury condo community, plan on a number of events in the facility during the sales period to allow prospects and brokers to develop an insider's appreciation of the amenity.

If referrals are a key strategy for driving sales, incorporate an "ambassador" incentive program into your public relations outreach, to enlarge the universe of prospects you are exposing to your project and to reward those who engage with it.

Be sure that your communications program includes bench-marking in order to capitalize on key construction milestones. Whether you post a photo gallery on your website to showcase construction progress, or issue press announcements as each phase of construction is begun or completed, keeping the news pipeline primed with continued updates is an excellent tool to cultivate and maintain interest.

Public relations is also the ideal pipeline to feed an e-marketing program, by providing a steady stream of content that can be delivered right to brokers' and prospects' desktops. Branded e-messages that drive key constituents to your website or to information portals supporting your sales program is one of the most effective ways you can prime the market.

The key to deploying public relations as part of your marketing program is to embrace it as a strategic communications tool. Enable your public relations team to understand the market scenario, the demographics of your target audience, the branding mission and the overall marketing strategy. Then invest them with responsibility to design creative ways to keep your project front and center.

Chances are that public relations will pay off in more ways than you can count, both by driving market awareness and by creating capital for your sales team.

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