

Module 4 : Getting to Know Your Clients

- Canvassing - finding clients
- Sellers and buyers
- Networking
- What you need to find out

Topics covered in this module:

- Canvassing - finding clients
- Sellers and buyers
- Networking
- What you need to find out

Getting to Know Your Clients – 5m 04s

4.1 Introduction

Selling houses is only half the business of being an estate agent or property negotiator.

The other half is the business of personal relationships. Both elements are essential if you are looking for long term success.

One of the battles you will face as an estate agent is the jaundiced view that some people have of estate agents and sales and marketing people in general.

This is partly due to the phenomenon of door to door selling which saw the development of high pressure techniques that were little more than downright trickery in many cases.

Since the early 1980s, door to door selling as a method of marketing has seen a radical decline. People have become far less trusting of their fellow men and there has been a sharp increase in the number of families where both partners have full time jobs.

Another factor has been the rise of the internet. This has enabled people to research and fact find for themselves and they have the facilities to check just about everything you say. They no longer have to go on the word of a salesperson and they have the added convenience of being able to buy online.

4.2 Where does the Property Market fit in?

While door to door selling has suffered a decline, there are still a few companies that use this method of marketing.

The big question is: "Why?"

The answer has two basic elements to it, both of which are of critical importance to the business of being an estate agent.

The first element is a trust in the product on behalf of the customers and the second is a relationship of trust that was developed between the door to door salesperson and the customer. Both these elements have to be built by the salesperson. Take note of the term "built".

Both these elements are directly applicable to your business as an estate agent.

The Trust Factor

At the outset, you cannot merely ask your client to trust you. Trust comes with an association and evidence that what you do and say has credibility. Trust is also a fragile commodity; one slip on your part can undo an entire relationship between an estate agent and a potential client. This may seem

like a tall order, but relationships between people become more durable as time goes by. You are more likely to forgive an old friend an honest mistake than you are a new acquaintance

The long way round is often the shortest way home

The property marketing business has a relatively long turnaround time. In a supermarket, for instance, people buy consumables and return on a weekly or monthly basis.

This means that, as an estate agent, you have to take a long view of the business you are in and of the methods you use to build your business.

Finding clients has to be an ongoing part of your life that will have to be second nature for it to be successful.

You never know where your next client is going to come from, which means that you never know who in your circle of friends and acquaintances will be the next one to be in the market to buy or sell a home. You need a large circle of friends and acquaintances.

FACT

In the United Kingdom property market, people tend to live in homes for an average of between 12 and 28 years

Hometrack Property Analytics survey

4.3 How to Find Clients

The usual image one has of an estate agent finding clients is of a person walking the streets of the neighbourhood knocking on doors and leaving leaflets in mail boxes.

While this is still one method of finding clients, it is probably the least efficient and most soul destroying.

More and more, estate agents and people involved in long term marketing areas of the economy are realising that developing a solid client base is an ongoing operation.

So how does it work? It comes down to a question of perspective.

How do you know which person is a client and which person is a friend or acquaintance? The short answer is that you don't know.

Rather than trying to see everyone you meet as a possible customer, you have to see yourself as a professional property marketing person. Not everyone is looking to buy or sell a house when you meet them, but they will at some stage be interested in joining the property market or changing their position in the property market. When they do, you want to be the one they approach.

So in answer to the question of how to find clients - they are all around you. It all comes down to a question of timing and of being there at the right time.

4.4 Getting Involved

People who don't own houses might like to buy a house but haven't decided when. People who own houses usually have a plan for when they will want to move to a larger house or a smaller house.

In some cases, a person's life circumstances might suddenly change for the better or for the worse and they will be forced to sell their house.

Being there at the right time

The issue you have to solve, as an estate agent, is how to be there for these people when they need you. The answer to this question forms the basis of how you must regard your clients and how you set about building your client base.

Drop the 'Prospect' mindset

The mindset of looking for prospects to sell your wares to belongs to other industries. It has no place in the lexicon of a successful estate agent.

The idea of a "prospect" as opposed to a "client" tends to work against the concept of service. One doesn't think in terms of prospect service, but client service is a given.

Next, you have to ask yourself how you are going to service your clients, especially clients that may not have bought anything from you or sold anything through you and indeed, may never buy or sell anything through your agency.

Finding people to talk to

Now that we have our mindset sorted, let's go back to the various ways of meeting people and what you intend to do with them once you have met them.

If you recall, one of the essential elements needed to be a successful estate agent is to be outgoing, friendly and able to relate to people.

To relate to people, you have to be there, in person. This puts paid to the idea that canvassing for clients is something you can do on the phone - cold calling.

The only time you use the phone to contact someone that you have not met in person is if you have been given their number by a person you trust. That person must have undertaken to give the person you are calling a heads up about your call. Otherwise cold calling on the telephone is invasive and counterproductive; for you and the people you are calling.

The other negative thing about cold calling on the phone is that you are probably blowing what would otherwise be a perfectly good contact if you had met the person face to face. How to deal with the suggestion that you call someone? Simply ask if it will be possible to arrange a meeting in person. This may take a little more time, but it will eliminate the almost certainly awkward and counterproductive phone call.

The next method often associated with door to door selling and estate agents canvassing for prospects is knocking on doors. Again, this is an invasive and not very productive method of finding people to talk to.

A less invasive thing to do is to regularly take walks through the neighbourhoods in which you market property. This may be a slower way of building up your contact base, but you will get to know the area and the people will come to recognise you as a regular.

As you are a friendly outgoing person, you will naturally and easily chat to people and get to know

them. In your first conversation, you should let it be known that you are an estate agent, but then leave it there. Don't tell them you are an estate agent and then in the next breath ask if they are putting their house on the market!

As you get to know your area, the people in the area will get to know you. If you are seen in the neighbourhood frequently, people will begin to realise that you are a member of the community and not someone looking for a quick sale before moving on.

By now, you should be getting the idea that looking for people to talk to is just a matter of getting yourself to where people are. So let's look at some other places.

Your lifestyle

Take a look at your lifestyle, not with a view to changing it, but with a view to what you do, what you enjoy doing and how you can turn this to building your base of contacts.

If you have children of school-going age, be involved with parent committees and parent teacher associations. You may not need your estate agent skills to help organise a fundraiser, but you will be making contacts and people will be getting to know you and know what you do for a living.

The gym, library and book club environments are always good activities to be involved in. So too are local societies and, most of all, chambers of commerce and business and neighbourhood improvement associations and welfare organisations.

4.5 Client Service at Large

You may ask yourself why these environments would be beneficial for your estate agent business.

They will only be as useful to you as you are to them.

This is not as cryptic as it might seem. Once again, you have to look at yourself and ask yourself what use you would be on a committee at your child's school; what could you offer to the local chamber of commerce and industry?; how can the historical society benefit from your presence?

The answer to this is that it all depends on what you know and how you present yourself.

You have to take the attitude that everyone you meet is your client and that you are there to offer them a service. You are an estate agent, so the service you will be offering is that of property knowhow and related information.

As part of being an estate agent, you will have to develop a better than average grasp of financial affairs, economics, politics and general knowledge about international affairs and what is happening in the news. This is because you never know who you are going to meet and the last thing you want is to come across as an ignoramus. It may seem an unfair ask, but people are always impressed when someone they meet is well informed, and they judge someone as well informed if that person can hold their own in whatever conversation is going on.

It is possible to be a mine of information without being a know-it-all, which is something you have to

guard against.

The personal side

Being a part of the community on this level requires energy and a plan of action.

Enthusiasm is a huge factor in generating the sort of network and eventually influence that you are seeking to establish. People are generally fairly lethargic. When someone with a bit of energy comes along, you will find that most people will be willing to let the enthusiastic members of the group take the lead and become people of influence.

Approach life and your job with a sense of purpose and enthusiasm and you will have won half the battle.

An ancillary of this is that people are also lazy, so if you seem to have the answers to most issues, people will tend to take your word for it. However, this is also something to beware of. Never take anything for granted and always double-check your facts. It can take a moment for you to make an incorrect or ill-informed statement. It is the easiest thing in the world for someone, including yourself, to take to the internet to check.

If you are an above board operator, the internet will be one of your greatest assets and allies. As soon as you start to make an impression in your community, it is highly likely that there will be someone who will go online to check your credentials. You have to know what your online profile reflects. Check it out regularly to make sure that it is in order and that you haven't been hacked or otherwise compromised.

Going one-on-one

In due course you will be in a position where one of your network of clients will be asking for your advice.

Now, more than ever, you need to remember that your estate agent business is never about you and what you know. It is always about your clients and what problems they have which you can help to solve with what you know and what you do.

Do your research before you meet

If the client has been referred by a friend, ask for more information. Do they have a favourite hobby? A preferred vacation spot? Do you have overlapping friends or acquaintances?

Knowing something specific about your clients can help you break the ice and start the conversation on a more cordial level.

Now is the time to listen

Here is what will happen if you do all the talking and none of the listening:

- You will talk about yourself and what you will do for the client, regardless of their needs
- You will not fully understand your client's needs and goals
- You may get a sale, but it will be more down to luck than to skill
- Your dealings with the client will end with the sale and that will be the end of the chain. That client won't return to you when they are in the market again and they won't refer you to friends and colleagues. Referrals are gold in the sales and marketing industry and you should always look to replace a closed deal with the possibility of another client with a need for your services
- If a client feels bullied or railroaded into a sale or purchase that they are not happy with, they will not waste any time in telling the world that they were shafted by a lousy estate agent.

When you are dealing with a client, it must be on the understanding that they are the focus and that your skills and knowledge will be brought to bear on the needs they want to fulfil or the goals they need to achieve.

Ask questions

Not any old questions - ask focused questions that relate to the client you are dealing with. To get off to the best possible start, your first questions should be asked before you sit down with them. You need to ensure that you have some background and that what you have is accurate.

Ask open-ended questions - these allows you to glean more information and makes your clients more comfortable at the same time. For example, instead of asking 'How long have you been teaching?', try rephrasing that as 'What is your most interesting teaching experience?'

Ask precise questions - Do not lead the client by pre-empting answers and setting false expectations. For instance, simply ask, 'What kind of neighbourhood do you prefer?' and be comfortable with the silence that might follow the question (as the client thinks of their preferences).

Offering too much information may end up confusing the client.

The more you allow the client to talk . .

During the interview and up until the time you have a solution to the client's needs, the ratio of talking should be at least 75% the client and at most 25% you. The more you allow the client to talk, the more you will be able to help them reach their goals.

Pay close attention to non-verbal cues

The way a client sits, speaks, positions his or her head or makes eye contact can reveal volumes about their thoughts. If you notice a rigid back or arms folded across the chest, it may mean the client is resistant to your suggestion.

On the other hand, if the client turns her body or feet towards you, it could indicate interest.

Always be focused on your client

In all your dealings with your clients, guard against holding forth on any topic, especially when you are in a one to one situation. You must always be focused on your client and their needs. It's a matter of prompting not preaching. You need them to talk so that you can find out how to provide the service they need.

Make sure you have your facts straight

Once you are satisfied that you have established the full extent of what your client needs you to do, make sure you have your facts straight and check them with the client.

Avoid making speeches

In the end, it will be your turn to sum up how you can meet their needs, exactly what you will be doing and the sequence of doing it. Again, avoid making speeches. In fact, try to avoid making a presentation that does not include your client. You must always be touching base with them and ensuring that they are following everything you are saying.

In the property marketing business, you will need to get measurements, energy certificates and various other details. At the end of your presentation, ask if it's okay to go ahead with gathering the information. If it isn't and you don't have a sole agency, then set a firm appointment for as soon as possible. It may feel a little pushy to some people, but you need to keep the initiative and let your client know that marketing their house is of paramount importance.

Where you have to go off and research material, then set a specific time that you will be back with the information and ensure that your client understands what it is that you are going to research. In the property marketing business, you will never be the only estate agent on the block. There will always be someone hot on your heels and your client would be a bit naïve if they were only obtaining one quote for the sale of their house.

Establishing the value of a home is a complicated issue.

From your first meeting with your client, you will be able to give them an estimate of what you think their home is worth and what you think you should try and market it for. If you are able to give an accurate figure at the end of your first meeting, then by all means do so. The policy relating to this will depend on the agency you work for.

Take a Quick Recap Test

[viralQuiz id=203]

4.6 Those Negotiating Skills

With all your dealings with your clients, don't forget that you will always need exceptional negotiating skills if you are going to sell the properties in your portfolio.

Sometimes you will have to push, but if you have spent the time on building your credibility and providing a service where it is needed, then your clients will not hold this against you. Sometimes people need help to make a decision. If you have been there for your client and taken them along with you every step of the way, they will trust you and will not feel that you rushed them into a deal they will later regret.

Assignment

Getting to know your clients

Time: 30+ minutes

Now that you have covered all of the information in this module, put what you have learnt to the test.

Download the worksheet below, print out and complete.

[Download Worksheet](#)

Summary

If you are truly involved in the community you are working in and spend the time to improve yourself and your knowledge of key subjects, you will be able to build a formidable business over time.

Being well informed is one of the surest ways to build up self-confidence, which in turn will make you better at everything you do. Added to this, self-confidence combined with a clearly focused need to serve and help people in your community will lead to people referring you to their friends and colleagues when they haven't actually used you to sell their property. If you extend the impression that you are capable and genuine in everything you do, people will not hesitate to pass your name along when the occasion arises.

In short, your reputation, good or bad, will precede you. Make sure it's the best it can be.

[Tweet "I just completed Module 4 of the Estate Agency Diploma Course"]
