

NEW AGE MARKETING

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NAMRATA KOHLI presents a slice of innovative New Age marketing in real estate industry

FAST FACT

DEVELOPERS ARE BECOMING MORE SOPHISTICATED IN THEIR MARKETING. FROM ORGANIZING SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE EVENTS TO EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING, THEY ARE GOING FOR SUBTLE YET MORE EFFECTIVE METHODS

QUICK BITES

THIS GOES BEYOND PLAIN COMMERCE. INSTILLING A SENSE OF PRIDE IN THE COMMUNITY BY FACILITATING A CLEANLINESS DRIVE HAS ITS OWN POSITIVE RETURNS FOR A MARKETER

THE TANGIBLE BENEFITS FOR A DEVELOPER ARE THAT ANY ENTERTAINMENT OR FAMILY OUTING, BE IT SHOPPING OR GET-TOGETHERS, TAKES THE PEOPLE TO THE DEVELOPER'S OUTLETS AS THE 'TOP OF THE MIND RECALL' VALUE HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED BY THESE SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE DRIVES

Developers were advertising in real estate magazines and in supplements in leading dailies for marketing their products, thus far. One usually saw advertisements of projects in newspapers, hoardings, theme events, real estate fairs or received the invasive and unwelcome SMSs on realty projects.

Recently, sops started being dished out on special occasions like Diwali, which read like assured gifts of white goods on the first 100 bookings - a flat Rs 50,000 off on the first 50 bookings and assured return for eight months, free 42-inch plasma TV for the first 50 bookings, etc.

Some of the recent noteworthy marketing efforts include the clean-up drive, "Let's Make Amritsar Sparkling", organized by Alpha G: Corp last year. As everything evolves, real estate marketing efforts, too, seem to be notching up in the value chain.

The cleanliness drive in Amritsar by Alpha G: Corp was held in concert with the local authorities of Amritsar. The Municipal Corporation of Amritsar provided garbage lifting autos, ditch machines, road-sweeping machines, water-sprinkling machines, fogging machines and tippers to help keep the city clean, green and free of water-borne diseases.

The whole route was full of volunteers standing with placards at different spots, who distributed leaflets before and during the cleanliness drive to increase public awareness.

The drive was a huge hit with the people of Amritsar, who came out in full force to support the movement. The volunteers gave out leaflets and explained the value of the cleanliness drive to various shopkeepers, who totally supported it and went along with the importance of their role in keeping the city clean and sparkling.

The shopkeepers also hoped this drive would help make the public realize the grassroots problems encountered in cleaning up a locality, and appreciate corrective actions. The campaign covered over 300 shops throughout the route.

The objective of this eco-drive was to clean the holy city. Shopkeepers were requested to clean their premises before closing their shops, so that garbage could be lifted the very next day, in the morning. They were also requested to place a dustbin inside their shop or house and not to throw garbage in front of the shops or the homes.

Prodipta Sen, executive director of Alpha G: Corp says: "We are committed to creating positive awareness about sustainable and healthy living in Amritsar, with a goal of making it a model city in terms of hygiene and civic amenities. We have been fortunate to have the support of the mayor's office and the municipal corporation. The drive is also aimed at creating awareness about hygiene and environmental issues and promoting solutions essential to a sustainable, healthy and greener environment among citizens. Various departments like sanitation and horticulture have readily agreed to participate in the removal of garbage, debris and water receptacles for better sanitation and greening for all."

Sen says that proactive participation in catchment areas by developers helps peo-

ple connect and build empathy with the developer's objectives. Ultimately, for any business or brand, especially in real estate, an emotional connect, by way of common causes and objectives, is essential, he says.

Developers have started believing that even though all forms of marketing are expensive, the intangible returns cannot be ignored. This goes beyond plain commerce. Instilling a sense of pride in the community by facilitating a cleanliness drive has its own positive returns for a marketer.

The tangible benefits for a developer are that any entertainment or family outing, be it shopping or get-togethers, takes the people to the developer's outlets as the 'top of the mind recall' value has been established by these socially responsible drives; these translate into increased footfalls, participation and ultimately, an exponential increase in revenues.

Another innovative marketing concept was the concept of "experiential market-

ing" by the Ashiana Group. In order to give customers a first-hand experience of their project Utsav in Jaipur, they created a concept of trial apartments so that customers could experience the lifestyle, facilities, services and ambience of the project before going for the final purchase.

The project is a senior citizens' project and the group invited customers who wished to opt for an active senior living in their silver innings, to come and experience the actual living condition of the resorts first hand before joining the community. The project's 2BHK fully-furnished trial apartments are equipped with all facilities and cost Rs 700 per night.

Ankur Gupta, the joint managing director of Ashiana Housing Ltd, says: "Be it automobiles, electronics or jewellery - nowadays, people believe in something tangible, those things of which they can have a personalized feel before buying. Same is the case with home buying, which is always an

important decision and, especially, with concept homes like the Utsav project.

It's always difficult to choose your home, especially for senior citizens, who have spent their entire life in a particular location. It's always difficult to move from that location to a newer one at that age without knowing the comfort, services and facilities of that location. Trial apartments enable customers to have a first-hand feel of our offerings."

The message seems to have gone down well with some end users. Sharan Amade and his wife, residents of Ashiana Utsav, Jaipur, say: "We knew about their (the group's) Bhiwadi project; but a one-night stay at the Jaipur trial apartment helped us make the final decision."

Tilak Raj Arora, a resident at Ashiana Utsav, Bhiwadi, says: "My wife and I were sceptical about moving into a retirement resort, but after spending two days at the trial home here, we made up our mind.

The facilities here are very good."

Talking about actual conversions, that is, the number of people who stay at trial apartments and those that actually buy into the projects, Vishal Gupta says: "Customers can avail this facility at Utsav Bhiwadi and Utsav Jaipur. At Utsav Bhiwadi, the percentage of conversion is almost 90%, which includes both customers who have taken a unit on rent in Utsav, as well as those who have purchased a unit after staying in the trial apartments. In Utsav Jaipur, where we just started handing over the project, the conversion ratio is 21%. This ratio will increase as people become aware of this concept."

Among the intangible benefits that trial apartments give customers is the chance to at least try the benefits that they might otherwise be missing in their life, without ever realizing it. It offers them a first-hand feel of a life from a different perspective.

TIMELY DELIVERY AND QUALITY THE KEY

For customers, timely delivery and quality of construction of houses are very important. Realty firms hoping to hit it off in the market must heed to these two critical criteria, says **GEETA**

Do customers seal the deal in those projects which are on the verge of completion or do they go with those firms which have a reputation for quality of construction?

Well, both the issues are important for customers. Sunil Jindal, the chief executive officer of SVP developers, says: "I can tell you from my experience that customers usually invest in those properties where they find some kind of activity. If they see that work is on, then they invest. Selling flats, floors or plots on barren land is not an easy task. Selling a dream is not that easy unless you back it up with performance on the ground."

However, there is a divergent view in this regard also. Alimuddin Rafi Ahmed, the chairman and managing director of ILD developers, says that customers do not necessarily book their dream homes where they see some kind of construction work. If that had been the case, then all the realty firms would start work on their foundation and easily sell their products.

The world of realty does not work that way, he says. "Fact of the matter is, nobody knows which project will create a storm in the market and which one will fall flat," Ahmed says.

Experts say that it is a huge task to read the

minds of prospective customers. Some prefer to book their homes where construction work is on. That gives them a sense of confidence. However, the image of some realty firms too counts.

A large number of customers also take into consideration the size of a firm's portfolio - the larger it is, and the longer it has been in the market, adds value to its latest offerings. People go and book their flats and floors there.

Ajay Singal, the director of Avalon group, says that the relationship shared between customers and an established brand is very important as no buyer is willing to compromise on the functionality and quality of the real estate product. "I can say that the brand value of a developer affects the buying decision of customers. The popularity of a brand results in optimum sales and increased consumer awareness, which is independent of the construction status of that project."

Manoj Ahuja, an East Delhi-based businessman, belongs to the category of customers who have booked their flats in a project of a builder who has promised construction-linked payment plan. He is of the opinion that considering the dismal track record of many so-called big-time realty firms, he thought he should not give much importance to the name

and fame of any company.

At the end of the day, one thing is absolutely clear - nobody can say with certainty which type of realty project can make a dent in the market.

Customers certainly give thumbs up

to those realty firms which hand over perfect homes to their buyers with excellent tiling work in the kitchens and the bathrooms, with perfect sewage pipes and plumbing work. Quality of a project is directly connected to the reputation

and image of the builder in the market. If a developer doesn't deliver quality projects, it will hurt his goodwill. In order to keep his reputation intact, a builder must deliver quality projects.

Sanjay Khanna of Kailash Nath Projects Pvt Ltd says: "While detailed monitoring is done to ensure quality compliance, our approach is extremely focused on the project in execution. The volume of our projects is kept at manageable proportions to enable higher levels of supervision. But the clinching factor is the level of commitment that successfully eliminates questionable quality." He, too, adds that customers prefer projects where they see construction work is on.

Realty market watchers say that publicity through word of mouth makes or mars the reputation of a realty firm.

If a realty firm gets bad publicity, it is very tough for it to change that perception in the market. Notwithstanding all its tall promises, the firm

will find it extremely difficult to sell its products.

Jindal says: "We have a dedicated department to ensure quality standards. Supervision is done at the micro level and this detailing eliminates the possibility of shoddy workmanship. When we are not satisfied with the workmanship, the specific area is reworked and is executed even if it means slipping up on a deadline."

It is also often said that when disappointed buyers try to hold the developer accountable, they are only told that his (developer) liability ends after one year of handing over the apartment complex. When attention is drawn to the promised quality, a finger is pointed at the sub-contractors. As if this were not enough, the penalty clause for the sub-contractor is again to the tune of one year after completion, which means that he is not accountable beyond that period. Sadly, many a time a customer pays a staggering price for his dream house with multiple defects and with no place to appeal.

If developers are insisting that they are according top priority to ensure the quality of construction, why then are developments increasingly coming up with sub-standard quality?

This is true with not just small builders, who are yet to make an impact, but with established and highly reputed developers.

"While this is not my concern what others do, we have devised a monitoring system to ensure quality compliance. We hire one of the best contractors to execute our projects. We have an efficient purchase team which procures materials like cement, steel, bricks, paint, sanitary ware, light fixtures, tiles and marble," Gaurav Mittal, the managing director of CHD Developers says.

"Apart from the quality-check lab at the site we have a series of checklists with a quality-control audit system. The head office works in coordination with site engineers to monitor workmanship," Mittal says.



QUICK BITES

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