

BUILDING SALES STRENGTH

MARC BEISHON describes how housebuilder Redrow has sharpened its selling edge



Historically, buying a house represents the largest purchasing decision that a person will ever make. One company, Redrow, has consciously and radically changed the focus of its salesforce to ensure it interacts more effectively with home buyers to match them with the right properties, by introducing a sales process that properly qualifies their needs.

Redrow is a FTSE 250 company that focuses on new build developments in England and Wales, including combining houses modelled on traditional designs with more contemporary and open plan interiors. Employing almost 2,200 people, Redrow has worked tirelessly to maintain and develop market share since the recession, with brands such as the Heritage Collection, based on the “arts and crafts” movement.

To lead the sales training, the company recruited Kate Hopkins as leadership and sales training manager. Kate came from Yell, the business directory firm, where she had roles

including sales manager and learning and development consultant. She has since transformed sales training and continuous development for around 300 sales consultants and managers at Redrow.

“What I found in terms of sales induction training was comparable with the rest of the industry. It was largely generic classroom training that was not specific to Redrow,” she says. “I have a strong training and coaching ethos and I’m a firm believer that each company needs to develop its own sales process to follow.”

REWORKING THE SALES PROCESS

Kate quickly identified that the sales process did not clearly define and address the buying stages that customers go through, in particular, the emotional and psychological aspects involved in making such a major decision. By doing so, Kate has created a unique sales training programme that is changing the way Redrow approaches and engages with its customers.

“It is important that we don’t go racing through the sale and lose the customer in the process – there is much more to why people prefer one house to another than we were finding out. Each customer is different – and it isn’t enough to just take basic information from them and hope we hit the mark. We need to tailor offers to their situation – and that means uncovering a lot of detail about them.”

One major component of the reworked sales process was in recognising and acknowledging exactly where Redrow’s potential customers had come from, analysing those sources and tailoring

“There are always many opportunities available to businesses within most sectors across the UK”

their sales approach accordingly. Redrow’s developments are marketed in a variety of ways, locally on billboards, on property

sites such as Zoopla, and on the firm’s own site – there is also My Redrow, an online system that allows customers to select their favourite house types. Customers can book appointments through My Redrow, or often they just arrive at the sales centres, so it is important that salespeople are able to react to the variety of potential customers, think quickly on their feet and change their sales approach depending on the individual’s circumstances. The fact that most houses are sold before they are built adds another dimension to the challenge.

Kate added that Redrow’s sales training

approach also takes into account the backgrounds of the sales consultants themselves, ensuring that they all receive the individual support needed depending on their level of previous experience. Many sales consultants have come from sectors outside of the traditional – other house builders and estate agents, from areas such as retail, aviation, or as returners to the workforce.

While the training also incorporates technical elements such as instruction on understanding plans and drawings, new recruits undergo an intense two-week sales induction programme at one of Redrow's training centres where the new tailored and customer-centred sales aspects take centre stage. "The first module is on preparation – not just on how to prepare the site or marketing area, but how to mentally prepare to meet the next customer," says Kate.

RATIONAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS

The next core element of the programme involves the qualification of both rational and emotional needs – essential in the business of selling a potential lifelong investment. This is both the most challenging as well as rewarding module, says Kate, as it involves getting "under the customer's skin" through a two-way consultative communication process.

Kate continues, "We aim to find out the underlying reasons for people wanting specific features – a necessary fourth bedroom may be due to the prospect of an elderly parent moving in years down the line, for example. If we don't fully understand the 'why' behind the detail we cannot truly understand our customers and provide them with a first class service. Once the conversation changes to what's really important, our sales staff become consultants who can demonstrate our products and bring to life the features that will work for them according to their priorities, which is the next step in our sales process."

Identifying added value should be at the heart of all successful sales – and it's no less important in selling houses, where the "extras" that Redrow offer turn the house into a bespoke home. To help build the skills to uncover added value, Kate has instigated practical demonstration during training. "The sales team create their own scenarios – a majority own their own home, so they can use their own reasons and motivation to show whether they had a good or bad buying experience."

Identifying real needs and demonstrating how they can be fulfilled, and then getting customers to reserve and commit is paying off for Redrow, which is seeing a boost in sales. As part of its continuous development process, the company is operating "mystery shopping" at its sites – where "buyers" engage with sales consultants.

Performance scores have shown an increase of 20% when measured before and after the revamped training, with particular success in the most complex area of qualification of customers.

Sales managers in each Redrow division also take the training programme, with the more experienced staff able to access elements as a refresher. In addition, Redrow offers further support to its sales managers on how they can continuously develop their people. "We offer a workshop for sales managers to help them know whether their salespeople need training or coaching – the 'skill or will' issue – and how to close gaps in the sales process quickly and effectively." All employees also have access to an online learning system called Evolve, which provides a wide range of courses and materials, and, as a heavily regulated industry, important instruction on compliance with consumer law.

The change in emphasis is working, highlighted by the "snapshot" interviews on Redrow's website with its salespeople, where a number of themes are apparent, including job variety, satisfaction of taking customers through the buying journey, autonomy when trusted to work alone on sites, and access to training and career development.

All of these positive changes will benefit from what Kate calls "the ultimate seal of approval" – endorsement by the Institute of Sales Management (ISM) against its new Quality Endorsement System, which allows companies to benchmark their training programmes and map them against the National Occupational Standards for Sales. Successful assessment against the ISM's Quality Endorsement System will demonstrate a level of excellence within Redrow's salesforce and, importantly, give confidence to its customers that they are dealing with a professional and ethical company. Redrow is currently in discussion with the ISM regarding the assessment process, which Kate is looking forward to implementing. "It is a goal to have what we produce accredited in this way – it will mean a lot to our sales consultants and managers that they are engaged in a programme with a quality seal for continuous professional development, and it will show we are committed to their development.

THE ISM'S QUALITY ENDORSEMENT SYSTEM

QES is a new way for companies to add value to their sales training and learning programmes. It allows them to benchmark training programmes, map them against the National Occupational Standards for Sales, provide evidence that their training is well designed and delivered to consistent standards, and meets business needs in the real world. It also promotes professionalism and excellence within the salesforce, and gives confidence to customers that they are dealing with a professional and ethical provider – and so creates a competitive edge. The endorsement approval process is rigorous, and includes examination by an auditor to confirm compliance with ISM quality requirements, a certification process concerned with trainee achievement, and ongoing quality assurance. See ismprofessional.com for details.