



# Webmaster BUILDERS

In the second of our series, **Rupert Bates** interviews digital developers, helping housebuilders find buyers and market homes through the web. This month: **Darren Richards and Lee Bramzell of Property Index.**



As a first date, business I hasten to add, with a digital dating guru it was very cordial – A pie and a glass of ale from the Malvern Hills in a Worcester

hostelry. So commercially what first attracts you to Darren Richards, who made £30 million when he sold his Dating Direct website two years ago?

Richards, the founder of PropertyIndex.com, had Lee Bramzell, the chief executive of the portal with him and indeed they had met through the dating game – business I hasten to add – when Bramzell was running Chemistry – a live dating event in London – girls had the padlocks; boys had the keys, you know the sort of thing – sponsored by and then bought by DatingDirect.com.

Live by the web; get embarrassed by the web. Looking for background on the Property Index bosses and I find Bramzell, five years ago, being referred to, because of his dating business, as “the love doctor” and a “master of chat-up-ology.” More embarrassing is the fact that he supports Spurs, although as I write Tottenham are riding high in the Premier League.

Property Index are not doing badly either. They only started in September 2007, initially just targeting the overseas market, but are now closing in on 10,000 UK estate agency accounts opened since they hit the domestic market last year. The overseas side of the portal has around 150 new overseas agents joining each month.

“We have also switched our focus from new client acquisition to deliver more value to clients already on board,” said Bramzell. For example the telephone lead generation systems which have delivered 50 per cent more leads to clients. Property Index has also developed a range of referral revenue streams, so clients can offset the cost of lead generation through the likes of conveyance, insurance and other referral categories, monetising hidden revenue streams.

The portal works on pay for results. UK agents pay £1 each time they receive an enquiry about a property they are marketing. So no fixed monthly subscription

commitments to meet.

Property Index, which brands itself as the UK's leading pay for results global property portal, is now targeting the UK housebuilders and Bramzell says watch this space. “I have enjoyed getting out there and meeting housebuilders and have detected a hunger for leads and a clear understanding of how marketing budgets can deliver Return On Investment.”

He breaks them down into cold, warm and hot prospects. Cold are buyers on their database looking for similar properties in the developer's key geographic area. Warm are email leads from propertyindex.com and via a network of marketing partners. Hot are inbound telephone leads. Crucially the company runs a robust, dispute procedure if the lead source is questioned, backed up with recordings of every call.

“The hot leads tend to be those who want to organise an appointment and those generated by our featured positions, which we can bundle into the cost per lead rate. We offer positions which put the developer or development at the top of every relevant page and every relevant search,” said Bramzell, with two campaigns for leading developers set to launch as case studies highlighting what Property Index can offer the UK housebuilder.

Property Index is clearly targeting the bigger, more established portals like Rightmove, luring agents away from paying monthly subscriptions, commissions and being tied into minimum term contracts. An affiliate scheme allows other websites to carry Property Index links, logos and banners and earn up to 50 per cent commission on leads and there are white label opportunities for associates. Take a cost per lead model and revenue share and go populate the web seems to be its simple, and effective, proposition.

Of course the argument is it can be easily replicated, but you sense, be it over a drink beneath the Route 66 sign in the company's reception, or hitting a few balls on the red pool table, that more ideas are knocked about daily than you could shake a cue at.

It is a competitive market out there, but Richards is committing a slice of his fortune to fast-tracking the website to the top of the rankings. Also having proved he can match



people online, he has extended that to matching builders and agents with buyers. Having come out of a long-term relationship and looking for love, he spotted a gap in the online market and launched Dating Direct ten years ago, attracting 40,000 members in three months. In 2007, with over 4.5 million members, he sold it for £30 million to Meetic.

This gives Property Index privately funded independence, reinvesting the cost per lead and cost per click revenue back into the lead generation process.

Richards, 42, is an understated Midlander, quieter than Essex entrepreneur Bramzell, 34, but the mutual respect is obvious. Coincidentally Richards' first job was a holiday rep in Gran Canaria, while Bramzell cut his working teeth as a club rep in Ibiza.

Richards divides his time between England and Tenerife, where he owns bars. He is a self-confessed petrol head, with an Ariel Atom, Caparo T1, Ferrari F430 Spider, Porsche 997 Turbo, Range Rover Vogue SE Supercharged, Aston Martin DB9, Lincoln Navigator, 1966 Ford Mustang and a new Ford Mustang convertible in his collection. Not forgetting a helicopter. No wonder Richards wants to save the British Motor Show and is in touch with Jeremy Clarkson, Rowan Atkinson and Simon Cowell, after their support. Presumably, given his chief executive's work rate, Richards lends Bramzell something fast at weekends so Bramzell can race home to Hertfordshire to see his wife and three young daughters.

Now that Route 66 sign in reception makes sense. Property Index is moving fast down the information superhighway. Final destination? For the time being just enjoy the journey. [sh](#)



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