

The Property Industry's Complete Guide to Digital in 2018/19



the source
Digital Marketing Evolved



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Introduction

We are The Source, a full-service integrated digital marketing agency with a difference. Our primary aim is to deliver more sales, faster and more efficiently than other digital agencies.

Working with a methodology called AGILE and delivering our work using Scrum, we work in very quick iterations, where we measure our results on a regular basis. Our activity is moulded according to results which means ROI on a larger scale quicker and more efficiency, with minimal wasted time. This is our unique approach to marketing.

We've worked with numerous companies across a whole range of sectors, however we are experts in the property sector having worked with a number of companies and branches in the industry achieve better results from their digital marketing efforts, spanning web development projects, SEO campaigns, Paid Media and Content Marketing campaigns.

In this ebook, we are going to be providing our insight and expertise from working in the property sector and analysing the different digital marketing channels, explaining their benefits and our experience in using that channel to drive return on investment.

We are aiming to solve the problems many property companies face, such as how to attract 'stock', the best methods to engage with your target audience, and how to use digital marketing to help you stand out from the crowd, in what is an incredibly saturated market.

Firstly though, we will be looking at what the objectives of a digital marketing campaign should be, including the end goal and the problems faced by property companies in trying to reach them.



Objectives of a Digital Marketing campaign:

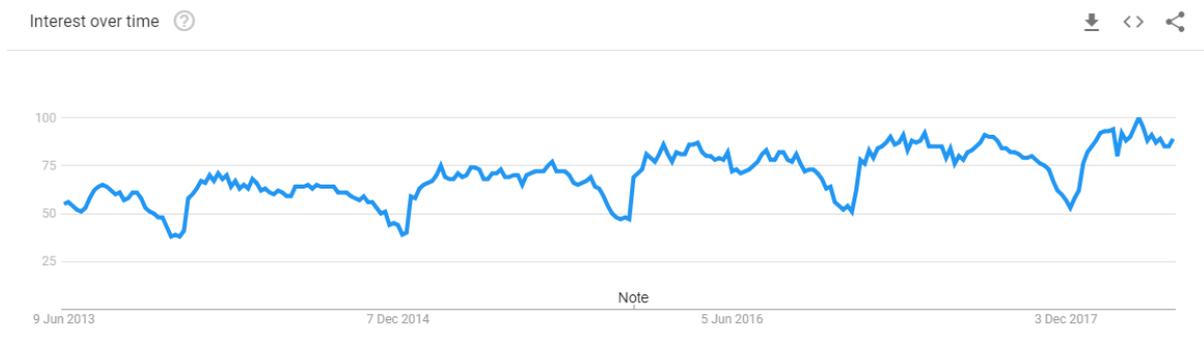
Before embarking on a digital marketing project, it's important to focus on what your business goals are and how your campaign relates to them. Most commonly, the end or ultimate business goal is to see an increase in revenue, however, this can be difficult with the likes of Rightmove and Zoopla having disrupted the market - more on that later!

Sometimes campaigns are also implemented for another specific purpose. For example:

- **To increase the number of valuations & stock:** Valuations often lead to vendors selling their property through the agent they've had a valuation through. The more valuations you're receiving, the more stock you are likely to have.
- **To generate calls or increase footfall:** A lot still rides on human interaction in the property sector, and so many companies find it is important to increase the number of phone calls or encourage footfall to their office.

Of course, in trying to meet these objectives, you are likely to encounter problems which hinder the performance of your campaigns, some of which are beyond your control, others which you may be able to counteract. Potential problems include:

- **Reputation:** As with many businesses, reputation plays an important part in your success, and the same is true in the property sector. If you have a poor reputation, then you are likely to struggle to attract your target audience. If this is an issue for your property business, then you may want to think about setting up a campaign to try and change the perception of your company.
- **Seasonality:** The time of year it is can have significant impact on the performance of your campaigns and of the business as a whole. While there is an increasing search demand for 'property for sale' overall, there are clear peaks and troughs, with popularity of the search declining from October to December each year, whereas March and April have the highest search volume.



- **Market crashes and booms:** Although these are often seen by experienced professionals in the property industry well in advance of them taking place, they still have an impact on your marketing campaigns and business overall.
- **Political Events:** Similarly to crashes and booms, political events can also have an effect on the property market. For example, if a policy on housing is revealed by a particular political party around the time of a General Election, this can have an effect on the number of people who want to buy and sell their properties. Other political events, such as the Brexit vote in June 2016, can have a similar impact, if not more so, with referenda of such magnitude causing a great deal of economic uncertainty, depending on the outcome.

Problems such as these can sometimes be counteracted, however, it takes a great deal of planning and understanding of the potential impact any action will have. For example, in leaner times, you may think it is better to switch your focus from a PR-based 'reputation' campaign to one which is solely fixed on generating leads, whether that's through contact forms or brochure downloads, and is promoted through Paid Media. However, it's important to think about the implications of doing so, for example how much it will cost.



The Market Disruptor

Another problem faced by many 'traditional' estate agents in the current market is the rise of the Market Disruptor, in this case, the 'online estate agent'. Companies such as Purplebricks, emoov, Yopa and Tepilo have entered the property sector and had an instant impact on how the sector operates, with traditional estate agents having to raise their game and think of new ways to market themselves in order to compete with them.

These 'online estate agents' have done what many traditional estate agents thought they were doing in making it easy to get a valuation of their property, arrange viewings, and make offers on properties they had seen. Of course, many of these online estate agents have embarked on campaigns which include expensive television adverts, something which is out of reach of the small, independent estate agency, but ultimately, they have made the process of buying and selling property a lot easier by addressing the needs of their target audience, which is why they have been so successful.

The Audience

The next step in developing a successful marketing campaign is identifying your target audience and understanding them, their behaviours and ultimately what their end goals are. This is the key to being able to deliver a truly successful marketing campaign.

Personas

As part of our planning process, we work by developing an understanding of our clients' audience, by creating a 'persona' document. This is essentially a breakdown of our clients' audience, and includes details of their age range, gender, hobbies and interests, their estimated household income, their occupation and their location. We also include details of any challenges they face and the channels in which they are most receptive to information, which allows us to build relevant campaigns and deliver them in ways in which they are more likely to engage with.

These personas are built by gaining insight from the client as to what they think their audience is, using their data to see what the audience really is, and undertaking our own additional research in order to get the best possible picture for each persona.



In the property sector, we could have a number of different personas. For example:

The First Time Buyer: People in this category are typically between 28 and 35, 57% of whom are either in a relationship or married and have a household income of £35,000 - £40,000. They are active on social media throughout the day, enjoy meals out and spend a lot of time together as a couple.

The Young Family: This persona is generally made up of 30 - 40 year olds, who have one or two children. They tend to have outgrown their first property and want to live in towns which have a good range of local facilities, such as supermarkets, cinemas and leisure centres. Being in the catchment area of good schools is important to them. They spend time on social media, but this tends to be in the evenings when their children are in bed.

The Downsizer: People in this persona are typically older than the Young Family, with an age range of between 55 and 65. They have older children who have left home, and enjoy spending quality time together at restaurants and outdoor activities such as countryside walks or visits to historic monuments or museums. They are less active on social media, and are likely to only use platforms to stay in touch with family members.

These are just three brief examples of different personas which could be relevant to the property sector. Others could include 'The Business Owner', who is looking for a commercial property to buy, or 'The Student', who is looking to rent a student property with friends whilst studying at university.

Businesses who understand their audience will find themselves developing a competitive advantage over their rivals. It's also worth noting that the longer you are able to engage with your customer for, the greater the opportunity will be for you to deliver a positive experience and build a strong relationship with them. This is particularly important in the property sector, with the experience of buying or selling a house a key event in the life of any individual. The process is completely based on trust, and so it is important for estate agents to start to build that trust as early on as possible so that the customer has completely confidence in the brand and the people behind it.

Every aspect of your marketing campaign should always relate back to at least one of your predetermined personas, and there should always be a justifiable reason behind any action taken.



SEO

The next step in developing a successful marketing campaign is identifying your target audience and understanding them, their behaviours and ultimately what their end goals are. This is the key to being able to deliver a truly successful marketing campaign.

“SEO helps to generate traffic to your website from search engines such as Google and Bing, by helping your site appear for search terms your audience is searching for. As a result, you are likely to see more valuation bookings, calls to the business or even visits to your branches”

Ensuring that your website is technically sound is a standard practice for any site, but for a business in the property sector it's even more important, with a high level of competition for search terms. Failing to ensure that best practice is adhered to will mean your website will make the task of competing with well-established estate agent groups and property portals an even harder task. So what is best practice when it comes to technical SEO?

There are many different aspects to technical SEO, all of which play an important part in how well your website ranks in the SERPs:

Page Titles: Starting with one of the most basic aspects of Technical SEO, Page Titles are absolutely vital. Not only do they tell the search engine algorithms what the page is about, but they also tell the end user. Page Titles should be between 50 and 60 characters long, and provide clear top-level information about what the page contains. Using Hunters as an example:

[Hunters Estate Agents & Letting Agents - Here to Get you There](https://www.hunters.com/)
<https://www.hunters.com/> ▼
Hunters Estate Agents is one of the largest independent networks of sales & lettings agents in the UK. Get in touch and discover the Hunters difference!

Welcome to Hunters Estate ... Welcome to Hunters Estate Agents and Letting Agents Leeds ...	Property search Filter your results. Narrow your search results using our filters to ...
Buying in Leeds A guide to buying property in Leeds. From first time buyers to ... More results from hunters.com »	My Hunters My Hunters. Hunters Logo. Email address. Password. Sign in ...

The Page Title for Hunters' homepage provides a clear message as to who they are and what they do.

Meta Descriptions: Similarly to Page Titles, Meta Descriptions are easy to deal with, but are essential to get right. Situated below the Page Title in the SERPs, the meta description provides **more information** on



what a particular page is about.

The length of meta descriptions is something which has been debated recently, with Google often running tests to see whether longer meta descriptions enhance the user experience. There are many free tools online which will help you preview your metadata, but current guidelines suggest that **320 characters** is the optimum length for meta descriptions.

Header Tags: Stylized as <H1> or <H2> in web code, Header Tags tell search engines about headers and how important they are. Header tags should be different to Page Titles, but it is advisable to put **target keywords** in them. You can have as many Header Tags as you like, but ensure that you only have one of each (1 x <h1>, 1 x <h2>, 1 x <h3> etc.) and that they are in the correct order.

Image Alt Tags: An ALT Tag, or 'ALT attribute' as it is sometimes known, adds a **short text description** to an image on a web page. It should be used on every image, and inform the search engine crawlers and the end user what the contents of the image is and what its purpose is. A maximum number of characters has not been published, however it is standard practice in the industry to restrict the length of the ALT tag to **125 characters**.

URL Structure: When it comes to the structure of your website's URLs, each one should be **concise** and **descriptive**, without space words and prepositions, and only use hyphens rather than underscores. They should also **contain target keywords**, but avoid stuffing them, and should be in **lowercase** font.



Robots.txt: The Robots.txt file of a website is a text file which sits in the backend of your website and tells search engines about specific URLs which you do not want appearing in the SERPs (**indexing**). It is really important that your Robots.txt file is checked on a regular basis to ensure that there are no URLs in there which shouldn't be! Robots.txt files are important in the property sector as websites in this discipline tend to be 'data heavy' with a lot of images and information present, which when crawled can seriously impact the speed of your site. By optimising your Robots.txt to stop certain URLs being crawled and indexed, you reduce the risk of a slow page speed.

Canonicals: A **rel=canonical** tag tells a search engine's crawlers which version of a page to index to



include in the SERPs. It is commonly used on websites where some pages have similar content, to avoid being penalised for duplicate content.

404 Pages: A 404 error page is displayed to users when the URL they typed in or were directed to doesn't exist on your website. This could be as a result of a property no longer being listed on your website as a result of a sale for example. Best practice when it comes to 404 pages is to ensure that they follow the **same structure and navigation** as your whole website, inform users that the page they were looking for doesn't exist, and provide them with **links to alternative pages**.

Sorry!

We can't find the page you're looking for.

Error code 404

[Go to homepage](#)

XML Sitemap: Along with the Robots.txt file, the XML Sitemap of your domain is one of the most important elements of technical SEO optimisation.

Your XML Sitemap is an XML file which contains a list of all the URLs available on your website, and includes information such as their title, their publishing date and when they were last updated. Search engine crawlers use the XML Sitemap to guide them as to which pages to index, and you can submit your XML Sitemap to them through **Google's Search Console** and **Bing's Webmaster Tools**.

SSL: Website security is always a hot topic, in IT departments and marketing agencies all over the world. Installing an SSL certificate on a website will give your website a 'HTTPS' domain, which in addition to demonstrating to users that your site is encrypted, is also a ranking factor. If you don't have SSL installed on your website, then we would advise that you do so as a matter of urgency.

These are just a few aspects of Technical SEO to consider, however there are many more which you may also want to include on your website to ensure it is fully optimised. For example, **Schema mark-up**, which adds semantic vocabulary to your website to help search engines show more informative results to their users, or **conversion tracking code** to help you identify the pages which generate the most leads.

Off-site is also an important part of overall SEO strategy. Off-site optimisation essentially entails **building the presence of your website online**, which is done by building **links and citations** from **relevant and authoritative domains**. One of the best ways of doing this is by targeting industry press through press



releases, interviews or through wider content marketing campaigns. The reason why this is likely to benefit your site more than getting citations or links from other sources such as directories is because the search engine will already know that industry press, for example Property Week, are an authority and are relevant to the property sector. By linking back to your website or citing your brand name, this sends a ranking signal to the algorithms of the search engines that your website is also relevant to that sector or topic. High-authority publications also include national newspapers and sources such as the BBC.

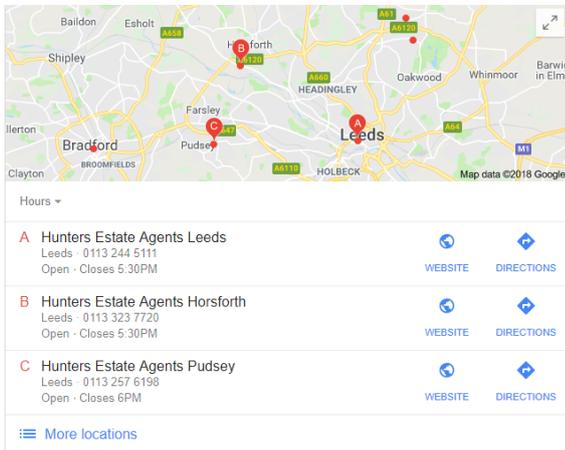
Many brands have also previously worked with bloggers which are relevant to their industry. Naturally, 'estate agent' or 'property' bloggers are few and far between, and so if this is an approach you have chosen, then you may need to think outside the box. For example, you may want to target bloggers who specialise in interior design or DIY. Collaborations or guest posting with other brands in these types of sectors, such as flooring companies or tool manufacturers, are also a great way of building links back to your site.

As part of off-site optimisation, you will want to monitor the links which are pointing back to your website, and instruct web crawlers not to count some of them when taking ranking factors into account during indexing. For example, as a business in the property sector, you will want links from websites such as propertyweek.com, newspapers such as theguardian.com and the domains of any relevant bloggers or influencers you have worked with. However, you will not want links from davesdaytrips.co.uk for example, as the site is likely to have little authority and is not relevant to your brand. You can also ensure that any malicious sites which have links pointing towards your domain are discounted. The way in which you do this is by listing these domains in a .txt file and submitting them to the **Disavow tool** in Google Search Console. This will instruct Google's crawlers not to take these links into account when assessing the quality of your website.

Off-site optimisation also plays a part in Local SEO, with links and citations from local sources, such as local newspapers, building the profile of your website in a particular area, as they send signals to a search engines algorithm, which tell it that your website is an authority on that topic in that locality, and is therefore relevant to a user's search. Getting your website featured in Google's '3-pack', which includes Google My Business, Google Maps and Google+ is an essential part to ensuring that your local search



presence is optimised.



With Google My Business, make sure that you check that all of the required information is correct when you set up the account. This includes your physical address, to which Google will send a postcard to with an authorization code on it, which you will need to confirm that the business is yours. Also, ensure that you have a complete profile. This means specifying your opening times, having correct contact information and having visually appealing photos associated with the listing.

In the property industry, particularly for estate agents, it is vital that every branch is listed in Google My Business.

Individual Branch Pages

In addition to the above, you may also want to consider having separate pages on your website for each branch. It's crucial to keep them separate from each other on your business website, as it will ensure that you create optimum search result visibility for all of your branch locations. As with the main site, each branch page should include information which is relevant to the location, such as the postcode and telephone number.

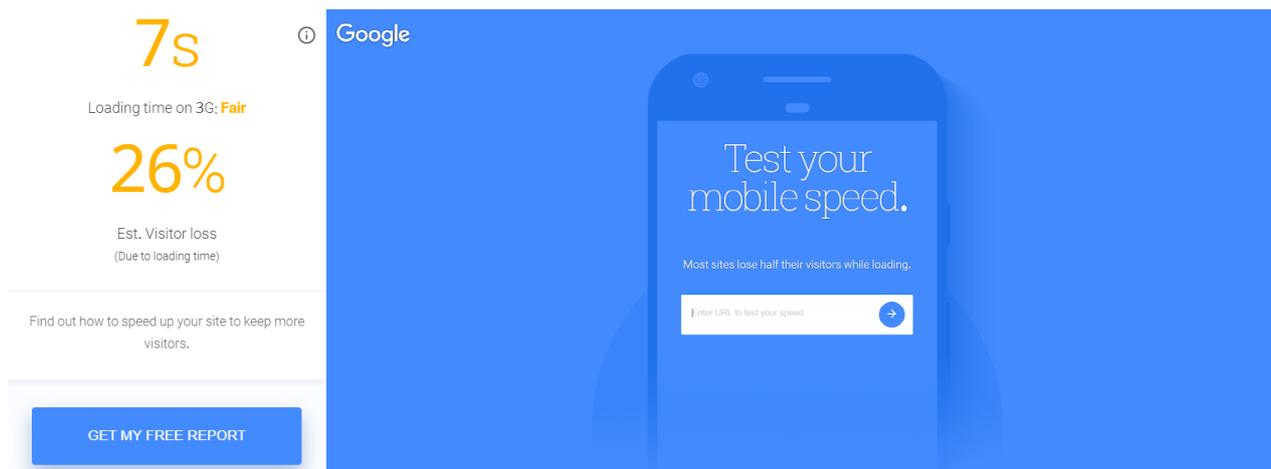
It seems basic, but simply having your address on your website also helps with Local SEO. Ideally, the best place for this is in the footer of every page, as it reinforces to search engine algorithms that each page is relevant to that location.

Mobile optimisation is also incredibly important for websites to get right. We now live in a mobile-first



world, where the majority of searches are made on a mobile device. Therefore, it's absolutely essential that your website to be optimised for peak performance in mobile SERPs.

Fortunately there are multiple tools to help with this. For example, Google has a **Mobile Friendly Test**, where you can insert your domain and it will give you a score, as well as make recommendations as to how you can make your website more 'mobile friendly'.



In addition to this, Google have developed a **Page Speed Insights** tool. This tool gives a score for both mobile and desktop page speed, but doesn't generate a report which is as in detail as the Mobile Friendly Test.

In order to improve page load speed, Google have also released the PageSpeed Module, which is an open-source server module which optimises your site automatically. This makes the process of ensuring that the load speed of your website, both on desktop and mobile, as low as it possibly can be, without the need for hours of manual optimisation work.

Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP) is another way of ensuring that your content is suitable for mobile devices. This open source code, which can be added to areas of your website where there is regular news type content, ensures the best presentation of your content and in the quickest possible time. However, the down-side of AMP is that rather than the content sitting on your own websites domain, it sits on a Google domain, for example Google.com/amp/yourcontent. This means that you will see little overall SEO benefit to creating content using AMP.

Finally, we look at **voice search**. It's unquestionable that voice search is rising, with recent figures showing that there are over 500 million assistant-enabled devices worldwide, with one billion voice



searches being made every month. Voice has already proven to be a successful addition to businesses in sectors such as eCommerce, however we are yet to see it make any sort of impact in other areas such as property. With that said, Google assistant in particular is becoming more human, with a demonstration at the I/O conference in 2018 showing how the Assistant can book appointments at business such as restaurants, hairdressers or dentists. The Assistant interacted seamlessly with humans, having multi-step conversations over the phone, and this raises the question of whether Google Assistant could potentially book activity such as property viewings, submit offers or even negotiate mortgages in the future. At present, it is difficult to optimise for voice search, as there is still very little information within the industry on how to do so. However, we would recommend that content is written in a way in which it would be spoken and using semantic search in order to stand the best chance of your content being picked up by the voice search algorithms.

Top Tips for SEO:

Focus on Local

Local search is vitally important for property companies, whether that be estate agents or property development companies, mainly as they are likely to operate multiple branches in many different areas. Even if you are a smaller independent business, you stand a good chance of ranking for more localised terms if you focus your efforts on building your profile in the area you're situated in, as many larger groups and portals will focus solely on the keywords which drive the most traffic.

Write unique content

It sounds like an obvious point, but writing unique content can really benefit your business' website. Estate agents often get a reputation for being boring so why not write some content which proves otherwise? Also, at 'stock' level, by which we mean individual property pages, refrain from using clichés and describing a house in the same way every other agent would.

Alternatively, using a social listening tool and writing content based on the results is a great way of ensuring that you are producing content which your audience is almost guaranteed to engage with.

Look at long-tail keywords

Long tail keywords are still neglected by a lot of businesses, and not just in the property sector. However, if someone searches "Georgian home in Chapel Allerton", as a local estate agent you are more likely to have a chance of ranking against the likes of Rightmove, Purplebricks and Zoopla, as the search term is much more specific than 'property in Leeds' for example. These longer-tail key phrases often have fewer people searching for them, but they have a high level of intent, as they know exactly what they are looking for.



SEO Checklist:

Issue	Description	Checked?
Page Titles	Has every page got a unique title? Is the title the correct length?	
Meta Descriptions	Has every page got a unique meta description? Is it the correct length?	
Header Tags	Have you made use of header tags?	
Images	Are all of your images correctly optimised? Do they have ALT tags?	
URL Structure	Are your URLs structured correctly? Does it contain keywords you want to be found for? Are there any elements of punctuation which shouldn't be in there?	
Robots.txt	Ensure that your robots.txt contains all of the correct information regarding pages you don't want indexing, and submit it to Google Search Console.	
Canonicals	Do you have rel=canonical tags in place? Failure to do so may result in a penalty for duplicate content.	
404 Pages	Are your 404 error pages constructed properly? Do they follow the same structure as your main pages? Do they contain links back to other pages such as the Home page?	
SSL Certificate	Have you got an SSL certificate in place? Without one, your website may not be supported in certain browsers, e.g. Chrome.	
Redirects	Ensure that any 302 redirects are changed to 301 redirects, as these will pass the vast majority of SEO authority on to the new page.	
Backlink profile checked?	Have you checked your backlink profile? Use a tool such as Majestic or Ahrefs to download a list of all the domains with links back to your website.	
Disavow File	Once you have checked your backlink profile, put the domains of the websites you don't want linking back to your site in to a .txt file, and upload it to Google Search Console's Disavow tool.	



Issue	Description	Checked?
Google Analytics	A free tool from Google, Analytics allows you to track the number of visitors your site is receiving, where it is coming from, the pages which are most popular and bounce rate, along with many other important metrics.	
Google Search Console	Search Console is a free tool provided by Google to webmasters. With Search Console, you can get data and feedback on how your site is performing. Similarly to Analytics, every website should be making use of Search Console.	
Bing Webmaster Tools	Bing's Webmaster Tools is very similar to Google's Search Console, except it is specifically for Bing, the Microsoft-powered search engine.	
Google My Business	Ensure you have verified your Google My Business page, and that all of the information on it is up to date. Your business name, address, phone number, main email, hours and website should be standard across the web.	
Sitemap	An XML sitemap helps search engines understand the structure of your site and find all the pages on your site that you want to be indexed. Ensure you submit one to Google by using Search Console.	
Speed Test	Ensure your site has a fast page speed. Search engines look favourably on sites which provide a good user experience, and a slow load speed will increase your bounce rate, which in turn has an effect on search rankings.	
Mobile Friendly Test	Have you carried out a mobile-friendly test? Use Google's free tool to test how responsive your site is on mobile devices.	



Paid Media

Focus on Local

Misunderstood by many, Paid Media is a great way to drive traffic and increase the number of leads your business is receiving. Of course, there are many different aspects of Paid Media for you to consider, including paid search, retargeting, display advertising and paid social media.

“Paid Media is a great way to generate leads, without having to rely on your ranking within the SERPs. Unlike organic search, Paid Media means that you pay a fee to appear higher for certain search terms. The vast majority of Paid Media is based on a cost-per-click basis, meaning you only pay when someone clicks on your advert.”

Firstly, let us explore the two primary platforms for Paid Media, those being **Google AdWords** and **Bing Ads**. **Google AdWords** is by far the most popular platform with millions of active accounts worldwide. This is unsurprising, with Google providing the most popular search engine, meaning a far **greater potential audience** than its main rival Bing. Where Bing perhaps the advantage though is as a result of the lower number of users, the **cost per click (CPC) of a keyword in Bing is typically lower** than it would be on the AdWords platform. Many businesses choose to use both platforms to ensure maximum exposure for their Paid Media campaigns, however, if identical **Ad Groups** and **Keywords** are used, it would be worth analysing these on a regular basis to ensure that you are achieving the maximum number of conversions for as low a cost as possible.

One aspect of both AdWords and Bing Ads which is beneficial to advertisers in the property sector is the ability to **create custom audiences** depending on your target demographic. For example, you may have multiple branches, meaning you may want to deliver adverts to people looking for property in the area near to a particular branch in order to drive traffic to it, either in the form of web traffic, leads generated or physical footfall. Using **geo-targeting**, an advertiser is able to serve ads to their audience **based on their location**, and exclude people who are searching for the same terms but who aren't within the chosen radius. For example, a branch in Leeds may choose to serve an advert to Leeds and within a 10 mile radius, to people searching for 'houses for sale'. That advert would only be shown to people looking for that or a similar term, depending on whether the keywords were exact match or broad match, within that radius. A user who searched 'houses for sale' located in York or Harrogate, would not be shown the advert.

In addition to geo-targeting, it is also possible to serve ads to users based on the device they are using to conduct the search. This allows you to ensure that you are showing your ads to your audience on the



device on which they are most likely to be using at the time. For example, you may want to target **First Time Buyers**, and you know through your persona research that they are **active on their mobile devices** on their commute, typically between 7am and 9am, and again between 5pm and 7pm.

Another avenue to consider is **Display Advertising**. Although this method tends not to deliver as high a conversion rate as paid search, it can deliver **high volumes of traffic**. Display is also a great way of generating brand awareness; with a traditional PPC advert appearing in the **SERPs**, users have to read the text and then click through to learn more about the business, whereas with a display advert, they are branded and often combined with an offer so a user can gather information on your brand with a quick glance. As with paid search, it is also possible to **create specific parameters** for them, so that you can control the types of website on which they appear, where the user is geographically and which demographic the user sits in (e.g. male, 25 - 34).

In our experience, we have found that Display Advertising is not commonly used in the property sector, which may be as a result of its reasonably **low return on investment**, however it could form an important part of a brand awareness campaign or even as part of a retargeting effort.

Finally, we take a look at **paid social media advertising**. Paid or 'Sponsored' posts on social media are a great way of reaching your audience, particularly if your persona spends a lot of time on social platforms.

Facebook Advertising is a great platform for property companies to reach their target audience. With the ever-changing algorithm, organic content on Facebook, although still important, is not as influential as it once was, and so many businesses are turning to Facebook Advertising to help them reach their target audience. With the ability to efficiently target ads, which are tailored to specific target audiences, you ensure that only people you want to see your adverts do so.

By using Facebook's Pixel, which is a small piece of code which can be embedded onto your website, you can also retarget website visitors on the social media channel by serving ads specifically based on what they have viewed on your website. For example, if Fred Smith visits your website as he is looking at buying a four bedroom newly-built property, he will see an advert for exactly that property on his news feed, if you are running a retargeting campaign.

The same could be said if a user visited your 'free valuation' page and then bounced without filling in the contact form, you could then keep it fresh in their minds by serving them adverts reminding them about your free valuation service, while they browse Facebook.



There is a huge amount of potential for property companies to capitalise on Facebook Advertising, with it generally cheaper than traditional Paid Media in the form of AdWords campaigns, and if you get it right, it has the ability to generate some impressive results.

When it comes to Paid Social Media, nearly every platform has its own Advertising service. For example, LinkedIn has a Campaign Manager, allowing users to serve adverts to individuals based on location, job title and the industry they work in. LinkedIn is a great platform if you are looking to advertise to a more commercial audience, for example small business owners who are looking to move to a new premises.

Top Tips for Paid Media:

Know where your audience are:

As we've previously alluded to, knowing your audience and where they spend their time online is not only absolutely vital to the success of your overall marketing activity, but specifically to your Paid Media campaigns. For example, are you targeting first time buyers who are regularly active on social media and are best targeted through imagery, or are you targeting another persona such as 'The Downsizer', who are looking for valuations using search engines such as Google and Bing.

Select niche keywords:

Keywords play a key part in the success of a paid search campaign. The competition level for keywords in the property sector is extremely high, with multiple estate agencies bidding on the same keywords, which in turn inflates the cost per click. By turning your attentions to more niche keywords and keeping on top of your negative keywords you will likely have greater success for less cost than bidding on generic estate agency and property terms.

Get your landing page right:

Your landing pages can make or break a campaign. Not only does it have to bear overall relevance to your ads, but the text and imagery on it also have to demonstrate benefits and a clear USP to the user, particularly in such a competitive sector.



Paid Media Checklist:

Issue	Description	Checked?
Conversion Tracking	Are your conversions being tracked correctly?	
Targeting	Are your campaigns targeting the right audience? Are your ads focused on the right location? Are you targeting the correct devices?	
Ad Groups	Your Ad Groups should be structured in a logical fashion, which means grouping relevant keywords together.	
Ad Extensions	Ad extensions mean that advertisers can complement their PPC ads with additional text. Sitelinks, Location, Call, and Review are all examples of Extensions which you can use to enhance your ad.	
Keyword Match Types	There are four types of keyword matches; broad keyword match, modified broad match, phrase match type, exact match type. Ensure that your ads are using the correct one, depending on your campaign goals.	
Negative Keywords	“Negative keywords let you exclude search terms from your campaigns and help you focus on only the keywords that matter to your customers.” Ensure that you have included negative keywords in your campaigns, otherwise you may end up paying to appear in searches which aren't relevant to you!	
Budget	Budget is absolutely key to the success of your paid media campaigns. You need to ensure that your budget is correctly allocated, that funds are available from your chosen payment method, and that you're not spending money bidding on terms which aren't relevant.	
Ad Copy	Is your ad copy relevant to the search term/keyword for which you want to appear?	
Landing Page	Your landing page must be relevant to your advert. Ensure you have linked the correct landing page for each advert or ad group.	



Social Media

Similarly to Paid Media, **Social Media** is often misunderstood and even misused by businesses, particularly within the property industry. Everyone agrees that you should be on social media platforms such as **Facebook** and **Twitter**, but it's rare to find a business who knows why they should be on them, other than the classic 'everyone else is on there' reason.

“Social Media can be used in a number of ways, from building an audience of potential customers and engaging in conversation with them, to retargeting visitors to your website who haven't completed a predetermined goal. Unlike SEO, you are not reliant on search rankings, and unlike Paid Media, you don't always have to pay to get your content seen, but it can still be used to generate leads.”

Having a strong social presence can help you attract and engage with your target audience, through the sharing of blogs, promotional material, professional imagery and influencer marketing. Any activity should strongly reinforce your brand message and have a clear purpose.

One aspect to remember when it comes to social media is that a 'one size fits all' approach simply doesn't work, as each platform has its different audiences, and their algorithms work differently in terms of how content is shown to the user base. For example, content you post on Twitter, which has an informal audience, may not be relevant to your audience on LinkedIn, which is a business to business platform designed for professional networking. Alternatively, one platform may not be relevant to your target audience.

Facebook

Facebook is seen as a 'staple' platform for most brands. However, from an organic point of view - the posting of statuses, photos and videos - it tends to generate very little in the way of return on investment, and is better used for showing a human side to your business, and providing knowledge to your audience. This is because the audience you are talking to have already heard of the brand, hence why they have already liked your page. They may have been a customer, having bought or sold a house, or put in a valuation request, and then subsequently liked the page. However, as we have previously mentioned, Facebook Advertising provides you with an opportunity to engage with people in your target audience who haven't yet liked your page. We would definitely recommend using Facebook ads as part of your overall strategy.



Twitter

Twitter is seen as the 'voice' of a brand, with businesses becoming increasingly active on the platform to try and engage with their audience on a more personal level. Although it is unlikely to generate leads, it is a good platform to post content such as reviews, blog posts and to talk to customers directly, dealing with any quick queries.

Twitter is about being '**of the moment**' and with this in mind, it's important to think about the time users are online using the platform. Typically, during the week, users are on first thing in the morning, during a commute, and at home in the evening, which makes these the prime times for posting content.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a platform which can be used by companies in the property sector, but it has to be used for the **right purpose**. You are unlikely to be able to attract people to buy or sell a home through, however, there is an opportunity for larger brands who **sell franchises** in order to increase their geographical presence. In order to do this, you will want to use LinkedIn's **Campaign Manager**, where you can create custom audiences and **target users** with a specific **job title** and in a specific **location**. For example, you could serve ads to users who had 'Director' in their title and worked in the 'Estate Agent' or 'Property' industry.

Instagram

Again, Instagram is unlikely to have a direct effect on the number of leads you receive, however with **over a billion users**, it could still be a great place to appeal to first time buyers. It's still relatively **underused by property companies**, but with their product being 'visual', it could provide a great opportunity to showcase some visually appealing or unusual homes. One slight drawback however, is that Instagram does not yet allow links to be posted with an image, which means users can't visit the page of a property which they like the look of in an image directly.

Top tips for Social Media:

Post unique content:

With social media, it's very easy to churn the same content over and over. This is likely to bore your audience, result in little to no engagement, and possibly even lead to them unfollowing you. **Do your research** into what is being talked about; keeping your posts **topical** will ensure that they are current and that they are **of interest** to your target audience.



Choose the right hashtag:

Ensuring that you **research hashtags** is also essential for your success on social media. Why are you 'hashtagging' that particular word? Is it searched for on a regular basis? Is there a lot of content already out there using this hashtag? Are you hijacking it? Also, consider the relevant hashtags to the post; for example, if it is a competition, use '#win', '#competition', and '#giveaway'. There are a lot of tools out there to help you analyse this, with '**Hashtagify**' being one of the best known.

Get your timing right:

We've already alluded to it in the Twitter section, but consider the **time** at which you are posting your content. The vast majority of your audience will find themselves **at work between 9am and 5pm**, so target them when they are most active such as when they **wake up, when they're commuting, or in the evenings** when they are scrolling through their social media channels while watching TV. This may vary slightly however, depending on the platform. For example, if you are looking to run a campaign with the aim of signing up more estate agents to become franchises, then you will want to target the business owner when they are at work, using a platform which they are likely to be accessing at their desk such as LinkedIn.

Social Media Checklist:

Issue	Description	Checked?
Profile & Header Images	Do your display images fit correctly? Using the wrong size image can reflect poorly on your business.	
Profile Information	Is your profile complete? Does it have all the necessary information such as website URL, email, address, phone number etc.	
Username	Ensure you are using a username which is relevant to your business, such as your brand/company name.	
Links	Are the links included in your post pointing to the correct page? Are the links too long? - Consider using a link shortener such as Bitly.	
Hashtags	Have you done research into relevant hashtags being used? Take a look at any competitors and see what they are doing?	
Content Calendar	Have you created a content calendar so you know what you are posting and when?	



Issue	Description	Checked?
Metrics	Have you decided on what metrics are most important for the activity you are undertaking?	
Content	Is the tone and style of your content right for the platform? Is the content you are posting relevant to your audience on that platform?	
Identify a primary platform	Identify which platform is most appropriate for your business. In the property industry, this is likely to be Twitter and Facebook, as this is where a vast majority of your target audience is.	

Content Marketing & PR

Content Marketing and PR is a great way to build your reputation within the industry and create familiarity with your target audience. But what is 'content marketing'?

Content Marketing, as defined by the Content Marketing Institute is:

"Content marketing is a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience — and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action."

Having seen a surge in popularity over the last few years, 'content marketing' is now very much one of the industry 'buzzwords'. Content Marketing can take many different forms, including:

- Blog Content
- Infographics
- Interactive Assets
- Newsletters
- eBooks

By producing content marketing, your business becomes a **credible, authoritative source** for information on topics which are of interest to your audience. This means that you're more likely to turn members of that **audience into customers**, by **strengthening the relationships** with them and **growing your active**



customer base. In the property industry, as we've mentioned previously in this paper, the strength of the relationships between your business and your audience is absolutely vital, as the process of buying and selling a house is **built on trust**.

The ultimate goal for your content marketing activity is to **move your audience along their purchasing journey**, from increasing awareness about your business, to generating that initial contact, right through to the exchange of contracts. By creating content which is suitable for the persona you are targeting, you are more likely to be able to guide them through the sales cycle. For example, a first-time buyer may be looking speculatively at property, but needs to be persuaded to give their contact details to you, so that you can send them potentially suitable properties. Or maybe, a family is looking to move, but they need reassurances about the area, such as the standard of the local nurseries, schools and colleges, before booking a viewing or arranging a valuation of their current home. Content can be created to suit any scenario such as this.

Of course, the issue with content is that it may become **dated and less relevant over time**, particularly in the property sector, with variables such as house prices changing on a regular basis. With this in mind, it's good to create content which will be **'evergreen'**, which means it will be relevant and accurate almost indefinitely.

However, **seasonal** content is also important, particularly as the property industry has a clearly defined 'selling season'. **Use content to your advantage**; if you know selling season is approaching, start producing content aimed at helping people to choose the right estate agent or tips on how to get the best valuation of their home.

Once you've created a content marketing piece, whether it's a blog or interactive asset, you need to ensure that it is **amplified** in order to reach the target audience. This can happen in a variety of ways, from publishing on your **own social media channels**, to gaining coverage on third-party websites such as **newspapers** and **magazines**. This leads us nicely on to PR. But again, what is it?

PR, or Public Relations, is defined by the **Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR)** as:

"...the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behaviour. It is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics."



Building associations with trusted sources is a key part of ensuring that your marketing campaigns are successful, both in terms of maximising your potential audience and getting SEO benefits. For example, not only would you benefit as business by having your content picked up by an online newspaper because of the number of people who read it, but it may also contain a link back to your site. As we looked at in the SEO section, links back from relevant and authoritative sources are essential to helping your website rank in the SERPs.

Journalists are always looking for content. They have to have it in order to keep the publication they're working for relevant and fresh. With this in mind, it's often beneficial to contact a journalist about your content marketing piece at an individual level, rather than go through an 'info@newspaper.com' type email address. Of course, you don't have to stick to content you've already created either; you could potentially pitch an idea to them based on a topic which you feel your business would be seen as an authority on.

Many people undervalue PR as an approach, and some even ignore it completely, especially within SEO agencies. Similarly, some PR agencies can have a more traditional approach and not understand the value of a link or brand citation within the pieces on which they are working. This is why it is often beneficial to work with an integrated agency who is able to combine multiple approaches in order to deliver the best possible results.

Influencer Marketing

Having spoken about social media and PR, we now must also mention Influencer Marketing.

"Influencer marketing is a way in which to deliver your brand's message to a wider audience, by using key leaders, who are relevant to the audience, to deliver the message for you. Although it can be costly, it provides business with a way of reaching their target audience which they wouldn't necessarily have access to"

Influencer Marketing is the process of working with a well-known or relevant personality in order to deliver your brand's message or gain exposure for your brand or product. For example, a company working in the property sector may want to invite influential bloggers or journalists to a launch event for a new development. These influencers would then write about the event, posting on their blog and sharing across their social media channels, thus providing coverage for your brand to their audience. Building relationships with these influencers can be extremely beneficial, particularly long-term, but often takes a lot of resource in order to do it.



Email Marketing

Email Marketing forms a vital part of the conversion process, as it helps keep your audience engaged even after they have left your website.

“Email marketing provides an opportunity for brands to keep in contact with their target audience, by sending them relevant content, with the long-term aim of converting the end user into a customer.”

The success of your email marketing campaigns can be measured in a number of ways, including how many people opened the email (open rate) and how many people clicked on content within the email (click-through rate).

Recent statistics suggest that you should expect to see an open rate of around 27% in the property sector, with a click through rate (CTR) of around 3%. This is a considerably lower CTR than other industries such as restaurants or health & beauty, but with property, the value of the click is much higher later on in the cycle.

There are a number of email marketing platforms available to you, including MailChimp, Drip and ActiveCampaign, with each one bringing different benefits. However, they will all be able to track the engagement levels of the emails you send.

One of the key aspects to email marketing is to ensure that the campaign is designed for mobile. The vast majority of people now open their emails on a mobile device, with the iPhone the primary medium, followed by Gmail, then iPad. If your email takes too long to open or is formatted wrong for these devices, then you will likely find that recipients unsubscribe from the list or disengage from your brand altogether.

Also, similarly to considering when you are posting on social media, take into account the time you are sending out your email campaigns. This can make or break the success of the campaign, with studies suggesting that Tuesdays and Thursdays are the best days to be sending out emails to your database.

With this in mind, email marketing can also fall into the category of marketing automation and lead warming. Using email marketing in this way, as part of ongoing interaction with the end user, has been very successful for a number of major online estate agents such as EweMove. Companies such as this use automation to their advantage, by delivering content such as specific landing pages, surveys and webinars, to their target audience, which keeps leads 'warm', which makes them easier to convert further along the sales cycle.



Web Design, Development & User Experience (UX)

The overall user experience is key to getting visitors to your site to complete your predetermined goals, whether that's to book a valuation, viewing or to contact a branch for more information. If a user has a poor experience of your website, they are unlikely to return to it, meaning in a potential customer lost.

There are a number of reasons why a user may have a poor experience:

Slow Load Speed

Slow load speed is one of the primary factors in why a user bounces from a website, and statistics show that 40% of people will abandon a page which takes three or more seconds to load. By making basic changes such as minimizing HTTP requests, using asynchronous loading for CSS and JavaScript files, reducing your server response time and reducing the size of image files on your site, you will make your website significantly faster.

Stock Imagery

Believe it or not, having stock imagery taken from online image libraries is a massive turn-off to a user as it shows that the brand behind the website doesn't see them as an individual as the content isn't tailored towards them.

Overly Complex

If you're on a journey in your car, you program the sat nav, and it takes you from point A to point B by the quickest possible route, with no additional detours. This is exactly how your website should work. Unfortunately, some designers make websites overly complex in a bid to try and be creative. They pile on additional design elements at the expense of usability, having an adverse effect on the overall user experience. With this in mind, it's important that you make information easily accessible, with no 'detours'.

Boring or irrelevant content

Nobody likes a boring website which is full of irrelevant or outdated content. Avoid using technical jargon wherever possible as this is likely to put users off, and try and avoid property industry cliches such as 'deceptively spacious', which usually means it really is as small as it looks, and 'an opportunity to put



your own stamp on', which often equates to 'this property is a complete wreck and needs considerable investment'.

Too 'Salesy'

It is important that you clearly signpost your users throughout their journey, but avoid being overly salesy in your tone of voice and calls to action. Ensuring that you're not overwhelming users with a sales pitch throughout your site will mean that they will enjoy the experience of being on your website.

Top Tips for Web Design, Development & User Experience:

Usability and function over design:

The content around individual properties is important and so it must have 'room to breathe'.

Focus on your user:

The overall journey and functionality of your website must be intuitive and it must flow smoothly. This is particularly important to help those users which aren't as tech savvy as others reach the end goal.

Calls to Action:

Calls-to-action (CTA's) are very important as they encourage users to take action towards the goals which you want them to complete. However, property websites differ from an eCommerce website, which have clear calls to action such as 'buy now' and 'add to wishlist'. With a property website, CTA's must be clear to the user; people need to know what to do, how to book a valuation or viewing, who to contact etc.

Which works best?

In short, there's simply no singular correct answer as to which approach or technique works best, as each company within the sector is different, with their audience personas slightly different, and each will have their own individual goals and objectives.

However, we would strongly recommend that a 'full service' approach is the best one to take.



Case Study: Hunters Property Group

Hunters Property Group are one of the largest estate agent chains in the UK, with over 200 branches nationwide. The Source are the retained digital marketing agency for Hunters, meaning that we have responsibility for multiple aspects of their overall marketing strategy, including web design & development, SEO and social media.

Hunters have engaged with us on a number of occasions. Firstly, they approached us with a view to increasing their online presence and search visibility.

Many years of experience within the industry has told Hunters that homeowners will typically contact a maximum of three estate agents when selling or letting their home. With this in mind, they wanted to increase their search visibility to ensure that they were one of the first names to appear in front of these potential vendors.

With numerous branches across the UK, we developed a targeted, local SEO strategy to drive traffic and increase the number of leads to each branch. Prior to undertaking the campaign, we delivered a bespoke competitor landscape report and targeted keyword analysis for each location, using a number of cutting-edge industry tools. After this was presented, we implemented a localised technical and off-site SEO strategy, which included alterations to metadata, generation of backlinks and local citations with authoritative third party websites, and these were consistently monitored and reported on.

The results of the campaign were impressive, with Hunters' website seeing an increase in traffic of 55% from organic Google search within the first 12 months of activity. In the second year of SEO activity, this rose by a further 20%, resulting in a considerable 86% compound increase in traffic. In light of these results, we were retained as Hunters preferred digital marketing agency.

Secondly, we designed, developed and integrated a web app which allowed prospective sellers to instantly book a home visit from a Hunters expert to value their property. The system needed to integrate with Hunters' back-office appointments system in order to offer available appointment times on the website while referring customers details to the most appropriate branch that would be handling the appointment.

We designed the web app from a 'mobile first' perspective, taking into account the increase in mobile traffic being seen by the Hunters website. Users of the app were able to quickly book their preferred



time slot to have a Hunters valuation expert visit their property, and submit their details which were then transferred to Hunters' back-office software. This allowed the app to return accurate time slots and ensure that the customer's request was submitted to their nearest Hunters branch.

On completion of the app, Hunters reported a significant increase of valuation bookings of 28%, which in turn contributed to an increase in sales instructions and overall revenue.

Thirdly, as we'd had previous success with an SEO campaign, Hunters engaged with us to lead on a social media campaign which would drive traffic and increase conversions.

In order to combat the low level of engagement Hunters were receiving on their social media channels, we devised a content marketing strategy which was amplified by Facebook Advertising.

We developed a content calendar, which formed the main pillar of the strategy, and was populated with content around trends and troughs occurring in the estate agency industry throughout the year.

In addition to this, over the course of the campaign we developed a number of assets related to the content, which included still images and animated short videos, with each one tailored to influence Hunters' specific on-site conversion goals. These proved popular with the audience, reaching over 3,000,000 people and generating over 600 conversions on the Hunters website.

Contact us

If you would like more information on any of the aspects of this ebook, then [click here.](#)

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