



One step beyond

Beating strong entries from Assetz and Property Frontiers, Portuguese agent Atlantic Estates triumphed as OPP Best Estate Agent in 2009; impressing judges with its comprehensive approach to marketing

Like most agents, Atlantic Estates has its own buyer database, predominantly covering Western Europe plus a bonus of buyers from South Africa, Angola, Brazil, Canada and the US. But what helped set the company apart in the judges' eyes for last year's OPP Industry Awards was its partner network of 60 agents across key buyer markets. So successful has it been, in fact, that 50% of the company's sales in 2009 were made through partners.

"Atlantic Estates is a small boutique operation with a large footprint," said marketing director Greg Boegner. "Our product area is purely the coastal and resort areas of Portugal. Yet our reach for marketing, partnerships and clients is vast, including the UK, France, Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Spain, Portugal and Russia. With our online inbound marketing strategy, our message is spread globally."

Partner support

To get the best from relationships with partner agents, Atlantic Estates employ international staff with multiple language skills covering

Spanish, French, German and English, as well as Portuguese. As UK buyers account for 60% of sales, the company also has British staff members to follow up enquiries and offer ex-pat advice. Additionally, a Moscow-based consultant assists with Russian clients and the translation of promotional materials.

Partners have access to an online 'Agent Zone' through Atlantic Estates' website, where they can download property details and images, read news about property in Portugal and the company, and register and monitor client activity. This allows the company to share specific data on buyers directly with their partners. Agents also receive frequent emails on special promotions and price reductions, new properties and developments, and marketing materials.

The company charges a standard minimum commission of 5% of the sale price. For partners, the share of commission depends on their level of involvement: those who send leads receive 10% of the commission, while those who pre-qualify clients to secure a visit gain 40% of commission, which

may later be increased to 50% as the relationship develops.

Reputable business

As part of its programme to protect partners, clients and itself, Atlantic Estates sticks to well known and reputable developers such as Vigia, Pestana and Vale do Lobo, and provides a portfolio of due diligence documentation on its private sellers. It also works hard to qualify clients

impressed the OPP judges was Atlantic Estates' commitment to marketing. In the last year, the firm has focused its efforts on moving from media that promotes property to those associated with Portuguese lifestyle and inbound social media marketing.

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to make sure sales don't fall through, determining the viability of their property search and providing assistance with mortgage, tax and immigration requirements. On top of this, the company has been a member of the Portuguese real estate trade body APEMIP since May 2003.

One of the areas that most

and we needed to adapt to a quickly declining economy. With that in mind, we narrowed our focus, rebranded and positioned ourselves as a boutique agency," said Boegner.

When it comes to traditional media, the company has bought advertising and pitched editorial ideas to magazines, newspapers and portals in



Ray of hope | As agents for Sunray Village in Portugal, Atlantic Estates are able to leverage an agent network and buyer database spanning the UK, France, Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Spain, Portugal and Russia. It has also invested in a comprehensive programme of marketing, combining a variety of platforms, to educate and engage foreign buyers.

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the UK, northern Europe and Russia, as well as local Portuguese publications and tourist entertainment guides.

But Atlantic Estates has also begun what it describes as “an aggressive online inbound marketing campaign”, in line with the popular embrace of internet and social media. This campaign uses a wide variety of websites and networks, from the more commonly known - such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube - to the more tailored and specific.

As well as writing their own lifestyle blog, Portugal Lifestyle at its Best, staff members use the social media site ASmallWorld.net to network on high net worth individuals and promote Portugal and the brand. The company also features in a fortnightly email newsletter that goes out to 12,000 potential buyers throughout the UK, northern Europe and the Middle East. Written by a local journalist, and called Inspirations Algarve, each issue contains information on boutique hotels, fine dining and events, plus a selection of properties from Atlantic Estates.

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On a more low-key note, the firm has even found success with the simple method of adding a single sentence “teaser” to its email signatures featuring a link to a property on the website, turning every email into an advert.

Personal contact

In the face-to-face marketing arena, Atlantic Estates attends a number of European property exhibitions, particularly focusing on Scandinavia and Russia. Instead of just attending as a single agent, the company usually puts together a consortium of developers who can promote the whole destination and assist with expenses.

But as part of the new strategy, the firm also lays out non-traditional services for clients to help encourage them to enjoy the process of browsing for and buying property. Qualified buyers are offered three-day, two-night ‘Lifestyle Visit’ inspection tours, based on themes such as golf, culture, ocean, nature and gastronomy. Not only do buyers view the properties but they also experience what it would be like to

live in them, enjoying complimentary massages, interior design consultations and baby-sitting services.

A dedicated CRM system helps the company keep track of its 6,000 contacts and can generate reports on demographics, budget or search criteria in order to target a particular set of clients. It also means they can send information about new properties directly to those buyers who have expressed interest in that type of inventory.

This database is kept up-to-date and relevant with immediate changes once a client indicates a change of mind or contact information. A follow-up call procedure to buyers allows staff to alter information appropriately but also to judge current levels of interest.

Associated services

As well as the firm’s agent partners, Atlantic Estates works with a variety of service providers to cater for the whole experience of buying and using their properties. This includes not only mortgages, foreign exchange, tax and legal advice, insurance and rental management, but also large and boutique hotels, car rental and airport transfer.

Judges were also impressed with Atlantic Estate’s Blue Box Card customer appreciation program, with property owners receiving membership that entitles them to discounts and promotions at upmarket Algarve establishments including spas, restaurants, golf excursions and entertainment.

Concluding with a final comment on

Best of the best

Year	Agent	Overall score
2009	Atlantic Estates	404
2008	Gowealthy	387
2007	Gowealthy	340

Why did Atlantic Estates win this year?

The criteria for the Best Estate Agent Award changed slightly from that initially set when the OPP Industry Awards were launched back in 2007. Where it put more emphasis on support of sub-agents initially, this year it was designed to focus more on the value for developer partners and how their property is sold.

This year, Atlantic Estates came out on top because it comprehensively satisfied each of the five key criteria, scoring particularly well on Marketing Support, Geographical Reach and Associated Services - combining excellent customer service with investment and innovation on behalf of its developer partners.

It’s entry focused solely on the main questions, providing only relevant detail and clear examples – and by following the entry template it was much easier for the judges to score.

why it scored highest in the Best Estate Agent category, one judge said: “Atlantic goes one step beyond to qualify buyers, PR and marketing is a strong point, and its geographical reach is widespread with a good mix of multi-lingual staff.”

INDUSTRY

PEOPLE

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MARKETING