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BUILDING REPUTATION IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

What every business needs to know

INTRODUCTION

A pivotal moment presents opportunity for property marketers.

The UK property sector stands at a pivotal moment. With the government's pledge to deliver 1.5 million new homes by the end of this parliament, housebuilding and regeneration have never been higher on the national agenda. Ambitious targets, planning reforms, and a renewed focus on unlocking land and investment are reshaping the landscape for developers, investors, and communities alike.

But as headlines focus on numbers and policy, the real challenge—and opportunity—lies in building reputation as well as homes.

This presents an opportunity for marketeers working across the built environment. A chance to build trust, to show and tell how your business, your developments and your people are contributing positively to story.

In a market defined by rapid change, it's not enough to broadcast about deals and square footage. Success now depends on sharing knowledge, earning endorsement, and communicating what truly sets you apart.

This eBook brings together expert perspectives from across the built environment, offering practical strategies to help you move beyond transactional marketing. Discover how to tell stories that resonate, communicate sustainability with credibility, and create connections that last—whether you're shaping new communities or revitalising established spaces.

As the sector races to meet government targets, those who build trust and reputation will be the ones who stand out. If you're ready to lead the conversation and make your mark in this new era of property, read on.

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MOVING BEYOND THE DEAL:

Moving beyond the transactions in property PR

> When we speak to new clients in the property sector, one topic that they want to shout about comes up more than any other: deals.

The focus is often on what has been sold, what acquisitions have been made, or which schemes have attracted investment.

Deals are important. They build awareness, demonstrate success, and show activity in the market. But too often, they dominate the conversation. For many businesses, deal announcements are their only communications strategy. And that can be a missed opportunity.

If you're looking to move beyond deal-led marketing, here are three areas to focus on.

1. Share knowledge, not just news

Think carefully about who you are trying to reach, then show them what you know. Deals are transactional; knowledge is relational. By letting your people speak on topics they know best—backed by experience, insights, and stories—you start to build authority and trust. And this will benefit you on and offline.

Don't be afraid to share personal viewpoints or challenge conventional wisdom. An informed opinion will resonate far more deeply with your audience than another dry announcement. Positioning your team as experts makes your brand memorable and credible.

2. Harness the power of endorsement

Third-party endorsement is a powerful tool. Advocates recommending you can convince and persuade prospects in a way that self-promotion simply can't. Whether it's testimonials from satisfied buyers, media coverage, or influencer partnerships, these external validations reassure potential clients that you are credible. In a market where decisions are high-stakes, leveraging independent voices can influence buyer confidence and accelerate decision-making.

Encourage clients, partners, or peers to share their positive experiences, recommend your people, or engage with your content. These signals help build credibility, In short: let others carry your message and watch your influence grow.

3. Define and communicate your difference

When you're setting out your stall against competitors, saying "we are the leading…" is just not enough. The property sector is saturated with firms making the same claim.

The challenge is to identify your points of difference and make them central to your communications strategy. What is it that truly sets your business apart—your approach, your ethos, your track record, or your people? Once you've defined your unique selling proposition, use it consistently to shape your messaging and stand out from the crowd.

Once you've built a strategy around knowledge, endorsement, and clear differentiation, then think about the channels you'll use—whether it's social media, PR, video, or in-person events.

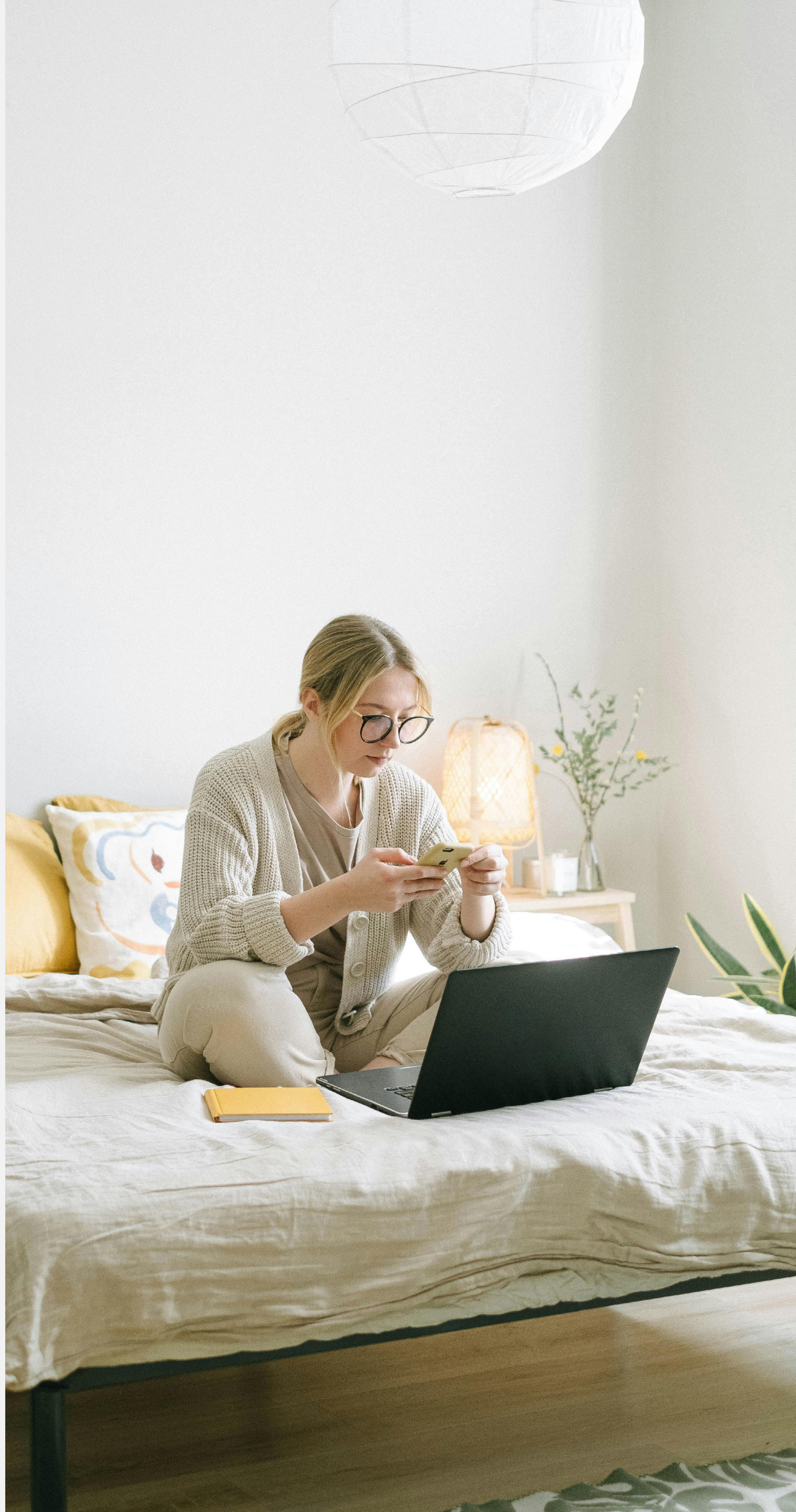
The message comes first. The medium comes second. And when used well together, that's when your property brand comes to life.

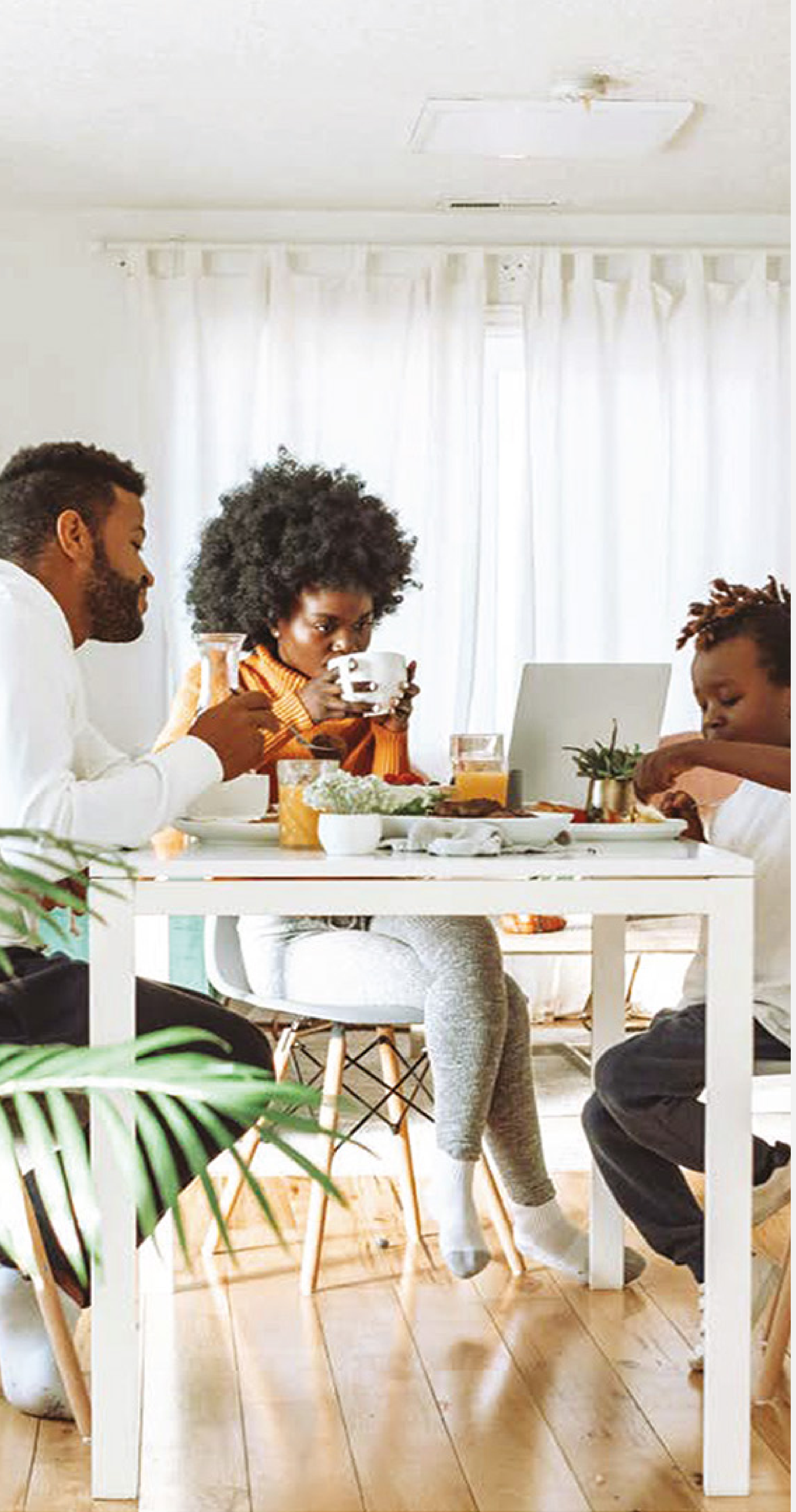
HOW TO BRING HUMAN INTEREST TO PROPERTY STORIES

> The most compelling property stories are the ones that reach beyond the technical specifications and speak to something more fundamental: the human experience.

In property communications, the narrative too often stops at bricks and mortar. We see endless references to the number of units, square footage, rental yield, or the headline figure of a deal. While these details have their place, they rarely capture the imagination. On their own, they are unlikely to spark an emotional connection or persuade someone that this is a place worth caring about.

The truth is that the most compelling property stories are the ones that reach beyond the technical specifications and speak to something more fundamental: the human experience. If you want your message to cut through the noise, you need to show how a property isn't just a structure. It's a place where people live, work, connect, and create meaning.





Sell the destination, not just the building

Whether you are promoting a new residential development or a commercial scheme, remember that people aren't investing in four walls alone. They are buying into a lifestyle, an experience, or an opportunity to imagine themselves thriving in that setting. For a family, it might be the sense of safety, greenery, and community. For a business, it could be the buzz of a well-connected district where innovation happens. Our role as communicators is to articulate that vision. To show not just what the property is, but what it enables.

From features to feelings

Ask yourself: what makes this project stand out? Perhaps it solves a pressing need in the city, such as affordable housing, sustainable office space, or revitalised public areas. Maybe it brings something entirely new; an architectural landmark, a cultural hub, or an innovative workplace design. Whatever the case, translate those features into stories that resonate. Specifications can tell us the size of a room, but stories can show us how it feels to gather there, to look out from the balcony, or to walk through the entrance. Use detail to spark imagination rather than overwhelm with statistics and specifications.

Show connection through community

Increasingly, people want to know that a development has roots. They don't want another anonymous block parachuted into their neighbourhood. They want evidence that it respects and enriches its surroundings. This might mean creating spaces where locals can meet, supporting nearby businesses, or contributing to cultural and social initiatives. By showing how a building interacts with its community, you demonstrate its relevance and value far beyond its physical form.

When you weave these three elements into your communications, you shift the conversation from assets to experiences, from structures to stories. And in doing so, you create a narrative that not only informs but also inspires.

WHY ‘ECO-FRIENDLY’ WON’T FLY:

Rethinking sustainability in property marketing

“How should the industry talk about sustainability in ways that inspire trust and resonate with audiences?

With regulations tightening and homeowners placing more value on sustainable living, property developers face growing pressure to communicate clearly about the environmental credentials of new homes and workplaces. From the Future Homes Standard to Part L, and from solar panels to heat pumps, there’s much more than bricks and mortar to think about.

At the same time, concerns over greenwashing are rising. Developers and their marketing teams need to strike a balance: making bold, engaging claims while avoiding vague or misleading language. So how should the industry talk about sustainability in ways that inspire trust and resonate with audiences?

Get to grips with the terms - but remember to be creative

Accreditations and benchmarks such as BREEAM or EPC ratings are important, but they are not the whole story. Technical jargon rarely connects with potential buyers or tenants on its own. Instead, use these frameworks as the foundation, then translate them into clear, relatable messages.

Guidelines like the UK's Green Claims Code set out how to avoid misleading or unsubstantiated claims. Understanding these rules gives developers the confidence to be creative with their communications without risking accusations of greenwashing. And importantly, don't consider this as the duty of the legal department. Making an awareness of greenwashing everyone's responsibility is the best way to avoid any issues.

Words like "eco-friendly" or "green" may sound positive, but they're too vague to stand up to scrutiny—and can leave you exposed to reputational risk. Instead, choose precise, tangible explanations. Say "these features are designed to reduce annual energy bills by up to 30%" rather than "these are green homes." Concrete details are both more persuasive and more resilient under regulatory and public scrutiny.

Paint a picture

Ultimately, sustainability is not just about environmental impact. It's about how people will experience living or working in the space. Will residents enjoy warmer homes with lower running costs? Will office workers benefit from fresh air, more natural light, or access to outdoor green space? These are the stories that bring sustainability to life.

By focusing on lived experience, developers can connect the dots between technical features and the day-to-day benefits that matter most to their audiences.

The Bottom Line

Talking about sustainability in property development doesn't have to be complicated. But it does have to be careful. Avoid jargon, stay away from vague language, and root your claims in facts people can feel and understand. Above all, show how sustainability translates into comfort, wellbeing, and value.

By getting this balance right, developers and their marketing teams can confidently communicate the real benefits of sustainable design; without falling into the greenwashing trap.

TOP TIPS FOR PROPERTY MARKETEERS

1 Move beyond the transactional news. Layer with opinions, thought leadership and advice for your readers. Give the reader something to take away.

2 Harness testimonials and endorsement. This can come in many forms, whether it's a case study, a joint announcement, or inviting a peer or client to write something for your platforms.

3 It's hard enough to differentiate your business in this market. But it's essential you do. And then lean into this in your communications. Show and tell how you stand out in the market.

4 When you are launching a scheme, move your focus beyond just the buildings. Bring stories which spark the imagination. This could be a lifestyle, a work community, or something less tangible like being part of a new, vibrant environment. Bring this to life through visuals, film and language.

5 Always, always, bring people into your stories. It's very hard to make an emotional connection without them.

6 Be considered in how your present your sustainability credentials so that you withstand scrutiny. Then, be creative in how you bring these to life.

Rob Bartlett,
Head of Marketing & Communications at YTL Developments,
Vice Chair at 1625 Independent People

BUILDING BRANDS:
Why creativity isn't enough

"Building brands". The metaphor is so familiar as to be banal. Cliched and unremarkable. Actually, no. Look closer. The commonalities between construction management and marketing campaigns are uncanny.

Both a property development project and a brand are sizeable business assets. By investing in them, a company will hope to secure ongoing rents greater than the initial outlay, even when discounted at an appropriate cost of capital.

The development cycle for both takes years. They involve a (usually insufficient) degree of public consultation and market research. In both cases, the whole process needs to follow a strategic plan and a thorough process of risk mitigation.

The 'messaging house' in your brand guidelines probably even talks about 'foundations' and 'pillars'. But the similarities highlight one glaring difference.

On any construction project you will always find a wide mix of skills. For every creative architect, interiors specialist or landscape designer, you will also find an analytical quantity surveyor and finance manager. And in the middle, a cohort of project planners and programme managers helps keep the whole show on the road.

Too often though, marketing and communications functions are seen as the preserve of creativity alone. Job descriptions prioritise the verbal and visual; talk of data, finance and project analysis is to many a foreign language.

There is no doubt that copywriting, creative design and content production, to name just a few, are very valuable skillsets for many if not most organisations.

But it is also true that ever-deeper specialisms eventually deliver diminishing marginal returns. Specific knowledge and skills will always date as technology and time march on.

That's because strategic marketing problems don't break down neatly by channel siloes. Solving them requires teams whose knowledge extends beyond narrow disciplines, whose thinking surpasses the scope of their direct experience and who can communicate clearly without resorting to jargon.

Narrow expertise can have huge tactical value. But the essence of good management - leadership, judgment, empathy - does not grow old.

The ability to define complex problems, identify the right mix of creative, analytical and planning skills needed to solve them and motivating a team with a mix of capabilities and personalities to do so given limited resources is always the ultimate source of long-term business value.

But if you ask a random sample of people on a PRINCE 2 project management course whether they see marketing as a good home for their skills, unfortunately most faces will be blank.

Ask most marketers to set up pivot tables to generate insight from their sales data, or whether a change in their brand tracking is statistically significant given the sample size, and you'll probably get the same reaction.

But the best teams bring together these skills in one place, recognising that a marketing campaign is like any other project.

Like peers on a construction site, the best marketing teams must be able to juggle the three pillars of project management – Scope, Time and Resources.

If your objective is to build a brand, you need to define a scope of work to follow, in the form of a marketing strategy.

You need to be clear on the timescale for delivery, and what financial and human resources are available for the task.

And you need to understand that there are always trade-offs to be made between those three parameters.

Manage them correctly, and you will always win the trust of boards who expect rigour, of clients who want accountability, and of teams who you need to trust you.

These are the skills that set the best marketing and communications managers apart.

If you're looking to take your marketing or communications career to the next level, follow the steps below when planning any project or responding to any client's brief:

- **Set your objectives:** Understand what your company's goals are, and how you should be contributing to them. Remember a KPI is a tool to help keep you on track towards a goal; it is not the goal itself.
- **Research, analyse & think:** Understand the market you are in, who your audience is, why they matter to your business and what matters to them. Whether it is a customer, a regulator or a potential recruit, if you want to influence them to act, you must understand what drives their behaviour.
- **Create your strategy:** Use the findings from stage 2 to set out what you will (and, often more importantly, what you will not) do to meet the objectives from Stage 1. If it's over a page, it's probably too complicated.
- **Turn it into a plan:** Putting your strategy from stage 3 into action. If it's not clear who will do what action by when, it's not a plan.
- **Identify risks:** Understand the weaknesses of your approach. Work hard to mitigate these risks to ensure your project is a success. But if you want to get your project signed off in the first place, you might have to pretend there aren't any risks at all.
- **Check your progress:** Remember, if you leave evaluation to the end, it's too late to influence the outcome. And whatever your results, use them to help in Steps 1 and 2 of your next project.

THE POWER OF THE PRE-STORY:
Why property marketing should start before the build

Rethinking the starting line

Too often, property marketing begins at the build milestones. Developers talk of spades in the ground, scheme launches and show homes open to the public. But by then, the real story has already been unfolding for months through planning meetings, council consultations, investor conversations, and community debate. Waiting until the physical build begins means marketers are playing catch-up with a narrative that's already taking shape.

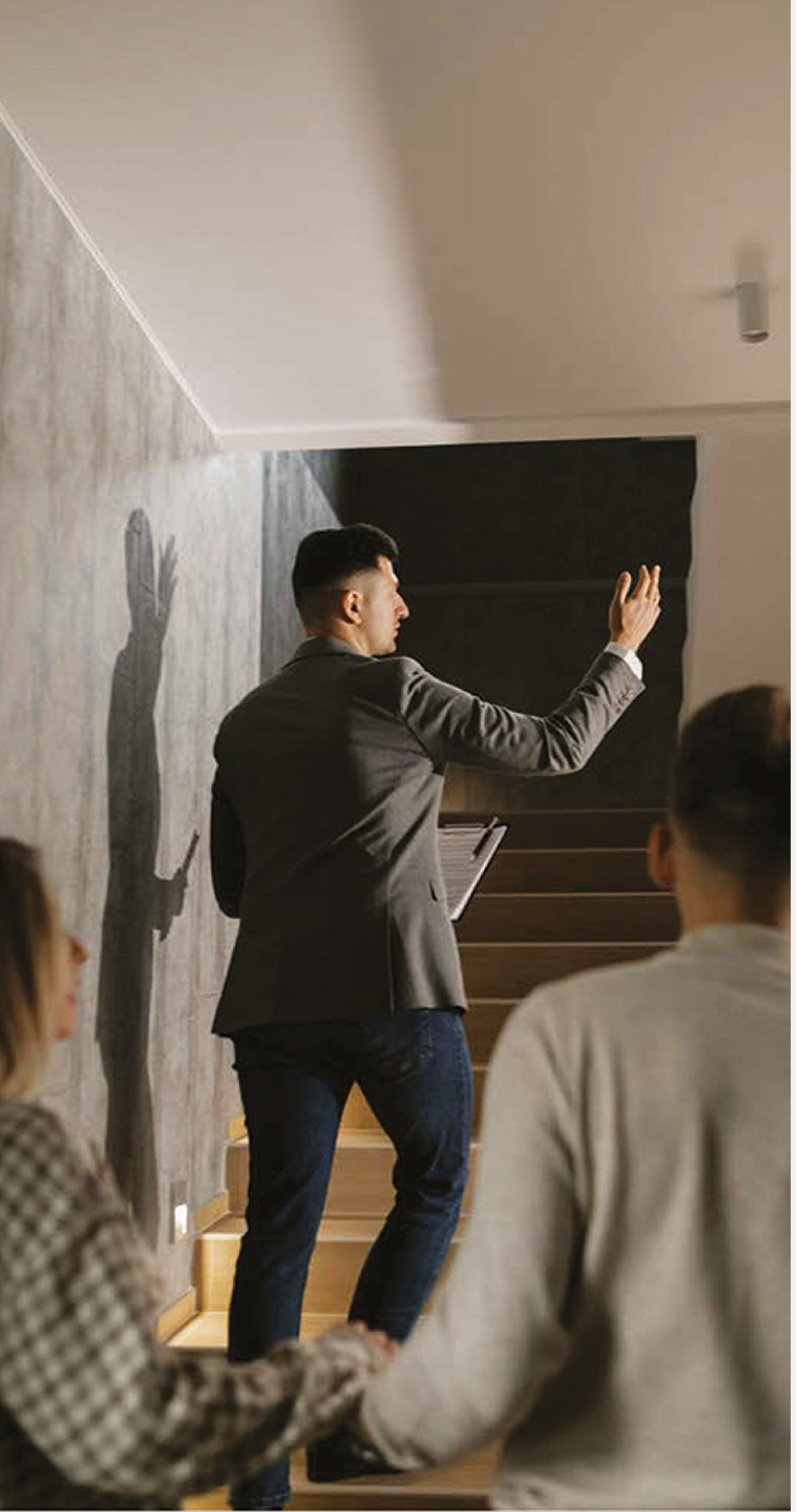
There's a better approach. What if marketing began earlier at the pre-story stage? Before planning applications, before design work, before ground is even broken. This is where marketers can add the most value by shaping how a development will be perceived long before it physically takes form.

Why the Pre-Story matters

Done well, early storytelling secures stakeholder buy-in, sways planning discussions, and builds momentum that carries right through to launch. The most successful pre-stories position developments not just as buildings, but as places, communities and even catalysts for positive change.

This is especially critical in projects that face heightened scrutiny: green belt sites , regeneration schemes, or speculatively built commercial properties where questions of purpose and place matter most. In these instances, the pre-story becomes essential, because without it, projects often fail to gain the support they need to proceed.

Victoria Heyes,
Marketing Manager,
Alder King



What a successful Pre-Story looks like

Building a pre-story means first distilling the project's why. What is the vision? What value will this site deliver? Why does it matter? This is about more than bricks and mortar. It's about anchoring the development to human, economic, and social purpose.

The next step is translation: shaping that purpose into language, visuals, and narratives that resonate with different audiences. Investors don't want the same detail as a residents' group, but the underlying message must remain consistent. A clear messaging framework is essential here, as it will equip your team with the tools to maintain consistency across every conversation.

Embedding broader goals such as ESG performance should be woven into that framework from the start, to make it an authentic part of the story. The trick is showing how decisions around ESG have been considered from the off. Rather than leaning on jargon or "green gloss", the pre-story should thread sustainability and social value into its DNA, rather than just simply claiming them as benefits.

Importantly, strong pre-stories are never static. They evolve alongside the project, picking up detail at design stage, supporting planning applications, and ultimately guiding sales campaigns. Yet at their core, they remain rooted in that initial purpose.

The benefits of telling the story early

Investing in the pre-story brings measurable advantages. When the narrative resonates, it creates differentiation in a crowded market. And when it's consistent, it builds the credibility that drives future sales and leasing activity.

Whilst property may be sold in square feet, the sale is won through the story. The pre-story lays the foundation - long before the concrete is poured - and if done well, it can unlock not just planning consent and investment, but also lasting value and return on every square metre built.

FIND OUT MORE

To discover more about how we can help your business build positive reputation in the built environment, give us a call on 0117 905 1177.

Alternatively, please contact Helen Embleton for any additional queries helen@ambitiouspr.co.uk

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