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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to suggest some innovative strategies for Coastal Housing¹ to expand their brand awareness, as well as evaluating the customer journey at Coastal. Innovative strategies will cover things like, brand, segmentation, specific advertising as well as physical evidence. Key findings from research indicate that the mentioned strategies and information regarding customer journey go hand in hand as selling is done in stages. Coastal should aim to create an awareness of their organisation before coming into direct contact with anyone. Recommendations suggested are too target older people and enhance their understanding and use of technology as well as having a more user friendly application for tablet or phone to enable tenants to interact more.

¹ Coastal Housing will be called Coastal for the remainder of the report

Introduction

In this report 2 objectives will be covered, first, a critical examination of how Coastal Housing can create innovative marketing strategies to further raise their brand awareness. Having visited Coastal recently it became clear that there were no major marketing campaigns being completed, even though they are leading competitors in this business sector in Swansea. Throughout the discussions given it was clear that Coastal rely heavily on word-of-mouth, testimonials, and some general advertisements. This report will suggest some innovative marketing strategies for Coastal, to enable them to further achieve brand awareness.

Suggestions regarding innovative marketing strategies go as follows, branding and how a brand is like a personality, Gardner et al (1955). Advertising to different segments and how this is necessary; the fact that you can tailor each segment with a different advertising technique is crucial. For example, younger people use the internet more therefore you can use social media for them, Pinkerfield, (2007a), but, older people those aged 65 and over aren't as technologically gifted and need more physical evidence like leaflets, Llewodraeth Cymru (2014). Other strategies are, to minimise risk for potential tenants by offering evidence in the form of visits and finally, pulling Coastal up to speed with the digital era and suggesting a Live Chat approach.

Secondly, this report will look at how Coastal manages its tenants' customer journey across channels to ensure they fulfil the expectations of their stakeholders. Coastal is a leader in the social housing in Swansea and surrounding areas therefore having a seamless customer journey is necessary as this will distinguish them from future competitors. Testimonials from the magazine Coastal produce and interviews conducted personally demonstrate that Coastal go beyond with each client to ensure that a customer journey is tailored to the individual. Under examination will be the 3 main areas where touchpoints will matter to Coastal as well as looking at what actual tenants of Coastal had to say in their Tenant Satisfaction survey of 2012, Lee et al (2012).

With the Neher et al (2016) quote in mind, a detailed analysis and evaluation of how Coastal could use the information gathered in this report to further themselves in raising awareness of who they are and how maintain this tremendous customer journey from the beginning to the end will keep stakeholders interested will begin. The main limitation of this report is that there is not enough access to data to see for effects of strategies mentioned, although it was attempted to be acquired.

Main Findings

Business is essentially the craft of finding out about customers' needs or a problem and then producing and offering a product that helps to fulfil this need or solve the particular problem. But how does a business go about communicating the availability of this product to its customers? The answer to this is innovative marketing.

Marketing is all about communicating a products availability and value proposition in order to sell, Ries et al (1998). There are many tools and methods that a business can use to achieve communication with its target market. One of the most recognised and successful methods is branding.

The first innovative marketing strategy suggested to create brand awareness would be to ensure that Coastal's brand is memorable. Branding is a tool to help create a single message that is recognisable and memorable across a group of products. It aids an organisation in "getting out there" and entering the minds of the general public, Ries et al (1998).

Brand is important to Coastal as it distinguishes them from other social housing companies in Swansea, but, do they do enough to create a large awareness of who they are? Coastal have a portfolio containing over 5000 properties but apart from these there is little evidence to suggest that a wider circle of people know who they are or what they do.

By using the Marketing Mix Coastal is able to differentiate who they want to target, how they can do this, and what style suits best, Fahy (2015). As seen at Coastal, they use a sheep as an emblem; they have cleverly and proactively incorporated the nationality of their location into their organisational identity. But, Coastal need to marry a campaign to a strong key word or phrase, something like, "Coastal Housing, Coastal People", this catchy slogan would make them stand out, instead of 'Here to help'. Also, by creating a local advertising campaign for example, Coastal can create brand imagery awareness. Here they would be able to put the key words of the organisation into people's head "quality housing for people", but also key themes. Coastal should think about what font style they use, what colours and what shapes they use. Apple is a superb example of an identifiable logo that is easily transferable to anything. Consumers will never be able to remember the details, and Coastal don't need to think about selling all they should be focusing on is getting people up to speed with who they are which will make people aware of their key competencies. Branding is there to get people interested, make it fun and emotional, Morgan (1999); Lewis (2003) p.429.

Doyle argues, branding is what will inevitably make or damage a business, (2000).

Consumers want to know if your brand is harmful, will it settle their needs, and will it be financially viable to them, you can get this done early on in the customer journey by having a brand that demonstrates your values and aims. Research concludes that a

brand has become more than just that but is an organisations personality, Gardner et al (1955); Bernstein (1984) p.264; Meech (1996) p.264.

A second innovative marketing strategy that Coastal could consider is to target certain segments of the market with specialised advertising techniques. By using the 7p's Marketing Mix, it has been confirmed that the targeted audience for Coastal is the C1 and C2 segments, particularly under 65 years. By identifying your sub-sets of consumers you can assume that they will all have similar needs, Palmer (200), p. 166. Further to this, research put forward by Pinkerfield (2007a) from a European study states countries are growing with the use of the internet, but, the UK is one of the countries that social media applications are used the most. With this information in mind, the strategy put forward is that Coastal should advertise on social media to increase awareness of their brand within their differentiated 'younger' market. The evidence suggests that this seems to be the way of the world now as online media is known to be cost effective, it can be updated from anywhere, even more links are available, as well being a 24 hour service, Palmer (2000), p.508. Unfortunately, people don't like being bombarded with constant updates on social media Coastal should keep in mind to avoid 'wearout'. In addition, although Coastal would be able to deliver much needed information through online sources, it isn't physical. There is much risk to be taken on the part of consumer, which leads us to our next innovative marketing strategy, p.512.

After an initial interaction via social media Coastal should consider the next p of the Marketing Mix, people. Coastal don't have a physical product at hand, it is a service with an end product. In such circumstances potential consumers might be put off by the elements of risk involved. When there is high risk involved consumers want to know more, Palmer (2000) consumers seek physical evidence from the company. The marketing strategy for raising awareness of their brand is too invite these potential consumers to the office, offer tours and little incentives to increase their awareness, p.476-478. Little touches as the ones mentioned are enough to create a differentiation from the competition. This is also an opportunity for Coastal to directly market to them. The connection and interest is there it's now about creating that relationship with the view of them becoming a part of the housing scheme. When discussing physical evidence it should be considered that those aged 65+ prefer communication in such ways, which takes us on to the next possible strategy.

Having completed the Segmentation, Targeting and Positioning strategic approach for the above further examination has shown that those in the plus 65 age category are also in need of social housing. As there is already a need for such homes the suggestion is that Coastal use more aggressive, specifically targeted tools to entice these potential consumers, leading off of Ansoff's basic principles on market penetration, (1957).

However, this age group is limited in their use of technology, Llewodraeth Cymru (2014). Taking this into account Coastal should create a strategy to raise awareness of

their organisation, specifically tailored. Using media like newspapers and articles will allow for richer, detailed reports to be created in order to create awareness, Daft et al, (1986), p. 69. Having spoken to Coastal they do not create leaflets as such. In the modern world such things as brochures might be outdated but for those in this particular age group they are one of very few ways to communicate in great depth. If Coastal don't communicate in such ways they will lose brand awareness from this sector of people.

Having placed their name and what they do in the mind of the potential consumer Coastal's next step to create even more awareness is to ensure a live chat is available after the general working hours and at the weekend. Having seen on Coastal's page their contact hours are limited and Coastal's chat goes offline at the same hour it would be fundamental for them to have a communication channel available should people have any questions, from the inspiration of the Audi Sinclair visitor (2016). Live chats are used by companies worldwide as they are seen as very time efficient, cost effective and allows for collaboration. For Coastal it would mean being at the forefront, if someone has a particular question at 10pm on a Saturday night, they could type in to Coastal and someone is there immediately to discuss, there's no need to wait around for an email. In terms of creating awareness of their brand the fact that they would be able to respond as fast to people would make them stand out. Some consumers may have difficult questions, being able to write it down and reference back and forth to it is helpful. Live

chat also eliminates the caller from being passed around from department to department, 1 person would be discussing exactly what the consumer wants to know and introduce the consumer to other potential areas that might be of interested. Such a tool would allow for many questions to be answered all at ones. Such efficiency creates immediate awareness, if a company delays in answering a question generally people attribute negative connotations to them, fluid digital (n. d.). Although this approach is fundamental strength to Coastal, it may also be its weakness. People will assume that you will be there 24 hours a day and will get angry if not, and it can sometimes slow down the website, Full Media (2013). As well, as some consumers not using the system at all, particularly those above 65 years.

Neher et al (2016) understand that touchpoints create the overall customer journey, but according to research too much emphasis on individual touchpoints can actually take away from the overall journey for the customer. A customer journey is linked to the buyer decision making process and should therefore be viewed as being important from end-to-end. Attention should be paid to pre, during and post purchase, as the consumer will be in contact with the organisation through various channels, before through social media, during face-to-face and after by telephone or visits, for example². Research indicates that although initially setting out a customer is happy with the service they receive, on further examination of the overall journey, satisfaction decreases by 40%, Neher et al (2016). Why is it more important to study the end-to-end journey rather

² See image 1 in appendix for illustration of a buyers decision making process

than just product sale? Creating a fulfilling, lasting and specialised customer journey gives organisations an incredible competitive advantage over other similar companies, Khanna et al (2014). Touchpoints reinforce the image and ideas that the brand has tried to create, with the view of expanding with new customers. The typical customer journey for a Coastal tenant will be evaluated to see how they keep their customers engaged and happy throughout.

Pre-purchase touchpoints are fundamental as this will affect the continuation of the process. This is when the consumer feels a need for a specific product, Murali (2005).

Touchpoints are now crucial because the consumer will be searching for help. It is at this point that Coastal need an appealing brand and awareness to be spread to attract the relevant people. By advertising on social media like stated above they will be in the eye of the public. Seeing a post online is better for some as too much information can lead to what is known as a 'marketing refusnik', where people tend to ignore the masses of information available, Tench et al (2006) p. 427. Discussions on social media sites are also a good place to start as word-of-mouth and testimonials are more sought after as they are real time experience of real people. It is at this stage that Coastal really needs to keep popping up and getting into the 'aware set' of the customer, they need to be novel and fresh and their adverts should be expressing their attitudes and values, hence a brand personality, Gardner et al (1955). Although difficult to monitor if adverts and

such are making a difference, Coastal could use the google Analytics server to see how many add clicks they receive off certain sites.

During the purchase phase, it is assumed that potential consumer has followed a lexicographic approach and ruled out all other competitors as they no longer suit their needs and have chosen Coastal. The first step for Coastal is to register the new consumer. The registering process involves the consumer coming into direct contact with the service, Shostack (1985). On arrival the consumer meets the staff, completes an assessment and any paperwork. This in itself is a touchpoint, the office symbolises Coastal's values and beliefs through the use of atmospherics, Stein et al (2016). At Coastal's office everyone is sat around together, this suggests collective, union, that is relaxed and friendly. The imagery on the walls is there to remind employees of what they are there to do, but also to illustrate once more what they aim to do for the consumer. The sheer fact employees are around and are able to talk brings the brand to life it gives a physical presence, and it indicates a potentially fulfilling relationship that is about to grow. Relationship marketing can be tied down to the philosophy of Coastal, they don't want to be seen as people you pay but as people you can seek help, trust and comfort in, Narver et al (1994). Relationships will flourish more in the later stages as tenant and employee get to know one and other across the next part of the journey. However, there is a long waiting list for properties. But this key interaction from Coastal will make enough of an effect on the consumer to ensure that they will still be in the

mind of the consumer in a few weeks. It also indicates that although they cannot provide a property immediately they can reinforce that they intend to do something as quickly as possible to help. By doing this Coastal instantly sets the scene for a satisfying journey, Bitner et al (1990). Coastal maintain contact with the waiting tenants to keep up to speed with any changes to circumstances, for example.

It is in the post-purchase phase that touchpoints really come to life. The largest touchpoint for Coastal to see satisfaction amongst tenants is the Tenant Satisfaction Survey, most recently in 2012, and by offering customer services to maintain properties and give advice. By offering such services Coastal hope that they can retain their customers and build up stable partnerships with them.

Evidence from the tenant satisfaction survey conducted for Coastal suggests that majority of the tenants are happy with their journey, with scores always being higher than that of the federation, Lee et al (2012).

The main value of Coastal for their tenants was said to be, the ease of being able to contact them if there was an issue. Coastal employs certain members off staff who are there to deal with tenant calls every day, and they have been trained effectively to know what to do with each problem. This eliminates the need for the caller to be passed from person to person and the tenant knows whatever the issue a member of the team will be there as promptly as can be to help. Members of the team are available to talk between working hours Monday to Friday and Coastal have a chat icon on their website

to speak online. Figures go as follows, of the sample collected 77% said that they had contacted Coastal at some point, generally through the telephone. More importantly 82% said that it was very easy to get hold of the right person when they needed something, as well as staff being very helpful, Lee et al (2012).

Results from this survey conclude that of the 4,500 tenant surveyed, only 53% thought their coastal home was of value for money. This may seem strange because evidence from this survey shows that people think Coastal go above and beyond to maintain and repair their properties and across touchpoints they rate well. The reason for such a figure to be drawn is that tenants are not necessarily happy with the environments of their homes. For example, rubbish (19%), disruption (12%) and parking (25%) are major issues in the SA1, SA6 and SA9 areas of Swansea which happens to be why there is a lower figure. The simple conclusion here would be to not go to such areas which would increase tenants overall satisfaction with their home, but Coastal cannot. Coastal are teamed with the BREEAM association which like to invest in particularly underdeveloped areas and to regenerate them back to life.

To develop further Coastal must keep engaged with their tenants by getting them to participate in surveys like this, but, as with this survey only a small percentage, 32% actually participated. With such a small figure to have to begin with Coastal is limited to what it can learn as it is not a true representation of all its tenants; even when incentivized tenants don't want to take part. The job for Coastal is to create innovative

ways to collect data, to enable them to improve across their tenants' customer journeys.

Coastal might consider using their social media application to entice tenants as most people use their phones and tablets daily it would keep costal up to date with technological advancement also, MacDonald (2015).

Conclusions

To conclude, above are demonstrations as to how might Coastal like to use innovative marketing strategies to raise more awareness of their brand. From research it is clear to see that to succeed in business you must dominate your competition by your own brand. The Coastal brand is what is going to make the difference between a portfolio of 5000 homes and doubling it.

By segmenting the audience Coastal are able to specifically tailor their advertising to the necessary age category. Having read 'The Strategy For Older People in Wales' it's evident that older people aren't confident in using technology effectively, certainly not when it comes to such important things as getting a home (2014). It is therefore fundamental that Coastal create some sort of physical evidence for these people. This physical evidence in the form of a leaflet can also be used for anyone too, maybe to those who might not have computer access.

Finally, by furthering into the digital age and having an onsite person who is available after regular hours will make a significant difference to Coastal. It shows that Coastal don't just care when they have to, but when perhaps it matters most they are there.

This would also help in terms of the customer journey. People would be on hand to deal with more queries and tenants wouldn't need to wait until Monday to get a job done.

Coastal should consider completing an integrated marketing communications strategy to

now see if such examples as the ones above actually make any difference to their market performance.

The customer journey is what will make a difference to Coastal, by completing the necessary steps, pre, during and post purchase Coastal should be able to create a customer journey that actually makes a difference to a tenant. They can create a journey that their tenants share with other people and then they will want to know what Coastal is all about.

Although Coastal's Tenant Satisfaction Survey, Lee et al (2012) shows that Coastal are out performing the federation they shouldn't stop at this. Coastal should learn that what they do is good, but they need to keep on improving. By improving Coastal will move even further away from their competitors, and dominate a sector.

Coastal should focus on closer working relationships being in place with tenants, eliminating the need for lots of channel members. Having a working relationship will allow for the tenant to trust who they work with and be open, less embarrassed and honest if there are any issues arising, for example, if there are familial based issues.

Finally, having a fully working customer journey that does what it is supposed to do will not only increase satisfaction amongst tenant, but employees will be happier, revenue will be higher, churn rate will be decreased and there will be less of a concern regarding negative press, Rawson et al (2013).

Recommendations

In terms of the overall customer journey Coastal covers it fairly well. Some recommendations are, to create vibrant living communities for older people where they can live social lives, with the promotion of wellbeing and additionally learning new skills, like IT, Llewodraeth Cymru (2014).

A further recommendation is, as some of the tenants at Coastal are above a certain age they may not be computer literate. Coastal should consider printing more documents to promote their organisation, they should also raise awareness of their magazine which has been designed and created specifically. Such a magazine should be seen in stores to increase awareness of the brand, not just sent to tenants.

Finally, as Coastal target the younger segment of the market, evidence already shows that these people tend to use their phones and tablets more, Coastal need to create a professional usable application designed for smart phones, tablets and gadgets. Unlike the Coastline Housing application which was found very easily on the application store, Coastal lacks in some details and these details will make them fall behind in terms of competitive advantage.

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Image 1

Need Recognition

The potential consumer needs a home

Information Search

They will look online at websites, social media sites and ask friends for inspiration.

Evaluation

They will evaluate by looking at different social housing companies and what each can offer

Decision

A lexicographic approach leads them to pick Coastal Housing and arrange a visit to further discuss. Here they will get to know staff and begin planning for their home by filling in paperwork and completing an assessment

Post-purchase Evaluation

They take part in the Tenant Satisfaction Survey to give their views on their journey

Simplified stages in the buyer decision process at Coastal: adapted from Adrian Palmer's book (2000).