

Business Stories

David Clarke Estate Agents

David Clarke Estate Agents had a loyal local market but the housing slump brought increased competition. Now a brand identity is helping the company maintain its marketshare and bring in new clientele.



Background

Established in Kent back in 1968, Paul Clarke took over David Clarke Estate Agents from his father in 1996. In addition to its Herne Bay head office David Clarke is now also represented in Whitstable and Canterbury.

The company is well known across the region and its core sales business, to first-time and older buyers, strongly reflects the demographics of the area.

The challenge

Early in 2008 a national downturn in the housing market saw turnover fall by nearly 50%. Competition for the remaining business became much stronger and David Clarke recognised that improved branding would help it compete with the national agents now trading in the area.

As well as putting the rebranding into effect as quickly as possible it was also vital that this established family firm did not lose its recognition in the marketplace and retained existing goodwill.

The response

Paul Clarke had an established relationship with Business Link having taken its advice on other business development projects. His Business Link Adviser introduced him to Designing Demand, a Solutions for Business programme, developed by the Design Council, funded by SEEDA and delivered by South East Design. Shortly after that introduction he was working with James Duguid, his allocated Design Associate.

“This project was different right from the start,” said Duguid. “As soon as we began the preliminary analysis it became clear that Paul had very strong ideas about design and creating a more corporate feel for his brand. He also knew what he hoped to achieve.

“For him there are two critical issues; rebranding quickly, to benefit from any bounce back in the housing market, and treating the process as one of development rather than total change. In fact, the whole process was completed and implemented within just six months of our first meeting.”

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However good the new branding was, it quickly became apparent that it had to be applied across every format to succeed and enable David Clarke to compete with well-known national agents.

A major part of the programme then became about empowering Paul to run his own in-house design management process. The website was designed to allow full content management. Advertising templates were created to ensure external branding never varies and can be easily updated in-house. The legacy of the project is that Paul is fully self-sufficient in managing his own design portfolio.

The outcome

James Duguid is particularly pleased with the way the rebranding has been approached by Paul Clarke. "Participating in the Designing Demand programme has really allowed David Clarke Estate Agents to move up a league. The second generation business is keen to improve and grow and throughout the whole process Paul has been prepared to take advice to achieve his goal. Better still, he realises the importance of brand consistency and will ensure that the new image is used correctly wherever its applied."

"We have always been aware of the importance of good design but this process has really helped refine and consolidate our ideas," said Paul. "Buying a house is unlike the vast majority of consumer sales and one of the main differentiating factors is the time involved in the process. It will take at least a year for the tangible benefits of the rebranding to show up on our bottom line. But I'm confident that they will. We have already seen an increase in the level of property enquiries and taken on an additional member of staff. The David Clarke Estate Agent brand is now highly visible and the agency is poised and ready as the housing market begins to improve."

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▲ The company chose Canterbury-based Think for the rebranding. Think had already designed a website for Paul and came to the project well prepared. Their brief was to create a corporate identity that could be used across the board, from stationary to website, advertising spreads to shop fronts and right through to the display boards used to market individual properties.

Nick Maxfield of Think describes the process as one of collaboration. "Paul is very forward thinking, and gives clear feedback which really helped move the project along. We knew from the start that he wanted to retain his existing brand colours so we created a series of logo styles around these, updating his existing image to finally arrive at both a full and abbreviated version of the branding suitable for all situations.

The collaboration didn't end there. Analysis of the David Clarke Estate Agents' branding had also revealed major inconsistencies in signage and use of logo styles throughout the organisation.

For further information or advice

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