## Leaders
Case Study

Overview

➢ With sixteen branches across Sussex, Hampshire, Kent, Surrey and the West Midlands, Leaders one of the UK's largest and most successful independent chain of residential property letting and management agents wanted to explore ways of improving profitability and management efficiency, to bolster the strong customer relationships already formed by the branches, and to forge new ones using on-line technology.

- Leaders, had invested in a basic web site, but feedback from Leaders' landlords, staff and prospective tenants indicated that there was potential for something more sophisticated. The site needed to be branch driven to enhance each region's selling power and contribute to a 'clicks and mortar' high-street and on-line presence.
- **TelaWorks**, an Internet design and marketing agency and **Dunstan Thomas**, an e-business solutions and services provider, formed a *"Best of Breed Partnership"* in order to offer Leaders a seamless and made-to-measure solution that would significantly enhance the company's profitability and competitiveness
- Leaders are so happy with the new internet spin that has helped to significantly grow the company in the past last year that they have decided to enhance their site to include maps of where properties are located to complement information already available on-line about local shops, restaurants, schools and much more. They even hope to offer virtual house tours of their luxury properties in order to help prospective tenants find the house of their dreams faster
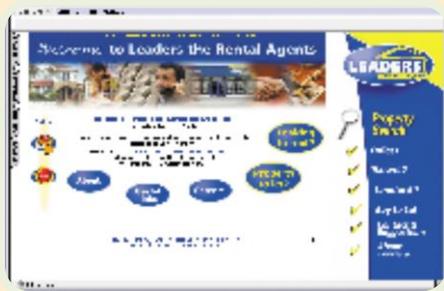
Client Comment

"*Since launching the updated web site nine months ago, activity has increased by 200% and a growing number of our offices are claiming that at least 25% of tenants enquires are generated by the web site. It has also proved to be an effective tool in gaining landlords instructions and on line tenant registrations have increased by 100% over the last two months*"

Jason Cliffe, Sales and Marketing Director

Benefits

- Tenant and landlord lead generation has been significantly boosted by the increased *"When and where"* flexibility that on-line registration offers.
- Prospective tenants can view properties on-line 24 hours a day, register their interest , email their dream home to their flatmates and be sure that they are looking at updated lists of available properties .
- Landlords can research information about letting their properties. They can also register and become part of central database of prospects.
- One of the strongest parts of the leaders web site is the *"let me know"* property updating facility. This is *"permission marketing"* at its best. Frim sales prospects allow leaders to email them daily on property availability. This allows the leaders name to be kept in front of a sales prospect for at least one month - a reminder email encourages re-subscription towards the end of this period.
- *"Buy to let"* – broadcast LIPEX *(Leaders Investment Property Exchange)* to investment landlords giving real time information on projected rental yields and property valuations in different regions

- Letting consultants who match potential tenants with available properties have found they are spending less unproductive time driving sales prospects around to view properties, as they have viewed them earlier on the line. Similarly, property managers, who supervise the day-to-day running of a landlord's property have found that landlords and tenants like to email during the evening, meaning that less time is spent on the telephone during the day.
- Many Leaders' internal forms are accessible to all branches via a password and can be downloaded and printed out by the branches as applicable. This has put an end to the short life span problem with printed documents and the saving in print costs is already well into four figures

Company Backgrounds

Over a period of nearly 20 years, Leaders has grown from a one-room office in Brighton, into one of the largest and most successful privately-owned chain of residential letting and management agents in the United Kingdom. They specialise in letting all types of property, from city centre one bedroom studio flats, two and three bedroom apartments and houses, through to substantial country residences.

TelaWorks is the Internet division of CVA Media Ltd, a City based advertising and marketing agency. Based on solid foundations of business experience and project management, TelaWorks offers a proven track record of first class design and branding.

Dunstan Thomas is a leading e-solutions consulting, development and training organisation that provides e-business solutions and services, utilising the latest in cutting edge technologies and recognised *"Best Practices."* Established in 1986, the company helps its clients transition their businesses to harness the power of knowledge management, business intelligence, CRM, business operations, e-commerce and related enterprise and wireless technologies.

The Situation

The Internet has re-invented the traditional property hunt allowing prospective tenants to search for properties on-line and agency staff to cut the average number of visits to properties from eight to four meaning staff can be rationalised and company overheads reduced.

One of the biggest "bug-bears" that besets the property hunter is that by the time he or she rings the letting agent, the house of their dreams is already taken. Turnover can be so fast that adverts for available properties can become redundant whilst there are still being printed. Leaders needed to guarantee their on-line applicants that the properties-to-rent list was continuously updated.

Another problem that prospective tenant face is that their house-searching time frame is determined by the letting agents' office hours. Leaders realised that the internet would offer applicants flexible 24x7 access to real-time property lists and not only give them the convenience of being able to pick a home from the comfort of their living room but also increase management efficiency by reducing the number of telephone enquires during office hours.

Landlords also face the issue of trust and reliability when handling over property-to-let to an agency. Leaders wanted to attract registrations from the landlords that would include valuable contract information for their central database and enable them to build a profile of each landlord's property portfolio.

From the point of view of the letting agency, the time spent by staff on conducting viewings can take up a large proportion of their day and Leaders wanted to reduce the number of visits per property in order to better utilise staff time and reduce travelling costs.

The Solution

- By working with senior company representatives, TelaWorks and Dunstan Thomas produced a document that comprised a quote and projection of work to be carried out.
- The Architecture and Design Services were allocated to **Dunstan Thomas** and **TelaWorks respectively.**
- **Dunstan Thomas** put systems in place that provide functions such as *"request a viewing"*, to optimise response from the branches without creating extra work or duplication where a visitor's selection may be shared between branches. Also the *"let me know"* subscription service and *"email to a friend"* that allow applicants to inform prospective flat mates about available properties. The company also helped create the *"intuitive"* Search engine that not only matches a given criteria, but also suggests realistic alternatives should those search details not be found. This proved useful in allowing visitors to get a feel for property prices, as well as avoiding the frustration of a *"zero results"* search. Leaders also found that prospective tenants were happy to scale up to a higher price brand, given the option, which also speeded up the conversation process
- **TelaWorks** designed a web site that is friendly, easy to navigate and that fit in seamlessly with the new corporate re-branding. The links logically channel visitors to a specific action, be it to search property, request a viewing or register their interest. The web site also had to communicate the advantages of letting a property through Leaders and convince prospective tenants that this was a company they could trust.
- Data for e-business and Internet evolution needs to be consolidated into a form that can be made accessible to the forthcoming development. All the data required for use on the Leaders web site was distributed over 17 branches throughout the UK. Dunstan Thomas created an XML filter that is able to convert data from the branches on a daily basis.

Technology

➤ Database Server – Access and SQL sever

➤ Platform – Windows NT

➤ Other Technology – Active Server Pages

➤ Number of Users – 900 visitors per day

Development

➤ Tool Used – InterDev

➤ Development Time and Deployment – The first iteration was delivered within one month of beginning the project and a year on Dunstan Thomas and TelaWorks are working on version 5