

hometruths

the right advice to sell your house

66 Supertips

For Estate Agents

by Sam Ashdown

£9.97



Discover how to SMASH the competition!



66 *SUPERTIPS*

66 Supertips to help Estate Agents

Get EVERY Valuation


Win EVERY Instruction

and

Sell EVERY Property

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For more information on how Sam can help you smash the competition, call 015242 72181 or email sam@home-truths.co.uk



So, you couldn't wait to get these by email, and now you have all 66 Supertips right here, for you to read in one go, whenever you like! Congratulations. You just took a very big step towards your goal of getting every valuation, winning every instruction and selling every property.

Enjoy, and as always, please let me know how you get on as you try these Supertips – I would love to hear from you.

Let's go!

VALUATIONS

Super Sneaky Strategy to Keep Your Eye on the Competition

There are lots of ways to keep track of who's selling what in your area. Perhaps you're already doing some of them?

[Twitter](#) is one way to do it, but only if a) your competitors tweet and b) if they tell the truth. (*"72 viewings and 15 sales already this week,..."*) Not that likely then...

[Google Alerts](#) – if you're not using these, they are a great, free resource. Simply search for 'Google alerts' and you'll find all you need to know. If you are using them, do you also have an alert set up for each competitor?

Sam's Super Sneaky Tip - [Rightmove RSS](#) – now, most agents I know have Rightmove alerts set up to email them when properties become available, just as buyers do, but I don't know any who use Rightmove's RSS feature. Here's how it works:

- Go to Rightmove and enter a search.
- When the search results are displayed, look for the little orange RSS symbol, just above the featured properties, to the right. Found it? Good. Click it.
- You'll see another page of results, and these also include price changes and updates.
- (note: this doesn't seem to work properly in Chrome, but is fine in Safari)


- On the right hand side, you'll see an option that says 'subscribe in mail'
- Click that, and a link will magically appear in your email inbox, like a folder. This link will then be updated by Rightmove daily and contain all the new properties, price changes and properties sold information. All you have to do is check it.

How easy is that? Now shhh.... don't tell anyone.....

3 Ways To Get Every Valuation

In this Supertip, I'm going to share with you my secrets for **getting every valuation**. It's so frustrating, isn't it, when you see a great property launched to market and you *didn't even get invited to value*? So what can you do to make sure that when a vendor is thinking about selling, they call you too?! Here are my three tactics to make sure that you get that call:

1. **Be everywhere** – if you aren't front of mind, the vendor may not even know you exist. Now I know this is a bit of a 'chicken and egg' issue, as if you can't get the properties, you can't get the properties! But there are plenty of ways you can 'be everywhere' in your local community:
 - Social media – you need to be on at least Twitter and Facebook, and preferably Foursquare, Google Plus and Pinterest too! Yes, this takes time, but it's also FREE – let's not forget this.
 - Sponsor community events, teams and causes
 - Take stands at Farmers' markets, school fairs, and country shows
 - Keep canvassing – make it regular with a creative message and strong call to action
2. **Be vendor-focused** – keep your eye on the prize. If your website is purchaser-focused (like 99.9% of agents' websites are) then change it! Make it a hub of free resources for vendors to get lots of great information about moving. Make vendors the subject of your print ads too, and of course, your social media efforts.
3. **Be a guerrilla!** No, I'm not talking hairy mammals or scary warfare, I'm talking about *guerrilla marketing*. To be a guerrilla, your efforts need to be creative, energetic and unconventional. Do some web research, and brainstorm with your employees. Offer a prize for the best results, and turn your team into your very own guerrilla marketing department.



It's not easy getting every valuation, but it's super important. Keep track of how many valuations you're currently getting, and measure any changes as you implement these three tactics. Then let me know! I'd love to hear. I'll also donate a crate of wine to the best guerrilla marketing idea, so get your creative head on!

Your THIRD Social Media Platform

How are your Social Media efforts coming along? Are they bringing in any actual customers or are you just using it for brand presence?

If you're on Social Media at all, you're probably currently using Facebook and Twitter. Just as you should be. After all, that's where all the action is, right? But where do you go next? Which third platform, if any, is worthy of your time and effort?

There are certainly plenty to choose from: LinkedIn, Google Plus, Pinterest, YouTube... the list goes on and on. But I'm going to introduce you to a new kid on the block. A platform that you may never have heard of, but that is going to be BIG. (You heard it here first.)



I'm talking about Foursquare. Before I go any further, have you got a spare 4 minutes to watch a video? You have? Oh great. Here's the link - [Foursquare Video](#)

If you just watched that video, you'll know exactly what I'm talking about when I say that this could be a great way of *proving* to your community that you are the go-to company for all things local.

Here are just a few benefits of using Foursquare:

- Improved engagement
- Great brand visibility
- Integration with Twitter and Facebook
- To position you as the expert 'concierge' of your town

Oh, and it's free. There's so much information I'd love to share with you about this great platform and how you can use it before your competitors do, but space here does not allow me to wax any more lyrical than I already have. Watch out for my future courses on the subject!



Are you still advertising in the paper? How not to chuck your money away.

Today, I'm going to tackle the very sticky subject of newspaper advertising. As usual, I have a very different take on it, so read on to find out how....

Why do YOU read your local paper?

Simple. In case there are people in it you know.

If you have lived in an area for some time, you may take an interest in the people stories you find in your local paper. Births, marriages and deaths are always some of the most popular pages in a paper, hence why those ads tend to be relatively inexpensive, to encourage people to post their notices. Look at the lead story and it's usually a human interest story. In my local paper, the Westmorland Gazette, one of the most read stories this week is 'Walkers gave me a Mars bar and saved my life'. Why wouldn't you want to read that?!


Readers are attracted by stories of people or places they know as they can *relate* to them.

Turning to the property pages however, and the reader experience changes significantly. Traditionally, the property and motor sections of the paper are informative in format, with small photos and minimal text in rows and columns, like a database. This allows the reader to quickly find the information they are looking for.

But times they are a-changing. The internet is a far better database than any print medium could ever hope to emulate; it's comprehensive and bang up to date. A newspaper is out of date *before it's even gone to print*.

Many estate agents are simply withdrawing from newspaper advertising altogether. Others remain in denial, posting the same ads they have posted for the last thirty years in the hope that this will help them to win instructions from vendors who are blissfully unaware of the fact that *print ads don't sell houses*.

So, if trying to be a database of properties is a flawed intention that you could never hope to achieve, but giving up advertising altogether puts you at the mercy of all those lost instructions due to vendor ignorance, then what is the answer for the independent 21st century estate agent?



Let's go back to the beginning of this article, to the premise that it is *human interest stories* that sell papers. How can you use that idea to really make the most of your ad spend? How about posting a story charting a local family's journey to sell their home and move on? I'm sure your filing cabinets are full of human interest stories – after all, moving house *is* a story, with a natural beginning, middle and end.

How about the World War II veteran who have lived in his home for 50 years and is finally moving into sheltered accommodation? Or the young family who won the lottery and are moving into their dream home? Or the couple moving from the city to the country, to start their own smallholding adventure?

Every vendor, and every buyer, has a story to tell. Your mission is to tease it out of them. Encourage them to tell their story, reassuring them that people will be genuinely interested to read about their journey – warts and all.


In telling their story, you are sharing their trials and tribulations, and at the same time, demonstrating that you are in it together – side by side, helping and guiding them through each step that they need to take. The barriers they encounter along the way – gazumping, gazundering, awful surveys, broken chains; are actually simply the elements of every good storyline and will only serve to make the tale even more compelling, as readers follow along, week after week, in order to discover what happens next. Associate yourself with their story, reveal their (hopefully) happy ending, and you will win the hearts and minds of readers that will, when they decide to sell their own home, want *you* to be their guide on their journey, to help them create their own story.

Are you making these 5 website mistakes?



I had the opportunity recently to work on an agent's website to make it work better for them – something I absolutely love to do. Whilst their overall traffic was good, at around 3,000 unique visitors per month, they weren't getting any enquiries through the site, and they wanted to know why. Here's where I come in.

First, I went to their homepage and found these mistakes:

1. **No sign-up box.** A nice easy 'ask' of your website visitors is just to pop their email into a box in exchange for some information, say a free checklist or report. Depending on the 'incentive' you offer, and the design and placement of your box, you can expect anywhere from 1% to 3% of visitors to give you their email address. For the agent in question, this could mean 30 – 90 people a month added to their subscriber list. Not bad.

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2. **No clickable telephone number.** Open your website on your phone, and try to click your telephone number. Does it work? If a prospective vendor or purchaser is out and about and wants to get hold of you, make it easy for them. Your phone number may look great in fancy graphics but if you can't click to call, it's pretty useless really.
 3. **A lame 'About Us' page.** After the home page, this is usually the most popular page on any website. Why? Because people buy people. And we want to see who we're thinking of doing business with. So why then do most 'About Us' pages just contain lots of text with 'why we are great' as the main theme? Some of the best pages are full of really great photos and personal information about each team member.
 4. **A complicated Contact Us page.** How many lines and check boxes does an enquirer need to complete before they can send the form to you? Does it have a *Captcha* test to put them off? Remember K.I.S.S = keep it simple, stupid. What's the absolute minimum amount of information that they can fill in? How about first name, email and comment? Do you really need all the other fields? Take them off and see if it results in more web enquiries.
 5. **No engagement opportunities.** Social sharing buttons in the right place are the key to building up online engagement and moving your readers to a platform where they can comment, ask questions, and generally engage with you and your team. Social sharing buttons on the front page may be counter-productive, as they can too quickly take your visitors off site before they have spent any time reading it. However, as the 'Contact Us' page is often the last page a visitor will visit, it makes sense to place all your Social buttons here, so that instead of spinning off to a competitor's website, they come to your Facebook or Pinterest page, and start a conversation with you.

Take a good look at your website. Are you making these 5 mistakes? When we changed these 5 elements of the site, engagement figures went up dramatically. A very impressive 7% of visitors downloaded this agency's free 'how to' report, and Facebook likes are climbing much faster than before. They also tell me that phone enquiries are up to their direct number, which whilst hard to track accurately, could well be a sign that this particular strategy is working.



AIDA – what it means and how it can get you valuations

Have you heard of it? It stands for

ATTENTION
INTEREST
DESIRE
ACTION

It's basically the journey a potential vendor goes on before they contact you. Now, some vendors take a long time – perhaps years – to decide to sell their home, right? Particularly downsizers, who may not be hugely motivated in the first place. This means that this journey can take many years from start to end. A motivated aspiring family who have outgrown their current house may skip through this journey in a matter of weeks, but you still have to cultivate and nurture that relationship.

So let's look at these elements – very briefly – one at a time:

ATTENTION – how do your vendors find out you exist? Your sale boards, website, and social media all play a part here to bring your agency to their attention.

INTEREST – do they like what they see long enough to stick around? Their next action may well be to do some 'research' on you – perhaps Googling you, following you on social media or asking their friends on Facebook.

DESIRE – you need to appeal to them to make them want to see more of you – a blog is a great tool to make people keep coming back to your website, or perhaps you could offer them a free selling guide.

ACTION – here's the point of all this! You actually want them to call, email or otherwise contact you and if you've done everything above right, here's where it pays off.

So off you go – start singing AIDA in the shower and think of me. Actually, that came out wrong....

ONE Change You Can Make To Your Website To Get A Ton More Valuations

Intrigued? Good, you should be.

Before I tell you what it is (and I know you're dying to find out), go to a screen and open your website. Now imagine you are a potential vendor or landlord. What do you see on that home page that is just for you?

I'm not talking about the 'Book your FREE Valuation!' button – I know most of you have those. But what if they aren't ready to book a valuation? Remember your AIDA plan from a couple of weeks ago? Attention-Desire-Interest-Action – well, until they get to the 'Action' phase, they are completely invisible to you, right? In fact, your goal is to start trying to attract and engage with them before they take an action, which by that time might be too late for you to get a look in.

So, going back to your home page – I ask again, what is there for a potential client?

Try this – go to [my site](#) and imagine you're a vendor. What is there for you? Loads! Great free stuff, a blog packed with useful information, and the chance to subscribe to my Selling Secrets by email. All free. I get a ton of enquiries like this. And you could too.

Here are my three steps to grabbing yourself some new valuations through your website:

1. **Write a free report, ebook or white paper.** Whatever you want to call it. Try something like *10 Steps to Selling Your Home in 30 Days*. Or if you are trying to attract landlords, how about *Landlord Tips from the Pros*. Have it nicely designed and convert it to a pdf.
2. **Add an email capture box to your home page.** If you are trying to attract both vendors and landlords, have two – one for each. Your web developer should be able to do this for you.
3. **Start building a list of potential clients**, and design a 'lead nurture plan' to keep in touch with them frequently and regularly with great tips in a non-salesy style.

If you only got 1 enquiry a day, that's 30 new leads a month – and perhaps 5 new valuations. All because you made one tiny change to your home page.

Could this be a secret source of landlords and vendors for you?

LinkedIn is a huge platform. As I write this, they have 238 million users, with almost 100 million checking in *every single day*. The [changes](#) that LinkedIn has made in recent months now allow users to add media to their profiles, making the platform more and more like a professional version of Facebook, without the wedding photos and silly games.

But are your potential landlords and vendors on LinkedIn?

If your clients are mostly first time buyers or little old ladies, then no – they probably aren't. You can stop reading this article right now and go make yourself a coffee.

However, if your clients are (or you would like them to be) professional, educated, financially astute, then yes – they are almost certainly on LinkedIn. And if they are, then they have already indicated – by definition – that that is where they want to engage. So go engage with them!

A quick 3 step guide to finding landlords and vendors on LinkedIn:

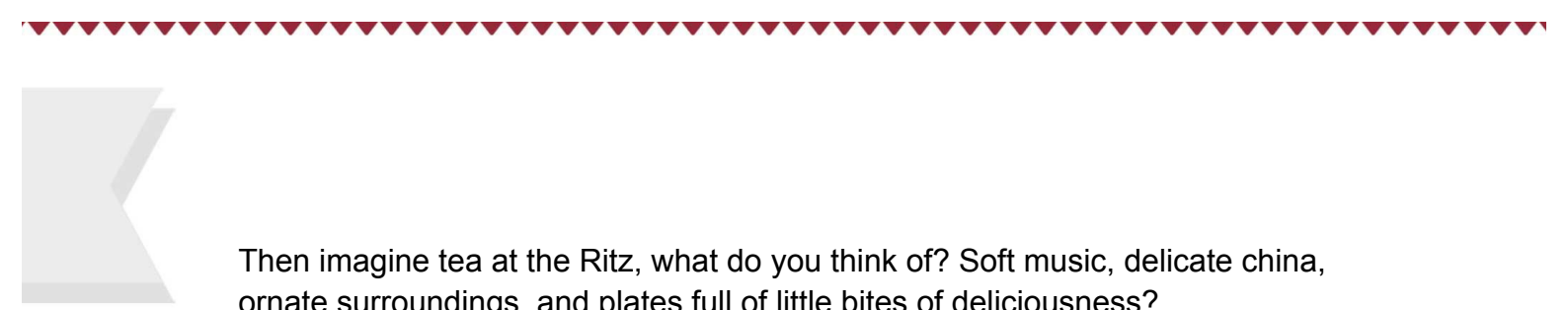
1. Optimise your profile so it looks great ([check mine out here](#)) and add a company page
2. Join some groups – there are plenty set up for landlords, but you could also join other professional services like conveyancing
3. Be active – post updates, add people, reach out in a friendly non-salesy way.

I'll be putting out a course soon on using LinkedIn to get landlords and vendors, so watch this space. In the meantime, [connect with me](#) on LinkedIn and I'll check out your profile.

Things in fancy wrapping cost more. Right?

Think about buying something from Tiffany's – what do you see in your mind? The beautiful box in its distinctive soft blue, the tissue paper, the satin ribbon?

Tiffany's sells jewellery, but so do many more high street retailers. But that beautiful packaging adds a premium to what they sell. It adds value in the customer's mind, creating a special experience around the act of buying, simply because of the wrapping. Note: it's not just about the jewellery.



Then imagine tea at the Ritz, what do you think of? Soft music, delicate china, ornate surroundings, and plates full of little bites of deliciousness?

But at the end of the day, Ritz sells tea, sandwiches and cakes. As do a thousand other places in London. In fact, if you want afternoon tea, you could probably get it for around a fifth of the price the Ritz will charge you for arguably the same food. Customers of the Ritz are prepared to pay an extra premium – and a hefty one at that, at around £100 for two - for the experience; the surroundings; the feeling that they are buying into something very special. It's not just about the food.

What do you sell? A transaction? Or do you offer fancy wrapping and a unique experience? What's your equivalent of the Tiffany's blue ribboned box, or the Ritz's red carpet treatment?

Because if you only offer the transaction – that is, a property sale, then you can only charge a transactional fee – the equivalent of afternoon tea at your local caff. (I'm sure it's just as delicious but definitely missing something.) Once you give your vendors and landlords something really special that they will truly value, your fee becomes a secondary consideration to *worth*. And then you can charge a premium because *you'll be worth it*.

Newsflash! Your website is attracting the wrong people.

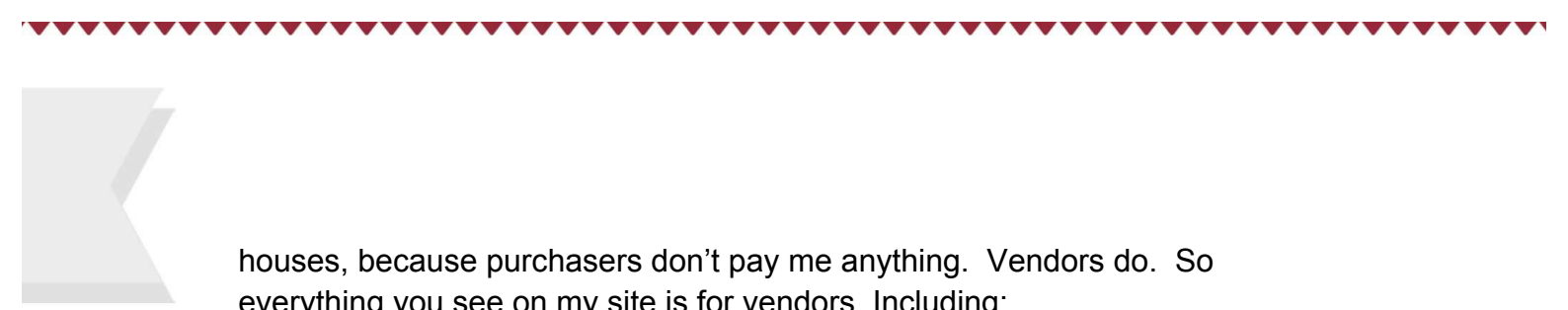
If I offered you 50 new applicants, or 10 new vendors, which would you choose? Vendors? Yes! Because if you can get the quality and quantity of stock, the purchasers will come, right?

Now I know I've talked about this before in previous Supertips, but it's important enough for me to bring up again here, not least because I still haven't seen any agent websites that are capturing vendors effectively!

Go to your home page. Imagine you're a vendor. What is there on the page for you? Anything??

I don't count your big red 'book a valuation' button either – it's too much of a big ask for vendors who may be nowhere near ready to actually make an appointment with you. Don't forget that some vendors – especially downsizers – can take months or even years to make the decision to move. During that time, you need to be attracting them back to your site as often as possible with content that is interesting and relevant – to them! Not to a purchaser.

If you're still not convinced, go to my site – www.home-truths.co.uk - mine is purely a vendor-focused site. There's nothing at all on there about buying



houses, because purchasers don't pay me anything. Vendors do. So everything you see on my site is for vendors. Including:

- My free 'Selling Secrets' they can download instantly
- Three free guides to help them sell more effectively
- An engaging, interesting up-to-date blog that is updated at least twice a week

All these elements have been carefully crafted to attract vendors to my site – and keep them coming back for more.

How does your site rate in comparison? Do you have any of the above?

Let me know!

They don't want selling to: they want a conversation

Think about the last thing you bought. Were you sold to, or did you select it and then purchase it yourself?

I recently bought an iPad Mini for my son. Before I did, I turned to social media – namely, Twitter and Facebook – and asked for advice and comments on buying a tablet. I also talked to a few of my friends about their thoughts.



Finally, when I felt that I had enough information to make a decision, I settled on an iPad Mini and bought it from Amazon.

The transaction itself took less than one minute. The time it took for me to collate the advice and information I needed, took a few weeks in total. During that time period, I didn't want selling to; I wanted a *conversation*.

Rarely when someone decides to sell his or her home does that decision happen quickly. It takes time to weigh up all the pros and cons, sift through the information and advice, and make decisions on timescales and priorities. Throughout that thinking stage, they will be having conversations with family and friends, and if they're active on social media, they may even be discussing their plans with people they have never met, and may in fact never meet.

This is the space you need to be. As perhaps the most valuable link to their future moving plans, you can be here, having a conversation with them at each stage of their thinking process. By careful listening, you can identify their biggest challenges and concerns, and offer simply honest, helpful advice and information – *exactly when they need it most*.

If however, your outreach messages consist of sales slogans, property listings, and reminders of your opening times, you're missing the point, and



perhaps some very valuable opportunities to create a real bond with someone who could become a client.

So are you selling? Or are you creating conversations?

Is your business based on Word of Mouth?

Businesses that are based on word of mouth are in trouble. Of course, it's great to be referred and recommended from clients who feel you did a great job for them; it shows you're doing something right. But what happens when your business is based on word of mouth, and you need more stock? You see, you can't ramp up word of mouth; it's not within your control.

Word of mouth is not your bread and butter – it's the jam. In other words, you should consider referred business as a bonus. You can't found a solid business on it. Instead, you need a robust marketing plan that will generate leads and keep them coming in all the year round, and most importantly, a plan that you can ramp up or slow down as you need to, depending on the level of enquiries and new valuations you're getting.

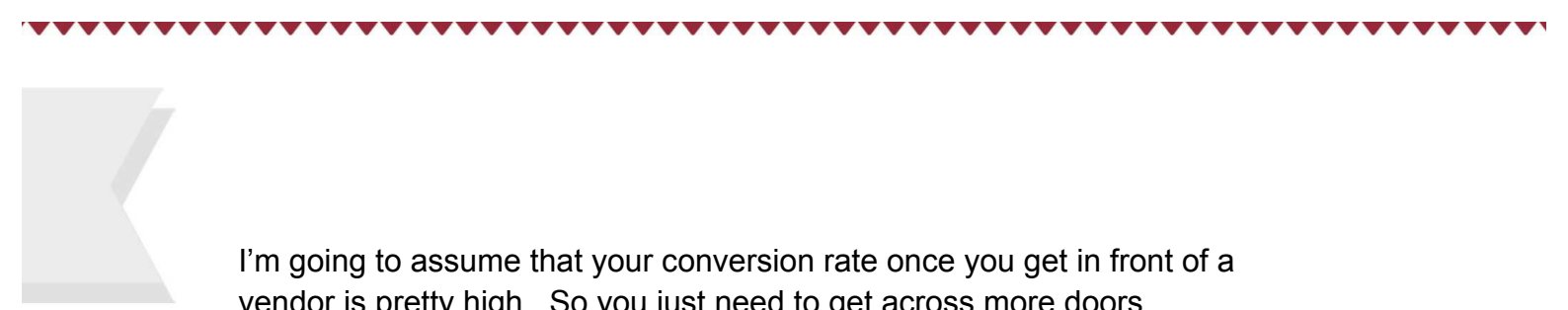
Enjoy your word of mouth business, and do keep encouraging referrals, but make sure your lead generation machine is whirring away in the background, keeping your phone ringing no matter what.

What did you do today?

Each of us spends our working days feeling like we're racing to a finish line that keeps moving. Answering emails, dealing with problems, fire-fighting much of the time; that to-do list we start the day with often remaining still to-do at the end of the day. Then 6pm rolls round and we think to ourselves, "What on earth have I done all day?"

I have some homework for you: for a whole day – a week would be even better – make a list of all the things you do. Now, take 3 highlighters and colour in green every activity that relates to getting new valuations; yellow for winning instructions and pink for selling properties. Everything that doesn't relate to one of these three objectives, leave uncoloured.

What does your list look like? Mainly yellow? Pink? If there are big sections of green highlighting, give yourself a hearty slap on the back. Almost every single one of you wants more valuations, right? Get the quality stock on your list and the buyers will come, we know that. And if you're a Supertip reader,



I'm going to assume that your conversion rate once you get in front of a vendor is pretty high. So you just need to get across more doors.

With that in mind, the bulk of each day should be coloured in green, meaning that your main daily focus is on creating valuation opportunities. If you're not personally actively involved in this, you need to make sure that you're outsourcing, delegating or managing the valuation generation process.

After all, it's the most important job you have right now. You can't sell houses that you don't have.

Different? Or just longer?

I spoke to an agent recently who told me that in his town of 6 agents, he was truly different. "How are you different?" I asked.

He went on to tell me that every other agent in his town was open until 5.30pm.

"When are you open until?"

"6pm!" he answered with relish, clearly very pleased with himself.

"That's not different", I told him. "That's longer".

The trouble with longer, is that it can be replicated. Before you know it, you'll be opening until 9pm, 10pm: where will it all end? Will you be taking a camped into work because you daren't close?

Differentiation is about *thinking differently*.

When I deliver my training course 'Getting Every Valuation', I have a slide that says: "Carlsberg don't do estate agents, but if they did, what would they be like?"

Instead of trying to open longer than the competition, or having bigger window displays, or booking more pages in the paper, you need to differentiate *intelligently*.

Use your vendors as a filter to help you work out your differentiators, because they need to be things that your vendors will truly value and appreciate.

Very few vendors will appreciate if you have two more pages in the paper than your competitors, but they may actually really value a free home stager visit, or a complimentary garden tidy every couple of weeks. Would they like a free sellers' clinic once a month, when they can drop into your office and ask questions about their sale, *even if they are not yet your vendors*? Or perhaps what they would really value is some help project managing replacing their dated bathroom?



Carlsberg may not do estate agents, but when they do, be ready....

You're different, right? 3 ways you can prove it.

Differentiation is one of the most difficult factors for an agent to prove. Very often, all the things that make you unique, like customer care, and a great rapport with your vendors, isn't something that they will experience until after they have instructed you. But how can you prove differentiation *before* they sign on the dotted line, and make sure that your competitors don't steal it from you?

Here are three ways to use differentiation to actually win that instruction:

1. **Deliberate differentiation** is when you tell your customers that you are different from the rest, *and how*. So for example you could say "We are the only agent in the area who uses professional photography as standard, at no charge to you". Saying that you are "professional, friendly and experienced" just won't cut it these days - you need to stand out! Be bold, and state why you are different to your customers. Don't let them have to do the work; *spell it out*.
2. **Creative differentiation** - this is where you need to use your imagination! How could you be creatively different from your competitors? Could you find something that not only no one in your area is doing, but that no other estate agent in the country is doing?! Gather your team around and really brainstorm this one. Let them know that no idea is too wacky, or stupid. Only by giving your team a safe place to play around with their own creativity can some truly innovative ideas come to the fore. Think Dyson, Apple, and Ikea. How outlandish did their ideas sound right out of the box?
3. **Conversion differentiation** - this is how to use your points of differentiation to get your prospect to *choose you*. Statements that use persuasion like "Instruct us today and we will have your windows cleaned tomorrow at our expense" or "If you instruct us, we'll give you and your partner a voucher for a local restaurant to say thank you". Make it bold, and make it count.

Try these, and let me know how you get on. Don't be afraid to be different - it's only by being different that you will build up a loyal following of fans who like and trust you. Scary as it is, differentiation ensures your longevity and financial success. Be brave; *be different!*

Are you doing your 5 a day?

Welcome to your 5-a-day checklist for maximum business health and wealth!

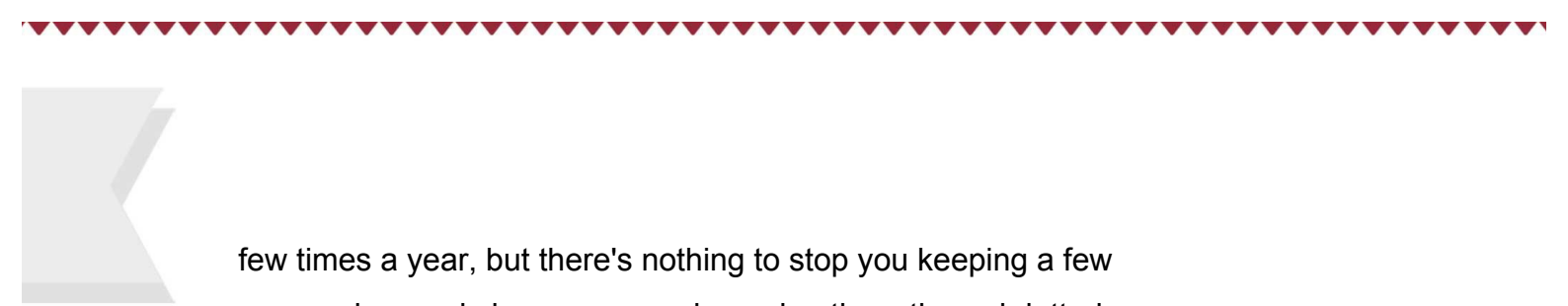
No, I'm not talking fruit and veg here; I'm referring to the basics of good old fashioned estate agency work that just has to be done to win instructions and sell properties. Take a look at my list and ask yourself if you are, in fact, doing your 5 a day.

1. Pick up the phone - it's very easy these days to feel that you've done a good days' work when actually, you haven't spoken to anyone outside the office. Estate agency is founded on relationships, and relationships need nurturing. Pick up the phone to your buyers, vendors and even your suppliers, on a regular basis to keep the goodwill flowing.

2. Check out the competition - it's a very competitive marketplace out there, so keeping a very close eye on the other agents in your area is vital. Look at their Rightmove listings - how do they compare in quantity and quality to yours? Can you spot any vendors that you've lost? How do their asking prices compare to your valuations? If you know their portfolio as well as your own, you'll be ready to pounce when their vendors start to get twitchy.

3. Check the news - I'm talking local and national here. Obviously keeping up to date with current property headlines is important, but you need to know what's going on in your local area too. Why? Because it's important to your clients, and therefore important to you too. Planning permission applications, village fetes, local issues - they are all valuable discussion fodder for you when you speak to your clients and prospective clients, and your professional credibility will rise accordingly.

4. Do some canvassing - I'm sure your office has a big push a



few times a year, but there's nothing to stop you keeping a few canvassing cards in your car and popping them through letterboxes between viewings. Even if you only post three a day, if there are two of you doing it, that's 1500 a year. At a 2% response rate, that's another 30 valuations. Worth doing? I think so.

5. Monitor your sales - catching up with your sales progression once a week just isn't enough in this very volatile market. Little and often is the tactic to go for; if your buyers are getting jittery, make sure you're the first to know. Keep a careful written record of every communication, and if you think a sale isn't as solid as you would like, talk to all parties often. Are you doing all 5? Well done if you are, have a gold star! If you aren't, maybe it would be a good idea to keep a note of these in the front of your diary as a checklist. Do you have any gems of your own? Let me know!

A little story about FREE

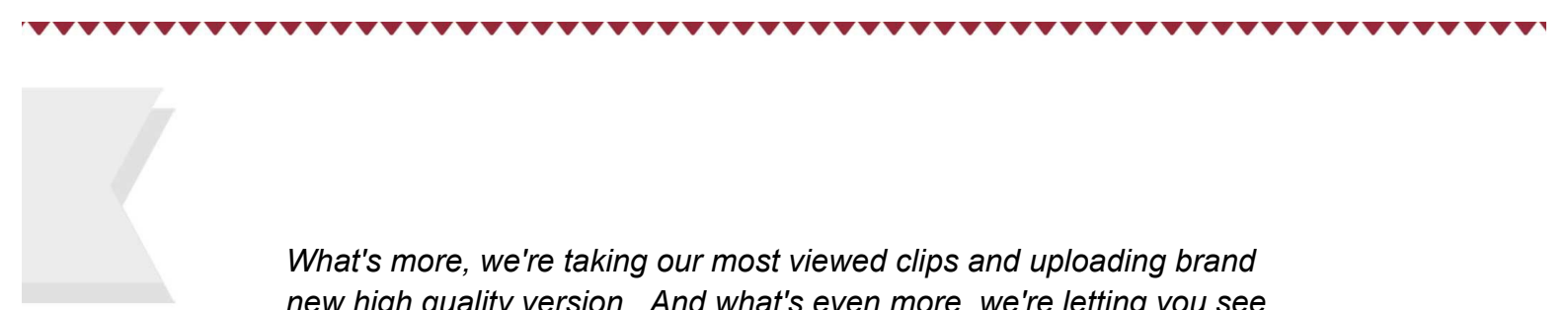
Are you a Monty Python fan? You may have seen that their sketches are freely available on YouTube for anyone to download and watch, free of charge. So what do the team make of this blatant pillaging?

Well a few years ago, they made the following announcement on YouTube:

"For 3 years, you YouTubers have been ripping us off, taking tens of thousands of our videos and putting them on YouTube. Now the tables are turned. It's time for us to take matters into our own hands.

We know who you are, we know where you live and we could come after you in ways too horrible to tell. But being the extra-ordinarily nice chaps we are, we've figured a better way to get our own back: we've launched our own Monty Python channel on YouTube.

No more of those crap quality videos you've been posting. We're given you the real thing - high quality vidoes delivered straight from our vault.



What's more, we're taking our most viewed clips and uploading brand new high quality version. And what's even more, we're letting you see absolutely everything for free!

But we want something in return.

None of your drivelling, mindless comments. Instead, we want you to click on the links, buy our movies and TV shows and soften our pain and disgust at being ripped off all these years."

Within three months, Monty Python's DVD was at number 2 in the Amazon movies' chart, with sales up 23,000%

More than 2 million people watched the clips on YouTube in those first few months, as word of mouth spread and parents (like me) introduced their children to the Black Knight and Dead Parrot Sketch. Thousands of people were reminded how much they loved Monty Python and wanted more, so they ordered the DVDs.

'Free' really worked for Monty Python: could it work for you too?

Quick question for you: do you know how many unique visitors you get to your site each month? If not, go and find out, quickly! If you do know, how does it compare to the number of inbound emails and phone calls you get?

1%?

Less??

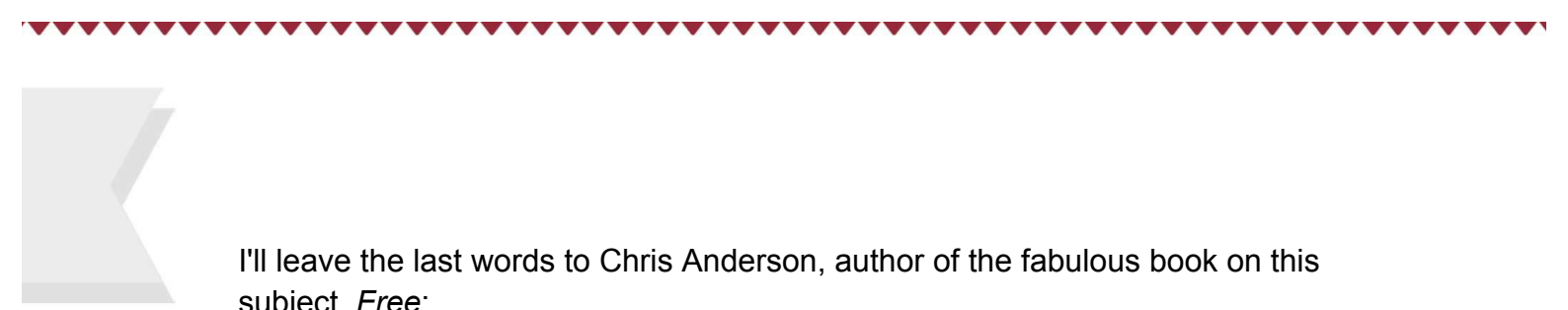
What is a visitor's incentive to contact you?

On my site (take a look - www.home-truths.co.uk) you'll see how much I really believe in *FREE*. In return for sharing their contact details with me, I give anyone tons of free information in the form of four informative ebooks.

It's really popular, and many enquirers are then willing to begin a dialogue that often results in a sale.

These days, we're all competing for a browser's attention, yet expecting a total stranger to share their very valuable information with us, for what? Well I think I offer a fair exchange - some great advice to swap for their contact information - but I have rarely seen a similar valuable freebie on any estate agents' sites.

So - have a think about it - what do you have that you could offer for free? A downloadable booklet of advice? A free assessment of their current online advert? (Great for poaching vendors!) And get it posted on your site, with only a request for a name and email address in return.



I'll leave the last words to Chris Anderson, author of the fabulous book on this subject, *Free*:

“Those who understand the new Free will command tomorrow's markets and disrupt today's - indeed, they're already doing it.”

Go disrupt the market!

Events! Why you could be missing a trick.

Events are a great way of reaching new and competitors' vendors and landlords. They create buzz and excitement, and get people talking. They are also an easy 'ask' of a potential client – after all, what do they have to lose other than a couple of hours of their time?

There are two types of events that I've held personally, and also for agent clients, and they can work really well if they are planned for carefully:

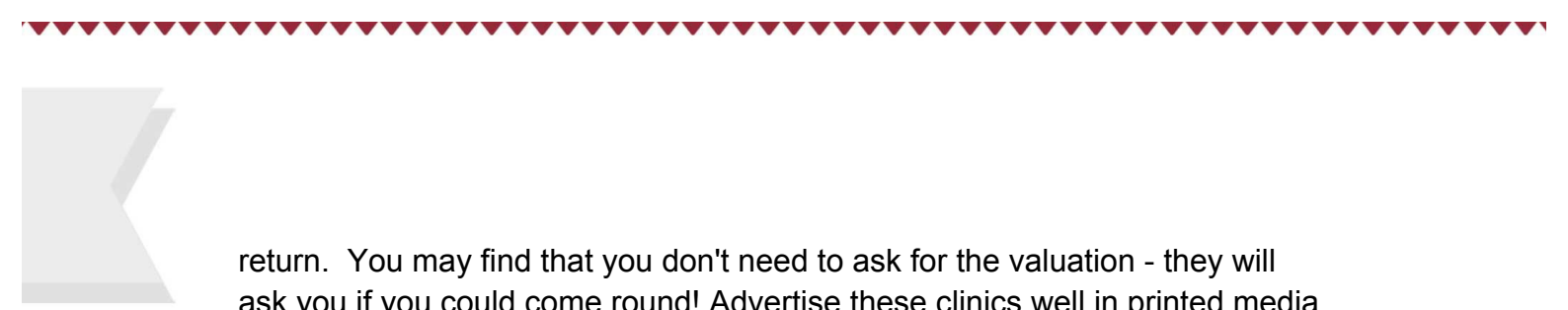
Advice Evenings

Host an evening, preferably out of your office, in a local hotel or other quality venue. Golf clubs can work really well, as they have a ready-made audience for you! I'd suggest you arrange it for a couple of hours, from around 7pm, and provide wine, orange juice and nibbles. Decorate it nicely with flowers, and have a couple of great speakers. If your evening is for vendors, think about inviting a home stager (they always have great before and after images) and perhaps a digital marketing expert. Don't invite solicitors or financial advisers, though these can be great for a landlord advice evening - along with perhaps a tax expert.

Allow extra time at the end so that you can be around to answer questions and hopefully book some valuations!"

Clinics

Slightly different from the advice evenings, you can also put on sellers' (or landlords') clinics on a Saturday in your office. This will encourage footfall and brand awareness. Ask for bookings half an hour apart, and if they are already on the market, suggest they bring along their current brochure for some free, impartial advice. Spend the half hour consultation on them: their plans and hopes for their move or their investments. Make sure you give real value in your advice and recommendations, and don't ask for anything in



return. You may find that you don't need to ask for the valuation - they will ask you if you could come round! Advertise these clinics well in printed media, (you may be able to persuade the local paper to do a little article on it for you) as well as across all your social media platforms, your website and your blog. Get some posters made up too, and distribute them around the area.


The best thing about events is that so few agents are doing them! Start now, before your competitors read this, and smash the competition!

Five canvassing ideas for when you're running out of stock

I had a call recently from an agent who had 36 properties on stock: 32 of which were under offer. Scary stuff. But what can you do when you're fast running out of properties and the phone isn't ringing?

Canvassing is one of the oldest forms of advertising and should really be part of every agent's marketing mix. I discussed canvassing with some leading industry professionals to see if they had any bright ideas on novel types of canvassing, and added a few of my own. See what you think:

- **Make it keepable** – so they don't make a very short trip into the recycling box. Try old photographs of the town; better still – their street. Print without any branding on one side and have three or four designs done. When you eventually get invited out to value, you may just see your cards pinned to the wall or on the fridge, and not in the recycling.
- **Make it noticeable** – unusual shapes have been done, but how about something really different – a door hanger? You know, like those 'Do Not Disturb' ones you see in hotels. Hang them on the outside of their front door, and at least they have to take it off whilst they open their door, hopefully taking a look at it as they do.
- **Make it useful** – how about one of those cardboard wheels, that you sometimes see given out in schools detailing which foods are healthy? You could make one with the best times of year to sell each type of house, or else a gardeners' one, showing what tasks to do when. Use your imagination, and so long as you make it useful, it'll be kept safe, away from the rubbish bin.

- 
- **Make it remarkable** – literally, causing the recipient to *remark* on it. Consider the cost of sending out three or four pieces of marketing, and compare it to other, more novel ideas. For example, give away a small potplant, with a gift tag, just saying something like “Happy Easter, love ABC Estates”. Think different, and you will be seen as *being* different.
 - **Make it clever** – that property you sold quickly, that you still have all those glossy A4 brochures of? Don’t bin them. Instead, attach a compliment slip (hand written) to each one and pop them through all the houses on the same street. The clever bit is not to ask for anything here, simply write “As a neighbor, I thought you might like to know that we have now sold this house. With warm regards, Tom” An agent I know tried this with 40 brochures, and got an amazing 10% response – 4 appointments.

So there you go – five ways to get more valuations with canvassing. Which is your favourite? Try one, two, or even all five, and please – let me know how you get on.

Does your Rightmove profile pass the Sam test?

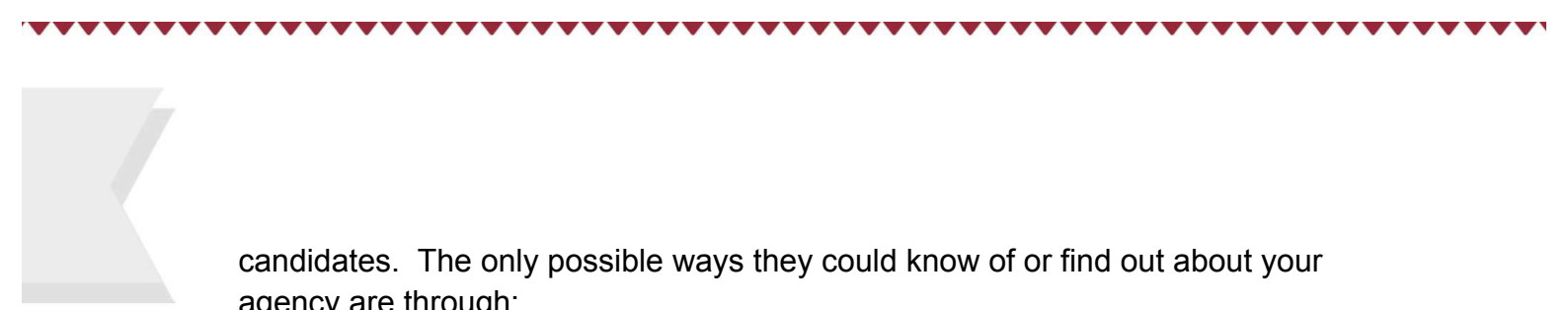
Before you read any further, go to Rightmove and open up your Agent Profile. Go on – I’ll wait.

Got it? Great. Quiz time. Award yourself a point for each one of these questions that you answer ‘yes’ to:

- ✓ Do you have a photograph *that isn’t* your logo or your office?
- ✓ Copy and paste the text into a Word document – is it less than 150 words?
- ✓ Does it include the words *you* or *your* at least 5 times?
- ✓ Is it written in the first person, ie using *we* or *I*?
- ✓ Does it include a *call to action* at the bottom of the text, eg ‘*Call us now*’ or ‘*Get in touch to arrange your appraisal*’?

How did you do? If you got 5 out of 5, pat yourself very hard on the back and go do something more interesting than reading this article. If not, read on....

Think about this from the vendor’s point of view: they are searching for a prospective agent to sell their home for them and so are filtering the likely



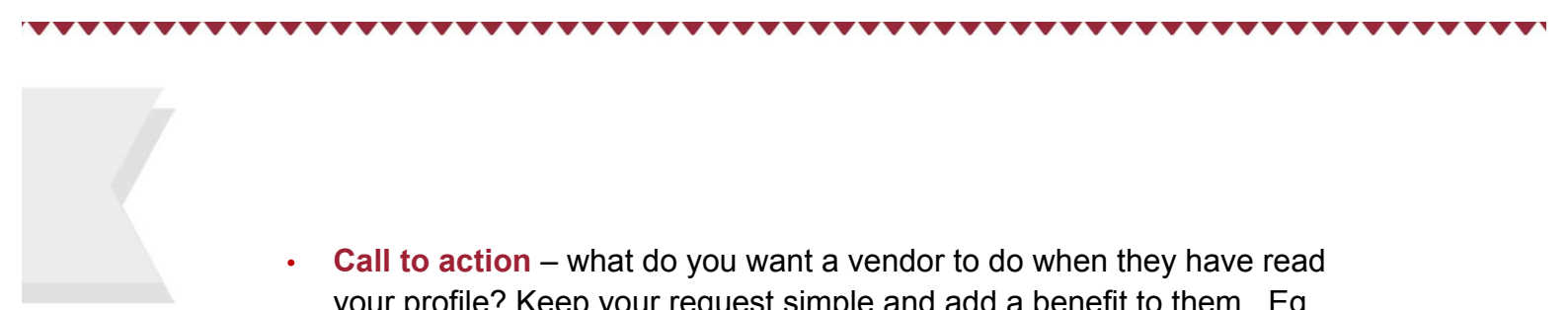
candidates. The only possible ways they could know of or find out about your agency are through:

- Word of mouth/local knowledge/used you before
- Seeing your boards
- Seeing your print adverts or marketing
- Finding you online

Research tells us that on average, we – the great British public – have to see a brand *seven times* before we take any action. This means that most of the interaction with your brand is completely invisible to you. By the time a prospective vendor finds your Agent Profile on Rightmove, they are probably filtering, based on your portfolio size and type, and the way your agency comes across in the profile piece. Here is your opportunity to make sure you're on the shortlist of three that we know around two thirds of people will invite to give a market appraisal.

You've probably deduced the advice I have for you in regard to your Rightmove Agent Profile, by the questions I have asked above. But humour me, and if you're still reading, let's explore them individually:

- **Your profile photograph** - if you use a self-promotional photograph, say your office, your logo, or a liveried car, you're not going to really *engage* a vendor and interest them, are you? What's important to *them*? Remember – people buy people – so show them a photo of you or your team, and let them see *who you are*.
- **Your text** – a quick check through some of the agent profiles on Rightmove shows that most agents' profiles are just too long. 150 words is plenty. Your readers aren't going to read any more anyway.
- **Them versus you** – I just looked at a premium independent agent in Oxford (Kemp and Kemp) and found they had used 13 instances of *we* and their name, and they didn't mention *you* or *your* once. None of the others are any better, by the way.
- **Who's speaking?** Remember that you are talking directly to your potential customer here. Why not say "Hello, I'm Tom from Downton Estate Agents and I'd like to welcome you to our page" or something similar. You have a great opportunity here to make that connection, and it works much more strongly if you talk as a real person.

- 
- **Call to action** – what do you want a vendor to do when they have read your profile? Keep your request simple and add a benefit to them. Eg “Call me – Tom – on 01823 345678 to find out exactly how you could sell faster and for more through Downton Estate Agents.

Rightmove has given you a mini website here folks, with a potential monthly readership of around 3 million unique visitors. Make the most of it!

11 blog headlines for you to steal

Are you blogging? You should be. My blog brings around 4,000 unique visitors to my site every single month, and the number is increasing all the time. Blogging gives your potential vendors and landlords a reason to keep coming back to your website, otherwise, what is there for them to read?

I’m often asked by agents for inspiration to help them write blogposts, so I’ve put together here for you 11 ideas to help you create titles, and also an example for each that you’re welcome to steal!

- **Lists**-7 things to do before every viewing
- **Reasons why**-3 reasons why you don’t need an estate agent
- **How to** -How to sell your house for more than you think
- **Controversial**-Rightmove is dead
- **Newsworthy**-How Kate and Will chose their new married home
- **What’s in it for me?**-Get a free copy of Sam’s new book
- **Ask a question**-When was your last viewing?
- **Drama**-Are you sabotaging your house sale?
- **Human interest**-What Sam did at the weekend and how it might just help you sell your house
- **Thought provoking**-Are we moving home too much?
- **Industry news**-RICS says that house prices are up by 5% this year – but is yours?

Does that help? Off you go then – you have some blogging to do....



The secret to being everywhere

Vendors and landlords are elusive. They hide, never respond to any of your canvassing efforts, then they call you when they have probably 90% decided which agent to instruct, using your valuation to make up the numbers.

The trick is to reach them much earlier in their selling journey. Before they even realise they want to sell, in fact. And the only way to do that, is to start a conversation with them, *wherever they like to spend their time*.

Social media is where more and more people like to hang out. They sit on the sofa, watching Downton Abbey or Strictly, sipping Shiraz and browsing on their iPads or smartphones. They are on Pinterest, Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus, YouTube..... the list is endless.

So where should you focus your efforts?

Everywhere that they are, I'm afraid.

It's not easy, and if you're a social media newbie, ignore this Supertip right now and concentrate on just one or two platforms, until you work out what on earth you're supposed to be doing.

Once you are a little more skilled however, it's time to reach out to your vendors and landlords, connecting with them *before* they are ready to book a valuation.

Here are my five steps to rolling out a successful 'be everywhere' strategy:

1. Look at your previous 20 vendors, and make a list of the social media platforms they are most likely to use. Better still, ask them!
2. Make sure you have an account on each of those platforms
3. Start spending 10 minutes a day on each platform, working out the dynamics, culture and etiquette.
4. Set a theme for each month, eg home strategies, Rightmove strategies, photography, and then plan some great content for each platform, based on your theme. If you blog (and you should) then this can be the basis for your updates for each platform.
5. Ask for help from your team, creating a Google doc or similar for everyone to be able to add their finds and ideas to.

So there you go – how to be everywhere. Or at least, everywhere that your vendors and landlords are!



INSTRUCTIONS

3 Ways to win Every Instruction

Welcome to my secrets to **Winning every instruction!**

1. Listen first - now I know you've heard this (no pun intended) a thousand times - who hasn't?! I thought I was a good listener until someone said to me recently "Listening is not just waiting to talk". Wow! That's so right. Of course, that is what most of us count as 'listening', right? So next time you are in a valuation, *really really listen*. Try to wipe your mind of everything you want to tell the vendor, and instead, open up your ears and your mind to what they have to say to you. It will probably contain the secret to winning the instruction, but if you're talking, you'll miss it.

2. Find commonality - what do you have in common with the vendor? Most likely, you won't have met this person before, so you only have a very short window to make a good impression, and the best way to do this, is by finding out what you have in common. Pets, cars, holidays, people you both know - these are all great ways to demonstrate "we're alike!" Remember - people do business with people they know, like and trust.

3. Demonstrate differentiation - if you can't *prove* you are different, then the vendor has nothing to go on, but your fee and valuation. And is that how you want them to make their very important decision? Show the vendor how and why you're different from all the rest, and they will have a reason then to remove the valuation/fee issue from their decision-making process.

Many of the agents I work with are already achieving great conversion rates of 60% and above, but there's always room for improvement! Keep these three elements in your mind as you step through the door, and you'll come out with

Have you thought of doing this?

Do you have a Facebook page?

Are you keen to improve your vendor retention rates?

Now I know that these two questions seem unrelated, but actually, one could be the answer to the other.....

First, let me tell you a story about my sister, the fabulous wedding and lifestyle photographer, Kathy Ashdown. She has a lively and interesting Facebook page, with over 1500 likes. Not bad.

But she also has a group page. Just for brides.

“What’s a group page”, I hear you ask?


Thanks for asking. Here’s the official line:

Facebook Groups can be created by individual users. They allow members to post items such as links, events, and notes, and to share or to upload files. Groups are a way of enabling a number of people to come together online to share information and discuss specific subjects” (Source: Wikipedia)

So in Kathy’s brides page, she has xxx brides, all talking, sharing, asking, discussing, and generally acting as a supportive community with Kathy adding her thoughts and comments as she thinks she needs to. In a conversation with her, Kathy explained that on the actual wedding day, a bride who is part of the Group is always, more appreciative, trusting and generally much easier to work with than a bride who isn’t. This is because during her time in the Group, she has forged a bond with Kathy, a relationship that has built over the months preceding the wedding. Some brides even stick around after their wedding, sharing their experiences, photographs, highs and lows, and anything else she thinks the other members will enjoy.

So then I got to thinking, why don’t estate agents use this free and very powerful feature? Why not create a Facebook page for your vendors? Here are just a few of the very many benefits it could bring to your agency – commercial and personal:

- It would encourage vendors to act like a community, sharing thoughts and ideas about selling
- Vendors could ask direct questions to the page admin (you) out of hours, and get a direct, timely and personal response. No getting swamped by emails.
- If you build a strong community, and you receive a negative comment, you may find that the other Group members jump in to support and defend you – so much more powerful than you doing it yourself.

- 
- You can share successes with the Group, so that it has a positive, upbeat atmosphere.
 - Problems and challenges can be aired in a safe environment, eg if someone isn't getting viewings, the rest of the Group could rally round to make suggestions and put forward ideas.
 - Based on that last point, it could be a very creative source of inspiration for you and your team!
 - You could have an 'ask the expert' slot once a week when you invite a local home stager, solicitor, removal firm, etc to be on hand to answer questions. (PS ask me – I'd love to do it!)

Think of how a vendor often feels when they aren't seeing any activity on their property: isolated and despondent. By being part of a Group, they are less likely to just give up and move to another agency without first raising some concerns or asking questions on the Group Page. In this way, you can respond positively and rapidly, and hopefully avoid their 'silent withdrawal'.

If anyone is already doing this, can you write and tell me? I'd love to know about your experiences. At the moment, I don't know of any of these Vendor Groups, but I'll bet they will start springing up all over the place very soon. Make sure you get there first!

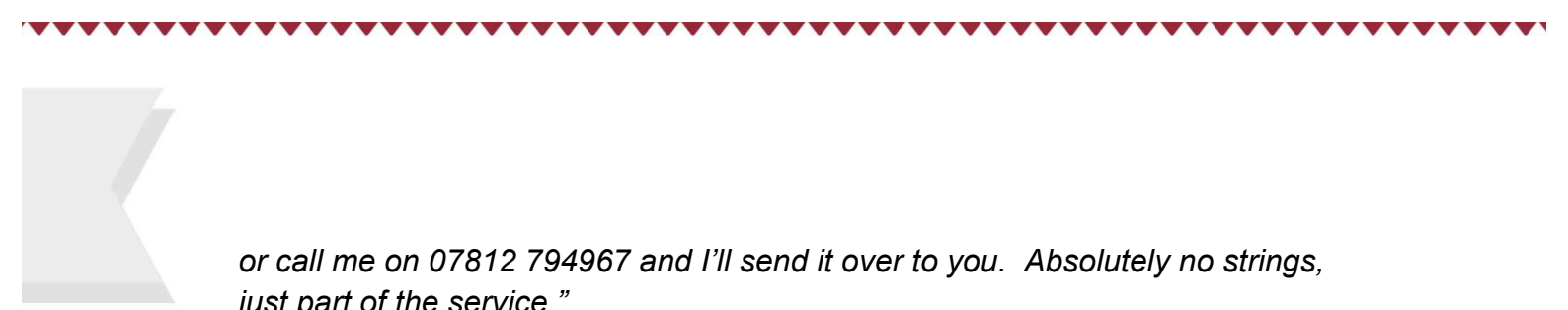
I bet you've never tried this instruction winner

Guerrilla marketing is one of my favourite subjects, and I've already touched on it in previous Supertips. It's really all about being creative and daring in your marketing efforts, avoiding spending oodles of cash, and instead standing out for being innovative and different.

Take a look at your website – on it, do you make the claim that you are innovative? Forward-thinking? Proactive? Prove it! Let's see how brave you really are....

Next blue-sky day, dispatch your *best* photographer (is this you?) to photograph the front of homes you would dearly love to have on your books, *whether they are on the market or not*. After taking each shot, pop a compliment slip through the door with a handwritten note that says:

"Hi, I'm Tom from Mission Impossible Estate Agents. As it's such a lovely day, and we were photographing a home on your street, I took the liberty of photographing your house, in case you decide to put it on the market on a day when the sky is grey. Just drop me an email at tom@missionimpossible.co.uk



or call me on 07812 794967 and I'll send it over to you. Absolutely no strings, just part of the service."

If the house is already on the market, check their front image on your phone before you take the shot, in case they already have a pretty blue sky on their image. In this case, your note could read something like:

"I noticed your current photograph was taken on a grey-sky day. I'd like to give you a new blue-sky image with my compliments. You are of course, welcome to give it to your current estate agent."

Creative? Yes. Daring? Hell, yes!!

But aren't you just helping your competitors by giving them your lovely blue-sky shots? Maybe. But you are also – very importantly – *showing them up!!* By being creative and generous, the homeowner will think highly of you, and your no-strings policy paints you in a great light.

Agents have such a terrible reputation, as we all know, that we in the industry fight sometimes on a daily basis. A guerrilla tactic like this will demonstrate that you have a higher purpose – that you just want to help vendors, *whether they are yours or not*.

And remember the *karma* of giving – it will *always* come back to you.

ONE question to ask a vendor that could win you the instruction

As I write this post, the sun is shining and the sky is blue – the opposite in fact of the weather the last time I shadowed an agent on a valuation. On that day, it was absolutely pouring with rain, bouncing off the tarmac, and even in the short run from car to front door, we were both soaked. As we were invited in by the smartly dressed lady in her sixties, I winced at the puddles we were making on her carpet. She was far too polite to comment, but instead led us into an elegant drawing room and offered us some tea, which we gladly accepted.

In the few moments whilst she was gone, I whispered to the agent, Tom "Ask her *why* she is moving". He didn't get chance to argue, as she came back in with a beautifully laid tea tray. I attended to the tea, whilst Tom asked the questions.

"So, Mrs Downton,er..... why are you moving?" he asked, obediently. This was clearly not a question he was in the habit of asking.

"I'm moving to Bristol", came the reply. Sensing Tom was about to move on to his list of usual questions, I jumped in with "Why Bristol?"



Mrs Downtown looked at me, then replied, “My son lives there with his wife.”

“So are you moving in with him, or nearby?” I persisted.

I won’t bore you with the whole story, but it transpired that her son had recently returned from Afghanistan, where he had unfortunately lost a leg, and been awarded a medal for bravery. He was struggling to cope, being at home all day with his newborn baby and four year old, and his wife was hoping to go back to work. The funds released from the sale of her house would allow an annex to be built onto the side of her son’s house, so Mrs Downton could live independently and stay close to her family to help and support.

Because I kept asking open questions, Mrs Downton kept talking, and at one point I said, “Tom’s just going to go measure up if that’s ok?” It was ok.

By the time he returned, Mrs Downton and I were old friends. When I gently introduced the agreement at an appropriate point in the conversation, she signed it willingly. The trust she felt for me, and by inference, in the agency, was made apparent by her openness, and by the time we left an hour later, Tom had hardly said a word. Nor had either of us ‘pitched’ in any way. All we had done was listen. Because Mrs Downton had a story to tell, a reason for moving, and a need to share it. No selling, no fee-bargaining, just a really genuine conversation between two people.

Can you do this? Can you ask ‘why’ and keep on asking ‘why’ until you get the whole story? Try it. See for yourself how powerful that little word can be.

Just sign here....

Before you read on, just grab a copy of the your Agreement, can you? I’ll wait here.

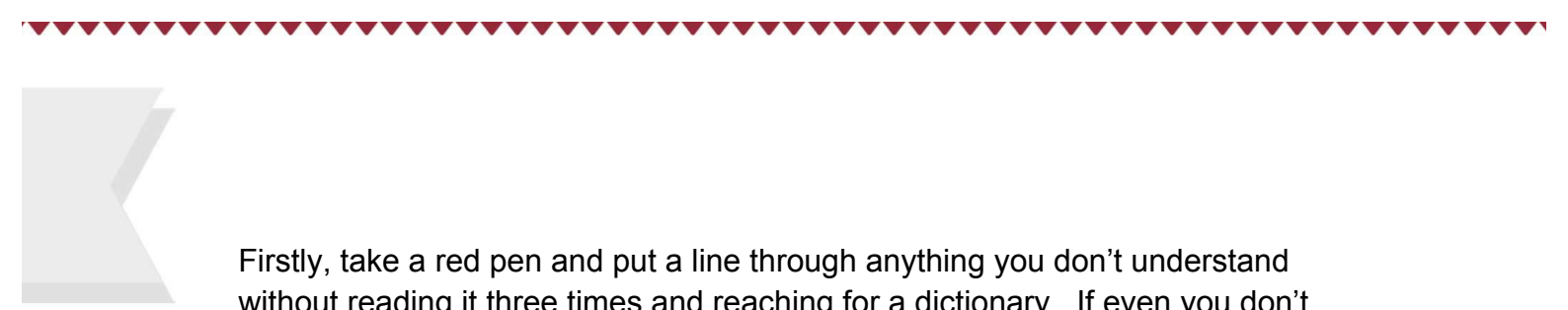
Ok – take a look at it – a good look. What do you notice? Is it one page? Is the font size less than 10 points? Is it easy for a vendor to scan quickly and not say, “I’ll read this later”?

The point of the Agreement is not so you can bash your vendor over the head in 6 months’ time and say “Haha – you never noticed Clause 1.6.5.7.a – more fool you!”

No, the point of the Agreement is to get them to – yep – *agree*.

But agree to what? To agree to use your agency to sell their property.

So let’s make it really simple, and I’m also going to give you a tip to help you get a signature every time.



Firstly, take a red pen and put a line through anything you don't understand without reading it three times and reaching for a dictionary. If even you don't understand it, is it fair to ask your vendor to sign it?

Secondly, re-write as much as you can using *plain English*. This is very important. Even if the Agreement then has to run onto two pages, you need to help your vendor to understand through clear information what they are agreeing to.

Then, ask your designer – yes, you heard right – your *designer*, to redesign your Agreement so it is nicely set out, on brand and has a clear and transparent tone.

Ok – now I'm going to share with you my idea about how to get more signatures there and then.

On your Agreement, incorporate a short checklist of options with a tick box. These options are free to the vendor, and are actually what you would provide them with anyway. Your checklist could look something like this:

- Rightmove advertising
- Printed brochure
- Accompanied viewings

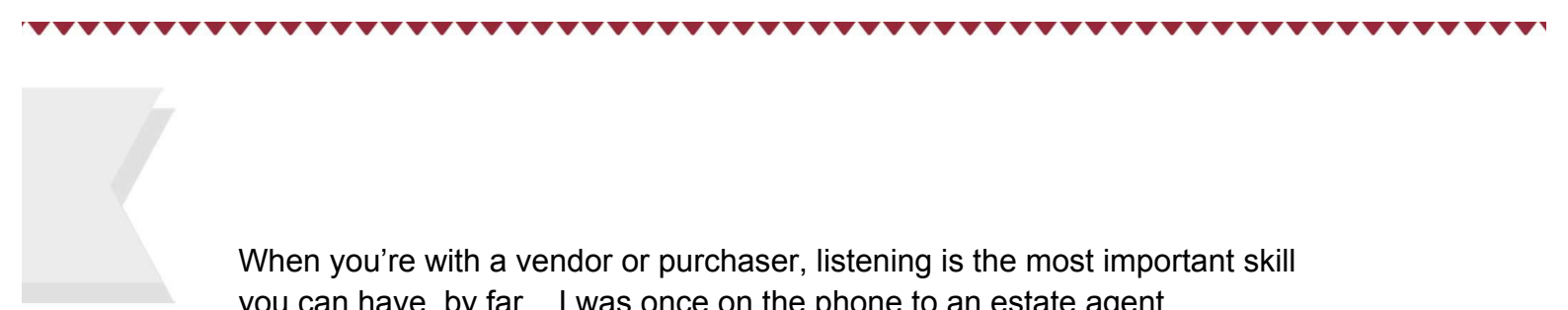
Etcetera. The point is, the vendor will be holding the pen, ticking the boxes, and when it comes to the signature, they will just be in the flow and sign. I promise you that this works. As an additional bonus, it not only gives you the chance to discuss these elements, and keep the client's focus away from the commission rate, it also shows the vendor clearly all the marketing features they are receiving *at no extra cost*. Isn't that going to make you look good? I think so.

Are you a good listener?

Do you consider yourself a good listener?

Most of us do, actually. That's because it's an effort to listen for many of us, when we have so much to say! We notice the effort we're making, but not so much the effort that the other party are making for us.

As a consequence, most of us don't actually listen very well. What we do instead, is *wait to talk*. Try it for yourself. Notice in the next conversation you have with someone, whether you're actually listening to them speak, or simply waiting to put your own opinion or experience across.



When you're with a vendor or purchaser, listening is the most important skill you can have, by far. I was once on the phone to an estate agent, conducting a mystery shop. The lady was very helpful, telling me all about a particular property she had which was close to a marvellous school. I let her tell me about it for a few minutes, before interrupting her to say "But I don't have children". Unfazed, she went on to tell me all about the beautiful walks in the area. But did she know if I liked walking? Of course not. Because she didn't ask.

Asking the right questions then really *listening* to the answers will put you head and shoulders above your competitors (unless of course they get my Supertips too!). Even better, repeat back to your potential customer what they have said *using the words they used* and they will truly feel listened to. It's a very seductive feeling, that the other person is genuinely listening intently and cares about what you think.

Your homework for this week is to practice listening. When you stop simply waiting to talk, and start to really listen, your family, friends, co-workers and of course, customers, will thank you for it.

Is your office admin answering your phone?

I called an Essex agent this week to ask about a property. The lady who answered told me that she didn't know anything about the house in question, but offered to get the owner of the agency to call me back. As the property is owned by a client of mine, I wanted to know whether this was usual procedure if an interested buyer calls. "Well I'm just admin" the lady explained.

"Who answers the phone normally then?" I asked.

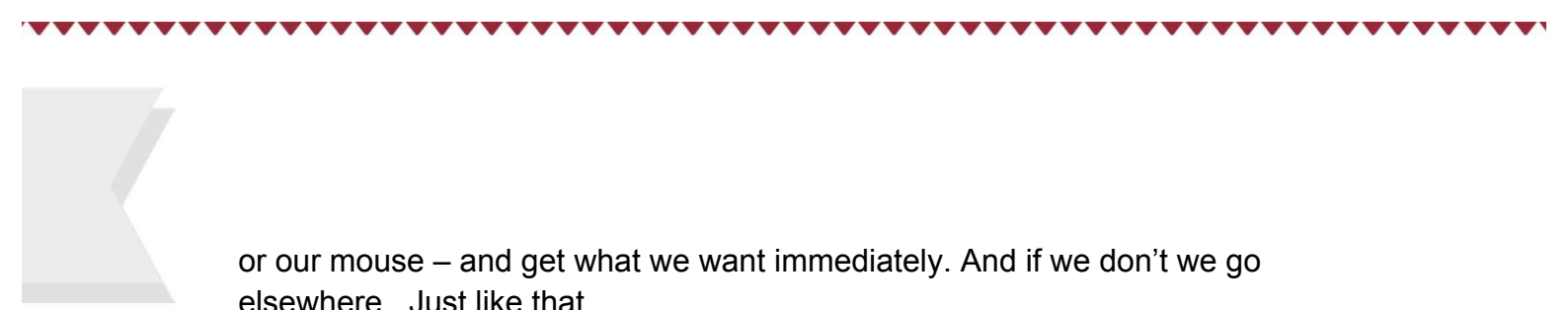
"I do", she replied.

"Then you're not admin," I pointed out – "you're sales".

This is an important point to make. The person who is answering the phone at your agency is customer facing, and their sole job if answering the phone to an interested buyer, is to *sell that buyer a viewing*.

Her job becomes even more vital to the success (or otherwise) of the agency, if a prospective vendor calls. In this case, her goal is to *sell that vendor a valuation appointment*.

People are fickle, and impatient. We don't want something tomorrow, we want it now. If a book I spot on Amazon isn't available on a next day delivery, I feel cheated. We're the 'click' generation – we expect to click our fingers –



or our mouse – and get what we want immediately. And if we don't we go elsewhere. Just like that.

You need a *sales person in the office at all times*. If you can't structure your team to enable this, then *hire for a customer service attitude and train admin staff to sell viewings and valuations*.

It's not rocket science. It's just good business.

What to wear on a valuation. Seriously.

When I arrange training for my HomeTruths' consultants, I bring in an image stylist. No joke. Image is everything, and the moment that client: ie vendor or landlord, opens their door to you, they make a snap judgement about who you are and your values by the way you look to them. It may not be fair, but it's definitely true.

Take the case of an agent who turns a couple of minutes late, rushing, arriving flustered on the vendor's doorstep. He's wearing a cheap suit that could do with a dry clean, a shirt that isn't quite as white as it once was, and a garish tie his mum gave him three Christmases ago. Looking down, his shoes haven't been polished in a while and his hair could do with a cut. Oh, and he's hoping the stubble he's sporting will be viewed as trendy, not that he forgot/didn't have time to shave this morning.

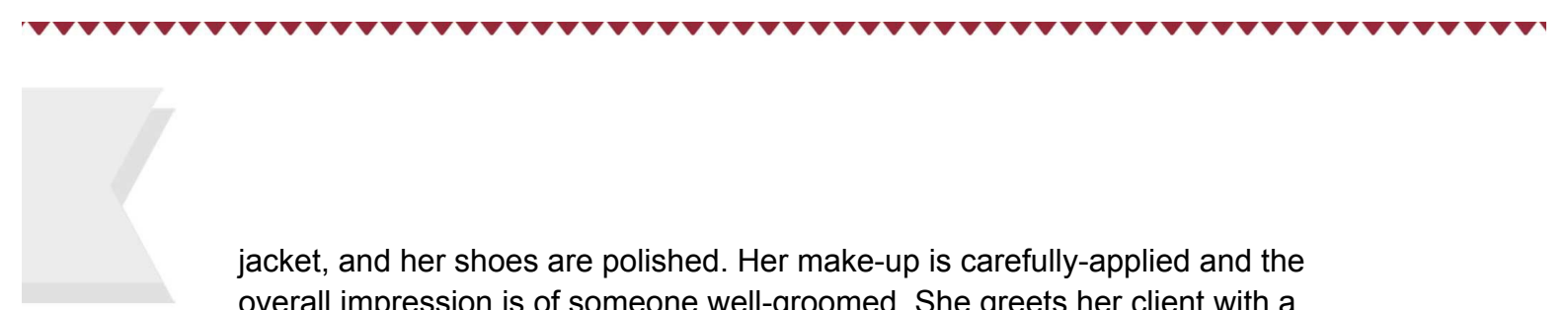
Get the picture?

Now be unkind, and let's make some judgements about him:

- He's lazy
- He's disorganised
- He's not very successful
- He doesn't take a personal pride in his appearance
- He has an 'it'll do' attitude

Disagree with any of the above?

Now let's imagine that one of my consultants rings the doorbell, exactly on time. She is calm, having arrived a few minutes early, and parked around the corner to prep for her visit. She is dressed smartly, wearing a good quality



jacket, and her shoes are polished. Her make-up is carefully-applied and the overall impression is of someone well-groomed. She greets her client with a big smile and shakes their hand warmly.

What assumptions do you make about her? How about:

- She's conscientious
- She's well-organised
- She's efficient
- She wants to make a good impression
- She has her client's best interests at heart.

Ok, the last point may have been a stretch, but assumptions do take a natural flow, and it is certainly probable, if not assured.

You will be judged instantly on the doorstep. The vendor or landlord may even make a irreversible decision about whether or not to instruct you, in that instant. Scary, isn't it?

Before you go to bed tonight, get out ready your outfit for tomorrow. Look at it with a critical eye. Does it say what you want it to about you? Check for marks, hairs: anything that could let you down. Do the same with your shoes, and anything else you'll be taking. Make sure the whole image says successful and professional. Because that's what you are – right?

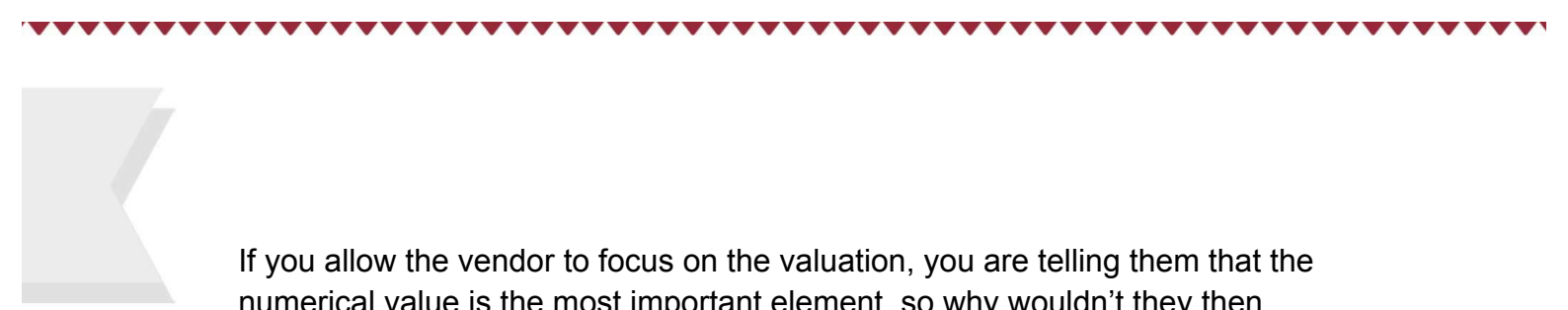
What's a valuation anyway?

An agent called me this week to ask for my help: "On every valuation, everyone tries to beat me down on commission, what can I do?"

"Stop calling it a valuation", I suggested. He was confused, and I'll bet you are, too. Let me explain...

What's a valuation? It's a figure with a pound sign at the front, that represents your advised marketing price. When you go out on a valuation visit, you and the vendor could be forgiven for considering this figure the point of the visit. After all, that's what it's called: the valuation visit.

If they (and you) are focused on a numerical figure, then it's a natural progression to subsequently focus on the other value you reveal – your commission fee.



If you allow the vendor to focus on the valuation, you are telling them that the numerical value is the most important element, so why wouldn't they then scrutinise and challenge your fee? You've led them to that conclusion, so don't be surprised when that's what they do.

The solution is easier than you think. First, stop calling it a valuation, because it's not. (And no, don't call it a 'market appraisal' either.) It's an opportunity to see if you can work with this person and help them to move home. It's a chance for them to see if they like you, and if they have confidence in your ability to help them move home. It's *the person that's important*, not the house. By putting the spotlight on the homeowner instead of the house, you will discover their motivations, their plans, and even their hopes and dreams. Not a pound sign in sight.

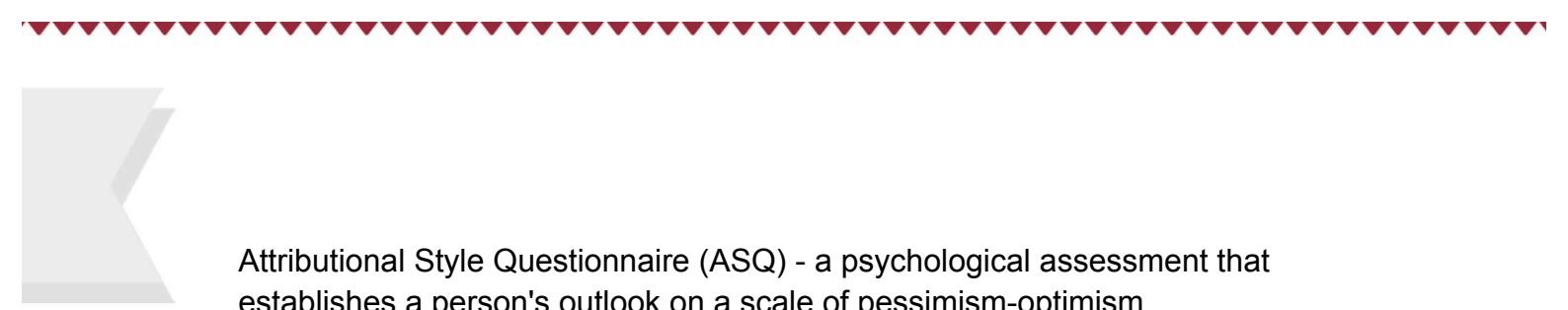
Sitting in front of you, is a person who is in transition. They need to move from their house, into a new one. And you are in the very privileged position of being able to make it happen for them. You are the bridge between their two chapters.

Once you stop calling it a valuation, even internally, and start calling it an 'advice visit', or a 'consultation', you are removing the monetary emphasis and putting it where it firmly belongs – on them. The transformation won't happen overnight, and there will always be some die-hard negotiators who believe beating an agent down to 0.75% is a sound investment; we have a long road ahead. Every journey begins with a single step, so the sooner you take it, the quicker you'll get there.

Keep your sunny side up!

"Hide the side that gets blue
When their team is knocking you flat
Smile and say we're better than that "

So sang Judy Garland and she was right. I've always said that positivity brings commercial rewards, and I recently came across some very interesting research to back up my optimistic claim. Martin Seligman, a psychological scientist, gathered together 100 insurance sales reps from the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. These salespeople held classic sales positions - they made cold calls to set up appointments, met with prospects to pitch policies, and earned their living from commissions on the sales they closed. Seligman gave all the agents a specially devised questionnaire called the



Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ) - a psychological assessment that establishes a person's outlook on a scale of pessimism-optimism.

These insurance reps were tracked for two years, measuring sales and commission. The results were pretty unequivocal. Simply put, the more optimistic the rep, the more insurance they sold - by 37%. In fact, those in the top 10% of the optimism scale sold a whopping 88% more than those in the bottom 10% of the scale. Those in the bottom 25% were also three times as likely to quit their job as those in the top 25% of the scale. The learning here is that optimism is not just a sentiment.

It drives persistence, and faith, that challenges can be overcome and negative feedback is temporary. So the next time you go into a valuation ready to pitch to a prospective vendor, keep the faith - remember, if they don't choose you, it's almost certainly their loss. Keep smiling, keep positive, and keep that sunny side up.

Win the fee you deserve

Over the last few years, we've all been scrapping around for pathetic fees. Far from the heady days of the mid 2000s, some agents are still complaining of their competition offering less than 1%. Although I'm finally hearing of great agents quoting 1.75% and still winning the instruction, these instances are still few and far between, with the vast majority of agents struggling to get anything above 1.25%.

So what do you do? Should you remain firm and walk away from what could be a very tasty little instruction? Or should you fight dirty and match, or even (God forbid) beat a 0.99% fee??

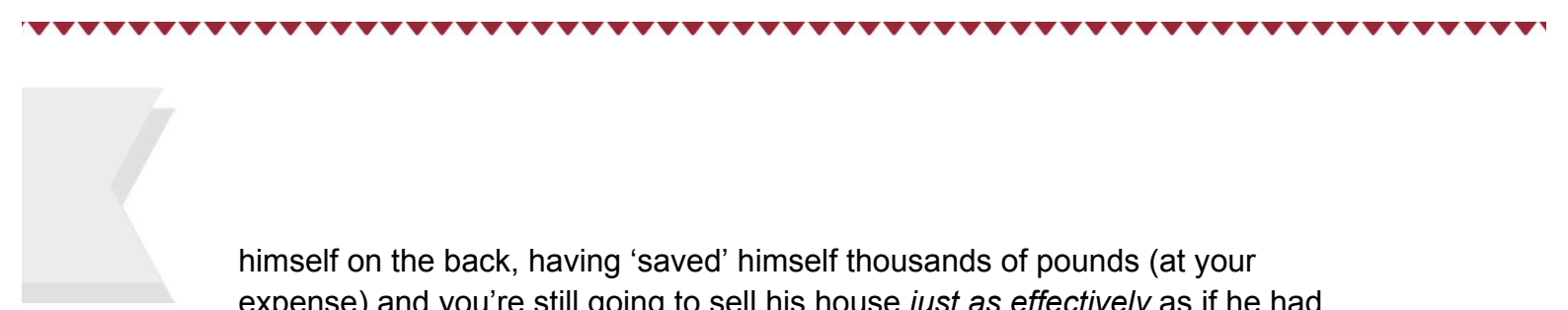
It's the age-old question and appropriately, there is an age-old answer: if the client thinks they are getting exactly the same service, they will choose the cheaper fee. Why wouldn't they? I would!

But it's not the same service, I hear you cry.

No? Then prove it. I'm sure your customer service is better, you're more likely to go above and beyond for your vendors, you genuinely care, and all that other good stuff. Unfortunately for you, that stuff is mostly invisible. Especially to a new vendor.

The way out of your dilemma is actually pretty simple: quote different fees for *different levels of service*.

Let me explain. If a vendor beats you black and blue from your tentatively whispered 1.5% to an eye-wateringly painful (for you) 0.75% fee he will pat



himself on the back, having ‘saved’ himself thousands of pounds (at your expense) and you’re still going to sell his house *just as effectively* as if he had paid 1.5%.


However, if you offer say, three different levels of service at three different commission rates, he is then forced to choose between those services. In other words, *he – and not you - is being made to compromise on what he wants in order to get the cheapest fee*. Let’s say for example that you were to offer a 0.75% service (please don’t – this is hypothetical); what’s the most basic, stripped-down service you could provide? Rightmove only? No board, brochure, viewings or advertising – just a listing online with your phone number. It’s certainly something to consider.

But let’s look at the other, more interesting, side of the multi-level coin: if your highest fee quoted at the moment is 1.5%, what could you do with 1.75% or even 2%+? Bespoke brochures? A property stylist? Magazine-style photographic shoot? Free removals? You are limited only by your imagination. And let’s not forget that those people who buy *Taste the Difference* at Sainsburys *want* to pay for the best. Make sure you’re the agent equivalent of *Taste the Difference* and they will feel that they are getting the very best. (Which of course they are.)

What I would do if I were an agent (one day, perhaps) is to offer three levels of service; in the spirit of age-old tradition, let’s call them Silver, Gold and Platinum. The Gold level is your current standard level, eg 1.5%. This service includes anything you currently already offer, in terms of brochures, photography, viewings etc. To create your Silver level service, start subtracting elements that have a high perceived value, like laminated brochures perhaps. Then for your Platinum service, give them everything you can think of. The fee for a Platinum level needs to be at least 0.25% above your Gold level, and perhaps even 0.5% to make sure you give it the Kudos it deserves.

With three levels of service, there will be no more ‘buying boards’ – in other words - dropping your fee to win instructions, out of desperation to beat off the competition. You will start to earn *what your service is worth*. You will also filter your vendors, because believe me, there are some people out there – more than you think – who want to pay for the best levels of service. (If that weren’t true, there would be no 5 star hotels.) And on top of all this, you will have the budget you need to effectively sell more houses, for better prices, in shorter timescales, which in turn will win you new instructions.

Are you brave enough to try it? If you do, please let me know. I’d love to hear how it changes the way you do business, because it will – believe me.



For most people, moving house is like changing banks, moving jobs and porting their mortgage all wrapped up into one – in other words, stressful, difficult and full of hurdles to overcome. No wonder some people stay put for decades.

Your job is to make it easier for them to move. Simple as that. There are two motivating factors comprising their decision to move, and the first step to help them is to find out what they are.


Firstly, there is the reason they need to move *out* of their existing house; in other words, their 'pain'. This could be a garden that's too big for them to manage, or a house that's too small. Whatever it is, it needs to be a strong enough reason for them to want to leave it, so identify it and acknowledge it to the homeowner.

Next, there is their pull to their next home – their *desire*. This could be a move to be closer to grandchildren, (or further away from parents!) a larger house, or somewhere they can work from home. This is just as strong a motivator, if not stronger, than the pain that's pushing them out of their existing property.

You form the *bridge* between the two: between the pain of their current property, and the desire of their new one. You are the enabler; the facilitator: their new best friend.

Once you've worked out what the point in you is, you can be what your vendor needs – the key to their new life.

What could be more compelling than that?





SELLING PROPERTIES

3 ways to sell every property

1. Be a Rightmove Superstar - when was the last time you spent any time on Rightmove, just browsing? After all, that's what buyers do, hour after hour. To get into a buyer's mindset, you need to do what they do, so spend time just browsing through all the properties on there and see which ones catch your eye, and why. Then look at your listings - how do your photos stack up? Are they good enough to click? What about your headline, and your summary description? If you've read my Super Secret Strategy to Boost your Click-Through Rate then your ads should be looking fantastic! If not, make some changes. Get those clicks high enough and you'll never be short of viewings.

2. Create viewing plans - these are a great resource, yet I don't know of any agents using these regularly. Simply decide on the best way of showing a property, and write down the order in which you would guide a viewer round, and any features you don't want to forget to mention. This also means that anyone else who might be doing the viewing, like a Saturday student, can simply pick it up as they leave.

3. Fit the viewer to the viewee - (is that even a word?!) In other words, whenever possible, try to make sure that the person who is doing the viewing is as close as is practical in age and demographic to the viewer. If you use your Saturday student, for example, to show round an elderly couple, they aren't going to have much in common and the language and cultural barriers will be high. Keep the student for the young singles and couples, and use your retired colonel (you do have a retired colonel, right?) for the elderly couple. Now I appreciate that I've used extremes to make my point, but if you can do a bit of fitting around the viewer, you'll find that the viewings are easier, the viewers are more relaxed, and it's more likely therefore that you'll get an offer.



How to take property pictures with your iphone

So you turn up at the vendor's house, ready to take photographs as arranged. Then disaster strikes. You've forgotten the camera. Or else, it's out of charge, the memory is full, or it just plain isn't working. What do you do?

Well if you have an iPhone, you actually have a great camera right there in your pocket.

An iPhone camera size ranges from around 5 – 8 megapixels, depending on model and version, which is not that different from the standard DSLR. In other words, taking the photographs with your iPhone will result in images you can use to at least get the property uploaded to the portals, and they will look fine, especially if you follow these seven tips to take better photos with your iPhone:

Tip 1: Zoom With Your Feet!

Never, ever think about zooming with the little slider at the bottom of your screen. This is the quickest way to ruin your picture. The iPhone may have a good camera built in, but as soon as that slider moves, you can kiss your image quality goodbye.

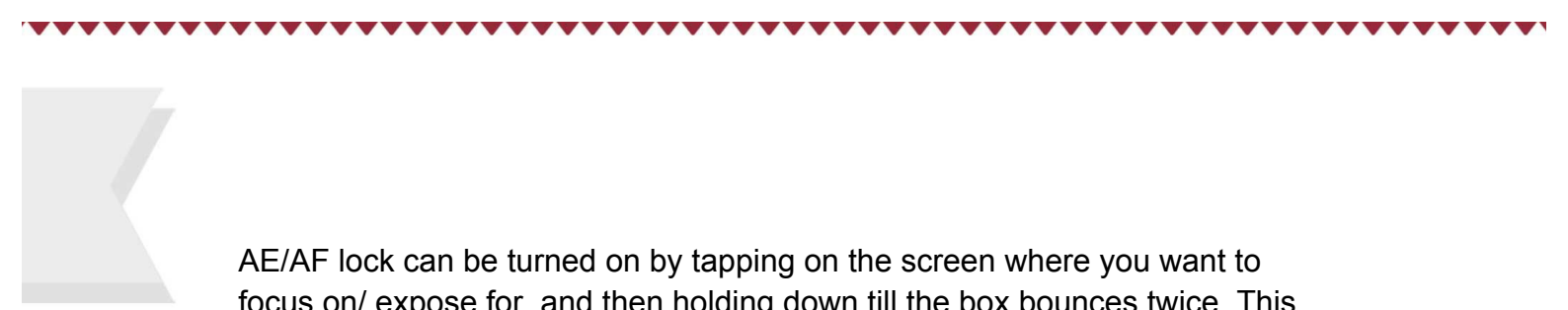
Tip 2: Turn On Your Grid Lines

Grid Lines are extremely helpful when using an iPhone. This divides your picture into 9 equal boxes and really helps you with your composition. Compose your image using the law of thirds and you are sure to have an interesting picture.

Tip 3: Use 2 Hands

Sure the iPhone is light and thin, but it still can move while you are taking a picture. Use two hands whenever you are taking a picture. Keep your arms in close and rest them on your body to stabilize yourself. Rest your iPhone on something sturdy if possible. Also, don't forget that you can push the + button on the side of your iPhone to release the shutter.

Tip 4: Learn AE/AF Lock



AE/AF lock can be turned on by tapping on the screen where you want to focus on/ expose for, and then holding down till the box bounces twice. This means that the place that you tapped on is where the camera focuses on and exposes for, and no matter where you move the camera those settings stay the same. This is good for rooms with bright windows. If you lock the exposure on the room, it will be properly exposed. Click a few different parts of the room to see what looks best.

Tip 5: Don't use flash

Flash is so unflattering! Avoid it if at all possible, and if you're unsure, take one with and one shot without the flash, so you can see what they look like when you upload them.

Tip 7: Download Camera Plus

Camera + is an incredible camera app. You can control the exposure and focus points independently, it has a self-timer, burst mode, stabilizer and a level. It's got it all. It's a must have – grab their free version and upgrade when you're comfortable with all it can do.

When you have an iPhone in your pocket, you'll always have a camera you can use. Practice at home and see how you get on, then [send me](#) some of your images! I'll feature the best on my Facebook page.

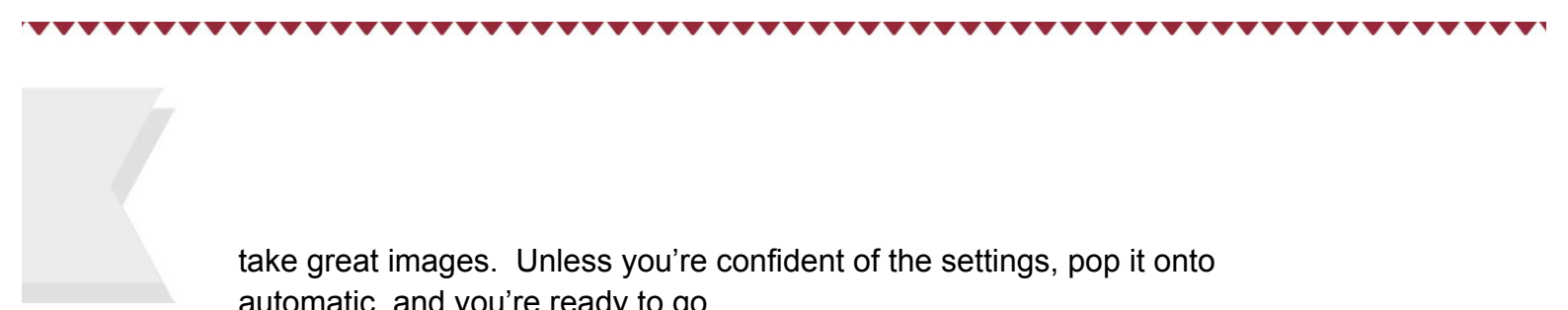
How to get that front shot just right

As most of my readers know, I really believe that it's worth getting a professional photographer to make sure the internal shots of a property are as good as they can be. Interiors are fraught with challenges, just waiting to trip up the amateur – blown windows, strange angles and dark shadows are all evident in most of the amateur property images I see every day on Rightmove.

The external images however, can be taken by an amateur almost as well as a professional can, so long as they follow some basic rules. After all, an amateur blue sky shot is always going to have the edge over a professional white sky image.

In this how-to, let's focus on the front shot – often the most important marketing image for a property.

1. **Get the right camera** - beg borrow or steal a good digital camera, unless you have one already. An SLR is best, though compacts these days can also



take great images. Unless you're confident of the settings, pop it onto automatic, and you're ready to go.

2. **Wait for a sunny day!** If you have to take the shot on a white sky day, make sure you go back. It's usually most flattering when the sun fairly low, on the front of the house.

3. **Plan first** - Ok, the sun is shining, today's a good day to take the shot. Leave your camera in the car for a moment, grab a stepladder, and go for a recce: walk around the front of the house, looking at its best features, and deciding on angles. Does it look better from directly across the road, or on an angle? Perhaps you can frame the door with your hedge, or garden gate? Try looking at the house from up the stepladder; (Houses are a bit like ladies – we don't like to be photographed from underneath.) Plan your angles, then go get your camera.

4. **Take a look** - Now you have your camera in hand, look through the viewfinder, and see how it looks. Don't go too wide; it's important that your house fills the screen as much as possible. Take a couple of test shots to see how it's looking. Too much in the shot? You don't want to distract a viewer from your house, so zoom in a little. Take another and check the results.

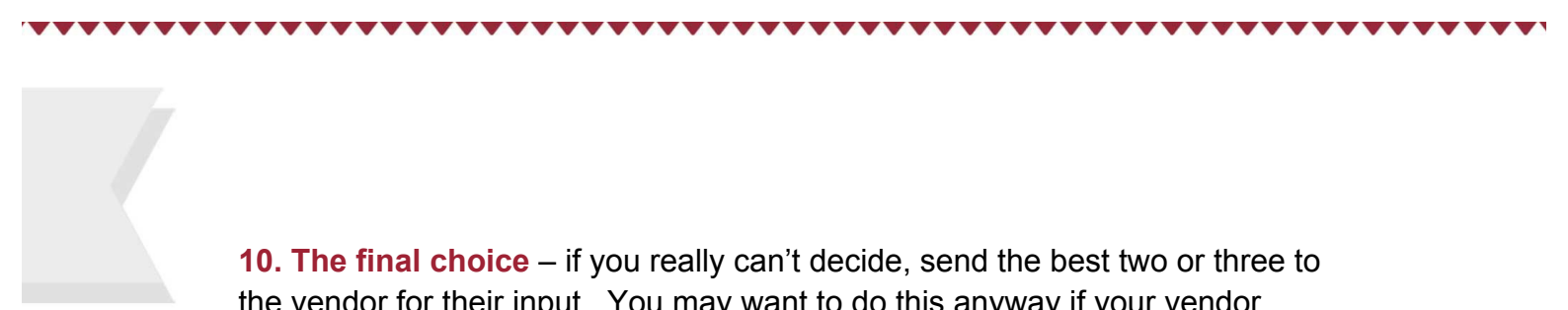
5. **Landscape, not portrait** – Rightmove and the other portals all need landscape shots, otherwise they just show the images much smaller. This can be tricky if the house is tall and thin, like a Victorian terrace. With these, try finding the best front feature to photograph horizontally. It obviously won't be the entire house, but could it be the front door, and the two downstairs windows? Or the front of the house framed by the garden gate?

6. **Keep really really still** – if possible, a tripod used here will make all the difference. You can pick one up for about £20 so it won't break the bank. If you haven't got a tripod, dig your elbows into your sides and plant your feet as far apart as you can (try not to fall off the ladder.....)

7. **Take three** - take each image at three different zoom distances, so you can see what looks better.

8. **Get creative** - see if you can add some foreground interest in the shot with maybe some colourful foliage, or over the garden gate. This way, you'll end up with a range of 'safe' images, and also some that may be more interesting.

9. **The reveal!** –Upload the images to your computer, and start going through them, preferably with someone you trust to give you a second opinion. Be ruthless, and discard any that aren't attractive and interesting. Look carefully at any distracting objects, shadows and lighting.



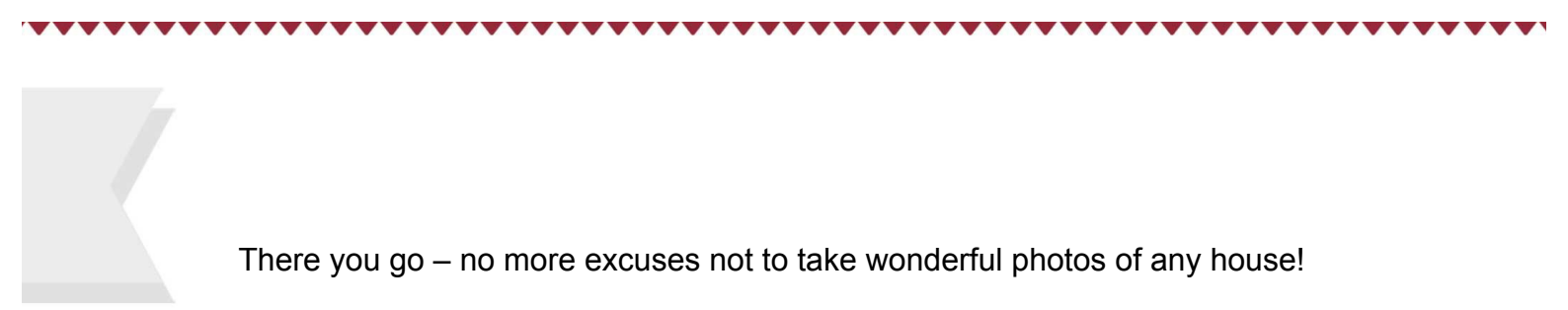
10. The final choice – if you really can't decide, send the best two or three to the vendor for their input. You may want to do this anyway if your vendor likes to be involved at each stage.

Taking this amount of care to get the front shot just right will make the property really stand out on the portals, get the right viewers across the door, and even better – your vendor will love you for it.

Pets, teenagers and other photo fails

We've all been there; you're trying to photograph a property and there's a teen still in bed asleep, or a smelly dog trying to photobomb all the shots. What can you do to ensure that your images look as good as they can do? Here are my top 5 Supertips to make sure your photography really sells the house, no matter what is thrown at you:

1. Warn your vendor – simply phone and make sure they know you may want to photograph every room so could they please tidy as much as possible, make sure beds are made and pets out of the way. Mention the washing up needs putting away and not to hang washing out too. Then email a brief list to them as a reminder.
2. If you possibly can, take an 'assistant' – just someone who may notice things that you don't, so you reduce the risk of having to re-take. Also someone to help you move things around, and keep the vendor happy.
3. Take out of the shot anything to do with pets. Some buyers just don't like them, and seeing a doggy bowl in the kitchen may actually put them off.
4. Kids' rooms can be really difficult to shoot successfully. If the room is just too busy and colourful, don't bother. You know it won't come out well, so leave out that shot. If the vendor insists, take it anyway then hope they don't notice. Or ask for some help getting it photo-ready: cover beds with plain bedding or throws, take away as many toys as is practical, and try to have as much carpet on show as you possibly can.
5. Bathrooms are very tricky, and usually, my advice is not to bother. Unless there's something very special or unusual, it's not going to look great on the advert anyway.



There you go – no more excuses not to take wonderful photos of any house!

Sneaky Rightmove hack

Here's a little Rightmove hack that will improve the way buyers view your property ads, and possibly avoid confusion and even wasted viewings.

Go to Rightmove now and bring up one of your property adverts. Click through, and look at the images - on the bottom right hand corner, what does the description say? If it states the name of the room, pat yourself on the back and go do something worthy like filing. If it says the number of the image, then read on...

When you upload your images to whichever software you use, you will usually be given the opportunity to rename the pictures from the generic numbering system. If you don't, you will simply see 'Picture 1' etc on each image. By renaming your images, buyers who are browsing the photos will be able to see straight away which room they are looking at. Thus avoiding time-wasters, people who think the view out of the window is actually in the garden, etc....


Simple, but effective.

Feedback calls – how to do them right

Have you had many viewings recently? How did your feedback calls go? It's difficult to muster up any enthusiasm for them; often, it takes several calls to even get in touch with the viewers, particularly if it's a Monday morning, and before you know it, the vendor's on the phone chasing you. When you do finally get through to the viewer, their response is either so non-committal that you don't know what to say to your vendor, except "Not for them, sorry", or else they were downright rude about their décor, price or dog, and you have to temper it in order to tell them anything.

So how can you make your feedback calls work better for you, your vendor, and the viewer?

1. **First, have a list of questions ready.** Just 3 or 4 should be enough, but then you're not just asking "what did you think?" Questions like "Did you like it enough to consider offering?" and "Are you still looking at other properties?" will give you a better understanding of where they are in their property hunting journey, and in their decision process.

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2. **Don't ask them what they think of the asking price.** There really isn't much point. If they didn't like it, their opinion is too skewed to have any value, and if they did like it, they will start talking the price down at the opportunity you've just given them.
 3. **If there is any glimmer of interest, say that you don't want them to 'lose' the property.** Research tells us that we are much more motivated to avoid loss, than we are to ensure a gain. Encourage action, in the form of a second viewing or an offer, to inject some urgency and a sense of competitive spirit otherwise the buyers will just keep looking at properties, and yours will soon be forgotten.
 4. **Don't put words into their mouth.** If the house is on a busy road and every other viewer has mentioned it, it could be because you have inadvertently let on that it is a recurring theme. By saying "Is the road putting you off?" (which by the way, I have heard asked, word-for-word) you're only giving them a let-out and they will just say "Yes!" with relief that they're off the hook.
 5. **Don't believe everything they say.** After all, 'Buyers are liars', right? The truth of the matter is that when you don't like a house, you may not actually know why, so feedback like "Garden too small", "too much work" or "Not enough parking" could just be red herrings. After all, they have to give some reason why they didn't like it, so they will just go for the obvious. And then they'll buy somewhere that had exactly the problem they've just cited.
 6. **Do book a second viewing.** It's better to get them to view a second time than it is to grill them about their first impression. Buyers rarely offer on their first viewing, and they may only second view two or three properties at most, so whether or not they want to book a second viewing is a really good indicator of how interested they are.
 7. **Don't give your vendors false hope.** If the viewer doesn't seem interested, they probably aren't, so don't raise your vendor's hopes by telling them otherwise. Just be straight with them, and move onto the next one.

Follow my advice and think of my on your next feedback call – I'll bet you'll be much more confident at getting to the outcome you want.

Are you sitting on a goldmine?

Do you watch Cash in the Attic? Or Antiques Roadshow? What I like about those is when some little old lady comes up to the front and finds out that some piece of tat that has been hanging in her downstairs loo for 35 years is actually worth £100,000. Isn't that great? That idea that we could all be sitting on *treasure*.

Are YOU sitting on treasure? Now I'm not going to suggest you rush to check your attic to see if you have a forgotten masterpiece up there, the treasure that you could be sitting on, is your unsold properties.

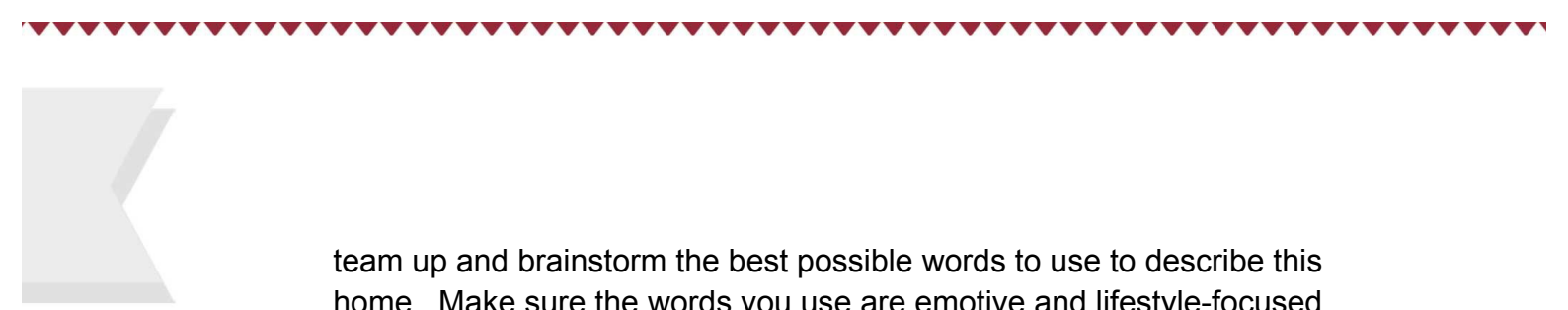
Look at your stock now, and have a look at the correlation between your most expensive properties and those that are taking longest to sell. Those lovely big fees are just out of reach, aren't they? And if you don't sell these soon, they'll be in the window of the agent down the road. So what can you do?

Well, firstly choose three properties that have been on the market for months, and that have good fees attached to them. Perhaps too, ones that you think you're in danger of losing sometime soon. Got them? Good.

Contact your vendors and explain to them that you are going to 're-market' their property in an effort to attract more interest. Explain to them you'll need to take the property off the market for short time whilst you prepare a dynamic 're-launch.

Next, do these five things for each property:

1. **Commission a home stager report.** As you're going to ask her to work on three properties, you should be able to secure a deal where you only pay around £75 per property, depending on your location and the size of the property. Then sit down with your vendor in their home and discuss the recommendations. See what is practical, and what's not. Decide on an appropriate budget, and help the vendor as much as you can in getting the work done.
2. Once the house is staged, **engage a professional photographer** – at your own cost – to re-photograph the house. If you did this the first time round, use a different, better photographer, to really polish those images. If the budget will run to it, have the home stager present to be the photographer's assistant and make sure every shot is fabulous.
3. Next step is to turn your attention to the **written description**. I would strongly recommend you use a copywriter for this step, which will set you back around £150 or so. If this isn't possible, then gather your



team up and brainstorm the best possible words to use to describe this home. Make sure the words you use are emotive and lifestyle-focused, not descriptive. Add a headline for the summary page, of no more than a line long to keep buyers clicking for more.

4. **Once you have your images back**, name them as creatively as you can, then choose the best 12-15 to upload to the portals. Make sure they flow in order as if you were showing the house, saving the garden shots until last.
5. Finally, **create a viewing plan** for the property. Decide on the best possible way to show the house, and write it down, together with any particular features you need to highlight in each room.

All you have to do now is choose a re-launch day, and make sure you implement a dynamic and comprehensive marketing campaign using all your chosen channels.

It's true that this strategy requires time, money and effort, but you may have tens of thousands of pounds tied up in these properties, so if only one sells, you should recoup your investment easily. Not only this, but in really applying your skills and proactive attitude to sell these houses, you have proved to yourself that you can do it, and maybe next time, you won't wait until a property hasn't sold for months before you do something about it.


Another Sneaky Rightmove hack

Here's one of my very favourite sneaky Rightmove hacks.

When you've created a lovely brochure for a client, isn't it frustrating that Rightmove in their wisdom then place the link all the way at the bottom of the property description page? I still don't understand why they do this, but they do, so let's turn our attention to what we can do to work around it.

First, make sure that your description is SHORT. I'm not talking five paragraphs here, I'm talking ONE. As a general guide, try to make sure that your description doesn't continue below the map on the right. So we're talking less than 100 words. This makes sure – very importantly – that your brochure link stays *above the fold*. That is, a browser doesn't have to scroll down to see it, but it's displayed on the main part of the screen.

Then, add a very simple but important line to the end of your description: '*click the link below for the brochure*'. There are lots of variations you could use:



'click the link below to see more photographs of this lovely property' would work just as well. The vital part of the sentence is *'click the link below'*.

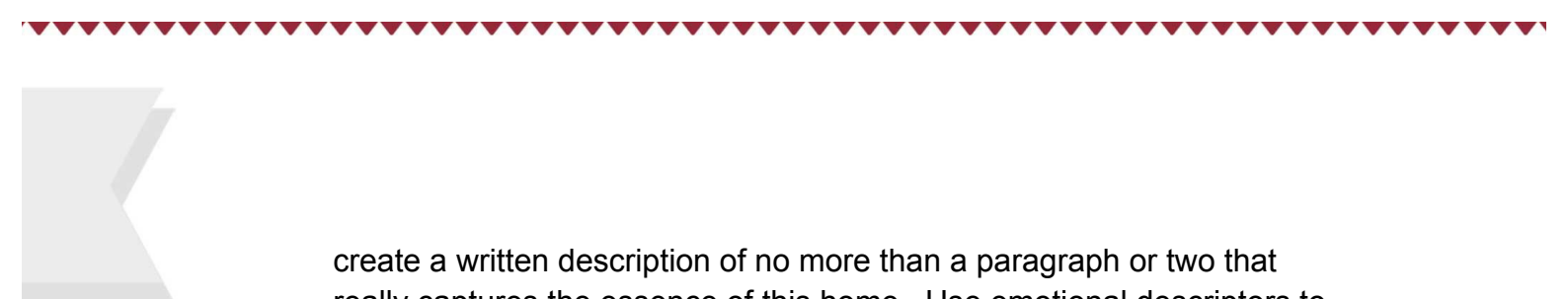
One agent I know includes this call to action as one of his bullet points, which could also work well. Test it, and see what works for you. And then please let me know!

How to launch that property with a bang

You've just taken on a great property, and the vendor has high expectations of early interest and lots of viewings. What can you do to make sure that when you launch the house to the market, the market is actually going to notice?

Here's my 7 step formula to make sure your launch goes with a bang:

1. **Set goals** – this could be click-through rate, brochure requests or viewings. I find it's best to aim conservatively, and share these goals with the vendor. Then try your best to surpass them! No better way of making you look good right at the start of your relationship.
2. **Decide on a launch date** – don't just upload the details as soon as the photographs are done; the best launches need careful planning and there's some preparation work to do if you really want to go to hit the ground running. I find the best launch days are Thursdays and Fridays, so they hit email inboxes in time to book weekend viewings. Plan to launch around 10 days ahead, so you can start marketing earlier.
3. **Write a headline** – think 'The Sun' not 'The Times' here. It needs to be snappy, concise and impactful. Grab interest with something different like 'Calling all aspiring authors' or 'The perfect home for dog lovers' or even 'Good news – your dream home is now available!'
4. **Email out** to the relevant subscribers to your mailing list with the headline as your email subject, and a few lines introducing the property. Don't be explicit, just given a rough idea of location, accommodation and price range, and make it clear that you're sharing insider knowledge with them, as you know they are a keen buyer looking for a property just like this one.
5. Next, **carefully craft your Rightmove advert** so it is as good as it can possibly be. Enlist the help of the best members of your team, and



create a written description of no more than a paragraph or two that really captures the essence of this home. Use emotional descriptors to bring your copy to life. Pick a really strong main image, and use the same headline you used as your email subject to create congruence.

6. When you're ready to upload, **call the hottest buyers you have** – the ones you really think will view this property. Tell them that you're calling ahead of the property going live the next day, and ask if they want to book the first viewing on it that weekend. See if you can create some excitement, to instil a sense of urgency and encourage viewings. Incentivise your team with a fiver a viewing, or a bottle of wine. Get them fired up and excited!
7. **Launch day** – put the details in your office window, with a big banner, proclaiming 'Launching today!' Call up any hot buyers you haven't managed to speak to yet – if it's a Saturday, chances are they will be easier to get hold of. Remember – your objective is to get as many viewings as possible for that first weekend.

You may find that those early viewings will result in an offer – possibly the best offer that your vendor will ever get. That first weekend is so important, and getting everyone in your team on board to generate interest and viewings will give you the best possible chance of creating that vital early attention.

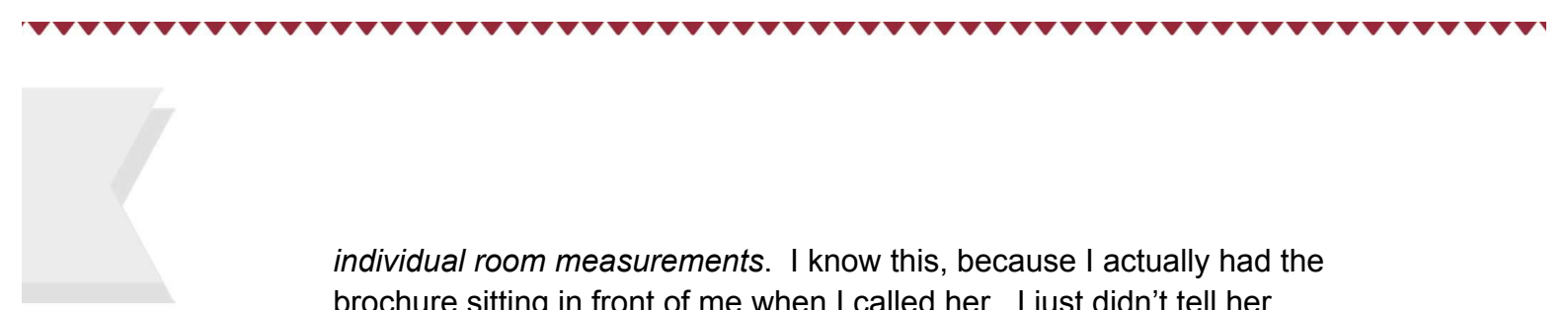
Let me know how you get on - I'd really love to know.

How are your phone manners?

when you answer the office phone to a buyer, what do you say? Do you have a standard protocol in the office that everyone follows, or do you just make it up whenever you pick up a call?

Let's say it's a buyer that calls. They are interested in a particular property and would like some further details sending. Here are some of the responses I've received when I've 'mystery shopped' an agent:

- "I don't have any other information other than what's on the internet."
- "What do you want to know?"
- I did speak to one lady who proceeded to read me *every single word of the brochure* – no word of a lie – all 1000+ words, *even down to each*



individual room measurements. I know this, because I actually had the brochure sitting in front of me when I called her. I just didn't tell her.

I was often made to feel that they just didn't have time for me, that they had busier, more important things to do than answer a call from a prospective buyer. (Really?!)

I have a checklist I use to 'score' an agent on their performance, to see if they maximise every opportunity they are offered. Here's a shortened version of it:

- Am I asked my name and address?
- Am I asked for my phone number?
- Am I asked any questions about my criteria?
- Am I asked about my buying position?
- Was the respondent friendly, helpful and willing to talk to me?

Not much to ask really, is it? You'd be amazed by how few calls meet just these five checks. Try it for yourself. Call an agent out of your area and pose as a buyer. Make a note of anything good they say that you could use yourself, and also any area where they were particularly weak. Then get a family member or friend to do the same in your office one day. Ask them to rate you.


It's a very interesting test of how well your staff are doing at engaging with buyers – or sellers of course. Test, and let me know how you fared. And if you're feeling brave, ask me to do it. I'll conduct a limited number free of charge and let you know how you scored. Go on – I dare you!

Clever pricing for the portals... and more viewings

You read this strategy first in my Super Secret Strategy to improve your Click-through Rate. However, there are still so few agents using it, I had to share it again, and perhaps explain it once more for those of you still confused by it (or not convinced)!

So let's take it one step at a time.

Try something with me. Go to Rightmove and conduct a search on Skipton. Put in a search radius of 3 miles and a price criteria of £500,000 to £600,000. I just did this and got 15 properties in my search results.



Next, change the price criteria to properties over £475,000 and count how many properties there are from £495,000 - £500,000. How many did you get? I counted 8. That means that *half as many properties again are invisible in the first search*.

The zero strategy – if you price a property at exactly the same as a Rightmove banding – in this case, £500,000 – *including the zeros* – then it will appear *in both searches*. That is potentially twice the number of buyers finding the property in their search.

Buying power - also, anyone who is looking up to £500,000 probably has a buying capability of less than £475,000 – right? So at £499,950 you are attracting people who just can't afford the house! The people who are looking in a search from £500,00 - £550,000 *have more money to spend* and your vendor's property may very well look great value for money.

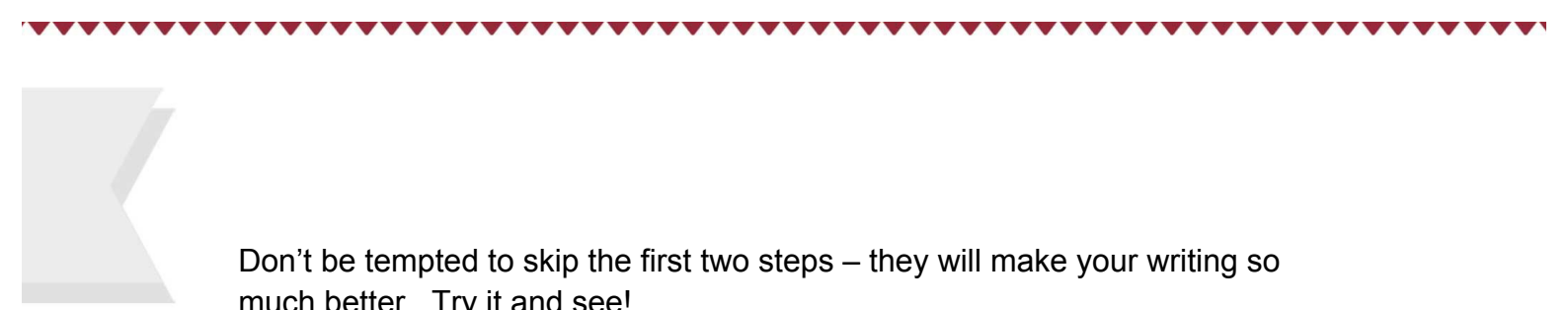
Got it now? Going to implement it? Great!

Three steps to a property description that sells.

I read so many bland, generic property descriptions. 'Spacious', 'impressive', 'viewing highly recommended' – they should all be banned!

Writing a property description is so much more than just spouting nice words; it needs – and deserves – some thought and care. Here are my three steps to a property description that does what it's supposed to do – sells the house!

1. **Identify the buyer** – this is a stage that is rarely done but is absolutely vital. Who is going to buy this property? Is it a first-time buyer, aspiring family, empty nester? Until you know who is the most likely buyer, how do you know what words to write to attract them?
2. **Make a list of keywords and phrases** – now you know the buyer, what is it they are looking for? A first-time buyer may be looking for a brand new kitchen and bathroom, whilst still having scope to add value; an aspiring family could be attracted by a large garden and an Aga. You get the picture? Make a list of the words and phrases that will appeal most to your ideal buyer.
3. **Start writing** – with each feature, eg 'log burner', add the corresponding benefit, eg 'making the living room cosy and providing a beautiful focal point'. Adding the phrase 'which means that' will really help you to turn each feature into a benefit and add depth and impact to your descriptions.



Don't be tempted to skip the first two steps – they will make your writing so much better. Try it and see!

How to photo like a pro

These days, the standard of property photography is higher than ever; there are some fabulous property photographers out there: just check out Andy Marshall at <http://fotofacade.com/> or Haakon Dewing at <http://haakon.co.uk/> to see just how property images should look. So if the budget won't stretch to a professional shoot, what can you do to make your images look fantastic? Here is a handy guide to taking photographs the professionals would approve of:


- 1. Get down** - lower angles are much more flattering, and professional. As a rule of thumb, the height to shoot at is between your waist and your chest.
- 2. Don't go too wide** - it'll only disappoint every viewer to walk through the door if you've used a very wide angled lens. They don't make the rooms look prettier anyway. 20mm is usually wide enough.
- 3. Take your time** - move extraneous objects out of the way, like bins and pet bowls. Ask the vendor to light the fire, and move any flowers from room to room as you go. Oh, and put the toilet seat down please!
- 4. Front doors are important** - if you want to know why, read my post on the subject [here](#). Make sure you include the front door wherever possible on the main shot.
- 5. Add lifestyle** - we give a shopping list to our clients before the day of the shoot, to make sure that the house is properly and effectively 'staged'. (See my blog post on the subject [here](#).) Don't try to get the whole of each room in ever shot; instead, try some 'vignettes' - some detail shots showing just a feature, like the Aga, a view through a doorway, or even the house sign.

You might not yet be a David Bailey, but following these five steps will definitely make your vendors' houses look beautiful, and more importantly, make them happy.

7 Ways to keep your vendors from running to your competition

We all want to keep our vendors from wandering off to another agent down the street, but sometimes we forget how. Here are some quick tips to help you keep your vendor loyal, and very happy!

1. **Keep your promises** – do what you say you will, when you say you will, and that's all most vendors will ever ask of you. Don't promise to call them back that day then ring them in the morning with an apology; instead, call them that day *without fail* and ask if it would be ok to speak in the morning.
2. **Keep in touch** – I see many unhappy vendors every year who bemoan the fact that their agent never contacts them. It doesn't take much; make a note of three things you can talk to them about – the interest (or even lack of it) in their property, any local property sales, and the current market conditions. Even if you really feel you have nothing to say to them, call them and ask how they are – they will appreciate the gesture.
3. **Feed back positively** - Don't make your vendors feel that their house isn't good enough or they have been greedy with their hoped-for asking price. Give them a 'feedback sandwich' (sometimes called something slightly less polite!) – start with telling them something positive, then deliver any bad news you have with sensitivity, then end with an upbeat comment. As Maya Angelou once said "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them *feel*."
4. **Tell them the truth**, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth – if you lie about anything at all, it will come back to haunt you. Little lies (sorry I'm late, I was stuck in traffic) have a habit of turning into big lies (there was an accident on the main road) and you will get found out. Just tell the truth (really sorry – I left the office later than I intended to) and your vendor will trust you more in the long term.
5. **Be visible** – often a vendor will say to me "My agent isn't doing anything to sell my house – I never hear from him". These two facts may not be linked at all, but in the client's mind they are, and that's all that matters. Make sure they know exactly what you're doing as often as possible. Copy them in on emails, drop them a note every time they are in the paper or you have called your applicants. Just be visible.

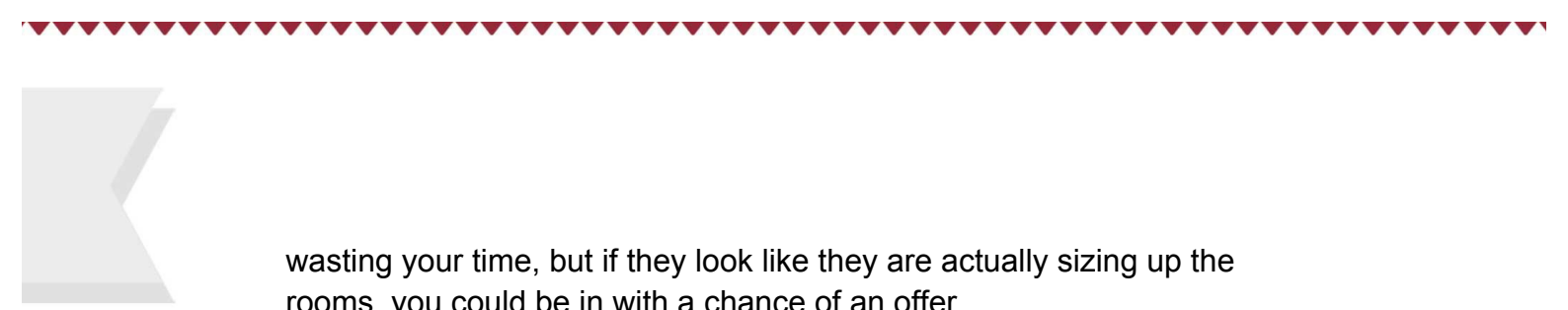
- 
6. **Stay real** - above all else, you are a real person, and so are they. Don't be agent versus vendor, think instead of Joe helping Anne. Be kind and don't be afraid to be yourself.
 7. **Keep their goals in mind** – find out why they are moving and keep this goal in your mind, always. Refer to it in every conversation and email you have with them. It will not only help you to stay on track and motivated, your vendor will love you for it, and stay loyal to you.

There you go – no more disinstructions for you!

Handy checklist: 10 questions to ask on a viewing

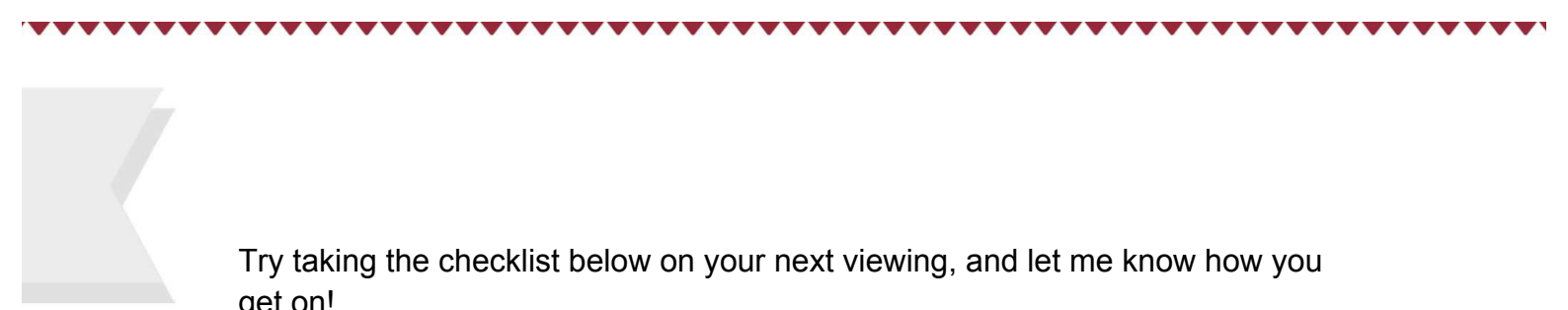
I know you're probably in a hurry, and sometimes it's tempting to rush viewings, to get to the next property so you don't end up running late. However, if you ask the right questions, in the right order, you should find you're more productive on each viewing and get to the right result more quickly. Here are 10 questions to ask - roughly in the right order - to help you be more effective:

1. **Where have you come from?** - This opens up the conversation, so you can discover if they are local, if they know the area, whether they are living with relatives and perhaps why they have chosen this location.
2. **Is it just for you/the two of you?** - This will give your viewers the chance to tell you a little bit more about themselves, so you can find out if they are single, friends, a couple or a family. Lots of valuable information here.
3. **What is it you're looking for?** - Brilliant open question to give you the chance to match the property offering to whatever it is they are looking for, if you possibly can. They will tell you very quickly what their priorities are, and you'll see if there are any conflicts between them.
4. **What timescale are you working to?** - This gives you a chance to talk to them about whether they've sold their own property, if they have school terms or a new job to coordinate, and if they are in a rush or not.
5. **How will your furniture fit the house?** - This question really helps to encourage the viewers to imagine themselves actually living in the house. If they start pulling negative faces, you know you're probably



wasting your time, but if they look like they are actually sizing up the rooms, you could be in with a chance of an offer.

6. ***How important is the outside space to you?*** - This question could reveal how they will intend to use the garden, if they have green fingers, or if they are looking for something very low maintenance. By their answers, you can gauge how long to spend outside, whether to move quickly through the garden, or linger a while.
7. ***Do you work from home?*** - If they do, you can then focus on attributes like the broadband speed, mobile phone strength and the quality of the address perhaps. Another good indicator of their priorities.
8. ***What else have you seen?*** - another very revealing question, as it will let you know where they are in their search - right at the beginning, or after they've seen 50 properties. If it's the latter, they will know exactly what they are looking for and you'll know straight away if there's any chance they will offer. It will also help you to discern their budget, whatever they may have told your office on the phone.
9. ***What do you think of the house?*** - Obvious? Perhaps, but rarely asked!
10. ***Would you like to make an offer?*** Well, that's the point of your being there, isn't it? They are never going to be more open to considering making an offer, than when they are in the house. If you have given them a chance to talk amongst themselves during the viewing, you should be able to tell whether you have the slightest chance of an offer by asking them this. If they say they need to think about it, agree a day to call them back "for your decision" so they don't string you along for ages.



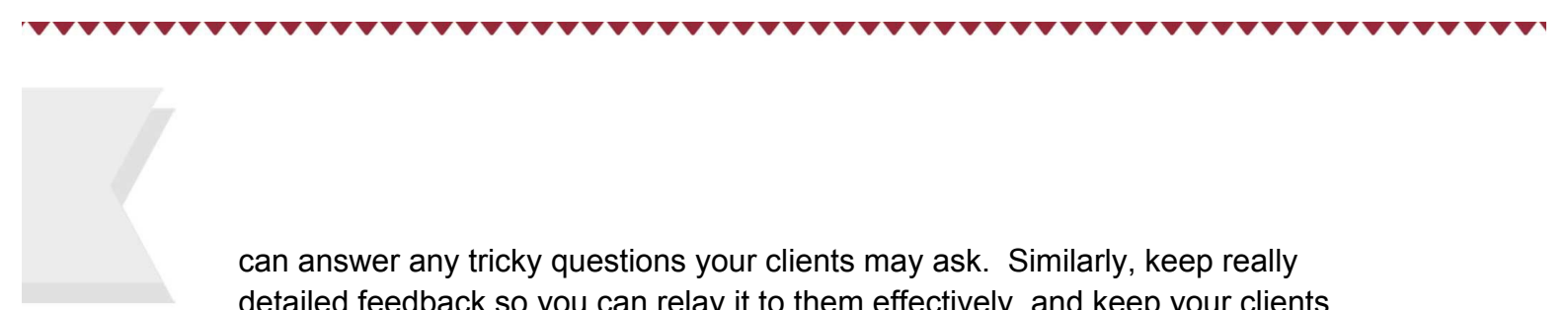
Try taking the checklist below on your next viewing, and let me know how you get on!

1. *Where have you come from?*
2. *Is it just for you/the two of you?*
3. *What is it you're looking for?*
4. *What timescale are you working to?*
5. *How will your furniture fit the house?*
6. *How important is the outside space to you?*
7. *Do you work from home?*
8. *What else have you seen?*
9. *What do you think of the house?*
10. *Would you like to make an offer?*

7 Ways to deal with difficult vendors

We all have difficult clients from time to time; you know - those that have unrealistic expectations, and seem to sap your time and your energy. Over the years I've devised some tips and strategies for dealing with those demanding clients:

- 1. Keep a contact log** - make a note of every conversation with dates and times; I promise you, it will come in very useful at some point.
- 2. Phone them first** - try to beat them in the communications game! Note from your contact log their favoured days and times to call you, and try to call them before they call you; it will give them less to complain about. If you know when your clients are out on a commute or a school run, leave a friendly message on their answerphone giving them an update, and they will have no reason to call you!
- 3. Keep communication to office hours** - if you answer their call or email out of hours, they will always expect you to. Wherever possible, keep your availability to 9-5.30pm on the days you work, and no more.
- 4. Gather detailed information** - before you call them to arrange a viewing, make sure you have very thorough information on the buyers. Ask them about their buying position, search criteria, budget and timescales, so that you



can answer any tricky questions your clients may ask. Similarly, keep really detailed feedback so you can relay it to them effectively, and keep your clients informed and satisfied.

5. Keep them close - they may not be very likeable, but you have to try! Find some commonality - a connection or shared interest - that will put you on safe ground to talk about. That way, you will win their trust and avoid having to 'prove' yourself in every conversation.

4. Set their expectations - if you're going on holiday, for goodness sake, tell them! If you didn't get their photos over to them when you promised, call them and apologise. If you're running late, let them know. An informed client is much happier than one left in the dark.

5. Stay one step ahead - it's your job to anticipate problems or issues, and use your professional skill and judgement to avoid them. Stay reassuring and positive at all times, and even the most difficult clients will start to relax.

Do you have any helpful tips of your own? Or funny stories of how you got into a scrape with a tricky client? [Let me know!](#) I'd love to hear from you.

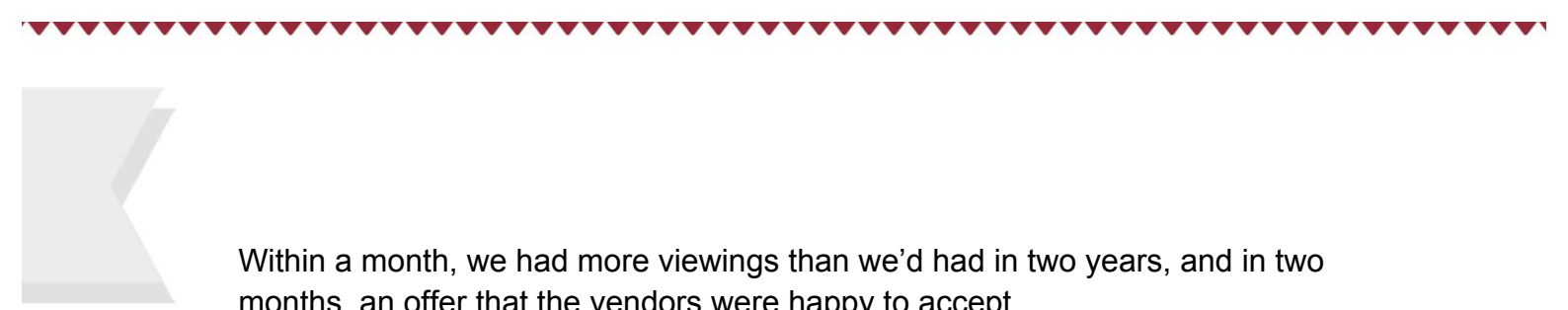
An idea for marketing awkward properties

You know those properties that seem to be the worst of both worlds – part residential and part commercial? How hard are they to market?! I had one like this a few years ago, in Stamford, Lincolnshire. It was a beautiful Georgian manor house, with a detached children's nursery. It had been on the market for two years when we were asked by the vendors for help, and they hadn't had any more than a handful of viewings.

The main problem, as I saw it, was that the property fell between two stools – it was neither a lovely residence, nor a thriving business. It was a mish-mash of both.

The solution, as I saw it, was to create a separate brochure for each the house, and the nursery. The house brochure focused on all the best features of the house; the period touches, the lovely family kitchen, the pretty gardens. The nursery brochure, was a business plan, in essence. It was full of facts and figures, of historical financial information and future potential.

To increase the market reach, we put the property with two agents – one residential, one commercial. Viewings started coming in straight away.



Within a month, we had more viewings than we'd had in two years, and in two months, an offer that the vendors were happy to accept.

This idea could work for several different types of property: a house with a detached holiday cottage, a property with a detached office, or like the one I saw this morning, a lovely detached barn conversion with a fishing lake in the grounds, and planning permission for 4 log cabins.

I've even created a separate brochure for a large treehouse!

Separating out what's on offer increases the perceived value of the property, and at the same time, clarifies the offering for a potential buyer.



SOCIAL MEDIA

How to go viral

In this Supertips, I'm going to explain how to achieve virality online. Or if not viral, then at least shareable. So what makes something worthy of sharing with friends and family?

Marketing messages tend to focus on *information*. Public health messages telling teenagers not to smoke or why they should eat their 5 a day usually contain lots of facts, set out in a clear, concise way. Is this how to get them to pay attention?

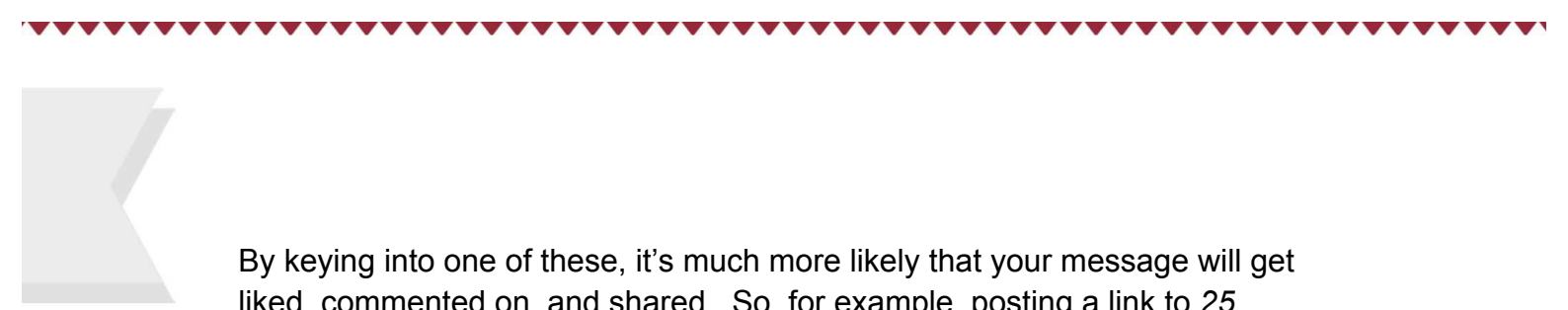
No! Of course it's not. Teenagers know smoking and eating Macdonalds is bad for them, they're not stupid (mostly). Information alone is not going to change their behaviour. They need a more compelling message.

And that's where *emotion* comes in. Instead of bashing people over the head with facts and figures, we need to focus on *feelings* – the underlying emotions that motivate people to take action.

When you post messages on Facebook or Twitter, how can you use emotion to make sure they get shared?

Have a look at Derek Halpern's site, Social Triggers. Derek is a master at understanding what motivates people to take action online, and he has identified 7 emotions that will make a message shareable:

1. Awe
2. Anger
3. Anxiety
4. Fear
5. Joy
6. Lust
7. Surprise



By keying into one of these, it's much more likely that your message will get liked, commented on, and shared. So, for example, posting a link to 25 *amazing treehouses* may inspire lust and awe, or *Addresses that start with a 'U' are worth £70k more*" (true story via the Mailonline)

In his book, *Contagious*, Jonah Berger tells us:

“When trying to use emotions to drive sharing, remember to pick ones that kindle the fire: select high-arousal emotions that drive people to action.”

So what can you post on your social media platforms, or in fact on your blog or website, that will encourage your readers to share it? Have a look at the shareability of your posts to date. What do your Facebook Insights tell you? If you have a lot of likes, it may be easier to plot the number of likes, comments and shares into a spreadsheet so you can see easily which ones drew the most attention. Then try ranking these on an 'emotional arousal' scale. Can you see a correlation between this and the 'people talking about this' score?

Set yourself and your team a goal to get not just likes, but shares on your Facebook page, and retweets on Twitter. Check frequently what works best, and find as much content as you can that fits the pattern. If you can't figure it out, go look at the PDQ Facebook page, where Chris is always creating really shareable posts, or the @GoogleFacts Twitter account which gets retweeted constantly. Then post > check > rinse > repeat until you get it right.



Who are you Tweeting to?

These days, lots of agents are using Twitter. I know, because I follow most of them! Well, quite a few, at any rate. But many of them are making the same mistake. They are *tweeting their listings*. In other words, simply using the software rss feed to push out a property link every time they get a new instruction. I spoke to a manager from Hamptons recently about this and he argued, protesting that it works for him. However, when I looked back through his feed, this was clearly not the case. No one was engaging with any of his tweets, and when I tracked his followers for a few weeks, the number barely moved. So – not working, after all.

The biggest argument I hear from agents who want to tweet each new property, is that their followers are buyers, wanting to keep up to date. But is this really true? Try this exercise:


Click on your followers on Twitter, so you see them in a list. Now, on a piece of paper, write these 5 column headings:

1. Estate agents
2. Industry professionals and suppliers
3. Contacts I know or know of
4. Don't know
5. Random (foreign, possible fake accounts, spammers)

Next, go back through your last 100 followers (more if you have time) and mark a tally in each column. I've just done this, and mine looks like this:

1. Estate agents - **11**
2. Industry professionals and suppliers - **39**
3. Contacts I know or know of - **14**
4. Don't know - **23**
5. Random (foreign, possible fake accounts, spammers) – **13**

(By the way, I'd love to see your results – [email](#) them to me!)



When you have your results, notice the number in heading 4. This is the number that could be hiding your prospective buyers and vendors. Now, I'd guess that less than 10% of these are actually potential customers, but that is only an educated guess. Why not ask them? Simply tweet to them, introducing yourself, and asking about their interest? Say you'd like to make sure your tweets are relevant to them. (Which is true, by the way.)

The point I'm making here is that your followers are probably not purchasers, or vendors, in the main. Twitter is a vast pot of knowledge, experience and interesting information. It's not a pot of customers. Simply make your tweets interesting and helpful, and then it really doesn't matter who is following you.

Should you follow back??

Do you Tweet? Do you find yourself looking at your list of followers and wondering why they chose to follow *you*? You're not alone. Most of us get followed by random accounts every day, and there is now a 'black market' for selling you followers. A 'spambot' simply follows your account picked at random, then if you haven't followed back within say, 3 days, it unfollows you.

But what if the account is a real person, as far as you can tell? My general rule of thumb is to follow back, if in any doubt. You can always unfollow of course at a later date. If you check back through their last few tweets, you can usually tell pretty quickly whether their tweets are going to be of any interest to you, or if it's just inane drivel. Also, check their profile – is it a photo of a genuine-looking person and have they described themselves in a way that doesn't cause any alarm? Then they're probably ok.

It could have been a random tweet that you made, a hashtag you referenced, or a retweet, that brought you to their attention. Don't worry, and don't display caution when it's not necessary.

Twitter is a bit like real life – if someone shows an interest in you, just be nice, and show an interest back. That's Twitter Karma for you, and you never know where it might lead.

5 terrific content sources to make your social media look fantastic

Are you stuck on what to share on Facebook? Is your Twitter feed looking a bit lacklustre and even empty? And don't even mention LinkedIn, Pinterest, Google Plus.....

Don't worry – I'm here to lend a helping hand and make your social media accounts shine with pride. Here are my top 5 terrific content sources to make your social media look fantastic!

1. [Houzz](#) – a really stylish site of all things property – inside and out. They have multiple updates per day so you'll never be short of something pretty to post.
2. [House to Home](#) – from the publishers of all the top interiors magazines, including 25 Beautiful Homes, this site is jam-packed with ideas and inspiration for making a house a home.
3. [Telegraph Property](#) – so many terrific articles about moving and improving. They are the stars of the lists – '10 unusual homes' and that kind of thing. Perfect for sharing, which is kind of the point.
4. [Rightmove](#) – don't turn your nose up at millions of buyers and sellers who think that Rightmove is the best thing since sliced bread (seeded, obviously). They have some feel-good, mass audience articles that your readers will love.
5. [Pinterest](#) – a veritable treasure trove for you and your followers to enjoy. Want a picture of a rolltop bath on a Balinese beach? There will be one on Pinterest. A scary underwater bedroom? Check it out. Seriously – it is highly addictive and you will get sucked in, and if you find yourself saying after a whole evening has disappeared 'what was I looking for?' don't blame me.

Go on then – what are you waiting for? A world of amazing social media updates awaits.

How to manage social media in 15 minutes a day. Really.

Social media can be a total time-suck. I know, believe me! Being a Twitter diva doesn't happen overnight; it takes work!

The key is consistency. But I know how busy you are, so I'm going to give you a great social media strategy that you can honestly manage in 15 minutes per day.

Ready?

Here we go..

First, read this article I wrote for Estate Agent today to help you curate your content. Schedule your Buffer for 3 posts per day on Twitter (think mealtimes) and 1 on Facebook (early morning or mid evening are best).

Then:

Morning

Check your Feedly for good content to post.

Choose three articles to share to Twitter, and one to Facebook

5 minutes

Afternoon

Twitter:

Check for interactions, and respond.

Also, post 3 tweets:

1. 1 x mention (talking to someone with the @ sign)
2. 1 x RT (retweet their post)
3. 1 x status update (just share something with your followers, like "busy day with viewings today, hope the rain holds off!")

Facebook:

Check for interactions and respond if necessary.

5 minutes



Evening

As per afternoon

5 minutes

There you go! Whilst you may not believe me that the above can be accomplished in three slots of 5 minutes each, I can promise you that it can. You may need a little practice, and of course, you may want to spend more than 5 minutes on Twitter and Facebook! I've given you a great strategy to help you maximise your time, and if you practice it daily, you can expect at least three new followers a day – that's 1000 a year! The rest is up to you :o)

3 ways to generate valuations through Twitter.

I've heard Twitter called all kinds of things: from a distraction or even a nuisance, to a vital part of the marketing mix. But it's not Twitter itself that determines its value to you – it's how you choose to use it.

I personally derive a huge amount of value from Twitter. It's my primary source of business, even though – and this may come as a shock to you – *I never sell anything on Twitter.*

As an early adopter of Twitter, I learned quickly what did – and didn't – work in attracting new clients on the platform, and for your delectation and delight, I have condensed my 4 years (and 33,000 tweets) of learning into just three ways you too can gain a business benefit from Twitter:

1. **Don't sell** - I know this sounds obvious, but look at your last few tweets – are you promoting something? A property? Your services? You may not even know you're doing it. As I look down the timeline of some agents on Twitter, I find these tweets:
 - Whether buying or selling a property, our highly experienced team can help your next property sale become a smooth and successful one.
 - Thinking of selling your home? We can help call us on 01234 567891
 - #Cornwall For Sale: 4 Bed Semi, Truro, £285,000
www.link.co.uk contact 01234 567891



And they were all from the same agent....

2. **Be useful** – how could you be the most helpful person to vendors? Try searching for your home town as a hashtag, or look at Twitter Advanced Search (Google it) and search for 'estate agent' as a mention within a given geographic area. Then simply join in the conversation, being as helpful and useful as you possibly can for, without – and this is the important bit – asking for anything at all in return.
3. **Create conversations** – start discussions and debates on topics like open houses, newspaper advertising and accompanied viewings. Let your followers have their say too, and nurture the discussion threads. In the conversation, you can portray a positive, encouraging persona that will stand you in good stead when they or anyone they know, think about selling their home.

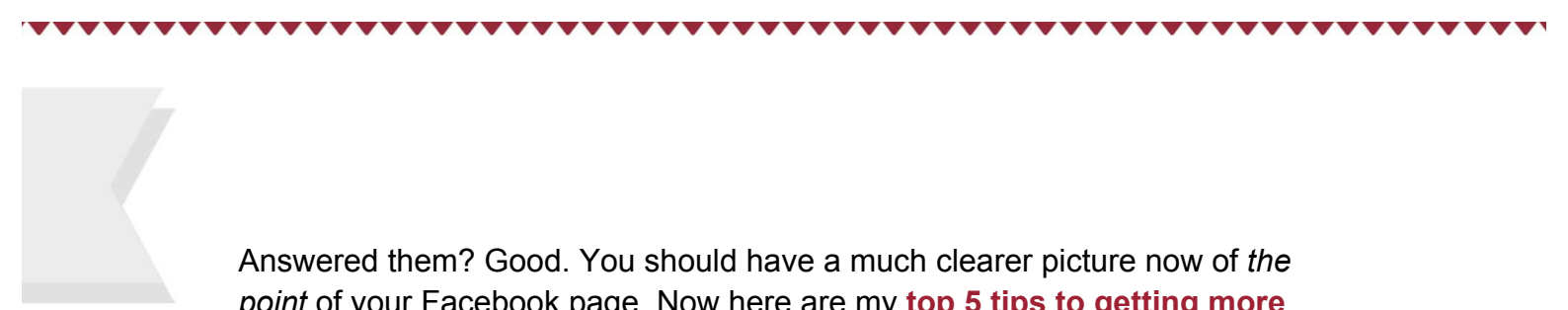
Twitter isn't complicated – just think of it as virtual networking. You wouldn't walk into a networking venue and start telling people what you do, without waiting for responses (I hope), so don't do it on Twitter. Just be nice, friendly, positive and people will naturally be drawn to you. Don't forget that if one in seven people will be considering moving in the next year, and you have 700 followers on Twitter, then 100 of them are potential vendors. What a fantastic opportunity you have there!

5 Ways to get more Likes on Facebook

Why should someone like your Facebook page? What is interesting about you? What is unique? What value do you provide?

Before you start trying to attract more likes for your page, try answering these questions:

- What value can I add?
- What's special about my page?
- Why should someone *want* to Like my Page?
- Once I get fans, what will I do with them?
- How will a Facebook audience be good for my business?



Answered them? Good. You should have a much clearer picture now of *the point* of your Facebook page. Now here are my **top 5 tips to getting more likes on Facebook**:

1. **Be yourself** – don't hide behind your brand, or photo of the front of your office. Remember – when you post an update or comment, your little avatar will appear next to it. If you're talking, the picture needs to be you, or people won't want to engage with you.
2. **Don't try to be Rightmove** – if I'm looking for a property, I need to be on Rightmove. Or Zoopla. Not your Facebook page. Besides, it looks terrible; lots of property listings. No one will want to like or share that.
3. **Stay community-focused** – make your page represent the heart of your community. Post news and local events, even gossip; make your page the go-to place for all things related to your town or village.
4. **Make it shareable** – likes are nice, but they don't grow your audience. What you really want, is for people to share your content. To be shareable, post updates and photos that arouse emotions – awe, happiness, a giggle – that's why cute kitten pictures do so well on Facebook – they are inherently shareable.
5. **Be consistent** – how often are you updating your Facebook page? Weekly? Sometimes hourly? Consistency is the key here, so your audience know what to expect, and they don't either get overwhelmed by your updates, or forget you exist. I'd suggest daily updates if you're new to Facebook, building up to 3 times a day once you're proficient, and you have built an audience.

So that's it: not exactly rocket science, is it?


Don't forget to [send me](#) the link to your page, and if I haven't already liked it, I will.



Social Media for Estate Agents – What you need to Know in 3 Easy Steps

Social media is a scary world for some – it even has a special language all of its own. If you find yourself Googling questions like ‘What does RT mean on Twitter?’ or ‘Do I need a Facebook business page?’ or even ‘Should I be on social media (and what is it anyway?’ – this article just might steer you in the right direction.

1. **Know why you’re doing it** – there’s no point in me telling you *how* to use social media for your business, if you have no idea *why* you’re doing it. It’s not enough to know that one in five Brits are on Facebook, or that Twitter is making millionaires daily, if you just don’t see the point of it. Be clear about what you want to get out of using social media, be it greater brand awareness, new leads or to be seen as a forward-thinking agent (all three are possible), and keep that objective in your mind as you begin your journey.
2. **Start with just one platform**, and get really good on it – the world of social media is truly boggling, with new platforms appearing all the time. Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, Pinterest.... The list goes on. Pick one platform where you feel most comfortable (or least uncomfortable) and spend some time getting to know each other. Listen to what others are saying, and search for your topics and other influencers in your area. At first, don’t tell anyone you’re on it, just have a play, and discover all the things you can do on your chosen platform. Educate yourself by watching YouTube videos, watching and copying the companies with the large followings, and reach out to friends and colleagues who are already using it, for advice and support. Once you know what you’re doing, start to spread the word and attract your audience by posting entertaining and relevant content on a regular basis.
3. **Systemise your content curation** – this is just a fancy way of saying create a list of the sites that have the best posts and articles you can share. ‘Curation’ is all about gathering information from a variety of sources, and sharing them with your audience. There are some great tools to help you do this: I use StumbleUpon, which is a random site generator, helping you find unique and interesting content from across



the world. Also check out Feedly, which is a news ‘aggregator’ – in other words, you can fill it full of your favourite blog sites, so you only have to visit one site to read the latest blogs. You can then easily share these direct from Feedly. Both these tools are free, so go and have a play, and find out what you can do with them.

So there you go – follow these three steps and before you know it, you’ll be posting like a pro. If you really can’t work it out, drop me a line, I’d be really pleased to hear from you.

A great Twitter tip for estate agents!

Are you on Twitter? Are your follower numbers creeping up all too slowly? I have a tip for you that will take you just an hour a week, but could earn you tens of new followers each time. Interested?

Have you heard of your local business hours? These are a scheduled hour slot each week, where by using a pre-determined hashtag, local businesses can find one another, and their tweets.

For example, my local Twitter hour uses #Cumbriahour; it’s on a Monday evening from 7pm-8pm, and often hundreds of people in my county are sending tweets during this hour. Last time I participated in it, I earned around 40 new followers, just by joining in! There is an hour near you, and probably several. If you’re lucky enough to be on the edge of two or more counties, you can participate in both. A quick search brings up #Northwesthour #Lancshour and even #Englandhour. A friend I know on Twitter grew her following from a standing start, to over 9,000 followers within 11 months, just by joining in her local three ‘Twitter hours’.

So what are you waiting for? Go find them. And if you’re stuck, [ask me on Twitter!](#)



GROWING YOUR AGENCY

How much do you know
about your business?

Let's find out shall we??

Something I absolutely love doing, is the Agents' Marketing Check-up. It's an hour long call, and during this time, we review all your marketing activities, looking for any missed opportunities, or potential to increase valuations and win instructions.

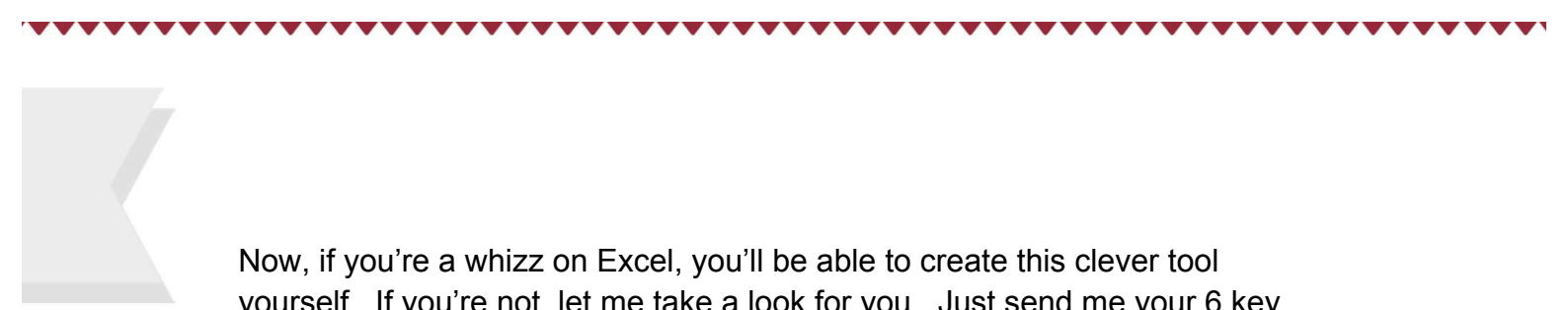
To better understand how the business is performing, I ask for 6 pieces of information. Not all agents know these, or can even lay their hands on the data. Do you? Here they are:

1. How many valuations do you do each month?
2. What's your conversion rate?
3. What commission do you quote? (both before and after discounting)
4. How many properties do you currently list (excluding pipeline)
5. What's the average asking price?
6. What percentage do you sell? (listings – withdrawals)

These 6 pieces of information – or *key metrics* – form the financial basis to your business success.

Now, I have a very clever little tool I have created. It allows me to tweak one, two or more of these metrics, to see what the bottom line result is. For example, for a recent client, we increased the average asking price by 5% and the commission by 0.25% and the result was a staggering £77,000 extra on his bottom line!

This clever little tool will also let you know which area of your business to focus on. For example, it may be more profitable to take on 10% less properties per year, at say 0.25% higher commission, than it would be to increase the number of instructions by 10% at say 1% commission.



Now, if you're a whizz on Excel, you'll be able to create this clever tool yourself. If you're not, let me take a look for you. Just send me your 6 key metrics, and let me see what I can discover about your business. Feeling brave? Good! Just drop me a line at sam@home-truths.co.uk and prepare to be amazed.

Sam's ONE secret of super-productivity

Let me ask you a question. When you get to your desk in the morning, what's the first thing you do? If you answered 'check email' then you're in the 90% of people who do exactly that before they do anything else to start their day's work. In addition, you have your Blackberry or iPhone winking at you constantly with emails that you can respond to immediately.

But does this make you more productive and efficient? I don't think so.

A year ago, I conducted an experiment – only on myself – I took my email off my phone. I had found that I was checking it constantly. Even though I didn't have an audible alert to let me know when an email arrived, I could still see that little red number telling me how many emails I had waiting, whispering to me “open me... open me.”

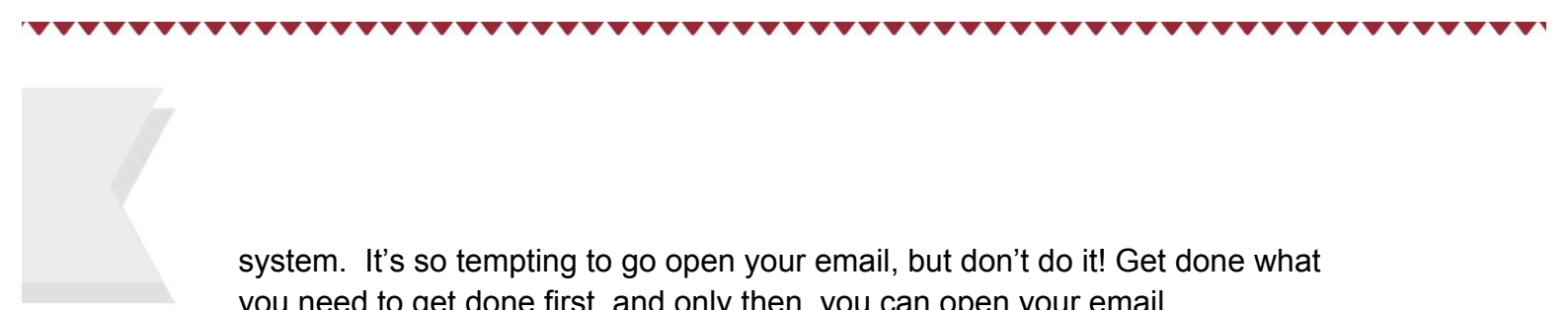
So I went cold turkey. It wasn't easy at first. I kept feeling I was missing something. But then I got used to being out of the office in both sense of the words, and started enjoying the feeling of freedom that gave me.

However, back in the office, the first thing I did every day was probably exactly what you do – check my email. The problem with that, is you just wind up answering and responding to those emails, and this could take all day. As well, as soon as you deal with one email, another pops up, demanding your attention. And so it goes on, all day. Someone once said to me that answering your emails as they come in is like running to the letter box every time you get a letter, all day long.

I've now developed a much better system, which I'm going to share with you here, in the hope it will help you to stop being *reactive*, and start being *proactive*.

Firstly, I write my to-do list the day before. I try to stick to less than 5 really important tasks, and star the one that is the most vital. This is the task that if I only achieved one thing that day, this would be it.

Then, when I get to my desk the following morning, *I don't open my email until I've done my to-do list*. This is the most important and difficult part of the



system. It's so tempting to go open your email, but don't do it! Get done what you need to get done first, and only then, you can open your email.

Now this may take you until noon, but that's ok. What email can't wait until noon? If you're really getting nervous, set up an autoreply that states: *Thank you for your email; I check my email between noon and three every day. If your enquiry is urgent, please call 0000000*"

I have to say though, that I generally don't check my email until at least noon, and nothing terrible has happened so far (touch wood). People in general will call you with an urgent query, or wait for an email response quite happily.

Once you have opened your email and dealt with it, then *close your inbox*. Really. Shut it again until you've been as productive as you can be for at least a couple of hours. Then open, check, respond, and close it again.

I promise you that this is the most important productivity tip you will ever learn, and the easiest to implement. It's also the hardest to get your head around.

Trust me and try it.

The best 20 minutes you can spend this week....

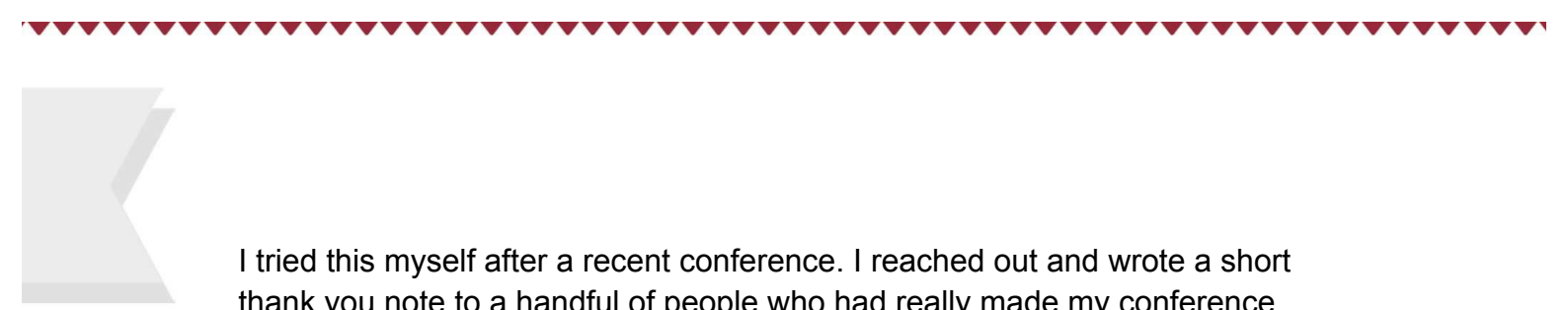
We're all such busy people. Dashing between viewings, responding to emails and phone calls, managing client relationships, dealing with staff issues – these could (and do) keep us busy all day long.

I'm going to suggest that you take just 20 minutes, once a week, to reach out to thank someone and express your gratitude.

Dave Kerpen in his book *Likeable Business* quotes some research from DonorsChoose.org, who did a study to measure the value of handwritten thank you notes. It turned out that the people who received handwritten thank you notes were *38% more likely to donate money a second time*. Those thank you notes had a tremendous impact.

Dave now writes thank you notes every single day, and says it's the first thing he does when he gets into the office each morning. He writes thank you notes to his staff, to clients, to prospects, and to the concierge in his building.

He loves the buzz it creates when someone gets one of his notes. "People who receive a thank you note are always amazed and usually call me, email me or tweet me about it. It helps to solidify potential business relationships and is essential for internal relationships."



I tried this myself after a recent conference. I reached out and wrote a short thank you note to a handful of people who had really made my conference experience richer and more fun. Those people were all delighted to have received a note, and in turn thanked me for sending it!

Try it for yourself, without agenda or expectation – simply reach out to say 5 people a week, with a personal thank you card or note. It really does work. I'll leave the last word on this to Dave:

"I know this is going to sound a little touchy-feely, but the second benefit to writing handwritten thank you notes is even if that note never leaves your desk, the ROI is that it puts you in a much happier state of mind. I can say this without a shadow of a doubt. It also makes you much more productive because you're in such a great mood."

What to do in between viewings

How much time do you spend travelling to and from viewings? If yours is a busy office, it could be a couple of hours a day at least. That's ten hours a week, or 21 days a year. That's a lot of time.

I'd like to share some thoughts with you about how to use that otherwise dead time to be more productive and efficient. Here are my top three things you can do in between viewings:

1. Make your follow-up and feedback calls (hands free, of course). Take a notebook with you and when you reach your destination, just make notes about who you've spoken to and the outcome.
2. Listen to podcasts. This is my favourite way of spending 'dead' time. There's a vast library in iTunes featuring some fantastic podcasts. Just type a search term in and you'll be amazed by how many podcasts there are. Amongst my favourites are marketing podcasts, which keep my brain ticking and my skills updated.
3. Write your newsletter or blog. Most phones these days have a voice memo function – my iPhone does – and I often dictate an article or an idea into it whilst driving. You can then type and tidy it up once you get back to the office.

What do you do in between viewings? Let me know!

And finally...

Your very last Supertip from me, is to IMPLEMENT! It's no good my giving you all of this fantastic information and advice, if you never actually put any of it into practice.

Make a list of the ones you feel most apply to you, and also the steps you can take easily, that will give your agency the most benefit. Then do one a week, or one a month; whatever fits with your goals and resources.

If you need help implementing any of these Supertips, I'm only an email away. Just [drop me a line](#) with your question.

I really hope you've enjoyed reading your Supertips as much as I've enjoyed writing them. I'd love to know how you get on – failures as well as successes.

I'll leave you with my favourite quote from Seth Godin

*“Soon is not as good as **now**.”*

You'd better believe it!



If you've enjoyed this book, and even if you haven't, I'd love to hear from you. Just give me a call on 015242 72181, drop me an email at sam@home-truths.co.uk or Tweet me at @thehometruths.