

Property And Estate Agency Recruitment News

By Darnell International

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Sold Out magazine interviews Alex Martin of Darnell International.

1. What's your opinion on the current state of the UK property market?

Generally the consensus is that the market and a majority of its participants are experiencing some kind of pinch. Various facets of the industry are intrinsically linked, and therefore some sectors might be feeling the knock on affects more than others. There is no doubt that the credit crunch, along with the current difficulty in obtaining a mortgage has a direct influence on the drop in sales of residential property. The negative media is not helping as it plays a large role in creating resistance in the average buyer's consciousness; this in turn affects agents and attitudes.

It seems estate agents are either panicking or accommodating themselves by changing focus and restructuring budgets. The top end of the market remains largely unaffected as the affluent have credibility and money to capitalise on the current situation. The focus should be on higher value property by stronger sales people. The lettings industry seems to be benefiting currently as the balance shifts to the average citizen renting over purchasing. I expect to see a positive shift around June of next year.

2. Has the downturn in the industry affected your business?

Well, having been established for over 10 years, this is not the first time we've experienced changes in market conditions. A volatile industry doesn't affect us negatively – it just changes the way we do business and our approach alters somewhat. The pool of vacancies within the UK has obviously become smaller – but the quality of appointments being made has improved a great deal. 12 months ago at any given time we would be working on a bank of perhaps 50-100 trainee/entry level roles. Now, due to clients having a greater need for more a more experienced staff that number has reduced. It has now been replaced to a certain extent by a greater quantity of senior level positions i.e. 3-5 years negging experience.

We have found that our clients who may have appointed junior staff within the last 6-12 months need to assess the weakest link and seek a stronger replacement – who can deal in a tough market. Recruiters much like agents are currently working much harder for deals, which in a way isn't a bad thing, because it reminds us why we are in business. The change in market conditions also means we have to respond quickly to find alternate ways to satisfy both the change in demand from both client and candidate perspectives.

3. Since the downturn in market conditions have you noticed any trends emerging on the recruitment side?

Obviously there is an increasing number of disillusioned estate agents who are struggling in the current climate to produce a healthy income for themselves, therefore a large number are leaving the industry completely. Furthermore there is a clear migration of sales moving across to lettings and also those seeking other roles, such as overseas options within the property industry. Our European and Middle Eastern divisions are extremely busy catering for those searching for a stronger sustainable market, and in particular Dubai, Abu Dhabi and surrounding emirates. Recruitment in outer London regions has become a bit tougher, but agents with prime central London experience are in even greater demand at present. Lettings staff are also being re-enforced across the nation in an attempt to ride the lettings market until sales pick up

again.

4. What actions have you taken as a business in order to cater for the changing market conditions?

Darnell is an international organisation, so with the support of our overseas divisions we can assist the large numbers of candidates looking for overseas careers. The UAE has a increasing demand for skilled property professionals. Visas are relatively easy to obtain and with the regions evident sustainability it is a strong favorite at the moment. Our Dubai office is ready for phase 2 of its expansion and we have plans for an Abu Dhabi office launch over the next few months. Last month I met with a CEO of a construction firm shortly after the Cityscape Expo in Abu Dhabi, and walked away with over 600 vacancies for their Qatar operation ranging from architects, engineers, project managers, designers and surveyors.

We have also recently secured exclusive recruitment contracts with Dubai's largest real estate company and several of the most innovative developers currently operating in the region. On the UK side we have grown our staff complement meaning we have a dedicated consultant per postcode region for London, and each outer London region. This means clients and candidates alike can benefit from a more specialized and personal approach. For larger clients who are currently on recruitment drives we have introduced a dedicated consultant who works purely on behalf of one company, servicing them in the same regard as part of their own HR function.

On a different slant we launched a Media recruitment division recruiting sales people for a variety of Magazine, Radio, TV, and Web media firms. This division of Darnell is young and exciting and allows those estate agents seeking a change in direction an opportunity to use their sales talents in a fun and interesting field.

5. What advice do you have for companies looking to hire?

Making an appointment in the current market is a crucial business decision and should be taken very seriously. Staff members are the lifeblood of any estate agency and in a market where every deal counts – you simply cannot afford to make the wrong choice. The net needs to be kept as wide as possible when screening in order to guarantee the right person is found. Using a professional recruitment company is even more prevalent in this market as it ensures that you find someone who adds extra value to your business. The candidate must have strong area knowledge and the experience to work a tough market to its full potential.

Choosing the right recruiter is also vitally important. The majority of placements that Darnell are making are with candidates that we have worked with before. We put our name behind our candidates and have their track records to back us. These are people who have been represented by Darnell exclusively for years, and are not just picked up by way of the mass market. Smaller or recently established recruiters will have a problem offering these types of quality placements, as they do not have a candidate bank spanning back over a great enough period of time.

6. What advice do you have for those looking to make change jobs?

Think carefully before making any decision and take your time to find a position that suits your requirements. The positions are there but patience is required for the correct process to find the right position. Keeping your options as broad as possible with an open minded attitude is key. In a market where grass can very easily look greener – it may not be. Market conditions are affecting a large number of agents, some of whom may look stable from first glance. Therefore do your own research, and consult with a well established recruitment firm for advice on your different options and then act accordingly.

7. Are there any positives to come from the changing market conditions?

Absolutely! For a start we should see the overall quality of estate agency improve as a result of quality firms prevailing and the stragglers falling by the wayside. When the market lifts stronger agents will flourish and both expansion and success will come at a lower price. Anyone can do business in a thriving market, estate agents and recruiters alike. However, ultimately in the trade industry it is those who deliver a consistent level of quality service that will prosper.

Furthermore a tough market drives enthusiasm, pro-activity and diversity. Those who can move quickly can act on these changes to capitalise on niche areas, which might not have been explored previously.

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