



Designing for everyone or designing for someone?

By Lee Valentine, Partner and
Group General Manager, Hoyne

“The majority of developers I have worked with over the years come to the table with the same goal or demand – maximising sales.”



The more time goes on, however, the more I find myself responding with two deceptively simple questions:

1. What does your project stand for or mean?
2. What makes your project different?

These questions can make people squirm. They start talking about how their project is aimed at first home buyers, but it's also perfect for young people with one or two children. They think stylish, childfree couples with money to spare would love it but, of course, it would also be great for baby boomers. At this point it's my turn to squirm.

Hoyne's successful approach relies entirely on identifying a project's unique angle and bringing that to life in the market. Admittedly, we sometimes end up creating this angle; we make suggestions to amplify certain architectural, interior and/or landscaping qualities or characteristics. Ideally, however, and saving time for everyone, a project stands on its own two feet from day one; it has meaning and originality built in.

How can everybody be the target market for a product unless that product is something crucial to life, like air or water? Even with water there are probably a thousand brands on the market.

The best marketing success stories in the world are not generic, they're specific. Author and innovator Seth Godin has a wonderful TED Talk where he discusses the concept of the purple cow. Driving around the countryside you'll see cow after cow after cow but you never really notice them. See one purple cow in the middle of a field, however, and you will definitely make a comment to your passenger. You might even pull over to take a photo for your Instagram account. Friends might pass that photo on. Before you know it, there are a whole lot of people making the trek to see the purple cow themselves.

I know in Australia we often think that we don't have the population to support highly distinctive or specialised commercial or residential property projects. The reality is we don't have

a population of people who all think the same. What we do have are population pockets who think differently, think specifically and who want things directed at them. These people tend to be early adopters and trendsetters. They lead, others follow.

Look around the property market in your own location, especially in Australia's capital city CBDs and outer suburban house and land estates. Do you see a lot product on or about to enter the market that looks markedly similar, is priced similarly and offers fairly similar amenities? When you think about entering this environment, keen to make higher profits and faster sales, do you actually think, "I can't wait to do something really similar, that's what the market needs right now!"

We need to start looking at distinct market segments, identifying their needs and preferences, and building things specifically for them. Think about an area like Sydney's Darlinghurst. Welcome to party central. A simple concept would

be to introduce double glazing to all apartment windows in your project. It's not ambitious or outlandish; it just acknowledges that life in Darlinghurst is exciting and colourful but also noisy. With double glazing you can be in the action but still find peace to sleep.

Cabramatta in New South Wales has a vibrant and growing Asian demographic. Notice this and design apartments accordingly. Think about shoe storage in the hallways, create kitchen spaces that comfortably and stylishly hold woks and utensils, and include range hoods that can deal with hot, delicious creations.

More ambitiously, you might notice that Darlinghurst and neighbouring suburbs have a lot of people – single, couples, older, younger – devoted to their dogs. How about an apartment block with the single-minded focus on dog owners? This block has a doggy-wash area in the basement, there's a grassed rooftop with a little walking route and a doggy-waste removal area. ➤

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It’s no more difficult than including a wine cellar or a mah-jong room. If there’s space for outdoor barbecue and entertaining areas then there’s space for a doggy-sandpit and watering holes.

You could even have a dog-friendly café at the base that becomes a destination in its own right. My wife and I have kids and we travel a lot for work. We do not want a dog. But I wouldn’t mind living somewhere where the kids get to play with other people’s dogs. We’d even be open to doggy-sitting when neighbours went away. I wouldn’t have to take the kids to the park so much to fulfil their dog-owning fantasies.

If property projects could stand for something it would help sales so much. You need to be remarkable and, as I said before, single-minded. Internationally, companies such as Candy and Candy take this approach. This UK operation targets the uber-rich. Their projects unabashedly court people wanting

sunken wine dens and glass-bottomed pools. Closer to home and less eccentric is Crown Group which concentrates solely on resort-style living for its luxury apartments.

Hoyme’s own long-time client, Frasers, is fast becoming Australia’s terrace living leaders. In locations such as Putney Hill and Botany Bay, Frasers is paving the way for stellar terrace homes in highly individual neighbourhoods. The company also, of course, initially made a name for itself in Sydney with Lumière where it debuted the idea of vertical village living. The village, whether among the skyscrapers or amidst the tree tops, is a consistent theme.

Fascinating steps are being taken by companies such as Small Giants, Neometro and Assemble, all based in Melbourne. These residential property developers share a truly focused approach to their work, introducing things that appeal to a specific strata of homebuyers

and include things such as apartments without car parking for inner-city dwellers, rain water collection and other sustainable or small footprint goals (read about Oxford and Peel on page 142). Assemble even gives buyers the chance to comment on how a building is built. What greater level of buy-in can you achieve?

Even in our own work at Hoyme we take this approach. By conducting initial workshops with clients we create themes that establish or accentuate a project’s point of difference. It works brilliantly. Most people want to produce good work. They want to add something to the community. Together we create the look and feel of the project and the assets that set it apart. Working with the clients, getting their individual input along this path, guarantees their buy-in. Together we commit to maintaining this vision and this quality together. It’s immensely inspiring and satisfying and also, you

guessed it, more commercially successful and profitable.

The individual is everything in this business. We need to create projects for individuals, connect with them early and get their commitment and loyalty from the start. This approach and these connections build reputations and relationships which in turn produce repeat custom and establish stronger foundations when launching future projects. Risk is reduced. Ask developers like Frasers and Mirvac, their repeat customer rates are among the highest in the business. — ●



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