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LEASING

Relationships And Research: Retail Leasing Comes Full Circle

Despite technology, relationships between landlords and tenants — and their representatives — are just as important as ever.

Beth Azor

In years past, sales and leasing agents knew their clients and prospects well, the same way the butcher shop owner knew the names of his customers. And then in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, and 2000s, it became mass sales. Agencies worked on the mantra, "How much can you put in the funnel?" If you can jam a thousand cold-calling prospects into that funnel, some will drop out at the bottom and you'll make a sale.

In 2019, this is not what you need to do anymore. You must develop the butcher-shop relationship. You need to cultivate and customize your selling relationships.

If I'm trying to convince Starbucks to come to my site, instead of emailing 6,000 contacts in my CRM, I will send one well-thought-out email to the director of real estate for Starbucks. Before I do that, I will research more than her name, such as whether she went to Duke University. In my email, I will mention of how the Blue Devils won their most recent basketball game.

That's the new way of selling. Why?

With the internet, buyers have access to all the information they think they need. Their need for a salesperson is significantly less. One way for agents to create value is to develop personal relationships. The other is to understand the marketplace and figure out, "How do I make something happen that doesn't exist?"

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One way for agents to create value is to develop personal relationships. The other is to understand the marketplace and figure out, "How do I make something happen that doesn't exist?" For me, that meant bringing the first Starbucks to Plantation, Florida, by creating an outparcel for it on an office building site. You can't Google that result.

KNOW YOUR MARKET

When the mayor of Plantation, a suburb of Fort Lauderdale, was helping me with a new site, she said, "Please bring the New York Grilled Cheese place here. They're in Boca Raton. I want them in Plantation." Then, she said, "The city has no ice cream. We want ice cream." Leasing agents should look for opportunities by asking questions such as, "What does my city need?"

If you are leasing 20 shopping cen-

ters, it's going to be hard to get a handle on all 20 different markets. You might know seven markets if you have three centers in each. The best way for you to lease is to understand:



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- Who's my competition?
- What are the vacancies?
- What are the occupancies?
- What tenants are doing well?
- What tenants aren't doing well?
- What rents that my neighbors are getting?
- What incentives are they giving?"

The better you know your market, the faster you're going to lease your property, the better tenant mix you're going to have, the better rents you're will command, and the faster you will lease vacancies.

To do that, you must develop solid relationships with local leasing agents and to obtain accurate market information. Call an agent, introduce yourself, and ask to take the person for coffee. Or take coffee to the agent's office.

Then, offer something of much greater value. When you promise to give a copy of a market study to everyone who contributed to it, you will get a much higher participation rate. And when agents call you for a favor, respond right away because when you need something, they'll help you.

CANVASSING VS. COLDCALLING

Prospecting takes many forms. Cold calling is picking up the phone and asking, "Hey, Starbucks. Are you interested in coming to Davie or Plantation?" or, when

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talking to the owner of a mom-and-pop shop. "What are your expansion plans?"

When canvassing, you might visit 20 bicycling stores and try to convince them to come to your shopping center. After introducing yourself, you ask a question like, "You're in Boca Raton and I have a center in Delray Beach. Have you ever thought about opening in Delray?"

Some people are more comfortable over the phone and some are better in person. I think people should go in person. You pick up visual information; you can talk to customers and operators of other stores.

IT'S NOT WHO YOU KNOW, IT'S WHO KNOWS YOU

In my book, I write, "In today's tech-obsessed, information-saturated and distracted world, it's no longer who you know, it's who knows you." And I give Michelle Villalobos and Dale Scott some credit for that.

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I may want Starbucks or Chipotle to come to my shopping center, but unless people know who I am and what I'm selling, I will never get their attention. I must call them, send a flyer, do something to get their attention so that they can say, 'Oh, Beth has properties in Davie.'

ing, I will never get their attention. I must call them, send a flyer, do something to get their attention so that they can say, "Oh, Beth has properties in Davie." Until they connect with Beth with properties in Davie, I don't have a prayer of making a deal.

INVEST IN YOURSELF

I have spent over \$35,000 on self-im-

provement in the last 12 months. I just returned from a conference called Shop-talk. Retailers talked about strategies and how they are looking at the next five years. I am attending because, as a landlord, I need to learn about my customers.

When you start in a market, join the local chamber of commerce because its members own storefronts or rent property. Listen in your car to sales, time management and businesses books like "The Nordstrom Way" for insights. If you have a 30-minute commute, spend 15 minutes investing in yourself and then 15 minutes enjoying either quiet or music or talk radio.

Brian Tracy, a self-development guru, said that for every \$1 you invest in yourself, it will return \$30 to your bottom line." I don't know anywhere else you can get that kind of return on an investment. You never lose on an investment in yourself. **SCB**

Beth Azor is a 33-year veteran of the commercial real estate industry, owns Azor Advisory Services, which specializes in consulting services, training, sales/leadership coaching, acquisition due diligence, and market analysis. Beth owns and manages a \$79 million portfolio of commercial retail properties in southeast Florida and recently wrote and published "Don't Say No For The Prospect," a guide to help propel the career of both novice and experienced leasing agents. She can be reached at beth@azoradvisoryservices.com