

Always looking for more attention

CONDO GIVEAWAY CONTESTS

Charities benefit as builders seek increased exposure

BY LISA VAN DE VEN

So, you're thinking of buying a condo. There are certainly plenty to choose from in this city. You check your savings and your budget. Then you wonder how you can get one for free.

There is a way. While giving away a condominium unit may seem counterintuitive to developers' goals — selling suites to make a profit — some do just that, in promotional draws and charity tie-ins.

According to some experts, that is because it makes good marketing sense.

"It's almost like relationship marketing, and it's almost like a niche kind of approach," says communications consultant Vicki Griffiths, partner with Vicbar Marketing. "I think what's happening today is people are having to be a little more innovative within their marketing. And it's hard to figure out new ways to get attention."

Developers can use promotional events or draws to expose a project to new potential customers, Ms. Griffiths says.

Take Tridel, for example. The developer has teamed up with the Scarborough Town Centre in a 13-week campaign that will see someone win a free unit at the company's 360° at the City Centre project in Scarborough. The campaign is designed to promote both the Scarborough Town Centre and 360°, says Jim Ritchie, vice-president of sales and marketing for Tridel. To qualify to win, shoppers at the mall must purchase Scarborough Town Centre gift certificates — for every \$10 certificate they buy, they can enter to win the \$173,000 condominium unit by registering at a kiosk at the 360° model suite, located in the mall.

Concord Adex Developments, developer of the 18-tower Concord CityPlace project downtown, recently put together a promotion to give away a downtown condo. The developer sponsored a two-day contest at its CityPlace Golf course, where anyone could pay \$10 to have the opportunity to shoot a hole-in-one and win a free condominium unit in the project's latest phase.

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Is giving away a condo a good marketing plan?

GIVEAWAY

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All of the proceeds — as well as golf fees at the course for the rest of the season — go to the United Way. While nobody won the condominium, United Way has been promised \$50,000 by Concord Adex.

"Our corporate philosophy is, if there's any kind of giving that we can do that can stay within the community, we absolutely do make that," says Alan Vihant, vice-president of development for Concord Adex. "I think there is something about community building that extends to charitable organizations like this."

Do the developers get sales in return? It depends on whom you ask. "It is definitely a marketing cost," Mr. Ritchie says. "But there is a tremendous, tremendous amount of traffic in [Scarborough Town Centre]. ... So the exposure that we've had has just been tremendous — several thousand people a day go through that model suite."

The added exposure — seen by people who may not normally see Tridel's ads in the newspapers, or stop to read billboards on the side of the street — makes up for the costs of giving away the condominium, which are split with the mall, he says.

While Mr. Ritchie believes the increased exposure translates into extra sales, others in the real estate business are not so certain. People stopping to look at billboards are people who are actively looking to buy, says real estate broker Brad Lamb of Brad J. Lamb Realty Inc.

People who come in to a sales centre just to win a new condominium, he says, are not necessarily prepared to buy one if they don't get the prize. "I don't think, in the long run, they work," he says. "I think you can get far more sales as a result of advertis-

ing, marketing and doing some clever things that way — it's a better use of that money than giving away a condo."

If a developer's goal is to expose a project to a new group of people, additional sales may not result, Mr. Lamb says. Many developers, though, align that giveaway with specific charities that receive donations in conjunction with the campaign.

A campaign that does that not only promotes the project and gives developers a tax write-off, but shows off a developer's altruistic side as well, Mr. Lamb says. "There are people who are legitimately charitable that give away money to charities, to hospitals and so on."

Tridel, for example, is giving a portion of each gift certificate bought during the campaign to the Ontario Nurses Association Benevolent Fund. It has promised \$50,000 to the group.

"Because of SARS and the way the health care workers were affected through the whole thing — that was our way and Scarborough Town Centre's way to just give back to them," Mr. Ritchie says.

An event such as Concord Adex's, with its charitable component, offers a different kind of marketing and reaches a different kind of crowd than buying ads in a newspaper might, Ms. Griffiths says.

Attaching the event to a charity has the added bonus of making developers look good to the public, but it also gives them the opportunity to be altruistic.

"I think, number one, it's because they feel they want to give back to the community; number two, it's an alternative way for them to reach people; number three it's a partnership that has some validity if it's with a charity," she says.

"And charities are always looking for opportunities for money."

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