JULY/AUGUST 2023 – ISSUE 23 – PRICE £12.95

# Blue Bricks

MAGAZINE

THE PROPERTY INVESTOR MAGAZINE

THE **BUSINESS** SIDE OF **PROPERTY**

## KEY ADVICE FOR ANY ENTREPRENEUR LOOKING TO SUCCEED IN BUSINESS AND PROPERTY

JAMES SINCLAIR

**DAN BUCHAN** – THE BUSINESS OF PROPERTY

**SAVOYS PROPERTIES** – FROM PLAYERS TO MASTERS

**COLETTE THOMPSON** – OVERCOMING IMPOSTER SYNDROME

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ISSUE 23 | JULY/AUGUST 2023

# EDITOR'S FOREWORD

The business side of property. This is what Issue 23 of Blue Bricks Magazine represents. Because, with this issue, I wanted to do something a little different. The economy is changing, and interest rates are skyrocketing. The way out of this, and the way to grow your property portfolio in these difficult times, is to think like a business owner.

This one has taken a while to put together on the back end, mainly because we've worked hard to tie down some of the amazing names you'll see within these pages. Each one of them is highly experienced, and the advice that they share in their articles is sure to help you both personally and financially, with some pointers that are essential in scaling your business.

James Sinclair, a highly accomplished entrepreneur and property investor, shares his insights on success in business and why investing in commercial property has numerous benefits that you might not have realised.

Savoys share their story of how they rose from investing in their first buy-to-let property to now having over 600 managed tenants.

Colette Thompson shares an inspiring story on overcoming Imposter Syndrome and how you can do the same, while the second-time feature, Caroline Pattinson, gives her advice as an ex-Senior Bank Manager on how you can financially prepare for business and economic changes.

Ultimately, this is a packed issue, and it's one that's perfect for business owners and property investors alike. So, grab a brew and have a read. Once you're done, share your thoughts on social media and tag us alongside #BlueBricksMagazine.

If you have an interesting story to tell, or if you'd like to give any feedback, then please contact me on the information below.

**Sam Cooke**
Editor of Blue Bricks Magazine

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in Blue Bricks Magazine

# MEET THE COLUMNISTS

## Dan Buchan

Dan Buchan is the co-Director of Aspire Property Group with business partner, Jamie York. Dan has built his business from the ground up, starting by sourcing deals from his own rent-to-rent unit and scaling the company to a point where it has closed £100,000,000 worth of property deals.

## James Sinclair

James started his career building an entertainment agency, then moved into building a leisure and day nursery business. Today, James operates a £30 million business which includes leisure, childcare, outdoor attractions, commercial property, arts and crafts manufacturing as well as one of the UK's oldest Ice cream companies; The Rossi Ice Cream Company.

## Colette Thompson

Colette was a successful corporate contract manager and part-time investor before setting up her own company in 2021. She is now a full-time property developer, with multiple income streams, specialising in high-end holiday homes and corporate lets.

## Caroline Pattinson

Caroline is a double award-winning landlord and Director of Chester Homeshare. Caroline specialises in providing homely, luxurious and sociable co-living homes to graduates and young professionals.

## Mark Winship

Co-founder and Director of Gateway Accommodation Solutions, Mark is on a mission to change the way that we think about business travel. Mark is privileged to work with corporate clients from all over Europe in providing clean and cost-effective serviced accommodation as an alternative to cramped and expensive hotel rooms.

## Malkit and Sanjay

Malkit Purewal and Sanjay Kumar are multi-award-winning developers from Savoys Properties who have been in the industry for 20 years. They specialise in HMOs/conversions and have won awards in three categories at the Property Investor Awards 2020 and 2021.

## Mike Taylor

Mike is a data-driven, technical marketer with 10 years of experience and $50m optimised across paid and organic channels. He co-founded Ladder.io and grew it to 50 people, with clients like Monzo Bank, Booking.com and Time Out. He is now building a simulator-based course on marketing mix modelling at vexpower.com.

## Imogen Cook

Imogen is an outsourcing expert and coach, currently making her mark as the founder of The Freedom Geek – a dynamic company leveraging talented individuals (Virtual Assistants) in the Philippines to assist overwhelmed Entrepreneurs with delegation, working smart and accelerating their businesses.

## Steve Smith

Steve is the Head of Property for Shadowfax Funding Solutions, an experienced broker in the field of property. He specialises in property development finance, commercial mortgages, bridging finance and buy-to-let mortgages. He has worked on cases from £25,000.00 to over £35,000,000.00 in debt funding.

## Jonathan Bentley

Jonathan is a property insurance specialist who is passionate about helping his clients get the right cover for their property portfolios. During his career, he has funded millions of pounds worth of property and saved his clients hundreds of thousands of pounds.

## We Are Property Marketing

The go-to marketing agency for our industry, We Are Property Marketing is a digital marketing agency dedicated to modernising property businesses, using the latest technologies to help them attract private investors and off-market opportunities.

# THE MARKET PULSE

Stay ahead with us

KEEPING A FINGER ON THE PULSE OF THE PROPERTY MARKET

JILL STEVENSON

The most recent rise in interest rates makes buying a house unaffordable

## Rising Interest Rates and Falling Prices A July Juggling Act

With house prices falling, mortgage rates rising and high inflation tightening its grip on household finances, the property market is wobbling. It's also steeling itself for future house price drops in the near future.

Despite this, more homes are coming on the market, with stock levels at an average thirty-eight properties per member, in May, according to the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. That's the highest number since March, two years ago. At the same time, the number of instructions for a survey, was up for the first time in over a year, indicating more buyer interest.

The optimism isn't reflected in the number of mortgage approvals though, with these falling to 48,690 in April (from double that figure in November 2020 at the height of the flurry to buy). It's also 26% less than in April 2019, according to data from the Bank of England.

### Two-Year Fixed Rate Mortgage Over 6%

And it seems interest in house buying is about to decline even further, thanks to the most recent rise in interest rates, making buying a house unaffordable for many UK households.

That's because mortgage interest rates, for a five-year fixed rate deal, jumped to 5.96%. That was a jump from 4.97% at the start of May. Interest on a two-year fixed rate, rose to 6.39% from 5.26% a month earlier. Two years ago, interest rates on two-year fixed rates, were just 1%.

In fact, "forget historically low mortgage interest rates," some financiers are saying. They believe that mortgage rates will settle at a much higher rate than previously and will remain there for quite some time.

Andrew Goodwin, chief economist at Oxford Economists, predicts rising interest rates will lead to, "a rise in the number of forced sales."

### House prices to fall 10%, says Moody's

Financial researchers, Moody's, expect a fall in house prices of up to 10%, over the next couple of years. They blame this on, "persistently high inflation and the recent spike in lending rates."

In May, property portal *Rightmove* reported a 1.8% increase in asking prices. In the same month though, *Nationwide* reported a fall of around 3.4%. That's the biggest fall since 2009.

### Fewer Homes Being Built in the UK

House builders are developing fewer homes here in the UK. In fact, the last time there were so few houses being built, was during the first month of lockdown, in April 2020 – and which is the lowest, since the big recession of 2009.

The downturn in house completions comes at a time when many people are turning their back on new builds due to the cost, which isn't recouped when they come to sell the property on.

### More International Property Investment

The high mortgage interest rates and big deposit demands are again pricing first-time buyers out of the market. Instead, international investment is once again big, so too is the number of cash buyers for properties.

On the plus side, at one million job vacancies advertised, unemployment is around the lowest figure since records started in 1971. At the same time, gas prices have finally started falling, meaning household finances aren't as dire as they once looked.

# THE FINANCE PULSE

Rather than tell you just what's happening in the lending world, I thought I would discuss the Bank of England (BoE) base rate which as of writing stands at 5%. We all know that the BoE is trying to reduce the inflation rate in the UK, but my personal view is that they are dealing with the symptom rather than the cause. However, don't take my word for it.

Increasing the base rate, to slow UK inflation will not work, according to Economist Professor, Trevor Williams. He goes on to explain that the BoE are pushing the point that it is wage increases that are causing the inflationary pressure to increase when a major factor is supply-side problems, due to war in Ukraine.

A direct effect of the rate rises is the increase in the cost of borrowing. Unless you have a fixed rate, the rate will rise, which in turn reflects in the re-payment and cashflow. Also, more expensive finance makes it more difficult to qualify for loans.

As recently as last week, the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) said it had made changes to the 'Mortgage Charter' relating to regulated mortgages, which will allow lenders to switch to interest-only options for six months, an extension to the term if the borrower is struggling to make their monthly payments. Also, a borrower will not be forced to leave their home within one year of their first missed payment.

**Steve Smith**

Unfortunately, there is so far, no help for landlords and with the National Residential Landlords Association (NRLA) quoting that 35% of landlords are planning to sell a property within the next 12 months, it could be the right time to buy. You can only offer what is affordable and there is a limit to what you can charge as rent, you could purchase some real bargains, make them work in this market and once the base rate lowers, you can pick up some great mortgage deals.

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# THE BUSINESS OF PROPERTY

## THREE CORE BUSINESS PHILOSOPHY'S THAT HELPED US CLOSE £100,000,000 WORTH OF PROPERTY DEALS

Property investment often starts as a personal interest, gradually evolving into a side hustle and potentially transforming into a full-fledged career. This progression is a common path chosen by many individuals in the realm of property investment. However, the question remains: at what point does this transition occur and how can one effectively elevate their passion or hobby to a higher level?

The answer, in my experience, comes in reversing your thinking.

Over the last decade, my business partner, Jamie York, and I have gone from sitting in my bedroom, generating ideas on a spreadsheet, creatively titled: "ways to make money", to having developed one of the largest portfolios of building and property trading businesses in the country. We're closing in on having sold £100,000,000 of property, we've built a multimillion-pound portfolio of our own and are pleased to have helped thousands of people build their property businesses, from the ground up.

While I won't reveal all of our money-making ideas, I can certainly confirm that selling "love rocks" was among them. These rocks, sourced from the nearby Whitstable beach, possessed a unique reddish hue that made them desirable. Now, the real question is: How did two individuals with a multitude of unconventional ideas, manage to successfully navigate this transition? In this article, we will delve into precisely that, while also providing valuable advice on transforming property investment from a mere hobby, into a lucrative and scalable business venture.

### Humble Beginnings

I was fortunate to be brought up in a middle-class setting and while not being surrounded by wealth, it did mean I had some stability to explore ideas (like the above!) But it also meant I was drilled in the traditional way of thinking: go to school, get an education, get a job and develop from there. I knew that wouldn't do; I wanted something more. And if you're reading this article, I am guessing you are seeking more too.

By the time I had finished university, I already knew the standard path wasn't going to be for me. I began studying and researching property and in 2014, we packaged our first deals (for those who may be unaware, deal packaging is a strategy in which we procure great investment properties and these sell to investors for a fee). It meant we could start without using any of our own funds.

We rapidly went through the journey from interest, to hustle, to full time career.

Over the coming years, I moved away from home and we grew from the two of us working from bedrooms, where we were tenants in our own rent-to-rent, to our first 'proper' office with one staff member, to having a strong team of more than 25 people, across all our businesses.



Dan Buchan

So, specifically, what makes this transformation? Reflecting back on this and incorporating the experience of those we have taught too; I've sought to identify what commonalities have transformed people's hustles and ventures into true successes. I believe there are three key fundamentals people NEED, to grow their property business. And it's these I want to share with you.

### 1. Start With the Destination in Mind

One common theme among all of those who have grown, is a mindset shift. They make the leap between treating their property investing as a hobby, to training their property ventures as a business.

In order to get out of the 'side-hustle' mindset, treat yourself as a PROPER business and proper results will come.

Firstly, it's necessary that you are clear on what you want to achieve. Yes, really, take a second now, while you're reading this article, what do you want to achieve in property? »

There are typically four reasons people invest in property. In practice, it is often a mix of these (as all of them are desirable) but usually, one is more prevalent than the other. These are:

1. **Cash flow** – getting income from property investments, to enhance your lifestyle.
2. **Growing Wealth** – people looking for their net wealth to grow and aiming to do so in a reliable way, which outpaces the alternatives.
3. **Inheritance and Legacy** – creating or building something tangible, which can be passed down, to provide stability to future generations.
4. **Financial Security** – some people invest just to keep their money safe. When you think of the super-wealthy, buying expensive buildings in London; this is their 'why'. The primary aim is securing the capital.

It's important to begin with the destination in mind, so that you can truly travel in that direction. There are a lot of strategies out there and while they all *can* work, what doesn't work is doing all of them. Some are better suited to hitting some of these goals than others. One of the most common pitfalls I see, is where people try the strategies aimlessly first, without considering this question beforehand. This often leads to trying one... and then switching to another... and another... and ultimately to disappointment.

Perhaps one of these reasons 'why', stands out to you more strongly? Or perhaps you have a mixture of a couple? Whatever that combination is for you, start with the end in mind and seek to always have that in your mind, as you implement the following methods in your property business.

Below are the three most common ways and tangible actions I believe people can take, to upgrade their property business and increase their output.

### *The Three Core Methods of Success in Property Investment*

1. **Where did all the offers go?** – If you've ever spoken to multiple vendors or been on more than a handful of viewings in a single day, you'll know that the information easily gets overloaded. Was it the first one or the third one which had the avocado bathroom? Your brain will forget it. And spreadsheet won't do. You'll need a CRM (customer relationship management system) to store this information in.

   There is not a single property business I know, doing multiple deals a month, which does not have some variation of this. So, let's put this step in place. We recommend using *Podio*, because it is adaptable and you can create what's required to suit your business needs (it's as close to 'bespoke' software as you'll ever get without the £10,000's price tag!) But others are and will be available too. The main thing is, you have a place to store that information, store your analysis and enabling you to follow up on offers you've made. Over 60% of our deals are done in our 'pipeline', they didn't say 'yes' right away. So, let's get that actioned!

2. **To raise serious finance, take finance raising seriously** – Whether it's Buy-to-Lets (BTLs) or multi-million Gross Development Value (GDV) developments, or anything in-between, property has two parts at its core – deals and money. Whether right away, or in the future, you will need to raise money to buy more deals. Inevitably, it ends up being necessary to grow.

   Yet I've seen SO many investors *say* they are looking at raising finance, but not *doing* anything about it. Take a moment here to consider, are you serious about raising money? Aside from having somewhere to nurture investors (like the CRM we mentioned above) do you have a prospectus or some sample deals to show serious parties what you are doing? Are you familiar with the loan agreements and security documents surrounding raising finance? Bringing yourself up to speed on these will improve your ability to raise finance.

   One action I would highly recommend is developing an 'investor journey' for your company. This is where you lay out the ideal life cycle of what happens when someone invests in your company, such as when they get updates, what certificates they get with their interest. Developing this as an experience, allows you to take your own finance raising more seriously and sharing the finished product with prospective investors, will significantly increase your conversion rate when raising finance.

## THERE ARE A LOT OF STRATEGIES OUT THERE AND WHILE THEY ALL CAN WORK, WHAT DOESN'T WORK IS DOING ALL OF THEM

3. **Lastly – YOU are the valuable asset. Prioritise your time** – The traditional way of obtaining a property is seen as: enquiry > viewing > offer. I would encourage you to flip this on its head. The viewing should be the LAST stage of agreeing a deal. I always aim to do my research, know the numbers and submit the offer subject to viewing, to save COUNTLESS hours of physically going around houses that may never be deals!

   This simple shift unlocks a much greater ability to offer on more properties. And couple this with a service such as *Viewber*, which conducts viewings for you wherever you are in the world, you can really begin to see scale and freedom come into view!

How big you want to grow your property business is up to you. But wherever you are at, however much time you have, consider whether you want to keep it as a 'hobby', or truly treat your ventures as a business. This mindset shift, followed by action, is a key difference in results achieved.

If you are looking to grow your portfolio without the hassle, or, if you are looking to learn more about property, please reach out on **hello@Aspirepropertygroup.co.uk**, or use this link or QR code:
**bit.ly/aspirebluebricks**

# ADAPT OR DIE?

## TALKING REAL BUSINESS, AMID THE EVER-RISING COSTS IN PROPERTY

What's happening with your business? Your property portfolio? Your buy to lets, HMOs, (SA) Serviced Accommodation, developments and any other businesses or income sources you may have?What are your COSTS? Your mortgages, finance, taxes, salaries, bills… the list goes on? Are you all sorted? Or does your business need to adapt or, if you're not careful, die?

Speaking as a 25-year ex-NatWest senior Bank Manager and property lender, as well as a 25-year portfolio landlord, there is unlikely to be any business that doesn't have to seriously adapt to the raft of increases and changes in almost all key areas of our asset and income streams.

### Rising Business Costs – The Truth No One Talks About

My basic business costs have increased by £63,725 per year, due to rises in interest rates, staff salaries and utilities alone. This is the reality of business and property. The truth that no one talks about, because it's the side that is, quite frankly, not the pretty side.

I'm certainly not prepared to allow £5,310 per month, to be lost to banks and energy companies! I have a child going to Uni to pay for, jobs to support, an 11-bed house to refurb and a host of other plans.

But, what's the solution? Especially when none of these costs are easily cut?

**The answer: Adapt or Die!**

The key areas I have risk assessed and planned for, and recommend you do the same, are:

- How much we WANT to earn
- Customers and the income they generate
- Financial and operational costs
- Refurbishment costs
- Regulatory change impacts
- Tax forecasts and costs.

I know this looks like a lot, but it's important that you analyse and prepare for each and every element in your business. Costs rise and it's important to know how to counteract them, by either increasing your profits or accepting less profit, lowering your costs, and, as a last resort, selling or exiting your business.

Let's go through these one by one.

### *1. How much money do you WANT to earn?*

This is personal to you, but it is safe to say, that nobody wants to earn less than they are used to and indeed, with inflation currently at 8.7% and taxes ever higher, to earn the same amount as you did last year, is to go backwards.

Working out the costs of your home, bills, kids, car, savings, lifestyle, your 'stuff', etc., can be daunting. The starting point is to know how much you need and then add on what you WANT. This is the money (£s) after tax, you WANT to earn.

Adding tax on top can make the hardiest person want to give up and feel anxious. But, if you are in business or property, to give yourself and your family financial security, or even better, financial freedom, then I recommend starting with the result in mind.

### *2. Customers and income*

With costs rising, I refocussed on my zero voids, zero arrears strategy: this is the single most efficient thing you can do, to not lose money in property.

I increased the rents on my existing rental portfolio by £40,655 per year, from the period April 2022 to June 2022.

This was NOT achieved through hitting my existing tenants with steep rent hikes. It came from rents generally rising at circa 10% across the UK, through supply and demand, pricing rooms at the top end of the current market, when they became available, offering unique services and care and through reasonable rent increases, mainly reflecting gas and electricity rises, to existing, loyal tenants.

### *3. Financial and operational costs*

Interest rates rose from 0.1% to 5% in just 18 months from Nov 2021, something that I had already analysed and forecast. The impact on my variable-rate mortgages, is they now cost an extra £12,375pa.

The impact on my fixed-rate mortgage agreements, rolling off in Jan 2024 and rates doubling to 7%, means an extra £21,350pa in bank interest charges. Plus, hefty re-finance or broker fees.

Staff wages rose due to inflation and skills retention costs, by at least an extra £6,000pa.

The electric, gas and general utilities increases from the year previous, is an extra £24,000.

**Total additional outgoings are currently £63,725 per year.**

Some people would have their credit rating ruined or even lose their own home, over price rises like this. It's serious sh*t and I am writing this 'no-holds barred', as I strongly believe that there is not enough talk and education on business planning and RISK management in our small-to-medium business and property worlds.

For anyone in the above situation – which will increase, as interest rates continue to bite – a serious consideration is to get out or sell up, BEFORE small losses turn into out of control ones.

This is why it is SO important to forecast ahead while you have time to do something about it and, while you still have the luxury of choice.

### *4. New deals and refurbishment costs*

Something that was a good deal in June 2022, may actually be a loss maker if started 12 months later.

Knowing that cost increases were coming and that a new property needs a lead-in period of at least 12 months, for planning permission, licensing, a full refurbishment and to start producing income, I started looking in October 2022.

In February 2023, I finally had an offer accepted on the 11-bedder. My original budget for a total refurbishment of this big property, was £120k and I made an offer on it, stacking at that. However, as building materials and costs have since risen steeply, I've also increased my budget to £150k.

I stress tested the whole project at 7%, assuming 100% as a worst-case scenario. I decided to proceed with this purchase, as the new figures still worked, however, I have adapted to pay a contract administrator, to control costs, as mitigation for the increased risk.

### *5. Regulatory change impacts*

Boring but essential, as some regulations are another risk to your business. Some risk is financial (though EPC ratings of C, being moved out to 2028, is good news)

## Caroline Pattinson

and some have legal or compliance risks. For example, I am forward engaging with planning permission for SA and learning more about the *Renters Reform Bill* proposals and how they may impact my business. Don't bury your head in the sand – these things can push a fragile business past breaking point, if you're unprepared.

### *6. Tax forecasts*

To know how solvent or profitable your business will be in a year's time, I'd suggest knowing roughly, what your tax bill is going to be. My end of year is the 5th of April and by the end of that month, all my tax returns were in and my 2023 tax bill (which is not due until January 2024) is paid. I also sent a forecast of my estimated income and expenditure, to my accountant, for the tax year ending April 2024, which is massive (thanks Section 24!) So again, that gives me well over a year to decide how to best tax plan for that situation. One option is spending the remaining profits on further investments.

Getting over the shock of having to find another £5,310 per month, just to stand still, against costs that I can't easily reduce, I undertook a deep dive into the options to increase income to cover it. I proactively started this in April 2022, in anticipation of interest rate hikes and in line with market demand. These examples are just from my HMO business:

I analysed what current and prospective customers actually WANT – what's most important to them, as their needs and wants change over time.

I researched current market rates and competition in my area. Things change!

I undertook some cosmetic refurbs e.g., adding more ensuites and some fresh and trendy interior design.

Result?

My existing portfolio, streamlined to the hilt, has provided £40,655 additional income towards the £63,725 additional costs (64%).

That's solid, known, contracted income against costs, which mostly, don't even kick in for another seven months.

That still leaves a maximum shortfall of £23,076pa (£1,923pm) or 36%, to find by January 2024.

Hence the new property, which I had an offer accepted on in February 2023 and, which I had robustly stress-tested at 7% and, which will produce MORE income than is needed, to cover the increase in cost on the main portfolio, also providing some residual profit.

### In Summary

I am confident that, not only will all cost increases be met on a realistic basis, but I make more money in the meantime, to invest and grow the business further, which will also generate capital growth for the future.

### Key Points:

- Understand and forecast these costs well BEFORE they happen. And, the profit of course, so you know what and when you can spend and invest.
- Maximise your existing business first if it's solid. Mine has managed to cover 64% of cost hikes, months before they kick in.
- Look at other strategies to fill the gap and keep earning what you want. Be careful on RISK – this is not a time to try out an unproven idea. My strategy of choice is to expand out of it. For someone else, it might be to close the business down early.
- Give yourself enough time to create what you need by acting early – don't wait until there's a problem.
- Remember to factor in your tax liabilities, well before they are due. Being on the front foot means positive cashflow and less stress.

I hope this 'keeping it real' article has been helpful in highlighting how I reacted to the changing economy. I would really welcome people sharing what they've done, in their own businesses, to adapt and changing threats into opportunities.

*Disclaimer: this article contains my own opinions and numbers and does not constitute advice in any form.*

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## IT IS SO IMPORTANT TO FORECAST AHEAD WHILE YOU HAVE TIME TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT




ADVERTORIAL

# UNDERINSURANCE

## THE £200 SECRET THAT COULD SAVE YOU TENS OF THOUSANDS

Working as an insurance broker, making ***advised sales***, I constantly struggle with clients wanting to insure their properties as cheaply as possible, which limits the cover provided and diminishes the ***advice*** given.

"Fine," I say, "but what about alongside that, I give you a 'belt and braces' policy; one that can potentially save you tens of thousands of pounds, in the event of x, y or z, for you to compare the difference?"

"Sure, I'd be really interested to see the difference," is the usual response.

So, here is an example of the difference; two quotes for the same property, you tell me which one you'd go for?

This is a 2-bed end terrace, with picturesque views over Halifax's beautiful *Happy Valleys*. Before we get to the numbers, I am going to address some of the pain points many brokers like me face, when trying to make an ***advised*** sale.

### Advised Sale

What does this mean? In a nutshell, it's my job to ***advise*** on what is *needed* for a landlord's building insurance. Many of the larger insurers follow a script, making it clear that they are NOT providing advice, they are merely catering to wants and not needs, so pick brokers carefully.

### Rebuild Costs vs Purchase Price (Ten Years Ago!)

Many properties are insured against a 'rebuild value'. In essence, this is where an insurance policy will cover the total cost of rebuilding a property, in the event of a structural disaster, such as it burning down in a fire, or an equally destructive event.

This is where a landlord or property owner might say, "well, I bought it for £85,000, ten years ago, I don't have to buy the land again, so I think £85k should cover it!"

Jonathan Bentley

I say this with experience and love, "know your assets and know their value." Because if you don't, then you will be woefully ***underinsured***. We're currently seeing a 'perfect storm' for underinsurance due to a mix of inflation, fluctuating exchange rates, global political instability and increases in labour and materials costs, combined to push up the sums insured on properties. If you take just one action from this article, get an independent expert to give you an appraisal, because I'll tell you now, it's highly unlikely it will cost the same to rebuild a property today, as it did ten years ago!

Every broker should present clients with a statement of facts to be insured, including rebuilding costs and they will ask them to confirm the details provided are accurate, to the best of their knowledge, delegating final sign-off to them (regardless of their expertise). If the worst should happen, they'll need to have deep pockets or a great finance broker to get their property back up and running, or they can ensure it is included in their policy.

**EVERY BROKER SHOULD PRESENT CLIENTS WITH A STATEMENT OF FACTS TO BE INSURED, INCLUDING REBUILDING COSTS**

### What Is Belt and Braces?

A broker can ***advise*** clients on what levels of cover to take out and some of them may seem to be surplus to requirements, but what is often overlooked is business interruption. With the rising costs already mentioned, standard indemnity periods may not be long enough to cover the extended delays in reinstatement. In some cases, 36- or even 48-month indemnity periods, would be more appropriate versus the standard 12 months.

Many policies no longer offer cover for subsidence or accidental damage as standard, they are treated as 'optional extras'! How much money have you got in the bank? I know where my money would be invested – in the right policy 'optional extras' (belt and braces).

While we are talking about 'optional extras', let's talk about some that will help reduce the stress of being a landlord. As a broker, I always ask how easy a life they want and what they have planned if something awful happened to their property? Whether it's a tricky tenant or a property disaster, would they want to put their lives on hold to deal with the fallout? What about rent protection? We've all probably heard about letting agents offering to guarantee rent until our grandchildren have grey hair, but working at a brokerage and taking a quick peek behind the curtain, I can tell you that's not always as glittery as it sounds. For a relatively small fee, rental income can be guaranteed in 12-month cycles.

### Back to Happy Valley

About that *happy valley* quote – although I didn't provide the statement of facts associated with it, I can tell you that the difference between 'bare minimum' and 'belt and braces' policies is approximately £200 and it's tax deductible. For building cover with a day-one uplift of 20%, including subsidence and accidental damage, the additional cost to the client was £121.55, including all fees.

For a free quote on any business or property insurance, please contact the team today and quoting BLUE BRICKS.

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# KEY ADVICE FOR ANY ENTREPRENEUR LOOKING TO SUCCEED IN BUSINESS AND PROPERTY

JAMES SINCLAIR

I have always had the mindset that business comes first and property comes second. Although, I'm aware that these days, it is taught the other way round and many people say that you can start a business that invests in, or sources property.

While this can work and many people have been successful investing in property, without any experience in business, I think that it's much harder and takes more time. If you have a successful, profitable company to back you up, then you can do 'property on steroids', using your business to fund property purchases, or using investment properties as collateral for lending, allowing you to borrow money to buy a new business or fund your existing one.

I started investing in property at a young age. I was able to do this by already having a successful children's entertainment business that I ran. I started it straight out of school and had my first employee by the age of 17. However, despite loving what I did and living my passion, I was only exchanging time for money. I *was* my business and if I became sick, then it was game over. Investing In property gave me a second source of income, which could sustain me if the worst happened, also acting as a pension pot on which I can retire.

Growing my first business, investing in property and then using this property as collateral, has allowed me to grow a £30 million business, which includes leisure, childcare, outdoor attractions, commercial property, arts and crafts, manufacturing as well as one of the UK's oldest ice cream manufacturers: the *Rossi Ice Cream Company*.

In this article, I'm excited to share valuable insights for achieving success in both property investment and entrepreneurship. Additionally, I'll delve into why I firmly believe that commercial property presents the most lucrative strategy for property investors. »

## An Entertaining Start

When I was a kid, my greatest joy came from making people laugh. Being on stage and entertaining others was my true calling. That's what inspired me to kick-start my own business as a children's entertainer, captivating audiences with comedy and magic tricks. But diving into the business world at such a tender age was no piece of cake. I had a bunch of people around me, let's call them 'mood hoovers', who constantly tried to rain on my parade. They believed that building a business was something you tackled in your forties, after you'd racked up enough life experience.

However, I didn't let their negativity hold me back. I rolled up my sleeves pushed forward and, against all odds, built a profitable business. It was a game-changer because it gave me the means to start investing in buy-to-let properties. Yet, deep down, I still felt the sting of running a 'time for money' business. It was a constant struggle. The only way to boost my earnings was to work myself to the bone. Believe me, it doesn't take long for that kind of grind to wear you down and make scaling your business seem like a distant dream.

That's when a lightbulb went off in my head—I needed to shake things up. I started opening my own venues, creating a space where people would come to me instead of me constantly hustling to find customers. It was a progressive move that allowed me to take my business to new heights and eventually step back from the day-to-day grind. You see, if you find yourself caught in the trap of trading time for money, it's crucial to break free from that cycle. Look for ways to systemise your business, so it doesn't rely solely on your efforts. Discover how you can bring added value to your customers' lives, so they're not just shopping based on price alone. That's the secret sauce to running a truly successful business—one that doesn't merely create a job for yourself, where you're overworked and underpaid.

## My First Love – Commercial property

When I was in my early twenties, I asked the wealthiest person I knew, what he thought about property. He told me that he loved it, but he didn't own a single flat, apartment or house. He used to, but he sold them all, so that he could start buying commercial units instead.

A commercial property is a building that's used for business purposes. This could be a shop, an office, a warehouse, or any other type of building you can think of, that is used as a base for a company, rather than a residential home that someone lives in.

In my opinion, I'd rather own a £1,000,000 commercial unit, than £1,000,000 worth of residential houses. The yields are greater, the cash flow is higher and commercial property is much more tax efficient. These days, when I buy a business, I also try to buy the property that the business operates from. When you're both the landlord and the tenant, you can control rents, you have no dilapidations and the banks love you!

My love for commercial property started when I was 26. I purchased a small premises and divided it into five smaller units, almost like a house of multiple occupation, but for commercial tenants. This increased the yield substantially and that same property now brings me £42,000 per annum in rent.

### The Figures:

| | |
|---|---|
| Purchase price: | £150,000 |
| Rent when purchased: | £30,000 |
| Current Value: | £480,000 |

When you're both the landlord and the tenant, you can control rents

## You're Not Just a 'Business Owner'

Although my businesses span various industries, from ice cream manufacturing to day nurseries, my role in each one remains consistent: marketing. One common mistake I observe among business owners, is relegating marketing to the back burner. Allow me to emphasise this point: every business owner is a marketer of their business.

Your primary focus should always be on generating income. What actions can you take to bring money into your business? In the realm of property, this entails dedicating your efforts to tasks that help you raise private finance or discover new deals. Any tasks that do not contribute to these objectives, should be outsourced or delegated to competent employees.

As your team expands, you will undoubtedly come across exceptional managers. However, I have yet to encounter a remarkable leader, who also excels at management. Typically, managers excel at maintaining operations and ensuring smooth sailing, but they may not possess the same drive or effectiveness when it comes to generating income. As a business owner, it is crucial that you remain at the forefront of innovation and constantly explore new avenues for revenue generation, while entrusting the day-to-day operations to capable individuals.


James Sinclair

Cashflow is king, especially for property investors who find themselves in a constant battle with interest rates. Failing to establish a strong income stream, while interest rates rise, will put you in a horrible position.

By prioritising marketing and income generation, business owners can ensure sustained growth and financial stability, in the face of evolving market conditions.

## The Key to Successful Marketing

But what exactly do I mean when I say that every business owner should embrace the role of a marketer? Picture it as a game of push and pull. Average businesses are constantly pushing, tirelessly seeking out opportunities, whether it's finding new clients or securing property deals. On the other hand, great businesses have mastered the art of pulling opportunities toward them. Here's a litmus test to determine if you're in the push game or the pull game: Is your phone ringing with promising opportunities and property deals, or are you still knocking on doors in search of them?

To excel in the pull game, you must elevate your profile. Seek out podcast interviews, speak at events and strive to be featured in publications like Blue Bricks Magazine. When someone contemplates investing in property or selling their house, you want them to think of you first. That's how you build a remarkable business.

When it comes to marketing, my advice is simple: identify the pain points of your target market and craft a message with a compelling headline, that clearly demonstrates how you can alleviate that pain. Determine the media channels your target market engages with, whether it's *LinkedIn* or online articles and ensure your message is visible there.

Allow me to illustrate this with an example from my own business, *Rossi Ice Cream*:

**Target:** Our target audience consists of customers who purchase wholesale ice cream for restaurants.

**Pain:** These customers have likely experienced disappointment with suppliers in the past. To address this pain, they need a reliable business that offers regular deliveries, exceptional products at competitive prices and possesses the necessary accreditations.

**Message:** We provide seven-days-a-week delivery, offer competitive prices and boast an impressive range of ice cream, with a well-known and beloved brand.

**Media:** Our customers are likely to be active on *LinkedIn*, so we engage with them through that platform. We also use direct mail to reach out to specific directors or individuals we want to connect with. Additionally, we attend and network at industry exhibitions, where restaurant owners and leisure attractions seek new suppliers.

You may not immediately see the relevance of this example to the property industry but consider a different perspective. Envision your customer as an investor who could finance one of your deals, or a motivated homeowner in need of a quick sale.

By identifying the pain points experienced by these individuals and understanding where they can be reached, you can deliver the right message and convert them into clients. Remember, your headline holds immense power, so ensure that the title of your letter or the opening line of your content, delivers a strong and compelling message, that immediately addresses their pain, whether it's financial difficulties for motivated homeowners or the depreciation of money in the bank, for private investors.

## Advice for Entrepreneurship – How to Build a Successful Business

There are several rules of thumb that I follow when searching for businesses to buy, or when setting up new ventures. By following these principles, you increase your chances of success and avoid common pitfalls, that many business owners encounter.

- First and foremost – It is crucial to love what you do. If you lack passion for your work, burnout is inevitable and you won't be able to give it your all.
- Secondly – Always keep margin in mind. Avoid becoming a business that competes solely on size. Unless your turnover exceeds £50 million, focus on maintaining healthy profit margins. Only large companies like *Lidl* or *Aldi* can effectively compete on price.

If you're starting a new business, ensure there is a hungry audience ready to buy from you immediately. Companies that address a specific pain point, often attract an existing customer base. You want people actively seeking your offerings rather than you having to chase them.

Another important rule is the 'Rule of Love, Want, Need' (LWN). If customers genuinely love, want and need what you offer, you have the foundation for a successful business.

I believe in starting businesses that adhere to the 'Rule of Four'. This » means creating a business where customers engage with you at least four times in quick succession. This psychological principle is based on the idea that humans develop habits after repeated actions. Find a business that fosters habits and relationships. It's similar to moving a child to a different school; it's challenging because they have already formed friendships and connections. You want your customers to feel that same attachment and resistance to switching over to your competitors.

Look for or establish businesses where you don't start from zero each month. If you constantly have to acquire new customers, you'll soon exhaust yourself, with little time left to scale. Aim for business models that have recurring revenue or loyal customer bases.

**Remember, 'E + M = S'. Entrepreneurship** combined with effective **management** leads to success. It's nearly impossible to simultaneously build and manage a business. A competent management team can handle day-to-day operations, but they might not be as skilled as you in generating revenue. Therefore, it's essential to outsource general business operations so you can concentrate on growth.

**WHEN IT COMES TO MARKETING, MY ADVICE IS SIMPLE: IDENTIFY THE PAIN POINTS OF YOUR TARGET MARKET AND CRAFT A MESSAGE WITH A COMPELLING HEADLINE**

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, allocate 80% of your time to money-making tasks and dedicate the remaining 20% to administrative and daily management duties. Consistently following this approach will allow you to scale your business at a speed of knots.

### All the Information You Need to Grow Your Property Business

In addition to buying businesses and investing in property, I dedicate a significant amount of time to my podcast and *YouTube* channel. By subscribing to my *YouTube* channel, you'll gain exclusive access to the behind-the-scenes happenings of my businesses, including both the successes and the challenges. On the *James Sinclair Business Broadcast* podcast, I conduct insightful interviews with industry experts, covering a wide range of topics, from business to investment.

I take great pride in both platforms, ensuring that every video and podcast episode is filled with valuable content. If you have found this article helpful and are eager to expand your property business, I highly recommend checking out my podcast and YouTube channel for further insights and guidance.

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# FROM PLAYERS TO MASTERS

SAVOYS PROPERTIES

## SAVOY'S GUIDE TO WINNING THE PROPERTY GAME

I still remember when *In the Club*, by 50 Cent, was released. It was an album that inspired me to push towards my dreams. It showed me that anything was possible. I've always been a fan of hip-hop music, but what stood out to me about this album was the artist. 50 Cent had been shot nine times, dropped by his record label and grinded for four years, before he finally found success. This album showed me that anything is possible if you work hard enough.

I started investing in property in 2001 and my drive and dedication have brought me to where I am today: a director *in Savoys Group*, with my business partner, Sanjay. *Savoys Group* is a property development company with staff, structure and over 600 managed tenants, many of which are from our own properties. We're also proud to be the official sponsors of Watford football club.

In this article, I want to share our story, the highs and lows and our advice for success in business and property investment.

### Escaping the Rat Race

My career had always focused on IT, something that I had studied in university. My job was okay and the pay was good, but I still felt like something was missing from life. This feeling was amplified in 2001 when the economy was in turmoil. We had just experienced 9/11 and the dot-com bubble had burst, causing many online-based businesses to plummet in value. When I started my job in 2000, the company I worked for had 300 staff. Within the space of a year, that number dropped to 150. The illusion of a 9-5 job being a safe bet shattered for me and I realised that with the economy being the way it was, my job wasn't secure.

Seeing how volatile the economy was, Sanjay's dad advised us to start investing in assets to secure our money. Property seemed like a safe investment, so I started stockpiling my cash into vanilla buy-to-lets. This was around the time that buy-to-let mortgages had come into fruition, making investment properties more accessible with a 10-15% deposit.

It was nothing fancy, but after a few years, the rental income exceeded what I was earning from my job, which was important, considering I was made redundant in 2003.

It took me four months to find another job. At this point, although we were investing in property, I didn't feel like I had found a strategy that suited me yet. Buy-to-lets are great, but the growth is slow and the real benefits are not felt for years.

Losing my job inspired me to put more time into growing my property portfolio. Sanjay and I started exploring ways to add value to properties, rather than just purchasing and refinancing. We started small, doing loft conversions » and extensions, slowly built up to our first house in multiple occupation (HMO) unit in 2010. This eventually led us to our first new-build development in 2012 and our favourite strategy, our first commercial conversion in 2013.

## Finding a Strategy that Suits You

Many people get overwhelmed when they first invest in property. There are almost unlimited options available and there's a training course for every single one of them.

We had a clear idea of the business we wanted to build. To scale, we needed a consistent monthly income. Buy-to-lets worked for this, but the income was too small, which is why we focused HMOs instead. We combined our HMO projects with commercial conversions, allowing us to have a growing monthly income, alongside larger profits from other development projects.

It's also important to analyse your strengths and weaknesses. We soon realised that we didn't enjoy new-build developments, because they involve more risk and are heavily reliant on the property cycle. Our strategy works for us, but we recommend finding one that works for you.

We also keep most of our properties rather than sell them. Property values double (on average) every ten years and rental values double every twenty years. To us, it feels like we're losing money if we sell assets now, rather than holding onto them.

## Know the Rules Before Playing the Game

To me, everything in life is a game. There are rules to every game and if you understand the rules better than anyone else, you'll know how to play the game effectively and win.

For example, I see the planning process as a game. There are rules that you must play by, such as not building in an area of outstanding natural beauty. But, if you know the rules as well as the planning officers, you can work your way around them and get your desired result.

This philosophy is what won us our first award: 'Property Deal of The Year', at The Property Investor Awards, for the conversion of an office into ten apartments.

Many investors had viewed this property and written it off as a bad deal. The consensus was that you could only get five apartments in there and at best, you'd break even. But because we knew the rules, we spotted something that most people had missed. Many investors didn't realise that, with 'prior approval', you could convert the whole aspect of a building without full planning permission. Our competitors didn't realise this, so they wrote off the loft and the undercroft, which gave space for five more apartments, resulting in a £2.5 million gross development value (GDV).

## The Bank Job

Another deal that won us 'Property Developer of The Year', was a bank that we converted into apartments. We encountered a similar situation to the office mentioned above. Many people saw the downstairs retail space and wouldn't touch it because the property was in a conservation area and, at the time, you couldn't develop properties in conservation areas under prior approval.

However, because we study the rules, we knew that a new rule was coming into place in 2021 that would allow the development of properties in conservation areas under 'prior approval'. We knew that by the time the deal got into planning, this rule would be in play.

We converted the bank into three flats and one retail unit, generating great returns for us. The figures are as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Purchase price: | £305,000 |
| Purchasing costs: | £11,327 |
| Build costs: | £105,000 |
| Gross development value: | £725,00 |

Where can you spend the least amount, for maximum uplift? For most of the HMOs we have done, we have pulled all our money out. The same applies to commercial-to-residential conversions. Always use the right formula.

## Looking at All Angles

To succeed in property, you need to be creative. It's about spotting opportunities that aren't obvious. But

We converted the bank into three flats and one retail unit, generating great returns for us most importantly, the only way you'll ever see success in property is by becoming a problem solver. Ultimately, that's all that we are and it's how we've succeeded. We find what problems people are having with their homes and we fix them.

We adopted this mindset when we first started using the HMO strategy. In Watford, there was a huge demand for ensuite HMO rooms for working professionals. The problem was, no developers in the area were supplying this solution at the time. We managed to fill our rooms and demand a higher rental income because we addressed this problem. It's one of the reasons we became so popular among local estate agents. Sometimes, it's not about doing what everyone else is doing or what seems obvious; pave your own way!

Applying this advice to bigger sites is how we won 'Property Deal of the Year' in 2021. There was a commercial premises for sale next to ten garages, spanning 57sqm, all owned by the same vendor. Many people were trying to negotiate the asking price down, so that they could convert the premises into apartments, which obviously wasn't of interest to the vendor.

We agreed to pay the asking price for the commercial property if the vendor gave us the garages for free. It didn't take much negotiation since he had valued them at £10,000 in his head.

Using our experience, we submitted planning for the garages to become a three-bed muse house. Planning was accepted and the build cost us £40,000, with a GDV of £400,000!

Reducing the purchase price isn't the only way you can make more money from your deals. Always think outside the box, know the rules and look for opportunities to add value.

**WE FIND THAT TOO MANY PEOPLE FOLLOW THE CROWD BECAUSE IT'S SAFER. BUT IF YOU WANT TO STAND OUT, YOU HAVE TO GO THE OTHER WAY. YOU HAVE TO BE AN INDIVIDUAL**

## Advice for Business and Marketing

Although Sanjay and I have been investing for over 20 years, we didn't brand ourselves as *Savoys* until three years ago. It wasn't until we started winning awards that we felt the need to show our faces. Before then, everything we did wasn't publicised.

As of today, we have 23,300 followers on *Instagram* alone. We've been featured in major publications and are a recognised name in the industry.

Having such a powerful brand has helped us source deals, negotiate better purchase prices and raise private finance. If you're looking to scale your property business, then more visibility is always a good thing.

An example of one of Savoys apartments

Our advice for success in business, is to go against the grain. Going back to my love for hip-hop, every successful artist has gone against the norm, like Eminem, for instance.

We find that too many people follow the crowd because it's safer. But if you want to stand out, you have to go the other way. You have to be an individual. For example, look at the events we run every quarter. While most people would organise a stuffy meetup with speakers, we rent high-end venues, pay for entertainment and pick up the tab at the end of the evening. There's music, exotic dancers and pyros. It's more like a party than a networking event.

You might not want to do something on this scale, but our events allowed us to stand out from the crowd and have helped us grow our profile even further. No matter what you do, just do it differently from everyone else.

We also decided to sponsor Watford football club. Although this is good for business and branding, we also wanted to show our children that anything is possible. You don't see many Asians in football and being from an Indian background, we wanted to show our kids that the sky is the limit.

Finally, follow your passion and don't get emotional when investing in deals. Everything should be based on figures and if the deal doesn't work, it doesn't work, no matter how much you want it. We view mistakes as education, so we don't beat ourselves up when we make them. Just learn from the things that go wrong and never make the same mistake twice.

## Helping You Grow Your Property Business

Speaking of going against the grain, we wanted to shake up property education. Instead of offering expensive three-day training, we have put together a cost-effective online training program to help you get started in HMOs and commercial conversions. If you'd like to discover more about our training, visit our website or get in touch with the team directly using the link below.

**linktr.ee/savoysproperties**

# UNLOCKING EFFICIENCY AND GROWTH

## THE RISE OF FILIPINO VIRTUAL ASSISTANTS IN UK PROPERTY INVESTING

Over the past decade, there has been a significant uptick in UK Property investors leveraging the services of Filipino Virtual Assistants (VAs). As someone who began utilising Filipino VAs eight years ago, for various tasks such as finding deals, sourcing tenants and organising viewings, I can attest to the fact this was an unconventional practice within the property investing community at that time. Consequently, my peers were full of curiosity and questions which I happily answered, leading to many requests for me to personally source great Filipino VAs, resulting in the creation of my Filipino VA agency. In this article, I will talk through the recurring questions and most common misconceptions that keep surfacing whenever Property Investors are considering hiring their first Filipino VA.

The idea of affordable outsourcing has been around for quite some time, as evidenced in *The 4-Hour Work Week* (2007) book by Tim Ferris. Nowadays, many property investors are hiring Filipino VAs, recognising it as a best practice standard, to scale in a fast, yet affordable way, while freeing up their own time. This is especially valuable for those who are struggling with balancing their jobs or personal lives with managing multiple property deals or businesses.

### What Can a VA Actually Do?

There can be a lot of confusion around this. Some people hold a misconception that a VA's role is limited to providing general administrative or secretarial support, thereby it doesn't seem an obvious best-fit solution for a property investor.

However, I believe the ideal VA is simply a smart person and the question of what they can do, is like asking what a smart person is capable of.

So... it depends.

It depends on their specific skillsets, work experience, natural strengths and passions, how much they enjoy their work and how resourceful they are as individuals.

The correct combination of the above qualities could result in someone who is an invaluable asset to your property investing business, but only when they receive excellent guidance, support and communication from you.

### Working with a Filipino VA: Weighing the Pros and Cons

Collaborating with a VA from the Philippines can be a wonderful experience. Filipinos are known for being diligent, courteous, empathetic and eager to learn. Many of them have exceptional written and spoken English, often with a neutral American accent, honed from experience of working in call centres, which cater to US customers and a work background which has equipped them with excellent customer service skills.

The most significant advantage of hiring a Filipino VA, is that they can be contracted for as low as £3 per hour (circa £520 per month, for full-time work) providing an attractive salary for them and an affordable option for UK property investors and small business owners.

In contrast, UK-based VA rates can be more than ten times more expensive, potentially making them cost prohibitive for new property investors. Examine this from another perspective... you could hire a team of ten Filipino Vas, for the cost of one UK VA.

However, working with Filipinos may also present some challenges. For instance, due to cultural sensitivities, they may struggle to say, 'no,' clearly, which could lead to a sudden and unexplained disappearance, if they are uncomfortable with certain aspects of the work. Bear in mind that the positive aspect of this cultural nuance, is that they often come across as incredibly humble, polite and respectful.

Filipino English proficiency will vary but can be unbelievably good, depending on their educational background and prior work experience. It's important to bear in mind they may have different cultural references and practices that could cause confusion when interacting with customers. One example is their inclination towards using US English, where they may cheerfully wish customers an "awesome" day, which might appear a bit odd in the UK business culture. With written English, there can be small grammatical errors.

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Implementing grammar checks as part of your processes and proofreading their work before sending it out, will help to ensure that your business is protected from such errors.

Working closely together on creating approved templates, to use in response to common queries, will enable your VA to respond in an appropriate communication style, remaining consistent and accurate with delivering the right information and thereby equip your VA with everything they need to deal with various stakeholders.

Training Filipino VAs is crucial and it may take a little time before they can work independently. However, once they are trained it's not unusual for a Filipino VA to stay with the business long term, especially if there's excellent communication in place, so they feel a valued member of the team. On the other hand, UK-based VAs specialising in property investment support, may be able to hit the ground running much faster, but at a much higher cost. Both flavours of VAs could potentially be working with multiple clients, although we've mostly placed dedicated Filipino VAs into small property investing businesses, with that business being their only or main client. Ultimately, finding the right VA who can deliver the results your business needs is crucial, regardless of their location.

## Determining Your VA Workload: Do You Have Enough Tasks?

When property investors find themselves constantly overwhelmed, feeling like there aren't enough hours in a day, the answer to whether they have enough work for a VA is most likely a resounding YES! We have witnessed clients hiring up to ten VAs, to support businesses that they previously managed single-handedly!

Property investors and small business owners often tend to take on more than they can handle, despite knowing deep down, that it's unsustainable in the long run. This imbalance can have devastating effects on personal lives and burnout can impact even the most brilliant.

It's perfectly acceptable to start with a VA on a small scale, such as a part-time basis. Most property investors would struggle to delegate a full eight hours of work to a VA on day one, especially if it's their first time working together. A more manageable approach would involve initially assigning the VA two hours of work per day, gradually increasing to four hours and then to eight hours as you establish a rhythm of working together. Once you have achieved these milestones and if you

Imogen Cook

still find yourself overwhelmed, it's time to reassess and review what tasks are now consuming your day, then think about how your next VA could support you.

## Managing the Different Time Zones

There is good news, as UK mornings align with the Filipino afternoons and early evenings. This means you can collaborate with your VA during these time windows, while still operating within UK business hours. This approach also allows your VA to avoid working the graveyard shift which is often required from them when supporting US businesses.

Working across time zones can often be surprisingly straightforward. Establishing a regular meeting time with your VA respecting both time zones, will ensure excellent communication between you. Initially, you may want to schedule daily meetings for around thirty minutes, to provide guidance, feedback and address any questions. As the VA becomes more proficient and delivers tasks to a higher standard, you can gradually scale back the frequency of these meetings to once a week.

The Asian time zone can provide a significant advantage when working with a Filipino VA. They can potentially start their workday at 2am UK time (9am Philippines) allowing them to clear tasks and address queries before the UK business day begins. When you come online later, a substantial portion of the workload could have already been completed. Your role then becomes reviewing the progress, ensuring everything is in order and discussing action items for the next day.

By effectively managing time zones, you can leverage the availability of your Filipino VA, to streamline productivity and create a smooth workflow that benefits both parties.

## Common Mistakes Property Investors Make Working with Filipino VAs

### *Lack of Effective Communication*

A dynamic Filipino VA will show up for work on their first day full of excitement about their new role. If that initial spark is met with a new boss who doesn't take time to speak to them and get to know them, it will soon die, damaging their potential and motivation. Regular voice or video calls are crucial, especially during the initial period of working together, to build a strong working relationship. While property investors may understandably feel overwhelmed, the key is initially slowing down, to ultimately speed up.

### *Unclear Instructions for the VA*

It's unfair for a property investor to expect a Filipino VA to immediately grasp all the intricacies of their business, regardless of how intelligent or competent that VA might be. Investing the time to show the VA how they can progressively pick up tasks, starting with the low-risk ones and assessing the VA's understanding and output every step of the way, is essential for developing successful processes and scaling the business.

### *Hiring the Wrong VA*

Hiring isn't easy, it takes patience, heavy filtering and trial by error. Even if a VA appears to be a star performer during the interview, their true abilities may only be revealed once they start working with you. The wrong VA hire can increase stress levels, leaving you feeling uneasy about entrusting them with important tasks. The right VA will demonstrate trustworthiness, resourcefulness and quickly make your life easier. Valuing and rewarding good VAs, to the extent your business allows, is crucial. These are the VAs who can truly give you back your time freedom.

Imogen Cook is the Founder of The Freedom Geek. The Freedom Geek (established 2017) has helped hundreds of overwhelmed property investors get their time back and accelerate their business success, through delegating to smart Filipino VAs. The Freedom Geek is a fully remote company, run entirely by Virtual Assistants. Imogen has worked closely with her own Filipino VAs supporting her businesses for over eight years. She 'lives and breathes' the delegation lifestyle.

We're offering the readers of Blue Bricks Magazine a free give-away! Our Mini Essential Delegation Guide for Property Investors – click here for your FREE copy.

If you need help hiring a Filipino VA or would like more information, please book a call with us through
thefreedomgeek.com

**IT'S NOT UNUSUAL FOR A FILIPINO VA TO STAY WITH THE BUSINESS LONG TERM, ESPECIALLY IF THERE'S EXCELLENT COMMUNICATION IN PLACE**

# THE MEMETIC EDGE

## PROPEL YOUR PROPERTY BUSINESS FORWARD WITH DATA-DRIVEN MARKETING

In my early days, studying economics at university, I held a rather sceptical view of marketing. To me, it all seemed like 'snake oil'. However, life took an unexpected turn when the economy collapsed, rendering economics degrees somewhat redundant. And so, I found myself venturing into the field of marketing.

Fast forward to today and I can proudly say I built a 50 person growth marketing agency, Ladder.io, with offices in London, New York, and various other locations worldwide. I departed the business in 2020 when it was generating an annual turnover of over £3.5 million, and I am currently working on training teams to automate work with AI, as well as publishing my new book "Marketing Memetics: Reverse-Engineering Creativity To Drive Brand Performance".

Through this article, I aim to demonstrate how property investors, like yourself, can employ Marketing Memetics – a proven strategy that has helped me and my clients generate hundreds of thousands of pounds in revenue. Additionally, I will highlight how you can leverage it, to secure private finance and uncover off-market properties to invest in.

### Marketing is More Than Social Media

While platforms such as *Facebook* and *Instagram* have the potential for significant success, they have become oversaturated. The exception, however, is *TikTok*, particularly for visually captivating content, such as showcasing high-end holiday properties or refurbishments.

Now, you may be wondering, "How often should I post on social media?" If a marketing agency provides you with a specific number, chances are they lack true understanding. Breaking through the barrier and effectively reaching your ideal customers, requires quality over quantity. Consider this: Would you rather see average content three times a week, or exceptional content once a week?

Take, for instance, the scenario of targeting homeowners in need of quick sales. What would resonate with them? Perhaps they seek guidance on escaping a challenging financial situation without losing their homes. In this case, content discussing lease options could prove highly successful.

Mike built growth marketing agency Ladder.io

To gauge audience interest, I recommend posting frequently in the early stages and tracking the response. If videos showcasing refurbishments generate significant engagement, while before-and-after images fall short, then this will give you an idea of what content you should focus on.

### Using AI to Write Powerful Blog Posts

Content marketing presents an opportunity to reach a wide audience with a single post – a much more efficient approach than hosting numerous dinner meetings! Your content may take various forms, such as videos offering advice to landlords on avoiding vacancy periods, podcasts delving into property investment, or blogs addressing the topic of selling houses quickly.

My blogs accounted for 60% of all new business inquiries. Moreover, 90% of new customers mentioned that they had read our blog before reaching out to us. However, creating a blog that truly stands out requires time and effort. With the rise of *ChatGPT*, anyone can generate at least average content. To achieve success, you must aim for excellence.

Before crafting a blog post, it is crucial to analyse existing content in your field. Suppose your target customers consist of high-net-worth individuals seeking property investment opportunities. In that case, imagine yourself in their shoes and jot down the search terms they would likely use on Google. Queries such as "How do I invest in property," "Passive property investment," or "Where should I invest my cash".

Explore the blog posts that currently rank for these search terms. As a client-focused observer, evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. Armed with this knowledge, you will know precisely how to surpass existing content and offer a superior experience.

If writing is not your cup of tea, fear not – *ChatGPT* can be your saviour. However, be mindful not to fall into the trap of asking AI to compose the entire blog for you. AI programs, like *ChatGPT*, lack creativity. Instead, ask *ChatGPT* to interview you on a certain topic. Then, compile the resulting Q and A list and ask *ChatGPT* to generate a blog using this information. By combining your expertise and *ChatGPT's* editing abilities, you save significant time while creating a powerful piece of content.

### Marketing Memetics

Marketing Memetics represents an art form rooted in data-driven analysis. By leveraging data, you can meticulously examine what strategies yield positive results and what tasks are futile time wasters.

This process unfolds in three distinct phases:

- **Memetic analysis:** Thoroughly assess what successful individuals in your industry are doing. Identify patterns that contribute to their achievements. By replicating these patterns, commonly referred to as "memes," you can "growth hack" your engagement. Take a close look at the social media profiles of other property investors and determine what resonates with their audience. Identify commonalities across successful posts. Perhaps short-form content or videos emerge as the underlying patterns.

- **Meme jacking:** Each pattern or meme presents an opportunity to either imitate or innovate. For example, if you notice that content relating to eco-friendly designs garners significant traction, consider focusing your marketing efforts in that direction.
- **Testing:** Continuously test your content to determine its effectiveness. Employ tools like *Google Analytics* for blogs and web content, or *Meta Business Suite* for *Facebook* and *Instagram*. Eliminate ineffective strategies and double down on what yields positive outcomes.

### "If It's Not Dope"

During a recent Kanye West documentary, one statement struck a chord with me: "I only do it if it's dope, and if it's not dope, I don't do it." (Or something to that effect).

## Mike Taylor

The key takeaway here is that all your content should resonate with your target audience. It should captivate them to the extent that they eagerly share it with like-minded individuals. Never underestimate the power of word-of-mouth marketing.

To create exceptional content, focus on answering burning questions or solving problems. Content offering glimpses behind the scenes or discussing unconventional secrets that most businesses shy away from, can work exceptionally well. Ensure that your content is different or, at the very least, better than what others are offering.

### Final Advice: Consider Hiring Professionals

If you find yourself unsure about marketing strategies or lack the time to run an effective campaign and analyse the data, hiring a professional is a good choice. Alternatively, if you're on a budget, consider bringing on a marketing graduate on a part-time basis. Allocate them a specific objective, such as managing blogs or *TikTok* campaigns. Regularly meet with them to analyse what strategies yield positive results. This approach allows you to leverage their expertise without sacrificing your precious time.

### Marketing Memetics: Unlocking Your Potential

If you're eager to dive deeper into Marketing Memetics or gain insider knowledge on growing a seven-figure marketing agency, I encourage you to purchase my book using the link below. It serves as a comprehensive guide to growth hacking your business through data-driven marketing.

I hope that this article has provided you with valuable insights, and I wish you the best of luck on your marketing journey.

**2michaeltaylor**
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# HOW TO CREATE A FUNCTIONAL, WELL-DESIGNED SERVICED ACCOMMODATION WEBSITE THAT ATTRACTS GUESTS AND REDUCES AIRBNB FEES

## WE ARE PROPERTY MARKETING

For many holiday let investors, fees from booking websites such as Airbnb are their biggest overheads. It's a catch-22 situation because these investors rely on platforms like Airbnb and booking.com to generate 90% of their business.

Consequently, you find yourself in a loop where you're essentially paying a significant referral fee to these websites for every booking you receive. This is not only an expensive option but also severely impacts your profit margins.

However, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. We have a solution that can help you eliminate one of your most expensive overheads while attracting more bookings than ever before. In this article, we will share clever marketing tricks that you can use to attract guests directly, without paying a single penny to a booking website.

### How Much Are Airbnb Fees?

Let's start by exploring the extent of Airbnb fees. Typically, Airbnb charges a 3% host service fee on your earnings. While this may seem like a nominal amount, the real sticking point is the 14% fee charged to the guest. Although this 14% fee doesn't directly come out of your pocket, it limits the price you can charge per night for your property. If you set your rates too high and add the 14% fee on top, you risk pricing yourself out of the market and discouraging potential guests from booking with you.

Booking.com, another popular platform, imposes a 15% commission on your bookings. When you consider this fee over the course of a year, it amounts to a substantial sum. For example, if your holiday let brings in a total of £30,000 annually, you would lose £4,500 in booking fees. This is almost equivalent to two months' worth of bookings!

### How to Minimise Airbnb Fees?

Now, let's discuss how holiday let investors can minimise Airbnb fees. The most effective way to do so is by encouraging direct bookings. This means guests booking directly with you instead of going through third-party websites like Airbnb. One quick and effective method is to leverage your existing resources, such as past guests. Reach out to them and offer a reduced cost if they book directly with you for future stays.

For instance, you could provide them with a 10% discount, which is still 5% more for you compared to using Booking.com. Additionally, print leaflets, flyers, or brochures and leave them in your properties, featuring the same special offer. This way, when guests are staying in your property, they'll be aware of the direct booking offer in case they decide to book again in the future.

If you're serious about scaling your holiday let business, the best solution is to have a dedicated website for direct bookings. This website allows visitors to view your properties and book available nights that suit them. By attracting guests directly from the internet, you can bypass the need for third-party bookings, reducing your fees significantly. However, to make this strategy successful, you need to drive traffic to your website.

The most effective methods are Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) and Pay Per Click (PPC) advertising. SEO helps your website appear in search engine results by optimising it with relevant keywords. For example, if someone searches for "Places to stay in Cornwall," effective SEO can help your website rank alongside Airbnb and Booking.com.

Make sure your website includes keywords related to your location, such »

SEO helps your website appear in search engine results by optimising it with relevant keywords as "places to stay in [location]" or "things to do in [location]." Additionally, register your website on Google My Business with an address that corresponds to your investment property's location. This helps your website show up in local searches and improves your ranking on Google.

PPC Google advertising allows you to pay for a prominent position on Google's search results page. By advertising your business under specific search terms, you can attract visitors directly to your website. This strategy is especially effective for targeting specific locations, so if you have multiple properties across different areas, you can tailor your PPC ads accordingly.

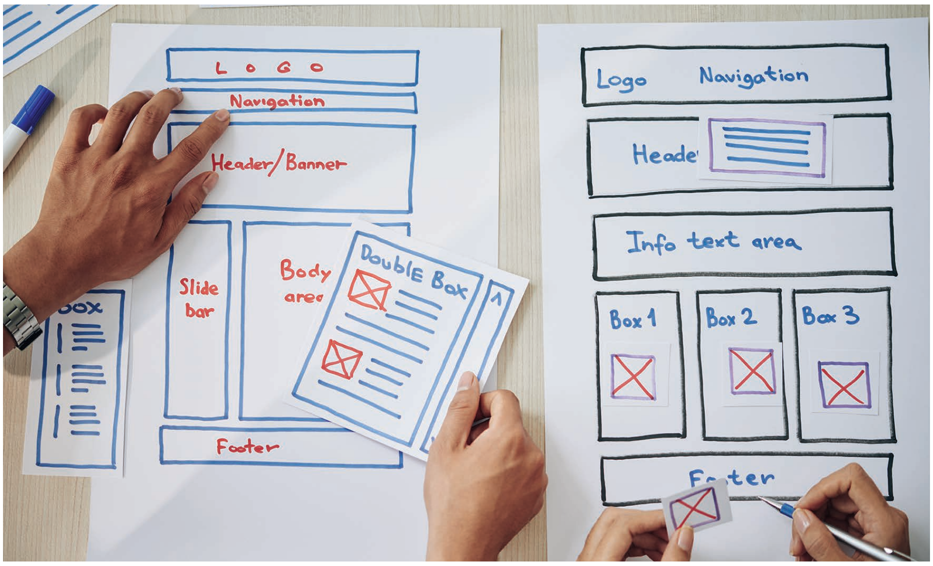
## How to Attract Direct Bookings for Your Airbnb?

Your properties are your product, and your guests are your customers. So, before you start marketing your properties to reduce Airbnb fees, you need to know who your target customer is. For example, it could be a middle-aged couple looking for a weekend break, it could be younger people looking for a party destination, or it could be contractors looking for a place to stay for a few months. The things that these people want to see will vary depending on the demographic you're searching for. Kit your properties out to fit this demographic. Holiday goers will want something high-end, whereas contractors will prioritise comfort.

Now, build a direct booking website that showcases your properties and gives people the option to book directly. This will cost upwards of £1,500, which you'll easily make back after a few direct bookings. Make sure the text on your website speaks in the interest of your target customers, either discussing things to do in the area or the direct transport links that take people to nearby hotspots.

You need to decide your marketing budget and the strategy you want to use to get direct bookings. The cheapest option is to send text and emails to previous guests, directing them to your new website with the offer of a reduced fee. PPC adverts, like Facebook or Google, are your next option. You'll want to put a minimum of £500 a month into advertising, however, this should bring you a stream of leads, filling your properties and making you a strong return on investment (ROI) without the need for paying 15% to third-party websites.

Write blogs on your website that talk about things to do in the local area. Get popular tourist attractions, walking groups or local businesses to link to your web page. Set up affiliation programmes with local businesses where you promote them to your guest and they promote you to their customers. You can offer a fee for this, or it can just be a mutual partnership to help people flourish. Speak with local walking groups and tour guides and offer them an incentive for referring people to you. You need to make people aware that your property exists and that people can book it as a place to stay in your area. Also, make sure you outline why this option is better than a hotel!




Ensure that your website has an appealing design that aligns with your brand and target audience

## How to set up a serviced accommodation website?

Setting up a professional and engaging serviced accommodation website is crucial to creating a positive impression and attracting potential guests. Your website should reflect the professionalism of your business and convey the unique features and advantages of your properties. The main things to include are as follows:

- **Design and Appearance:** Ensure that your website has an appealing design that aligns with your brand and target audience. Use high-quality images of your properties and consider incorporating virtual tours or videos to provide an immersive experience for visitors.

- **Content and Information:** Create informative and engaging content that highlights the features and amenities of your properties. Showcase the local area, including nearby attractions, restaurants and transportation options. Position yourself as an area expert to instil confidence in potential guests.

- **User-Friendly Booking Process:** Make it easy for visitors to book directly on your website. Implement a secure and straightforward booking system that allows guests to select their desired dates, view pricing options and make payments efficiently. Utilise a reliable payment processor like Stripe to handle transactions seamlessly.

- **Search Engine Optimisation (SEO):** Optimise your website with relevant keywords such as "serviced accommodation" and "holiday home." This will improve your website's visibility in search engine results, driving organic traffic and increasing the chances of direct bookings.

- **Professional Assistance:** If you lack the technical expertise or time to create a website from scratch, consider seeking professional help. Engaging the services of an experienced agency specialising in creating serviced accommodation websites can save you time and ensure a high-quality, functional website that generates positive results.

By following these steps and focusing on creating a professional, user-friendly website, you can establish a strong online presence, attract direct bookings and reduce your reliance on third-party platforms like Airbnb.

## Minimise Your Airbnb Fees Today

Building a direct-booking website will save you thousands of pounds in fees. Within a matter of months, your investment will be paid back and you'll have more money to invest in your next deal.

Let us help you scale your holiday let portfolio today. Book a free strategy session by clicking the button below. Here, we will help you to create a step-by-step guide that will attract more guests and help you make more money each month.

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# FOUR HOUSES AND A HOTEL

## HOW YOU CAN TAKE YOUR SERVICED ACCOMMODATION BUSINESS TO THE NEXT LEVEL

How many hotels make a chain? This is not a question that I ever envisaged having to ask myself, when we bought our first two-bedroom investment property, back in 2016. But recently, before writing this article, we collected the keys to our third hotel project, which may just turn out to be the best one yet.

Our first hotel project was a dated 9-bedroom guest house in Southampton, with owner's accommodation, which we purchased direct-to-vendor and with none of our own money. We turned it in to a modern, automated, 17-unit aparthotel, tailored to guests visiting the area for work. Since we launched in September 2022, The Madison has achieved an average net monthly cashflow of over £16,000 per month, which gave us the proof of concept we needed to take this strategy to the next level.

In this article, I'm going to show you how you can take your property game to the next level, by investing in hotels, just like a true *Monopoly* player!

### How We Started

Seven years ago, we had never even heard of serviced accommodation (SA). We started out investing in houses in multiple occupation (HMO's). This is where we cut our teeth on development projects and the buy, refurbish, refinance strategy. We hit it pretty hard and quickly built a tidy portfolio in the Midlands and the Northwest of England. My wife was undergoing treatment for breast cancer at the time, which served to strengthen our resolve to create financial security and time freedom for our family and at the end of 2017, we secured a large mixed-use property in the Midlands, that we spent the next few months converting in to serviced apartments and we haven't looked back since. Fast forward by just over four years and we are now operating nearly fifty SA units across the UK, with another hotel on the way, most of which we own; purchased and developed using very little of our own money.

### What to Look for When Purchasing Hotels

We saw an opportunity in reaching out to the owners of tired guest houses who had been running an outdated and inefficient lifestyle business, forced to close due to the COVID restrictions and were now looking to exit the industry.

The beauty of investing in hotels, is that there is often a lot less competition than you usually find in the residential market. There just aren't that many people looking to buy guest houses right now, which means more scope for negotiation and the chance to bag a lot more property for your money.

Our hunting brief was simple and it hasn't changed much since. Sprucing up an existing guest house, renting the rooms out, managing them remotely and calling it a smart hotel isn't enough. It is part of the equation, but you will be missing a trick. We have the following criteria when we are hotel shopping:

#### *1. Owner's Accommodation*

We are looking for guest houses and bed and breakfasts (B&Bs) in which the owner lives on site and in which, there is plenty of ancillary space (guest dining room, kitchen, guest lounge etc.,) that is not currently generating revenue. This is fundamental to our model, as it will also be the key that allows us to unlock a healthy commercial valuation, when we convert these spaces into more lettable rooms. We would ideally look for an opportunity to increase the number of lettable rooms by at least 40%. So, when I am looking at a potential hotel opportunity the first thing I will want to see is the floorplan!

#### *2. High Demand and a Clear Target Market*

This kind of goes without saying, but all of the principles and the process of assessing an area, in terms of the demand for serviced accommodation, also applies to hotels – arguably even more so, as your financial commitment is larger. We look at what the data tells us in terms of trends for short-stay accommodation and we also seek to understand who is coming to the area and why. This will allow us to define our target market and to tailor the development and our service to meet the needs of this market.

#### *3. Self-Catering Facilities*

We then look to introduce self-catering facilities to as many of the rooms as possible, to create self-contained studio rooms, which appeal to longer stays. We won't be providing breakfast and we will be managing the hotel remotely and without the need for on-site staff, which makes the business model much more efficient. Bear in mind that introducing multiple kitchens to an unstaffed facility makes us a fire authority's worst nightmare, so the building control requirements, in relation to fire safety, »

Inside one of the bedroom's at the The Madison

© Mike Winship

are stringent and will represent a good chunk of your development budget. But the benefit in terms of attracting longer stays is huge, particularly if working stays are your target market and this allows us to occupy a nice little sweet spot between the standard 'room-only' hotel offering and serviced apartments. Washing facilities are also critical. There may not be space for a washing machine in every room, but a laundry room is a must.

## The Numbers

The numbers speak for themselves. The opportunity to secure a full commercial valuation, based on the income that the hotel generates, allows you to pull most, if not all, of your initial investment back out of the deal, to then be left with an asset that brings in tens of thousands in income every month. One of my favourite things about this model and this deal, is the £750,000 in equity, created 'out of thin air', given that we didn't use any of our own money for the purchase or the conversion.

| | |
|---|---|
| Purchase Price | £830,000 |
| Stamp, Legals and Professional Fees | £65,200 |
| Refurb and Conversion | £508,000 |
| End Valuation | £2,100,000 |
| Net Refinance | £1,350,000 |
| Avg. Net Cashflow (actual) | £16,000pm |

## Getting Creative

We have secured our latest hotel project on a lease option. This is a hotel in Somerset which was part of a chain of hotels and leisure facilities, which ran in to financial difficulties and ultimately collapsed. This particular hotel has been sat empty for over two years. Unusually for us, it doesn't require much

Mark Winship

work. The previous proprietors had spent a lot of money converting a care home into a modern executive hotel and were forced to close the doors shortly afterwards, when the leisure company closed.

We will lease the hotel for 12 months. During that time, we will convert some of the ancillary spaces and introduce self-catering facilities to some of the rooms, to fit with our model and to maximise income during the period. This should allow us to secure a commercial valuation with a 12 month income track-record on the books, which will more than cover the agreed purchase price. A hotel that buys itself!

## SA Regulation

The serviced accommodation space will almost certainly become more regulated over the next couple of years. There is a government consultation ongoing as we speak, regarding the introduction of some form of licensing and a new planning use class for short-stay rental properties. The aim is to prevent too much of the residential housing stock being taken out of circulation. The fact that hotels already have their own dedicated planning use class makes it likely that they will fall outside of this regulation, while also benefiting from reduced competition, as local *Airbnb* owners look to exit the market, in response to an onerous and costly licensing process. The supply of new holiday accommodation, as competition to hotels, will also be limited by the introduction of article 4 restrictions, which will remove permitted development rights in areas of high concentration, making this strategy all the more exciting moving forwards.

## Here to Help

Investing in a hotel is unlikely to be your first foray in to serviced accommodation, but if you need any help and support in how to start and scale your serviced accommodation business, please do send me an email to **mark@netgainclub.com** or DM me on *Instagram* **@markdwinship**.

I am co-founder of an exciting new property community called 'The Net Gain Club' and I would love for you to get involved with our growing community of like-minded investors. Look us up on *Facebook* or take a look at our website **netgainclub.com**.

My wife and I also document our journey and the inner workings of our serviced accommodation business on our new podcast. It's something a little different to the standard property podcast fayre! We would love for you to give us a listen. Just search Secret Serviced Podcast wherever you get your podcast fix.

**linktr.ee/markwinship**

# MAKING YOUR LIST

## THE SECRET TO OVERCOMING IMPOSTER SYNDROME AND GETTING OUT OF YOUR OWN WAY

Many of us take for granted the skills and attributes that truly set us apart. When something comes naturally to us, we find it easy or believe it's common-sense. We tend to undervalue it, or worse, disregard it altogether. This mindset is steeped in *'Imposter Syndrome'* and we genuinely believe everybody must work this way and understand how and why, we come to the conclusions we do.

Yet this is not the case, those skills that come so naturally, that you don't even think about them, are likely to be the very skills that totally set you apart from your peers and drive the biggest impact for your clients or employer. The problem with not recognising your skills and impact is that you lose the benefit to your business twice over – first you don't openly advertise and shout about your key attributes, losing potential clients that don't know what they're missing. Then, you will totally undervalue the skill set or worse, give this work away, for free, to the clients you do have.

Colette Thompson

### Cutting the Ropes that Held Me Back

Years ago, I started a new role when I returned from maternity leave and while I was being treated for post-natal depression. My confidence was at an all-time low, but I had to get back to work, both financially and for my sanity. The role was very challenging, with a number of ongoing delays and customer disputes to resolve.

I threw myself into it, but it was brand new to me. I didn't know anyone on the project from my company or the client. I didn't know the project, or the basis of the delays and I used this as my in, to build new, open and honest relationships with all parties. I took a different approach to the delays and issues we were trying to resolve – starting with the highest value tickets, that clearly had the highest impact to the client and grouping issues, so we could scale the solution. We quickly established a new process, working in collaboration with the client.

It went so well; I was encouraged to put myself forward for a promotion – cue the imposter syndrome and chronic lack of confidence. Throw myself into a seemingly impossible work task, find a solution and get all parties on board – easy peasy. Write it up for the promotion review – pass the sick bucket.

I wrote up the boring minutiae of how I'd 'helped', 'supported', or other such self-deprecating language. Thankfully, my director replaced it with the factual impact from my efforts; both the tangible impacts: **all client disputes cleared and £3M in outstanding invoices paid within three months!** And the intangible impacts: the client relationship had been restored – new orders were received and the liability of having work, not under contract, had been removed. This was massive and I didn't appreciate any of it until I saw it written down, because I only ever looked to the next task on my to-do list; I never looked at what I had achieved or took any credit for it.

The huge change for me came here – where I'd struggled with imposter syndrome – worrying, was I showing off, or giving myself too much credit when I was part of a team? I discovered I was actually ok with saying these points out loud, because quite simply, they were true, indisputable facts.

### Fact Checking – The Enemy of Imposter Syndrome

That is the key point we all need to understand and reflect on within our own businesses. If we don't fact check, understand how amazing we are, where our point of difference lies and the impact we have, then we open the door to imposter syndrome and undervaluing our worth.

And what happens then? We don't pitch for bigger work, we don't price our work at the right level and this results in us making less money, with smaller achievements, attracting poorer quality clients and causing our confidence to erode; we feel less worthy, charging less, fulfilling an ever decreasing circle.

I'd love to tell you that following the red pen exercise above, I was cured and never looked back, sadly it's »

Colette launched an 'Earn and Learn' programme for property investors

not quite the case! I set up on my own and guess what? Yep, I went and fell into the same trap all over again.

When I started my business, I played it too safe. If I could 'just' get a few sourcing clients to get started, pay my mortgage, look after the family, then, maybe, one day, I could try developments and grow my own portfolio.

Fact – when I left corporate, in my spare time, I had already built:

- a £2M portfolio, with £1M equity and
- a successful holiday let business.

Within six months of establishing my new Ltd. company, I had an award-winning rent-to-rent business, providing rental accommodation to Oxford United.

So why was I holding myself back, waiting to become a developer one day and looking to raise private finance? I was shocked to realise I'd fallen into that same trap again. I hadn't looked at what I had achieved, I hadn't fact checked myself and I'd hugely underestimated my worth. These were massive achievements I hadn't recognised or given myself any credit for. It was time for that to stop, once and for all.

I took time to look at my portfolio success in depth. What I had achieved and where this was repeatable, scalable and ready for others to invest.

I looked at the financials and asked, am I comfortable going into bridging? Would an investor's money be safe in the business? Risk assessment is one of my greatest assets, a skill I've honed over years of contract management and the answer was a clear, 'yes!' From that point, I never looked back and my business scaled – I:

- doubled my portfolio value to £4M
- received £500k from Angel Investors
- started working with private equity companies
- started mentoring and public speaking
- launched an 'Earn and Learn' programme for property investors and
- was named in the *Telegraph* and *NatWest's* '100 Female Entrepreneurs to Watch'.

That's my latest fact-check list and I come back to it whenever I feel the imposter syndrome creeping in or start to doubt my rates.

## Make Your Own List

I promise you; you can find your list too! My task to you today, is to stop and look at what you do – the stuff that really comes naturally. It's hard, because these are going to be the points you never think about; they're the ones that will be giving most value to your client! Have you valued them and priced them correctly?!

It's not always easy to extract the answers yourself, but don't worry, there are steps you can take to get there. I live and breathe each of these now and during my journey to get here:

1. Fact check: saying how amazing you are is always going to stick in your throat, so find a fact that says it for you!
2. Find a mentor who can hold a mirror to you and help you articulate those facts. I love doing this and helping people to recognise their brilliance!
3. Listen to your supporters; your family, colleagues, peers – they know what they're talking about. Store their facts about you.
4. Put yourself forward for awards. This is again super uncomfortable, but a brilliant way to force you to concentrate on the facts for the award nominations. Regardless of winning, the process cements in your brain, where your brilliance lies. And trust me, if you don't put yourself forward and some *Mr. Mediocre* does and goes on to win it, you will kick yourself!
5. Increase your prices accordingly! We've all had teaching on 'the ideal client', remember that if your service is not within a client's budget, it doesn't mean you're overpriced, it means they are not your ideal client; they are not ready for you.
6. Put yourself out there, tell everyone what you do, what your points of brilliance are. They can't buy your incredible service if they don't know it exists.
7. Fact check again and again, it's an incredible yet moving list!

## IF YOUR SERVICE IS NOT WITHIN A CLIENT'S BUDGET, IT DOESN'T MEAN YOU'RE OVERPRICED, IT MEANS THEY ARE NOT YOUR IDEAL CLIENT

And, if you follow these points and start to truly know your worth, you will value and price it correctly. Then what will happen? You will attract the right client, your ideal client and although you'll be scared the first time, you'll nail it! Your confidence will grow, your income will improve and you'll find yourself on an ever-increasing cycle of improving confidence, growth and happiness. Good luck!

I hope this article has helped you to see how to eliminate that pesky imposter syndrome and if you have any questions on this process or investing in general, I'm always happy to chat. Contact me here:

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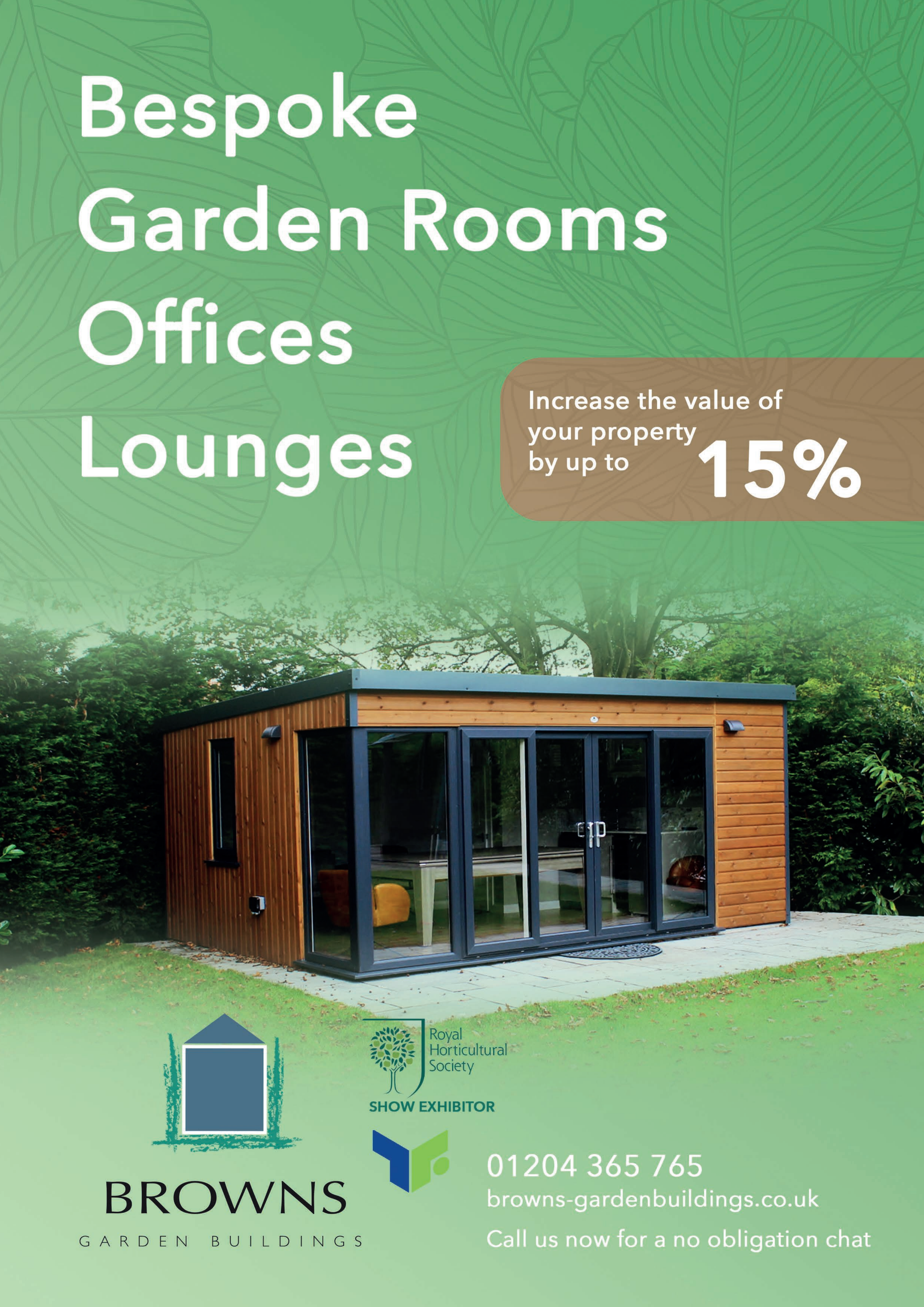
colette.thompson.9066
colette_jt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