

Local estate agency 'best in the country'

Beaconsfield, 01.12.09

Beaconsfield estate agents, Ashington Page, have just been declared the best small agency in the UK at the Estate Agency of the Years Award, on only their second time entering the competition.

Gareth Ashington, owner and director told us, "We only entered for the first time last year, it's a bit daunting as over 4,000 estate agency branches are represented at the awards. We are so delighted, and surprised too, in fact Tracey had gone to buy champagne to celebrate winning Best Small Agency in the South East when we heard we'd won Best Small Agency in the UK!"

The award, sponsored by the Sunday Times, is widely recognised as the most important in the industry calendar and the competition is stiff. Ashington Page managed to take a silver award for the region last year, but this time had hoped for more as they've implemented several major initiatives in the last year to improve the way they do business.

"We all know the property market has been difficult in the last couple of years, and it would have been tempting to batten down the hatches and just try to weather the storm; simply keeping afloat has been a challenge for many agents."

"Instead however, we decided to take the opportunity to improve what we do, putting in systems to monitor client feedback, completely rebuilding our website based on client input, and also changing the way we approach our market appraisals. We now give sellers an in-depth analysis of their situation rather than just the valuation letter and terms we used to send out."

The results have been impressive, 96.8% of buyers and sellers this year have said Ashington Page were better or much better than any other estate agent they'd ever used.

"That still gives us 3.2% to work on!", joked Gareth, "But more importantly, every single respondent told us they'd recommend us to friends and family, which is so important in this business".

The judges, chaired by the Property Ombudsmen Christopher Hamer, fed back that, "Throughout the property recession Ashington Page has continued to invest, innovate, and improve its customer facing activities. Gareth Ashington prides himself on their customer feedback – they receive 100% genuine satisfaction from both vendors and purchasers and his company's ability to survive and thrive in the face of strong competition from both nationals and strong independents is impressive."

It wasn't the thought of the award that spurred the estate agents to improve what they did, instead it was some research of their own that triggered many of the changes.

Simon Patrick, who handles the marketing for Ashington Page, carried out some 'mystery shopping' of agents, simply trying to find out if they could give him a good reason to use them over their competitors. "None of them could, of the six agencies I visited, no one had a compelling reason why I should use them rather than someone else, so we decided to make sure Ashington Page could give an answer!"

One audacious step they've taken to be different is to scrap any minimum term tie-in on their sales contract, "We want the only reason for someone to be using us to be that they love the way we look after them. If that's not the case we'd never want to force them to stay with us", added Gareth.

As to the future, Angela Robinson, the other director at the agency told us, "We just want to keep on giving our clients amazing service through one of the most stressful processes any of us go through. Estate agency as a profession doesn't have the best of reputations, but we are so proud of what we do, and it's so important that it's done well."

Ever optimistic, Gareth is already thinking about next year, "We won the best small agency in the UK, that still gives us the challenge of taking on the medium and large firms and winning the overall prize too!"

Thinking further about what 2010 holds for estate agents Gareth commented, "Opinions are very mixed as to what the property market will look like nationally next year, some experts are predicting continued growth, others say it can't last."

"Certainly we see the Beaconsfield market remaining strong, it's a wonderful area and properties are always highly sought after, ultimately it's about supply and demand. However, no one can afford to be complacent, it's still a very different environment since the peak in 2007, and awards or not, our continued success depends on being seen as trusted advisors, delivering amazing service, nothing else matters."

"We think it will be a real boost to business to be able to say that their local estate agent happens to also be the best in the country."

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Photos attached:

- Gareth and the team (Kay Wilkinson, Angela Robinson and Tracey Lapham from left to right) receiving the award GMTV's Penny Smith
- Award logo

Notes:

Ashington Page received the ultimate industry accolade on by being crowned as the best small estate agency in the country at the 2009 Estate Agency of the Year Awards held at the Chelsea Football Club's Stamford Bridge.

The event, now in its sixth year, was this year supported for the first time by The Sunday Times and is widely recognised as the most important in the industry calendar with over 4,000 branches represented nationwide.

To win Ashington Page has been subjected to rigorous scrutiny by a panel of independent industry experts and the whole judging process was overseen by the Property Ombudsman Christopher Hamer and is supported by leading professional bodies the NAEA and ARLA.

Here are the judges full feedback statements:

UK SMALL GOLD - ASHINGTON PAGE

Throughout the property recession Ashington Page has continued to invest, innovate, and improve its customer facing activities resulting in increased profit. Gareth Ashington prides himself on their customer feedback – they receive 100% genuine satisfaction from both vendors and purchasers and his company’s ability to survive and thrive in the face of strong competition from both nationals and strong independents is impressive. Staff retention is paramount – they’ve had the same team for nearly 5 years and is reflected in a continued “passion” from all to continue to strive to do better, whether through the production of a completely new web site, impressive marketing material, or just exemplary service levels. An outstanding and dynamic agency which is proving unbeatable.

SOUTH EAST Gold – Ashington Page

Owner Gareth Ashington has worked in estate agency for 28 years and both he and his team are extremely vocal about their ongoing passion for the industry. Early cost cutting resulted in a profitable agency who has come through the recession without needing an overdraft or loan, who made no redundancies and retain a healthy bank balance. 100% of client feedback is positive and they enjoy a high level of recommendations. A strong believer in his team, Gareth has invested heavily in private training for the staff and the value is reflected in the quality of their actions. Having achieved a silver award in this category last year, the team has actively endeavored to improve this year – the gold award is theirs.