Connect the Speakers: Sean Thomas on building products for different demographics

Sean Thomas launched a real estate app that was sold in an exit to **eXp Realty** where he actually made a profit — and if you know anything about technology, especially real estate technology, then you know that counts as a huge success. So when it comes to talking about how to build products for different demographics, he can tell you how it's done.

He'll be discussing user experience (UX) and what he learned from his work in real estate at **Hacker Connect**, part of **Inman Connect New York**, taking place January 29 through February 1 at the **Marriott Marquis Times Square**. We asked him about his app and what he sees in its future with eXp.

Tell us a little more about your session. How will it address how the industry can embrace the shifting market?

First and foremost, I looked at the existing tools and **didn't like the odds that were placed on very expensive tools.** I've been going at it and grinding away, and I've paid these gurus to teach me how they got their leads. It always comes down to this: You have to send 1,000 pieces of something away in hopes of getting 3 percent, and that happens on a singular transactional level — **it makes up for the money you waste in a mailing campaign**. So I looked at the current existing processes available to me and I looked at affordability. At the end of the day, I looked at the consumer — which is buyers, the one party that is the most crucial to any real estate changing hands. You can have the best house in the world, and if nobody buys it, your house will sit there forever on the market. **You can have a dream but it won't sell because you don't have a buyer able to buy it.**

This is where the industry shifted; buyers want to feel like their voice is heard, what we call validation. And the latest form of validation for their communication style is **instant gratification**. That instant gratification arrives in the form of text messages, they want to know if they put a

question out into the ether, it will be responded to. The last thing a buyer wants is to pull up to a house and call and leave a voicemail. Their experience is that they won't get a response instantly. That's why the technology of dialing a 1-800 number or a virtual tour — buyers don't want that; **they want to know someone will pick it up.**

Artificial intelligence can solve that, but it hasn't evolved enough to convince a buyer; it just shows them they're not talking to a person. Buyers want their questions answered or to at least know that somebody is hearing them out, that's why I created the on-demand showing app. They send out a showing request, and it's answered.

To stay competitive, agents, brokers and companies need to execute quickly. What do you feel are key areas where quick execution can vastly improve the customer experience?

If you have to wait four days for the agent to tell you "I'm only available on Saturday" and the house is on the market on Tuesday, you might miss out. Isn't it more convenient for buyers to say, "I work Monday through Friday," or "I have split days off, I work 5 to 2 and I'm available at 3 p.m." It's the buyer's time; they know when they're going to be available. Your Realtor doesn't know when you're going to go home for half a day because it's slow. So you're going to go out and say "I'm going to go into that neighborhood where I've been window-shopping."

The UX has to be cutting-edge, and we even had phase one, two, three of UX — by a good two years into development, I realized we needed an overhaul before we launched. Those are the decisions you have to make because **if your product looks like something from the '90s, nobody is going to want to use it.**

What are your hopes for the next 12 months, and what will you be working on?

My hope in the next 12 months is that the general awareness of the consumer will be raised through the series of pilots we're launching within eXp.

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