

Chapter

07

Video and Virtual Tour Marketing



Chapter

07

In the context of the rapid transformations witnessed by the real estate sector, and with customers' expectations for more transparent and persuasive purchasing experiences steadily increasing, one of the leading real estate development companies launched its ambitious project, "Riyadh Residential Front," on the banks of Wadi Hanifa. Spanning an area of more than two million square metres, the project comprises over one thousand two hundred residential units, varying between detached villas and contemporary apartments, surrounded by green spaces and supported by service, educational, and recreational facilities that together form a fully integrated community by every standard.

Yet the real challenge did not lie in the scale of the project or in the precision of its engineering specifications, but rather in how to translate these figures and architectural drawings into a vivid human experience in the minds of prospective customers, particularly given that marketing commenced at the "off-plan" stage, when no completed units were available for physical viewing. The marketing team was therefore required to build a bridge between dry plans and the emotions of those seeking housing, and to transform technical data into a compelling narrative that would anticipate the material experience. Hence, reliance was placed on an integrated methodological framework inspired by the storytelling arts of indigenous narrators, employing visual storytelling in accordance with scientific principles of information processing, and utilizing virtual tours as an interactive tool that compresses distances and reduces uncertainty.

First: Building the Story – Grounding the Brand within a Heritage-Based Narrative Framework

The marketing team’s decision to begin with storytelling was not merely a cultural luxury; rather, it stemmed from a profound awareness of the organic relationship between the story and the medium, as discussed in the lecture that opened with an examination of the arts of indigenous storytellers. Thus, reliance on traditional narrative elements—tone, mental imagery, context, plot, and authenticity—constituted the establishment of solid foundations upon which all subsequent visual and interactive materials would rest. Without a well-constructed story, the video remains nothing more than moving footage, and the virtual tour no more than a series of connected panoramic images.

Tone and Brand Voice: Between Respect and Intimacy

The team began by formulating a tone that achieved a delicate balance between the respect due to a real estate purchase decision—which is among the most significant financial decisions in an individual’s life—and the intimacy that brings the brand close to the heart. Drawing inspiration from the traditions of indigenous storytellers, the team recognized that the narrator’s tone shifts according to context: in moments of imparting wisdom, the tone is calm and respectful, whereas in moments of suspense, it becomes more dynamic. This principle was applied to the marketing language: in general introductory materials, an educational and information-rich tone was employed, reflecting the developer’s expertise and confidence. By contrast, in materials aimed at generating desire, the tone shifted to warmer language, using expressions such as “We understand that searching for a home can be exhausting” and “We are here to accompany you on this journey.” Any language suggestive of condescension or exclusion was deliberately avoided, and the pronoun “we” was adopted to express the company as a living entity with values, while “you” was used to engage the customer in a direct dialogue.

Mental Imagery: Transforming Specifications into Emotions

The most distinctive feature of the narrative lay in transforming every material attribute into verbal mental imagery capable of evoking a sensory scene in the mind. Thus, instead of stating that “the proportion of green areas is 40%,” the phrase was rendered as: “where pathways stretch between native trees planted to tell the story of this valley, and the home garden becomes a natural extension beneath children’s feet, while shadows sway across the walls as the position of the sun changes.” Likewise, rather than merely referring to “a view overlooking Wadi Hanifa,” the expression was transformed into: “the windows of your homes become living paintings whose colours change with the seasons; in spring they turn green, in winter they whisper with the waters of the valley, and in the evening they are washed in the golden hues of sunset.”

These verbal images were designed to function as stimuli for visual memory, so that when the customer later viewed the images or videos, he or she would feel as though rediscovering something already familiar. Verbal mental imagery was also crafted for intangible elements: family security was expressed in the phrase, “where the gardens fall asleep to the sound of flowing water, and awaken to the laughter of children in shaded playgrounds.” Investment value, in turn, was transformed into: “Here, you do not merely purchase walls; rather, you acquire a part of a valley that, over time, is becoming an address of rarity and quality.”

Chapter
07**Rich Context: Situating the Project within Broader Frameworks**

The project was not presented as a collection of villas and apartments isolated from their surroundings; rather, it was situated within multiple layered contexts that endowed the narrative with both depth and breadth. The spatial context positioned Wadi Hanifa as a natural and historical artery of Riyadh, with reference to the substantial efforts undertaken to develop it as an environmental and recreational destination. The urban context was linked to Saudi Vision 2030, which places quality of life at the centre of its priorities, as well as to the objectives of the Housing Programme in providing integrated communities. The social context reflected changing lifestyles, whereby the contemporary family seeks spaces that combine privacy with openness to the community, and an environment that enhances both psychological and physical well-being. The cultural context involved the revival of authentic Najdi architectural elements—such as the independent majlis, rawasheen, and the internal courtyard—yet rendered through a contemporary touch that corresponds to the requirements of the age.

This multilayered framework enabled the narrative to address different segments simultaneously: the father concerned with proximity to schools and services, the mother seeking safe spaces for children, and the investor discerning the future value of sustainable locations.

Plot and Character Development: The Dramatic Structure of the Customer Journey

The marketing narrative was formulated in accordance with the classical dramatic structure commonly known as Freytag's Pyramid, on the basis that the protagonist of this story is the target customer himself or herself, whether a family searching for a first home or an investor seeking long-term returns. The elements were structured as follows:

Exposition (the problem): The housing seeker in Riyadh suffers from a persistent gap between aspirations and reality: either the location is excellent, yet the essential services (schools, health centres, recreation) are incomplete, or the project is fully serviced but situated on the distant outskirts of the city, far removed from the attributes of natural living such as green spaces and tranquillity. This dilemma constitutes the central conflict that the narrative is constructed to resolve.

Rising action (failed attempts at resolution): The target persona moves among multiple projects in which standards of quality vary considerably. In some, it becomes apparent that the impressive specifications presented in the plans do not correspond to the experience of everyday living; in others, high construction quality is not matched by integrated community services. This escalation creates dramatic tension that encourages the audience to empathize with the hardship of a prolonged search.

Climax (the moment of discovery): This is represented by the moment of encountering the project "Riyadh Residential Front" and its distinctive location on Wadi Hanifa, where the criteria of a prime location, integrated services, and sustainable design converge. At this stage, the visual content and the virtual tour were designed to function as the emotional climax, so that the customer would feel as though personally experiencing the moment of discovery.

Chapter
07

Falling action (after the decision): Following the climax, the steps of purchase and financing are presented with clarity and transparency, while reassuring the customer that a specialized team will accompany him or her from reservation to handover, and that quality and maintenance guarantees constitute an integral part of the overall experience.

Resolution (the outcome): Scenes are then presented depicting life after relocation: children playing in shaded playgrounds, neighbours exchanging conversation along green pathways, and families receiving their guests in majalis overlooking the valley. This concluding scene closes the narrative with a sense of accomplishment and belonging.

Authenticity and Truthfulness: The Foundation of Credibility

The team adhered to the principle that the most powerful stories are those that do not require embellishment. Thus, rather than exaggerating the project's features, it relied on presenting the facts clearly while acknowledging the existence of natural challenges inherent in any large-scale project (such as lengthy construction phases). Moreover, every claim was substantiated by data, images, or genuine testimonials drawn from the developer's previous projects. This authenticity fostered early trust with the audience and made the narrative appear as a credible account presented by an entity that does not fear transparency.

Second: Applying Video Marketing – Translating the Story into a Hierarchical Visual Language

After the narrative structure had been completed, the team moved to the stage of producing visual content, based on the principle that video is the channel most capable of conveying dense information rapidly through a combination of image, sound, and movement. However, the team did not confine itself to producing a single video; rather, it designed a hierarchy of visual materials aligned with the stages of awareness, interest, and conversion, while taking into account the characteristics of each platform and the audience behaviour associated with it.

The Main Product Video: The Immersive Tour

At the apex of this hierarchy, a three-minute flagship video was positioned, produced entirely using three-dimensional modelling (CGI) before a single stone had been laid on site. The video was based on the project's precise digital model, which had been created using advanced software (3ds Max and Unreal Engine) with realistic simulation of materials and natural lighting.

The video opened with an aerial panoramic scene of Wadi Hanifa at sunset, accompanied by a calm voice-over stating: "Here, where the valley meets the city skyline, the story of a new community began." The camera then moved seamlessly to the entrance of the home and subsequently to the interior, pausing in each space to reveal the details that had previously been crafted through verbal mental imagery. The camera movement was designed to be smooth and slow in spaces requiring contemplation (such as the view from the window), and faster in passageways in order to convey a sense of harmony.

A shifting musical score was also employed: it began with tranquil music expressive of nature, then moved into warmer tones upon entering the home, before returning to calmness in the closing scenes. On-screen text was kept to a minimum, limited to keywords that appeared gently in the corners without distracting from the image. At the end of the video, a clear call to action appeared in the form of a pop-up window: "Are you ready for the beginning of your story? Book an appointment to visit the model showroom," accompanied by a direct link and QR codes.

Platform- and Stage-Based Diversification

The team recognized that a long-form video is not suitable for all platforms or for all stages of audience awareness. It therefore produced multiple versions of the original video: vertical excerpts (9:16), each 15 seconds in length, for short-form social media platforms (TikTok and Instagram Reels), focusing on the most striking shots, such as the transition from darkness to light upon opening the balcony door overlooking the valley, or a shot of the kitchen glowing in the evening light. These short clips were designed to possess independent visual value even when viewed without sound, with large, clear text conveying the core message. On Facebook, by contrast, a square-format (1:1) version of 60 seconds was used, combining the most visually appealing scenes and incorporating embedded subtitles, given that a large proportion of Facebook views occur without sound.

In addition to the product video, the team produced an eight-minute educational video entitled “How Do You Choose an Integrated Residential Community?”, which was published on YouTube and LinkedIn. In this video, a real estate expert from the company’s team presented the criteria for selection: location, services, design, sustainability, and investment return. Under each criterion, the expert cited “Riyadh Residential Front” as an applied example, yet without making the video directly promotional. This video established a high degree of credibility, achieved substantial organic viewership, and contributed to improving the website’s ranking in search engines by virtue of being valuable educational content.

The team also produced a 90-second company culture video, filmed both on site and in the engineering offices. In it, members of the architectural and engineering design team appeared discussing their sources of inspiration: traditional Najdi architecture, the ways in which they transformed enclosed majalis into open spaces overlooking the valley, and how they integrated smart home technologies without compromising the authenticity of the façades. This video imparted a human dimension to the brand and demonstrated that behind the project stood a team deeply passionate about its work.

Chapter

07

Nor did the team overlook the importance of social proof. It therefore produced short testimonial videos featuring previous customers from the developer's earlier projects. These customers—filmed in their actual homes—spoke about their experience of trusting the company, the quality of after-sales service, and the prompt responsiveness of the maintenance team. These testimonials were distributed across social media channels and were also embedded as interaction points within the virtual tour, serving as indirect confirmation that the promises made were not merely words.

Optimization Through Data

The video production process did not represent the final stage; rather, it marked the beginning of a continuous optimization cycle. The team monitored retention curves on YouTube and discovered that a substantial proportion of viewers abandoned the long-form video at its midpoint. Upon returning to a precise second-by-second analysis, it became evident that the reason for this drop-off lay in an excessively slow pace in the segment devoted to the secondary bedrooms, whereas the kitchen and garden shots proved to be the most engaging. The team therefore restructured the edit: it brought the kitchen and garden forward to an earlier point in the video (within the first 45 seconds), shortened the section devoted to the secondary bedrooms, and added quick shots from multiple angles of the bedrooms instead of prolonged scenes. Following this modification, the average viewing time increased by 38%, while the video completion rate rose from 22% to 47%.

The team also conducted an A/B test of the thumbnails: one thumbnail featured the façade of the villa, while the other presented the valley view under sunset lighting. The latter was found to achieve a 64% higher click-through rate, and was therefore adopted by the team across all publishing platforms.

Third: The Virtual Tour – Embodying Place and Rendering It an Immersive Interactive Experience

Although the video conveyed the story in an engaging manner, the decision to purchase real estate remains closely tied to the perception of space, dimensions, and the relationships among spatial units. Here, the role of the virtual tour became central, as it was designed to be more than a mere presentation tool; rather, it constituted an interactive experience closely resembling physical presence. The team drew on the classification of tours presented in the lecture and selected different technologies for each stage of the project.

The First Stage: The Three-Dimensional Model-Based Tour (for Off-Plan Marketing)

In the absence of any physical buildings, the team resorted to creating a complete digital twin of the project using high-precision three-dimensional modelling. This twin was not merely a static model, but rather an interactive environment through which the customer could move freely, enter every room, alter the viewing angle using a mouse or touch controls, and zoom in on fine details such as floor textures or the type of wood used in the kitchens. The tour was developed on a game engine (Unreal Engine) in order to ensure fluid movement and high-quality dynamic lighting simulating different times of day.

The team incorporated into this tour three principal features:

Dollhouse View:

This feature displayed the entire project as a miniature three-dimensional model that the user could rotate, enlarge, and reduce, while also allowing the user to click on any building or villa in order to move immediately to its interior tour. This functionality provided the user with an exceptional spatial understanding of the relationships among units, facilities, and green spaces.

Chapter
07**Interactive Hotspots:**

When passing over certain areas (such as the kitchen, living room, or master bathroom), icons appeared from which an informational window would open. The contents of these windows varied: some presented short texts on technical specifications, others displayed a short video explaining the smart home system or thermal insulation technologies, and others included links for downloading engineering specification brochures or viewing a testimonial from a previous customer.

Measurement Capability:

This interactive tool enabled the user to click on any wall, window, or piece of furniture in order to view its actual dimensions in centimetres. This feature proved decisive in reducing uncertainty among customers interested in furnishing or comparing the property with their current homes.

This tour was distributed through the website (with an optimized mobile version) and was linked to all digital advertisements via direct links. It was also made available through interactive kiosks at real estate exhibitions, where visitors could explore the project on a large touch screen. During the first two months, the average dwell time within the tour reached 5 minutes and 20 seconds, and 35% of tour visitors clicked on the calls to action, such as “Book an Appointment” or “Request a Brochure.”

The Second Stage: Guided Live Tours (Virtual Open Houses)

Recognizing that self-directed experience may not answer every question, the team organized guided live tours via livestreaming, initially from within the digital model and later, once completed, from within the actual model unit. In these weekly sessions, a real estate broker led the tour, explained details while moving through the space, and interacted with participants' questions in real time. These sessions were announced in advance عبر social media channels, and the first session recorded attendance exceeding 1,200 live viewers, of whom 18% converted into appointment-booking requests to visit the model showroom. These sessions were recorded and republished as marketing assets, making them available to those who were unable to attend the live broadcast.

The Third Stage: The 360° Panoramic Tour of the Actual Model Unit

Upon completion of the model unit—a fully finished villa built to the final finishing specifications—it was photographed using a professional 360° camera (Insta360 Pro 2) from 15 strategic points covering all angles of the house. The images were processed and integrated into a seamless interactive tour, with the addition of new hotspots containing short videos filmed inside the actual unit to explain finishing details that might not be visible in a static image, such as opening cabinets, activating the smart lighting system, or displaying the window view through augmented reality technology.

An additional comparison tool was incorporated into this tour, allowing the customer to compare the digital model used in the first stage with the actual unit, thereby demonstrating the degree of precision achieved in the modelling process. This, in turn, strengthened trust in future projects that would be sold off-plan.

Integration between the Tour and the Other Tools

The virtual tour was not conceived as an isolated tool; rather, it was designed to interweave with the marketing videos. At the end of each YouTube video, the direct link to the tour appeared as the first pinned comment and within the video's end cards. Within the tour itself, hotspots displayed testimonial videos and the company culture video. On the project-dedicated pages of the website, the tour occupied a central position, accompanied by side links for viewing the various videos. This integration rendered the customer journey seamless and enabled the customer to move between different forms of content according to his or her needs at each moment.

Measurement and Continuous Optimization of the Tour

The virtual tour platform provided advanced analytics, including heat maps showing the rooms most frequently visited by users, the dwell time at each point, and the click-through rate on the hotspots. The team observed that many visitors did not reach the back garden, despite the fact that it represented one of the project's principal strengths. Accordingly, the team redesigned the navigation path, making the transition to the garden possible from more than one point within the tour, and added a highlighted hotspot that appeared automatically after 30 seconds from the beginning of the tour, encouraging users to explore the outdoor area. As a result, the proportion of visitors who viewed the garden increased from 32% to 68% within two weeks. The team also noted that hotspots containing videos received a click rate three times higher than those containing text only; consequently, most text-based hotspots were converted into short videos.

Chapter
07**Fourth: Methodological Integration**

What rendered this strategy coherent was that the story did not serve merely as an introduction and then fade away; rather, it remained the organizing thread of every element. Each video carried the same tone and mental imagery, and every hotspot within the tour reformulated a part of the story. For example, when the customer navigated the virtual tour and reached the living room, the hotspot there displayed a short video reproducing the verbal expression: “This window is your ever-changing canvas; in spring it turns green, in winter it whispers, and in the evening it is washed in the golden hues of sunset.” This measured repetition of the mental images reinforced them in memory more effectively than if they had appeared only once.

Likewise, the structure of Freytag’s Pyramid was manifested in every piece of content. The long-form video had its exposition (the hardship of searching), rising action (the alternative projects), climax (the discovery of the project), and resolution (life within it). The virtual tour, in turn, was designed along a narrative path that began at the entrance (exposition), passed through the principal rooms (rising action), and ended in the garden overlooking the valley (resolution). Even the short clips on Instagram embodied a miniature structure: the first two seconds captured attention (the hook), followed by a swift presentation of the feature (rising action), then the climactic shot (such as opening the balcony door onto the valley), and finally a brief call to action.

Fifth: Multi-Level Measurement and Continuous Learning

The measurement process was not confined to view counts alone; rather, the team developed an integrated system for monitoring indicators associated with the stages of the customer journey:

Awareness Stage: Impressions, unique reach, and the click-through rate (CTR) of thumbnails and titles were monitored. This enabled the continuous optimization of thumbnails and video titles.

Consideration Stage: Viewing times, retention curves, and hotspot interactions within the virtual tour were tracked. These indicators guided editing adjustments, the rearrangement of scenes, and the addition of further interactive elements in areas where drop-off rates were high.

Conversion Stage: The team tracked click-through rates on call-to-action (CTA) elements within the videos and tours, as well as lead conversions (such as completing a form or booking an appointment). A multi-touch attribution model was also employed to determine which channel or content asset had the greatest effect in driving the customer toward the final decision. The data showed that customers who began their journey by watching the long-form video and then entered the virtual tour were the most likely to book an actual appointment, with a conversion rate three times higher than that of those who entered the project page directly without engaging with the visual content. These findings guided the team to allocate a larger portion of the budget to promoting the video and the tour together.

Loyalty Stage: After the sale, the team monitored returning viewers of the content, as well as the rate of shares and mentions across social media. Comments praising the service or recommending it to friends were also tracked, thereby providing organic social proof that was subsequently used in later campaigns.

Chapter

07

Conclusion

After six months of implementing this integrated strategy, “Riyadh Residential Front” was no longer merely a name on a real estate map; rather, it had become a story told among families searching for a home and among investors who perceived added value in its sustainable location. The greatest achievement did not lie in the number of views or inquiries, but in the fact that customers were arriving at the model showroom already familiar with the details of the home they desired, because they had experienced it virtually, listened to its story visually, and explored its spaces before their feet had even crossed its threshold.

In this way, digital tools were transformed from mere means of presenting the product into channels for narrating a story, and storytelling—that ancient art mastered by indigenous peoples thousands of years ago—became the bridge that connected architectural plans with the hearts of customers. In a world marked by accelerating digital transformation, the deeper lesson remains that, however advanced technology may become, it ultimately remains in the service of the story, and that the most successful marketing strategies are those that make the customer feel that what stands before them is not an advertisement, but rather an invitation to a journey, and that the decision they will take at its conclusion is not merely a purchase, but the beginning of a new chapter in their life.



Thank You