

How top developers are navigating the MCO

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It is an unprecedented time as the nation grapples with the Covid-19 pandemic. Plans are being redrawn and new measures are being imposed by the government, affecting all sectors, including property development. The Movement Control Order (MCO), which has now been extended to April 14, has resulted in a nationwide shutdown of all non-essential business premises, including property sales galleries. For developers, project launches are being deferred while sales have suffered.

City & Country contacted top 10 developers in *The Edge Malaysia* Property Excellence Awards (TEPEA) 2019 that are looking at innovative ways to stay in touch with homebuyers and investors in the short run. *The Edge Malaysia* Top Property Developers' Awards, which anchors TEPEA, ranks the best property developers in the country based on both qualitative and quantitative attributes. With the exception of Sunway Property (the property arm of Sunway Bhd), IOI Properties Group Bhd and UOA Development Bhd, which declined to participate, the top developers talk about how they have resorted to digital platforms and mobile apps, with some opting to sell their products online. Below are their takes on and short-term plans for the MCO.



S P SETIA BHD
PRESIDENT AND CEO
DATUK C J KHOR

“We are leveraging our digital communication platforms to keep in touch with our buyers. These platforms include telephony, SMS, emails, websites, mobile apps, social media and social chat. When the MCO was announced, we immediately informed all our buyers that S P Setia has activated the work-from-home arrangement and provided them with the key contacts to call [should they require assistance].

We have also ensured that all of our product information is made available on our digital channels. Customers can view the product details and reach out to our personnel through the various digital channels available.

We have also introduced the Setia Community mobile app where buyers at our key townships can interact with us. We are continuously improving our services and adopting new communication channels to engage with our buyers.



IGB BHD
TAN & TAN DEVELOPMENTS BHD
CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER
COLIN NG

“Although our physical office is closed, our buyers can always reach us through a phone call, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and email. We have three call lines, two WhatsApp lines, a Facebook account (Tan & Tan Developments) and an email account. Our phone numbers and email are available on Tan & Tan Developments' Facebook page as well as our website. If potential buyers are interested in a virtual walkthrough, our sales consultant will direct them to the 3D walkthrough on our website.



ECO WORLD DEVELOPMENT GROUP BHD
PRESIDENT AND CEO
DATUK CHANG KHIM WAH

“It is a challenging time for Malaysia and everyone as we try to flatten the curve and tackle the Covid-19 pandemic. Our offices and galleries may be closed but our customer engagement continues through our digital platforms, on which we have always been active, such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. We have the EcoWorld Neighbourhood App where our residents are kept updated on the happenings in their own neighbourhood. During this period, we have also established hotlines for our residents to reach us more conveniently. We may not be physically present but we are just a phone call or a click away. These platforms of communication are not new to us and have always been an important ancillary tool for EcoWorld.

With the MCO, our EcoWorld Auxiliary Police team remains on standby 24/7. It is an essential part of how we support our residents and community, more so during this time. And the team has proved time and again how valuable it is, not only to us but to the people it serves.

Our strong presence on various digital platforms ensures that our brand is always visible. We are pleased to share that our latest homeownership programme, #InstaYours, is the perfect model for digital buying. The whole sales process, right down to loan application, can be done from the comfort and safety of one's home.



SIME DARBY PROPERTY BHD
ACTING GROUP CEO
DATUK WAN HASHIMI ALBAKRI
WAN AHMAD AMIN JAFFRI

“In view of the MCO, we have shifted our focus to online customer engagement. We have been getting a steady stream of online enquiries on properties and responses have been good. We are still seeing strong traffic to our website ... it remains consistent at about 90% of the traffic we were seeing before the MCO. Other than our website, we actively respond to queries on our Facebook and Instagram pages. We want our customers to remain safe and comfortable at home, but also be able to fulfil their interest in property. To enable our customers to browse and purchase property without leaving their homes, Sime Darby Property will be deploying the Online Guided Sales Experience campaign from March 25 to 31 (the campaign has been extended to April 14).

It is a one-to-one interactive guided sales experience where our sales executive will lead the customer through the products on sale, from enquiries right through to booking a unit, all without physically going to a sales gallery. We will roll this out first with The Ridge@ KL East and Senada Residence @ KLGCC Resort with special deals and rebates for those who do get a unit online during the campaign period.



MAH SING GROUP BHD
FOUNDER AND GROUP MANAGING DIRECTOR
TAN SRI LEONG HOY KUM

“The Covid-19 outbreak has certainly placed the world on edge, with many daily routines and lives disrupted. Our hearts and thoughts go out to the people and businesses affected by this unprecedented event. We believe in doing our part as a responsible corporate citizen to limit its spread and impact. As a responsible property developer, we are doing our part, soldiering on with day-to-day matters. Mah Sing is heavily reliant on technology — our employees are working from home using collaboration tools that have been implemented company-wide for some time now.

Upon the announcement of the MCO, we notified our existing purchasers — through our Facebook closed group and sent push notification via My Mah Sing app — that our customer service team remains fully operational and is reachable via phone, WhatsApp, email, direct messaging through Mah Sing Facebook and Instagram as well as live chat on My Mah Sing app. We are using online platforms to showcase our products to potential buyers — most of our new projects are available for viewing via virtual showrooms. Our property advisers are also available for video chats with potential buyers. While we are using this medium to reach out to buyers during the MCO, we foresee that increased digitalisation is the way forward for the entire industry. Industry players need to be alert and play catch-up once the situation improves.

Buyers are also able to stay connected to our social media platforms for more details on our projects and all things Mah Sing via Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn.



GAMUDA LAND BHD
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER
AW SEI CHEH

“Digitisation of our business to create a seamless customer experience has always been an ongoing effort in Gamuda Land. Prior to the MCO, we had already been communicating with our customers digitally either through our Gamuda Land mobile app, our social media pages or our website. These channels will continue to be open to the public and our community. We have a strong and enthusiastic team that is agile and able to respond quickly and strategically in every situation. Our mobile app, with strong GL Friends followers, was launched last year, enabling residents in our developments to get in touch instantly with our township management team for any assistance they might require. This is especially useful during this period where people need to stay home. Our township management team is also on standby to assist residents on the ground. Our team had been working ceaselessly on Gamuda Land's online property deals prior to the MCO and we have decided to launch this campaign to spread some good news to genuine homebuyers. Our team has worked hard to provide potential purchasers with more value with exclusive deals, extra savings and additional rewards.

Customers can browse all ongoing and new developments and experience virtual show unit tours online but I highly recommend genuine buyers to reach out to our relationship managers. We have more than 70 relationship managers to assist customers daily. We hope they do take advantage of the online deals that are available for a limited period of time only, from March 24 to April 24.

Recently, Gamuda Land entered into a partnership with online shopping platform Shopee to allow customers to browse and purchase certain Gamuda Land properties through its platform, anytime and anywhere.



IJM LAND BHD
MANAGING DIRECTOR
EDWARD CHONG

“All IJM Land sales galleries and offices nationwide are temporarily closed. Our sales advisers are working from home and remain accessible for any assistance through multiple platforms including mobile phone, WhatsApp, SMS, email and website. While we are limiting in-person interaction with staff as much as possible, they are prepared to continue serving customers in a safe way and responding via email and phone. Additionally, we are accelerating the use of our digital platforms to market our properties safely. These platforms allow our sales advisers access to project information at any time, from home, the office or anywhere. Sales advisers can also complete their sales bookings, perform credit checks for buyers ... up to bank financing through these platforms.

IJM Land will also provide property updates and details of upcoming launches and developments on our website and all social media channels. We are ramping up efforts to market our properties and connect with buyers. We have lined up property ads and videos as well as online registration to enable buyers to register their interest with us. They can submit their details to us digitally. Through this effort, we are able to keep in touch with buyers to provide supporting information and updates. We are also using technology and online marketing, such as e-brochures, providing 360° virtual show house walkthroughs and curating relevant content for social media. Our sales advisers can have a live walkthrough with the buyers, allowing them to view the show units from the comfort of their homes. We believe these are the right steps to take to maintain essential access without risk or personal contact and, at the same time, help contain the spread of the virus and ensure the safety of our buyers, employees and communities.



UEM SUNRISE BHD
MANAGING DIRECTOR AND CEO
ANWAR SYAHRIN ABDUL AJIB

“We continue to engage our customers through relevant and timely content, especially on social media, tying our brand tagline, 'Find Your Happy', to the current situation. We empathise with everyone but we would like to remind our customers to remain optimistic despite this time of uncertainty and adversity. The concept of our new branding direction, which we launched late last year, is to show that happiness can be found in any circumstance [if we make the best of it]. Likewise, we have also been sharing with our followers what they can do to get through the MCO period, including tips for staying healthy and working from home. With our sales galleries closed and face-to-face interaction unavailable, communicating with our customers digitally and the traditional method of phone calls are the only options. Though we are in partial lockdown, people will have the time to consume more media and respond immediately should our messages hit the mark and pique their interest. For that, we focus on channels such as radio, social media and online news platforms to communicate our marketing campaigns and to reach out to prospects using exciting promotions with attractive rebates, prizes and facilitating easy entry.

Despite the closure of all our offices, we are still committed to engaging with our customers. Our toll-free number is still operational, although calls are re-routed to our staff's mobile numbers, and our customer care consultants are still responding to emails as they always do. We have also ramped up our digital customer experiential efforts such as virtual walkthrough of our projects and video conferences. While we are cognisant of other tools such as chatbots, our discerning and sophisticated customers expect more bespoke responses from us. In June last year, we hit a digital transformation milestone, launching our digital customer interactive experience, a mobile app available on both iPhone iOS and Android Play Store called hUb. Developed to cater for UEM Sunrise's loyal customers, or 'Trésorians', and future homebuyers, it is a tool and a digital one-stop centre to help customers keep track of the products that they buy, their billing progress, make appointment bookings of crucial collection and joint inspection, make submissions and track defects, [gain] Trésor status to see the latest promotions from participating merchants and [keep updated on] upcoming events and new project launches.

