

Firzt Realty Company

THE PROJECT

Project Name
Firzt Site Redesign

Service
UI/UX Design

Year done
2015

The business requirement was to re-design the company website. Having had the website designed over a decade ago the company began to see the importance of getting a site re-designing.

MY ROLE

Project advisor, design, team lead, research, test

PROJECT STATEMENT

Firzt Realty Company, a family owned and managed real estate company started off as a residential property sales company. Fast forward twenty years to 2015, Firzt had diversified its footing in the property market to cater for commercial properties, new developments as well as rental properties. The original site focused primarily on residential property sales but over the years the company had spread it's wings, unfortunately this diversification did not reflect on their website (their main digital marketing tool).

The main requirement was to add all the new business facets which had been added to the business operations. As a business, what they wanted to see was a modern, highly functional site which was a one stop shop for people in both the business and residential property markets.

PAIN POINTS

At project briefing a number of pain points came to light:

- i) The existing site, at the time, had limited information regarding the different services offered by the company.
- ii) The site had limited functionality. All the customers were able to do on the website was view properties on sale and get a consultant's number which they could use to book a property viewing.
- iii) The company had been perceived as one which specialised in 'cheap' (low value properties) but in fact the company was in the business of selling good value properties across a wide spectrum of markets.

INTERVIEWS

Due to the nature of the business it was vital that interviews be conducted to get a better understanding of the issues on hand and to better understand what customers were expecting to see on the site. Having reached out to the company, requesting access to customers, both past and present, company denied us access. What they did permit us to do was interact with their property consultants. They also allowed us to create a small questionnaire which we then distributed and collected data at show days.

- i) My first point of call was interviewing the property consultants. I got a lot of insightful information regarding responses they regularly got from past, present and potential customers.
- ii) I ran a surveys which was facilitated electronically by the property consultants at show days and at every opportunity they had when interacting with customer.

Through the above channels I was able to gather a lot of vital information which helped me to better understand our target users prior to designing a web solution for Firzt Realty Company.

THE PROCESS

Prior to commencing design my team and I setup brainstorming sessions to get ideas for the project. Out of the brainstorming sessions, among other things discussed, we collectively discussed how we were going to tackle the project. The project roadmap we discussed and followed through was as follows:

- i) Research. Following initial the client project briefing it was apparent that we needed to do some client research. Having been given the client requirements, there was a need to understand our target audience as these were the people we were actually designing for.
- ii) Brainstorming. Having conducted research, we had a good understanding of our target users. We saw the need to conduct brainstorming sessions as the working team for the project. These sessions helped the team get a definite direction of how the project was going to be delivered.
- iii) Personas. As a team we collectively drew up several personas to help us fully understand our target users so that we could develop a software solution which could solve their problems.
- iv) Storyboarding and affinity mapping. My team and I set out to have discussions and map out how we were going to tackle the project.
- v) Wireframing. Low fidelity wireframes kick started the design process. After my team and I had created our low fidelity wireframes, I conducted a team brainstorming session to consolidate our ideas and make amends early in the process. After polishing our low fidelity wireframes I had an initial meeting with client to discuss our proposal and walk them through the design, in its infancy. Client was happy with the direction we were taking. My team and I commenced high fidelity wireframing after the approval of our low fidelity wireframes. Following high fidelity wireframe design, I then stitched the designs together to create a prototype. On completion of the prototype I had a follow up presentation with client. In this presentation we were able to include some property sales consultants as well, to see and validate our solution (since Firzt declined us direct access their customer base).
- vi) Development handover. Designs were approved by client subject to making a few amends as raised in the sign off session. After the amends highlighted were made, I shared the final prototype link with client. I conducted a handover session with the development team to walk them through and clarify any queries they had. Due to the fact that I had been working closely with the development team throughout the design process, running them through ideas we had and getting feedback from them throughout the design process, we did not experience any pushback at development handover.
- vii) Development. While the software was being developed, I worked closely with the developers to see to it that the designs approved and handed over for development were brought to life in accordance to approved requirements.
- viii) After software development had been completed, I further worked closely with the testing team to see that the system looked and functioned as required.

Having gone through all of those processes I was able to team lead and design a software solution which digitally positioned Firzt Realty Company as a progressive forward thinking property brand.

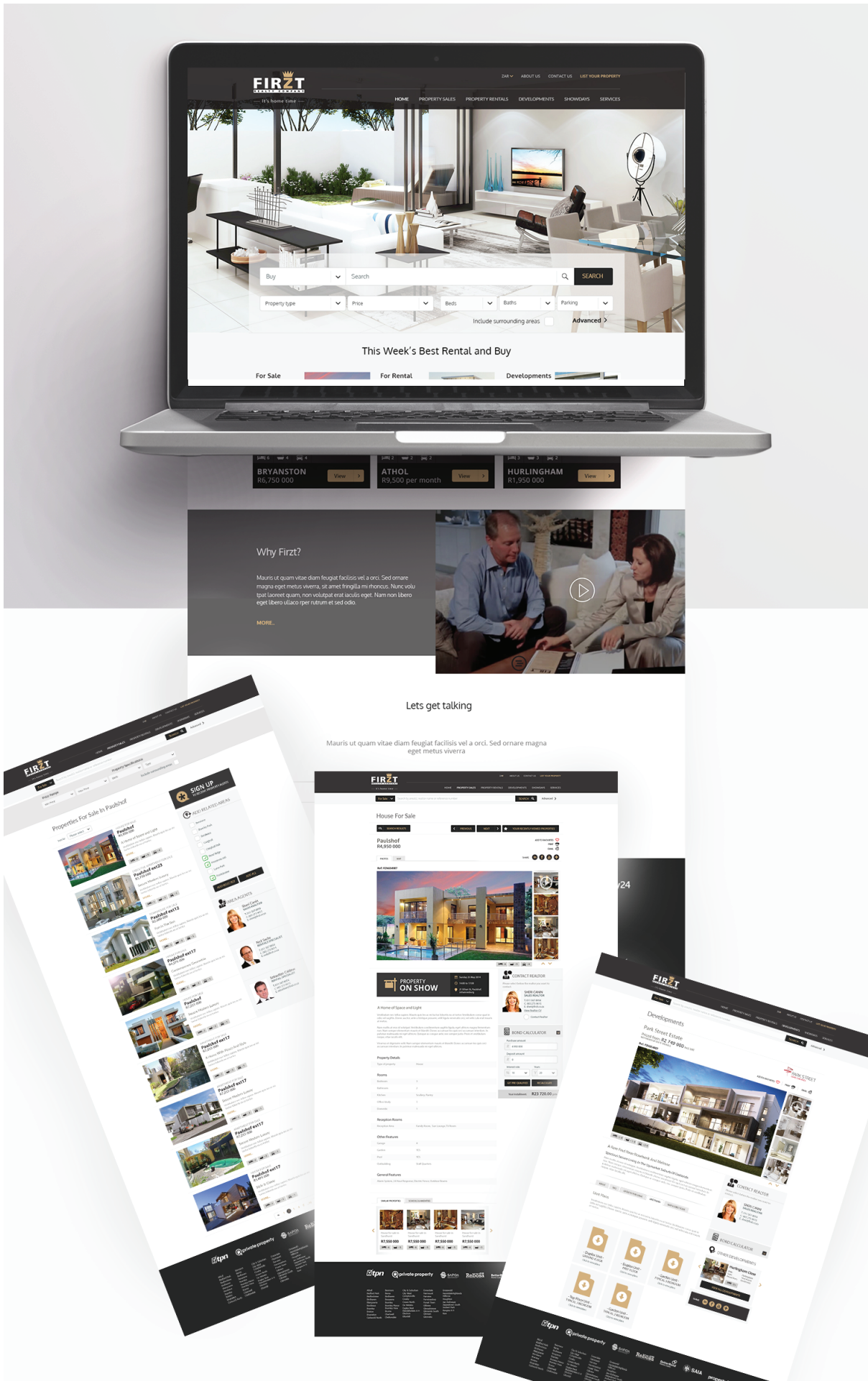
THE SOLUTION

The design solution was born out of a collective effort by my team and I to create the best, feature filled, user centred property software on the market. The final solution was made up of the following key features:

- i) Information. The existing site, prior to commissioning the new website, had very limited information regarding the different facets of the business. As a solution to this issue in the new design, my team and I created the different sections catering for the multiple property sectors which Firzt Realty Company was catering to. These different facets were:
 - Residential Sales
 - Residential Letting
 - New Development Sales
 - Commercial Property Sales
 - Commercial Property Letting
 - International Property Sales
 - International Property Letting
- ii) Limited site functionality. Previously the site had very limited site functionality. Having done research and gotten a better understanding of the target user, we came up with numerous features which made life easier for the target user. At the time of launch, some of the innovative features we brought to the site were:
 - Incorporation of Search Chips in the property search functionality. This enabled the user to quickly search for specific properties through typing out exact requirements. This eliminated the use of needing to have multiple filter option selections
 - Artificial intelligence. Based off a user's previous searches, the system begins to push notifications of new listings to a user's IP address. User does however have the ability to switch off these notifications if they do not want to receive them. Also based of the user's previous search criteria, the system will push previous search related 'Feature Properties' and 'Similar' suggested properties
 - When surfing the site on a mobile device, while on the move, the site uses the mobile GPS location to checks for and propose properties in the area which match the user's previous search
 - Another useful function incorporated onto the site was that of being able to do a property search for specific properties within a specific geographic area by simply making a selection of an area on the site's map search function
- iii) 'Cheap' property perception. The company had for many years been perceived as a seller of 'cheap,' houses. With the redesign of the site we as a design team were able to create a professional look for the site which in turn was able to change the general negative perception which had plagued Firzt Realty Company for decades.

THE DESIGN

Based off the design process we took, we were able to come up with a solid solution which was able to push the property website into a new era.



CONCLUSION

The ground work we conducted prior to design was able to unearth some interesting insights which we used to create a system which was able to reposition the Firzt Realty Brand as a solid brand with a property solution for all walks of life.

Following completion of the site we setup Google Analytics. Google Analytics gave us the ability to monitor how the website was performing. We were also able to surface a few problem areas which we made amends to order to enhance the user experience. Based off the data we gathered from the analytics, there was a marked increase in the use of the website.

A month after launch of the new site, the Firzt website was showcased in the 'Property Weekly', a digital property magazine which used to showcase all things property. This was a highly welcome development as the review showcased Firzt Realty Company in a positive light, based off their newly launched property site.

When the site was launched we created another digital survey to gather feedback on how the new site was aiding property seekers access properties sold by Firzt. The responses gathered indicated that the site had been well received by the target users and was helping in their quest to find their desired properties. What this ultimately meant was that the new site we had designed and developed had been a success.