

Rayna Hunter CEO, LH1 Global

It's never too late to start in property. Nigel Lewis meets the woman who has made a powerful impact in the highly charged prime London sector.



There's plenty of heated debate within the industry about people who jump ship to estate agency from other areas of the business world – and whether it's good for an industry built on reputation, knowledge and track record.

One success story is Rayna Hunter, who after several decades spent working in PR including a stint running her own firm, joined London prime estate agency LH1 Global in 2017, rising to become its CEO in October last year. Here she reveals what it's like being joining the property industry and what it's been like being one of the relatively few CEO-level women within the sector.

Why the switch to property?

"Property is in my blood – from a young age I was exposed to the industry regularly when helping my father who led many successful property businesses when I was growing up. I was always gaining experience where I could, whether it was answering phones for an estate agency or sitting and taking notes during negotiations for high-profile land or

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development deals.

"As a self-starter and extremely motivated, one of the first careers I embarked on involved the formation of my own PR and events business, which I ran successfully for over a decade. This initial career path involved arranging high profile charity events culminating in over half a million pounds being raised over the years, plus multi-million-pound events and parties for high-profile individuals, including booking Rod Stewart for a private party in The Bahamas for one client.

"Then in 2018 I started working alongside my husband, Benjamin Hunter, at LH1 Global a leading international off-plan property consultancy, which was growing quickly. I was originally heading up the UK sales department then global sales and then proudly taking the role of CEO which is testament to my business acumen and previous history in property.

"I may have entered the property world late, but to me it's all about delivering results, to be able to work on some incredible projects on a daily basis is one that drives me on to keep leading and learning."

What's it been like joining the property industry later in life?

"You could say I came onto the scene in later life [Rayna joined LH1 in 2017 when she was

WHAT IS LH1 GLOBAL?

Founded in 2017 originally as LH1 London the business has delivered prime projects across major UK cities in the past five years including those in London, Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Derby and Ashford. It also has a recently-opened office in Dubai which founder Benjamin Hunter now leads.

LH1 works with several well-known names within the UK agency sectors including LSL New Homes and Pygott & Crone.

The company was set up with an aim to become the UK's leading international property consultancy, specialising in the off-plan sales and marketing of prime city centre residential developments.

Hunter says this has now achieved and it's now time to "move on to the global stage and take our trusted and proven model to overseas developments", he says.

57 years old) and especially as a woman in a leading position, there could have been added challenges in what is a typically male dominated industry.

"But I've only seen my age and my gender as a positive. I try to use my experience and world viewpoint to create a more diverse team that can deliver the best results for our clients. I still have enough background knowledge to be well informed of how the industry and property market works, whilst I can bring other skills and a fresh perspective to try to do things differently and improve current practices.

"There are still misconceptions of hiring older people into new roles, however, there is a lot of experience that is being lost and I am a good case study of being able to step into a new role in a relatively new industry and adapt and deliver."

Do women find it harder in the industry?

"No, I don't believe so, but I do believe a lot of that comes back to the experience I brought into the role. I wasn't a junior making their first steps on the career ladder, I already had a base of knowledge and professional confidence developed over many years. But I still had to gain the respect of my clients and male peers. I would say I have done that by being assured and confident in my abilities, it is this more than anything else that has allowed me to enjoy success in the industry.

"I feel that people have judged me by who I am as a person, rather than the fact I'm female, and that has allowed me to build trust and strong relationships. If there has been any advantage to me being a woman in the industry it is the fact I may approach certain

aspects of the role with a different viewpoint than some of my male counterparts and the fact I hold a senior role means that I can direct real change. I believe there is still some way to go until women can feel as true equals in the sector, but I certainly don't think we are necessarily held back, like anything it is just going to take time for overarching views or stereotypes to change."

Are there enough women at the top?

"Women can play a major role alongside their male peers in senior roles. Women must not feel intimidated by working in property or in a male workplace and need to be given the confidence and reassurance that they will be working in a secure, exciting, and challenging environment, whilst also having a voice that can be heard and respected.

"In my opinion, you just need to embrace the challenge, it can be a rough and ready environment at times, especially if you need to spend time onsite. My team bought me pink safety boots, so I can still embrace my femininity, but that doesn't stop me commanding the best standards on a working site. It's how you carry yourself that's important. Ultimately, I believe there is a bright future for women in this industry, attitudes have changed enormously, and I hope that I and other female leaders in the sector can continue to inspire the next generations to get involved and continue to drive change."

Has LH1 Global expanded since you joined?

"It has been an incredibly successful period for the business during a time when the UK property market has stagnated. I believe we have achieved this by firstly building a strong team that has a multitude of strengths and experience that is perfectly blended to deliver excellent results for our developer clients and across multiple projects. It is also largely down to the fact that we have established a fantastic model in the sales and marketing of off-plan city centre multi-unit developments.

"Overall, we find that our approach leads to faster sales and completions due to purchasers being managed carefully to ensure that if there are any issues, we are on hand to provide support or find a solution to the problem.

"We are also very good at identifying emerging markets before they become overheated and work closely with our clients to source strategic sites, which will deliver homes that will prove popular once released onto the market in spite of any potential negative market conditions. This has allowed us to expand the business into the international sphere and take our model to new and emerging global markets and it is a very exciting time to be spearheading the business alongside Benjamin Hunter who is driving this growth from our Dubai office." ■