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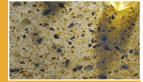
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THE LEGENDS AT VISTA DEL VERDE**

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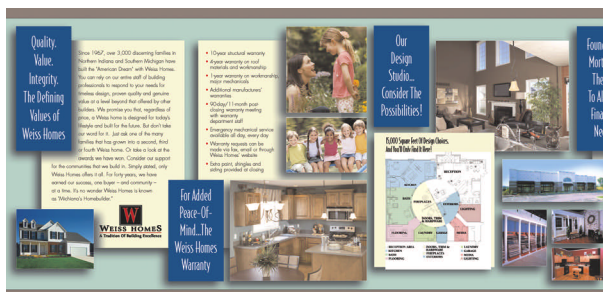


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perspective

Total Quality Revisited



Recently, the editorial staff has been having quite a discussion about the role of total quality management in home building companies. Some contend home builders are fad followers and TQM is a management fad that has passed. Others feel that now is the time — more than ever — that builders should be implementing TQM principles.

The discussion has boiled to a head because of our involvement in the National Housing Quality Awards, the judging of which is going on as I write. For nearly 15 years, *Professional Builder* has co-sponsored the awards with the NAHB Research Center. After this year, the Research Center is going to drop its involvement so it can concentrate on the National Housing Quality Certification program.

I want to say publicly that *PB* is committed to the NHQ Awards, and we feel it is an excellent next step of achievement beyond the certification program. Even though the Research Center has chosen not to continue with this aspect of the TQM program, it is committed to the ideas of best practices for home builders. Mike Luzier, president of the Research Center, says his team sees a direct correlation between builders' ability to execute a quality-built green home and the need for well-executed quality processes. And the NHQ certification program is a superior way for builders to implement changes in their organizations that will improve the bottom line and build great homes.

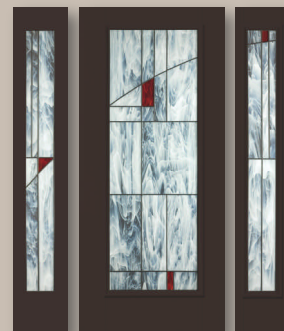
We have made the decision to continue our support of the NHQ Award in spite of our belief that builders tend to follow management fads. We all agreed there is nothing more important we can do as an information service in these times than give our audience tools to help them survive. And we all believe there are no better tools for surviving than a commitment to implementing quality process and best practices.

"Commitment" is a word that stresses all the right things about the NHQ Awards and TQM. Without it, builders seeking to make the kinds of changes necessary to garner recognition and enact improvement will not succeed. With it, they will find not only that they have significantly improved their businesses, but that they can reassure their prospective customers they are truly the highest order of professional builder.

The National Housing Quality Awards will be presented at **The Professional Builder Benchmark and AVID Leadership Conference** in Phoenix on Oct. 6. For more information, go to www.probuilder.com/benchmark.

Paul Deffenbaugh, *Editorial Director*
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NEW RURALISM

Internet access and cell phones allow people to live in the country and stay connected to the city office. Recent demographic studies suggest that overstressed and cramped city dwellers are taking flight. Dubbed “New Ruralism,” the hallmarks of this trend are dedicated open space; cyber-commuting; a less hectic lifestyle; Americana-style community; and environmental involvement. Builders take heed: rural populations are growing at the fastest rate in more than 20 years, according to two recent studies by Kenneth Johnson of Chicago’s Loyola University. Also of note: 71 percent of rural counties in America increased in population from 1990 to 2000 by 5.2 million residents (10.3 percent).

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[CUSTOMER SATISFACTION]

Show Me the Market Share!



The old measures of success must be adjusted for a shifting economy. Celebrate the gains, or you'll do more harm than good.

By Paul Cardis, CEO, Avid Ratings

Every business aspires to yearly revenue increases, but home builders who are depressed about yearly declines must recalibrate their goals to put greater emphasis on market share. The fact is, virtually all builders are experiencing a significant drop in home sales. That means survivors must outperform the competition even when their own sales are continuing to decline.

Jack Welch, the renowned former chairman and CEO of GE, provided bonuses not by how much a business unit profited, but rather by benchmarking each division with its corresponding market aver-

Please don't misunderstand this point; we shouldn't stop trying to grow our businesses. Rather, it means we need to reset the definition of success to our employees in this age of miserably sky-high inventories and declining home values.

In light of the economy — which will surely send dozens more of builders into bankruptcy — how does one measure success? Many builders today do not know how to set up a dashboard for success because the past misled them to think high volume and high profits were normal. Half jokingly, you might say you are successful if you're still

ers. Though sales volume will always be a key factor, market share will become a more important measure of performance. A company that sold 1,000 homes representing a 5 percent market share should be proud to sell just 750 homes representing a 10 percent market share. That's a 100 percent increase in market share, despite a 25 percent decline in unit sales. Rally your team and celebrate this kind of performance. Without recognition, we risk significant staff burn out!

In some respects, every home building executive needs to restrategize his or her company as if it's a new business. Business plans need to be rewritten to reflect the new realities of the marketplace, and new measures for success need to be implemented. Sales volume will always be an important factor. However, a more sophisticated approach that values gains in market share along with profitability is needed to thrive in an industry where many are struggling to survive. **PB**

Paul Cardis is CEO of Avid Ratings, a research and consulting firm specializing in customer satisfaction for the home-building industry. You can reach him at paul.cardis@avidratings.com.

You need to **look beyond sheer volume** and turn your attention to other measures, such as **market share, customer satisfaction and increased profitability.**

ages. If a division was highly profitable, but less so than their competitors in that market sector, he gave no bonuses to that division. Correspondingly, if a division lost money, but was doing better than the market, he awarded them a bonus. Crazy you say? Welch credits this incentive strategy as one of the ways he lead GE to consistently record profits.

in business. More seriously, however, you need to look beyond sheer volume and turn your attention to other measures, such as market share, customer satisfaction and increased profitability.

Whereas there used to be more than enough business to go around, home builders must increasingly vie for a shrinking pool of home buy-

Cardis' Tips

CARVE A BIGGER SLICE

The size of home-building pie may not grow for some time. Meanwhile, focus on getting a larger piece of what's still there.

REVISE REWARDS

Align incentives with your new focus on market share. Award bonuses even when sales are down if market share increases.

FOCUS ON THE CUSTOMER

The best way to increase market share is through referral sales, which only happen when home buyers are delighted.

REMEMBER PROFITS STILL MATTER

As you work to increase market share, make sure you're still keeping an eye on ways to increase profitability through watching those expenditures.



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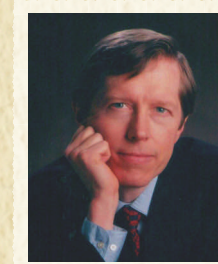
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[H.R. DEPT.]

Your Business During the Downtown



Training, sharing and communicating make the list of what you're doing to make the most of a bad market, an informal survey reveals.

By Rodney Hall, The Talon Group

Ongoing training, development, flexible use of great talent and ongoing communication are strategies builders utilize to make the best of a bad market. We polled more than 40 home building executives with the following question: "How is your company using this down cycle to further develop employees?" Here's what they told us:

- "We've expanded our use of e-learning and redesigned our internal training homepage to provide employees access to self-directed learning tools. In addition, we had four

'high-potential employees' for our two-year management development program, which exposes them to many facets of the business." — *Regional president for a national builder*

- "We began to cross-train our employees in different disciplines. ... We eliminated some outside contractors and created our own service business, such as landscape maintenance for the models. Our IT department now helps marketing with Web sites and e-blasts, versus paying an outside advertising firm." — *Division president*

president of sales described, "We educated our employees on what got us in this mess in the first place, where we are today and where we want to head. We clearly communicated what role we needed them to play. Now more than ever, our team members realize we need their feedback, and that alone helped increase employee satisfaction and accountability." Additionally, he reports employees support one another and have better morale.

Last but not least, getting back to the basics was another common message. "We're stressing to our people that things we could get away with in the past won't work now," said one sales director for a national builder. Or as one regional president noted, "The lesson I am imparting is that traditional roles and hierarchy are out the window. Everyone needs to be prepared to do whatever it takes to keep the ship afloat." **PB**

Rodney Hall is a senior partner with The Talon Group, a leading executive search firm specializing in the real-estate development and home building industries.

"We're stressing to our people that **things we could get away with in the past** won't work now." — *Sales director for a national builder*

individuals train on using Six Sigma for process improvement." — *Vice president of process control for a national builder*

- "Besides industry-specific training, we're including topics like social styles, negotiating to yes, and 7 Habits." — *Regional president of a national builder*
- "We continue to identify

for a California builder

- "We worked out a career development program for all our key people. This includes identifying weaknesses in skills and exposure to other business areas." — *President of a community developer*

For other builders, communication and mentorship have been the focus. As one vice

Make a Move

TRAIN YOUR EMPLOYEES

Work on their career development.

KEEP THEM INVOLVED

Give them updates on what's going on and where you're headed.

MENTOR

Use the time to reach out to the young'ns.

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An Attitude of Gratitude

The reward for investing in your employees in good times is folks who are willing to go to the mat for you when times get tough. Meet the companies we named the best places to work and learn how yours compares to others.

By Felicia Oliver, Senior Editor

Photo: Getty Images

No big surprise: entries for this year's Best Workplaces are down a bit amid layoffs; salary freezes and cuts; and the fact that some companies have simply gone out of business since last year's survey. But, happily, there are companies that have bucked the expectation of disgruntled employees ready to jump ship. This year's best workplaces have cultivated loyalty and a willingness to do double duty to help their companies ride out the current housing dip. These companies understand that a huge part of their success is their people, so they are willing to invest in them. And in these uncertain times, their staffs have not forgotten what has been done for them.

"I've got the best employees," says Doug Tripp, president of Tripp Trademark Homes, one of our finalists. "They are really looking to [find out] what else can they do to help us. Our receptionist has gone out into the field and is working as a hostess on her days off in our sales office. A couple of guys brought lawn mowers in to mow some of our inventory houses. The sales, construction and service people will vacuum the models on Friday afternoon instead of us paying a cleaning person, so that they look good during the weekend. I didn't tell them to do those things."

He adds that they were able to avoid some layoffs because staff were willing to take pay reductions for the benefit of the whole. "If people are willing to do that and not leave, that's

loyalty,” says Tripp.

Agreed. This year we are honoring six Best Workplaces: three top building companies with 100 or fewer employees, and three top building companies with more than 100 employees.

A common theme coming from those we spoke to at these companies is that the time and money spent to make employees feel heard, respected and motivated — be it through unique benefits, a good work/life balance, educational opportunities or fun get-togethers — is worth it. As belts tighten and situations seem dour, these companies have cultivated employees for such a time as this. They seem ready and willing to do what it takes to keep their companies going.

Putting things in perspective

Overall scores for survey participants were lower this year than last. But one thing that has stayed amazingly consistent is the percentage of respondents who strongly agree that they expect to be working for their current employer in the next two years. This year 71.2 percent agreed; last year just over 70 percent said so. (Note: There is a slight discrepancy in how total scores were evaluated last year and this year. Proportionally the scores were the same amongst last year's companies; the total scores this year were tallied differently.)

Scores were highest on the statements “I would recommend this company to others as a good place to work” at 75.4 percent — just a few points higher than last year's 72.4 percent — and “I would rate this company as a great place to work compared to other companies I know about” — 77.5 percent — up a bit from last year's 74.9 percent. (Hey, why even fill out the survey if you don't agree with that?)

Wallen Homes got several perfect scores. It scored 100 percent on all three questions relating to confidence in man-

PROFESSIONAL BUILDER 2008 BEST WORKPLACES

TOP 3 (100 EMPLOYEES OR FEWER)

1. Wallen Homes, Rio Rancho, N.M.
2. Tripp Trademark Homes, Lutz, Fla.
3. Traton Homes, Marietta, Ga.

TOP 3 (MORE THAN 100 EMPLOYEES)

1. Trendmaker Homes, Houston
2. Capital Pacific Homes, Newport Beach, Calif.
3. Holiday Builders, Melbourne, Fla.

agement's leadership ability (“I understand my company's business strategy and goals”; “I understand how my work fits into my company's business strategy”; “I have trust and confidence in the overall job being done by the senior leadership team of this company”). The average scores in this category were fairly good overall (66.1, 72 and 73.6 percent respectively). Traton Homes had 93 percent who strongly agreed that they understand how their work fits into their company's business strategy; Trendmaker had 92 per-

cent who felt that way.

Wallen Homes scored 100 percent in two areas of customer service (“I would rate this company highly on satisfying its customers”; “I would rate this company highly on providing quality customer service”). Wallen also scored 100 percent three times out of a possible four in the category of workplace culture and environment on questions concerning work/life balance; a climate of mutual respect among employees of different backgrounds; and encouraging teamwork and collaboration. Overall average scores on work/life balance were 59 percent; mutual respect, 71 percent and teamwork/collaboration, 73.5 percent. Last year the overall scores were, 53.3, 62 (almost a 10 percent increase this year!) and 70.3 percent, respectively, bucking the trend of lower scores this year. But it's not surprising that pleasing customers is top of mind in this current sales environment.

Wallen was bested only by Trendmaker on the question, “My company employs strong, ethical principles in its business practice” — the fourth question under the category of workplace culture. Wallen scored 89 percent versus Trendmaker's 93 percent. The overall average score was 75.6 percent.

Tripp Trademark scored high in two areas of corporate and social responsibility. Ninety-three percent strongly agreed,

Methodology

Professional Builder solicited responses to a 32-question online survey about how people feel about the home building company for which they work. We received almost 1,000 individual responses representing 63 separately identified companies.

Aside from giving a general description of their title (support staff/administrative, middle manager, senior manager, field supervisor or owner) and naming their company, respondents remained anonymous. Survey questions covered compensation and benefits; professional development, education and training; recruitment and retention; job satisfaction; workplace culture

and environment; social and corporate responsibility; customer service; and leadership ability of management.

We selected the top three companies in two categories — companies with 100 employees or fewer and companies with more than 100 employees — that scored highest overall on the employee survey result, which is to say, those with the most respondents who strongly agreed with the survey statements reflecting their view of their employer. Only companies with nine or more respondents representing 20 percent or more of employees were considered.

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"My company actively supports community outreach, public service and charitable work," which was the highest score this year on that particularly question; and 93 percent also strongly agreed that, "My company contributes to the local building industry, economy and corporate community," a score second only to Wallen's 100 percent. The overall average was 66 percent and 69 percent respectively. The overall average score this year on "My company practices environmentally responsibility in its operations" was 57.1 percent compared to 62.8 last year. Wallen and Trendmaker scored far above average at 89 and 80 percent, respectively, on this question.

As was the case last year, some of the lowest scores overall were in the area of recruitment and retention, presumably for the same reasons — more folks are being let go than recruited or retained. A mere 42.6 percent strongly agree that they are being groomed for a position of increased responsibility, or, if managers, are grooming at least one staff member for such a position. Last year the number was 49.57. Only 43 percent say open positions are being filled in a timely manner, fairly even with last year's 43.9 percent. What's more likely is that these positions are being left open indefinitely or eliminated completely.

Under the category of compensation and benefits, only 41.7 percent strongly agreed that their salary is competitive with similar positions in other companies, compared to a similar 43.7 percent last year. And in terms of professional development, education and training, only 42.2 percent strongly agree that their company's mentoring program has helped them develop important skills, compared with 47.10 percent last year. A low 46.6 percent of all respondents strongly be-

NO. 1 (100 EMPLOYEES OR FEWER)

WALLEN HOMES, RIO RANCHO, N.M.

Jenice Montoya,
President and General Manager
www.wallenbuilders.com

Employees: 28
2007 Revenue: \$58 million
2007 units closed: 188



WALLEN HOMES is a semi-custom builder primarily targeting move-up buyers. It has a library of about 45 floor plans but allows customers to make changes as significant as moving walls and adding patios.

"We'll actually let a customer go in and really customize that home," says President and General Manager Jenice Montoya. "So that gives us a little bit of a different approach."

Wallen Builders was originally founded as a framing company by Garry Wallen in 1985. In the late 1990s, a company called Amrep Southwest decided to stop building homes in Rio Rancho and asked Wallen to build out its remaining home contracts. Thus Wallen Builders became a home builder. Wallen remained owner of the company until he sold it to investors in April and retired in May 2007. The name changed to Wallen Homes to better reflect its position as a home builder.

Wallen Homes is a National Housing Quality Certified Builder.

"If you're familiar with NHQ certification, you know that it's much more than just building a good home," Montoya says. "While that's certainly a part of it, the underlying factor is just being a good company, being a good business partner, not only to our trade partners but to our employees as well."

lieve the better their performance, the better their pay will be. The number is down from 51.7 percent last year.

The Habits of Highly Successful Best Workplaces

Themes crept up among the winners. Here's a look at best practices these winning companies share:

Time Off

Both Tripp Trademark and Wallen Homes traditionally close their offices for at least a week during the Christmas holiday. Almost all six companies report a formal or informal flextime policy.

Fringe Bennies

Trendmaker allows employees to earn a percentage of gross profit contributions. Traton Homes has a gym on the premises, while Tripp Trademark offers membership to a gym next door.

Due Recognition

All six Best Workplaces have an employee awards and recognition system.

Knowledge is Power

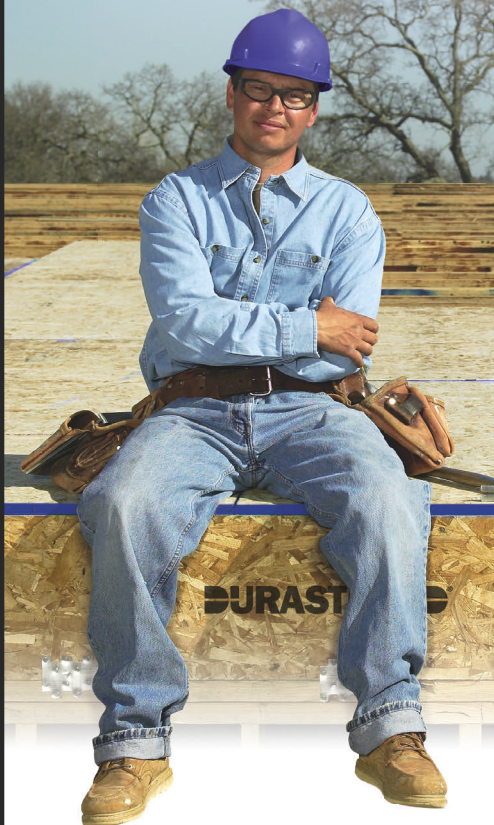
Both Capital Pacific and Holiday Builders offer an internal "university" program to address the training and professional development needs of employees.

Handling Layoffs

Wallen's HR department have helped laid off employees with resumes, interview techniques and whatever assistance they need in getting their next position.

To go more in depth on the highly successful habits of our Best Workplaces, check out this story online at www.probuilder.com/bestworkplaces.

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NO. 2 (100 EMPLOYEES OR FEWER)

TRIPP TRADEMARK HOMES, LUTZ, FLA.
Douglas Tripp, Founder/President
www.tripptrademarkhomes.com

Employees: 22
2007 Revenue: \$19 million
2007 units closed: 89

TRIPP TRADEMARK HOMES is a family-owned company founded by Doug Tripp in 2000. He started the company after 20 years in the home-building business, including 13 years as an executive for two of the nation's largest home builders. The company has closed more than 900 homes since then. Tripp Trademark builds single-family homes, townhomes and its popular villa product in several of Tampa Bay's premier communities.

Tripp Trademark describes itself as a small company with a big heart. Part of the company's mission is to build up the communities in which its homes are located.

"We've encouraged all our employees to become involved with non-profits and organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, Big Brother/Big Sister and the American Heart Association," says Tripp. "We give them time off from work to participate if they care to. We typically give financially [to these organizations]."

Tripp says he appreciates the recognition as a Best Workplace, but he think he should be recognized for having the best employees. "I'm very fortunate and blessed to have them," he says. "I try to stay out of their way and let them do their job. I'm there for any guidance they'd like."



NO. 3 (100 EMPLOYEES OR FEWER)

TRATON HOMES, MARIETTA, GA.
Bill and Milburn Poston, Founders
www.tratonhomes.com

Employees: 68
2007 Revenue: \$95 million
2007 units closed: 225

TRATON HOMES is a third-generation family-owned business. Brothers Bill and Milburn Poston founded Traton Homes in 1971. Since then, Traton has built more than 6,000 homes in more than 50 communities. Dale Bercher is chief operating officer of Traton Homes; William C. (Clif) Poston Jr. is the executive vice president; and Chris Poston is senior vice president. Traton is No. 203 on *Professional Builder's* 2008 Giant 400 list.

"Our office has a homey kind of feeling," says Clif Poston. "It's a comfortable, unassuming. ... Everybody has to dress and act professionally, but we want the feeling to be more like you're at home with your family."

And like a comfortable home, the office has a recreational space: a "retreat" on the third floor.

"There's a large bar up there, a big screen TV — it's like being in a lodge," says Bercher. "We use it periodically. We might have an after work get together, a company meeting or something like that. We can have a couple of cocktails and enjoy each other's company."



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NO. 1 (MORE THAN 100 EMPLOYEES)**TRENDMAKER HOMES, HOUSTON**

Will Holden, President
www.trendmakerhomes.com

Employees: 164
2007 Revenue: \$316.2 million
2007 units closed: 796

TRENDMAKER HOMES has been in Houston since 1971 and has built a niche as a builder of luxury production homes that incorporate “smart differences”— added features that add comfort and convenience but are not considered upgrades.

The company is part of WRECO, the real-estate subsidiary of Weyerhaeuser. One of the benefits of being a Weyerhaeuser company is that Trendmaker is one of a few home builders that offers employees a pension plan. The company also pays for each employee’s medical and dental insurance — and there is a cost to cover other family members.

“We have a very family-friendly environment,” says Will Holden, president of Trendmaker Homes. “I’ve been here 15 years, and I’ve had a lot of challenges in my life and with my kids — diabetes and other challenges. The company is very accommodating to people’s special needs. We are focused on retaining our employees for their career, and accommodating people through periods of their lives is probably the best way to do that.”

**NO. 2 (MORE THAN 100 EMPLOYEES)**

CAPITAL PACIFIC HOMES, NEWPORT, CALIF.
 Hadi Makarechian, Chairman/CEO/President
www.capitalpacifichomes.com

Employees: 260
2007 Revenue: \$372.6 million
2007 units closed: 1,045



CAPITAL PACIFIC HOMES is a wholly owned subsidiary of Capital Pacific Holding (No. 66 this year on *Professional Builder's* Giant 400 list) and is among the nation’s largest regional home builders with operations in Arizona, California, Colorado and Texas. Its Southern California Division earned National Housing Quality Certification earlier this year.

Founder Hadi Makarechian returned to his native Iran after graduating from the State University of New York at Buffalo to join his family’s development and construction company that, at the time, was the country’s largest developer. Returning to the States in the late ’70s, Makarechian established his own real-estate development business through various corporate entities.

Matt Kern joined CPH as corporate controller in 2002 and assumed his current position as chief financial officer in 2005. With the layoffs the company has had, Kern says remaining employees understand their importance.

“Our employees feel they are contributing something,” he says. “The organization wouldn’t be where it is today without their individual efforts. ... We can’t do this without [them], our key people.”

NO. 3 (MORE THAN 100 EMPLOYEES)

HOLIDAY BUILDERS, MELBOURNE, FLA.
 Kim Shelpman, President
www.holidaybuilders.com

Employees: 249
2007 Revenue: \$235.6 million
2007 units closed: 1,152

HOLIDAY BUILDERS was founded in 1983 with the mission to build affordable homes in Florida for the first-time home buyer. In its first year, the company overachieved on its business plan, selling 76 homes compared with the 12 it planned. Today, it has built more than 30,000 single-family homes in 65 communities throughout Florida, Texas, Alabama and South Carolina. Holiday is No. 88 on *Professional Builder's* 2008 Giant 400 list.

Holiday established its Employee Stock Ownership Program in 1996 and became 100 percent employee-owned in 1999, making it the largest employee-owned home builder in the nation. President Kim Shelpman says being an ESOP is an important benefit to employees. “They are certainly a piece of the pie. They have that daily accountability factor.”

The company is among the top 20 privately owned companies in the state of Florida and one of only a handful of companies to be employee-owned for more than 10 years.



MORE TIME TO SHOP

No more Sunday mornings spent perusing the real-estate section of the newspaper. New York City-based residential brokerage company Home Quest has created technology that lets home buyers in the city receive real-estate market information through text message alerts as soon as homes come onto the market. So house hunters now have time for more productive pursuits on a Sunday morning – like actually coming to see the homes you have available.

Photo: Home Quest

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INSIDE

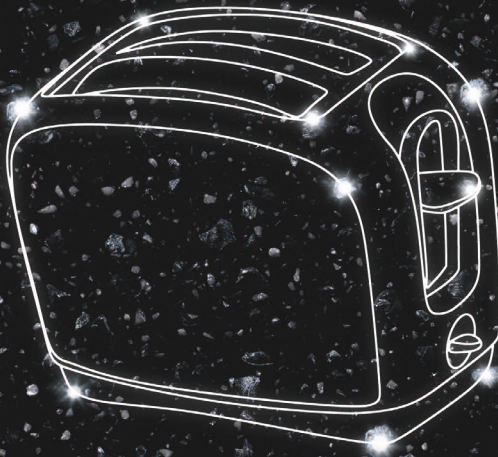
Give your sales presentations a make-over [page 29]

Use auctions to your advantage [page 30]

Selling Service 101 [page 36]



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Retool Your Sales Presentation



The sales methods you've been using are likely outdated. It's time to shake things up.

By John Rymer, New Home Knowledge

How good are your sales presentations? Are you regularly performing role plays at sales meetings? Do you feel good about what you hear and see? Do you have consistent measurements for judging presentation skills? Is your team scoring well on feedback metrics?

In today's environment it's trite but true to say that there is no better use of time and efforts than improving the presentation skills of sales team and the sale process experienced by your customers. But what if you feel good about your training program and presentation skills of your team?

Many sales professionals

It's trite but true to say that there is **no better use of time and efforts** than **improving the presentation skills of sales team** and the sale process experienced by your customers.

and managers are focusing on sales presentations based on the same formulas and criteria that worked well in a typical sales environment. Yet many of the proven sales techniques are falling flat in a sales atmosphere that is anything but typical. Take your pick: "Critical Path Selling," "Relationship Selling," "The Five Ps to a Sure

Sale" — it's not that these sales systems are inherently flawed, because they're not. But much of the emphasis, coaching and feedback measurements were refined during good times and are often out of touch with today's buyers. The result is a sales presentation that lacks the priorities and hard facts today's customer demands.

So what are the new priorities and key drivers of today's sales success?

No. 1: Stand tall and don't hide from value. The value question is on the mind of every buyer. Whether the question is stated as "What are your discounts?" "What specials are you offering?" or "I know those

are the list prices but what can you do for me," the underlying theme is all the same: sell me on why this is the best value in the market. Your answer should show confidence and willingness to take value head on: "Sounds like you're a customer who is focused on value. Congratulations, you've come to the right place. In this mar-

ket I wouldn't expect anyone to buy unless they thought they were getting the best value ..."

No. 2: Become an expert on the housing market fundamentals. While everyone is waiting to buy until the market bottoms out, the best sales professionals are getting schooled and are refining presentation skills in housing economics 201. It sounds like this: "No one knows for sure when the bottom of the market is or has occurred. But let me tell you why the housing market fundamentals are in your favor. Our national economy produces about 1.5 million new households annually. Right now we're on track to build only about 65 percent of the housing needed to meet the long term demand."

You won't find either or the above in most traditional sales training programs. Yet, focusing on hot points such as floor plans and locations, for example, without dealing with value or housing economics is a sure way to keep customer on the fence and postpone their housing decision. **PB**

John Rymer is the founder of New Home Knowledge, which offers sales training for new home builders and real-estate professionals. You can reach him at john@newhomeknowledge.com.

Rymer's Rules

STAND TALL AND DON'T HIDE FROM VALUE

Running from the "What's your discount?" question is sales suicide. Speak with confidence about your prices and justify your best value positioning.

BECOME AN EXPERT ON THE HOUSING MARKET FUNDAMENTALS

Discuss specific economic fundamentals of the housing market and demonstrate a balanced view of why postponing a decision doesn't make economic sense.

RETHINK TRADITIONAL SALES-TRAINING PROGRAMS

Many programs that worked in traditional market environments lack the priorities and hard facts demanded by today's customer.



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[HOME AUCTIONS]

Going Once, Going Twice

Builders turn to auctions to clear inventory, net quick cash and garner publicity. **By Felicia Oliver, Senior Editor**

Wish you could see your overstocked home inventory disappear as fast as the whack of a hammer on an auction block? Gardena, Calif.-based Cal Coast Homes is one recent developer who reportedly auctioned 18 of 24 homes offered in less than 40 minutes, netting a reported \$10 million from its Gardena Village community just southwest of Los Angeles International Airport.

Roger Pollock, president of Buena Vista Custom Homes of Lake Oswego, Ore., successfully pulled off a two-day auction last December of 141 of his 250-unit home inventory, generating \$65 million in sales in a well-publicized move that may have been the largest sales event in Oregon real-estate history. He conducted a successful smaller auction in March.

Here are some of Pollock's tips to keep in mind if you're considering an auction:

- **Come to grips with the reality of the market.** "Builders must realize that if they enter into an auction, this will likely bring the best available price and, good or bad, you should be prepared to accept the reality that the market delivers."
- **Select a professional auction producer.** "We went with nationally renowned Real Estate Disposition Co.

They run a flawless operation and focus on the key elements needed to deliver customers to buy your product. Without this you are going to fail."

- **Market the auction.** "Treat the auction like an event to get the bidders you need, and have a well-designed marketing and PR plan. We are big believers in public relations, and we chose to tell the story: 'We overbuilt; now we need to sell.' It is what it is. ... We build a great home and we have a positive name, and we wanted to let people know why we were auctioning off these homes."
- **Be the leader.** "Ask yourself whether you would like to be first to do an auction in your market or last. If you think this is a good avenue to quickly move your product, then don't stew over your decision. Make an action plan and get it done."
- **Be prepared to sell.** "We sold 141 homes in our first auction. We high-fived each other and then realized that we need to prepare 141 homes to close within 30 days. That was a big undertaking for our company. This will likely be the case for any builder. ... We had a couple of our sub-contractors quit immediately saying they couldn't do it. Prepare your operations crew for the task at hand." **PB**



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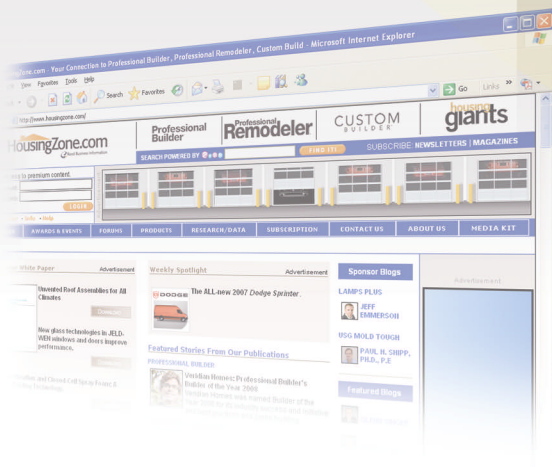
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How to Make the Most of the Web

By Mark Jarasek, Senior Editor, E-Media

Not all too long ago one of the only ways business professionals could get information specific to their industry was through the print media – trade publications containing industry-focused articles and other content. Perfect examples would be how *Professional Builder*, *Custom Builder*, *Housing Giants* and *Professional Remodeler* magazines have long served the residential construction industry.

Back in those days when print ruled the world of information dissemination for unique trade interests, there weren't even any television or radio programs that served industry-specific audiences such as home builders or remodelers. Then the Internet appeared, and it's pretty obvious how it has revolutionized the world of communications.

This young upstart has been growing and maturing quicker than any ravenous teenager ever could. The Internet rapidly evolved; static text Web sites delivered to your clunky personal computer via telephone lines rigged to slow 56k modems became dynamic multimedia Web playgrounds accessible in a blink of the eye. Before we sat at a computer station to work; now hand-held gadgets keep us moving and working simultaneously.

The New Name Game

It seems as if one morning we woke up to find a host of newfangled tools, social networks and interactive applications appearing across the Internet — tools with cryptic-sounding names such as RSS Feeds; brave new means for airing opinions called blogs; space for interactive feedback that allow anyone to add their own observations to online articles; and social networking Web sites with imaginative monikers including MySpace, Facebook and even LinkedIn.

Feeling a little confused? Not surprising. Even those of us who work every day in the electronic media world have been left scratching our heads in bewilderment. Which is why we've created this guidebook to help homebuilders and remodelers better understand it all and find out how to use the innovative Internet resources to improve and advance their businesses.



Your friend The Internet has basic tools that can help your home building business in more ways than one.

Resources at Your Fingertips

By Mark Jarasek, Senior Editor, E-Media

If you've been reading articles on HousingZone.com or any of our publication's sites — Pro-Builder.com, CustomBuilderOnline.com, HousingGiants.com or ProRemodeler.com — you might have noticed a bundle of new tools in place. These are the tools you can find on typical information or news-related Web sites.

Here's a run-down of exactly what they are, how they work and how you can use them.



other people have contributed; their observations can be very enlightening.

The link to the Talk Back feature is located at the very end of every article. Once you submit your Talk Back comment, a link to your comment appears at the end of the article where you

placed your comment.

Those involved in the home building and remodeling industries can benefit from both contributing to and reading other Talk Back submissions. Web visitors have offered interesting and valuable insights on a wide variety of articles on HousingZone.com and its related Web sites. They offer a whole new dimension to the work of the journalists, in effect broadening the sources and information contained in news and feature articles.

Talk Back

Talk Back

POST A COMMENT ON THIS ARTICLE

- Nothing to eat? Moulds and mildew w.....Paul W Mastenbrook — 07/11/08
- Very helpful. Thanks.Pamela Armstrong — 08/07/07
- Since mold is a big concern, why is.....Rob L — 04/04/07
- Just finished building and rebuild.....Grey Rideout — 03/22/07

On HousingZone.com and our related Web sites, the Talk Back feature allows anyone to add their insights, observations or opinions to any article or blog posting. It's also very interesting to read the strings of what

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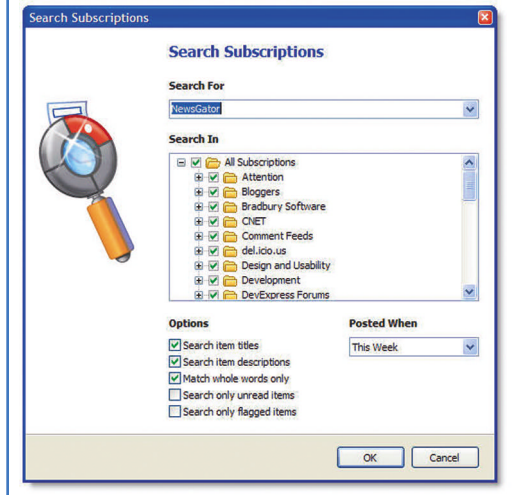
RSS Feeds



Let's take any mystery out of this one right now: RSS stands for "Really Simple Syndication." It's a new way to deliver information online through what are known as RSS feeds. Using RSS feeds is a very easy and convenient way to have specific types of content delivered directly to your computer as it is released from the source.

An RSS document (which is called a feed, Web feed or channel) contains either a summary of content from an associated Web site or the full text. RSS makes it possible for people to keep up with Web sites automatically; that content is piped into special programs or filtered displays on personal computers.

The benefit of RSS is that content from multiple sources is aggregated into one place for you. RSS content can be read using software called an RSS reader, a feed reader



or an aggregator, which can be Web-based or desktop-based. A standardized coding format allows the information to be published once and viewed by many different programs. The user subscribes to a feed by entering the feed's link into a reader or by clicking an RSS icon in a browser that initiates the subscription process.

At the heart of the technology is special Web coding, called XML, which can automatically push headlines and/or information to an RSS Reader. This is a simple, convenient way to have content delivered directly to your computer. But first, you need the feed reader. How it works: the RSS reader checks the user's subscribed feeds regularly for new content, downloads any updates that it finds, and provides a fairly simple user interface to monitor and read the feeds.

Performing a search for "RSS Feed Readers" in any major search engine such as Google.com or Yahoo.com will produce a slew of software options — many that are free or have a nominal cost. Examples of free Web-based RSS readers are Google Reader, NewsGator, Bloglines and My Yahoo.

Desktop software versions of RSS readers can be found in the newer versions of Web browsers such as Internet Explorer and Mozilla Firefox. Readers are also included in some e-mail programs, including Microsoft Outlook and Mozilla Thunderboard. You can also use any Internet search engine to find

other RSS readers that are available — some for free and others inexpensively.

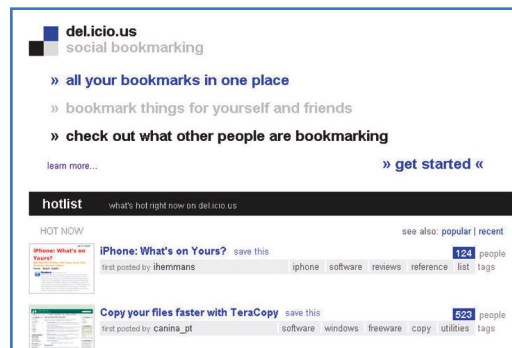
Once you've obtained a feed reader, subscribing to an RSS feed is as simple as looking for the appropriate XML code. Most Web sites that publish an RSS feed will display a tiny orange box or button labeled RSS or XML. Click the button and your Web browser typically goes to a page of cryptic code. Just copy the Web address, or URL, of that page and plug it into your feed reader. The software will then automatically retrieve and display that site's latest information as it is released.

Home builders and remodelers can collect RSS feeds from a whole host of resources that offer information that can impact or improve their business. See our list of these resources on the last page.

Bookmarking with del.icio.us

According to information found on its Web site, del.icio.us defines itself as a social bookmarking resource. The primary use of del.icio.us is to store your bookmarks online, which allows you to access the same bookmarks from any computer and add bookmarks from anywhere you might be.

As it relates to the Internet, a bookmark is a page or Web site URL you can save in one spot so that it's easy to return without retyping the address or url again. This feature is available in most Internet browsers. For example, Microsoft Internet Explorer bookmarks are known as "favorites" and a menu option is available for you to view your favorites in the Microsoft Internet Explorer browser. However, if you're not at the computer where you've stored all of your precious bookmarks, then you can't access what



you've saved. That's where del.icio.us comes in handy.

Del.icio.us allows you to save any or all of your bookmarks so that no matter where you are or what computer you are using, you can go to <http://del.icio.us/>, log in and retrieve your bookmarks. Del.icio.us also offers a means to share your bookmarks with business associates, colleagues or friends.

It may be a little difficult to imagine how this type of Web site can be useful to a business person, but there are opportunities to use it for in-depth research because you can keep track of any of the resource material you find online. It can also be used for collaboration where coworkers or other groups can use a shared account to collect and organize bookmarks that are relevant to the entire group.

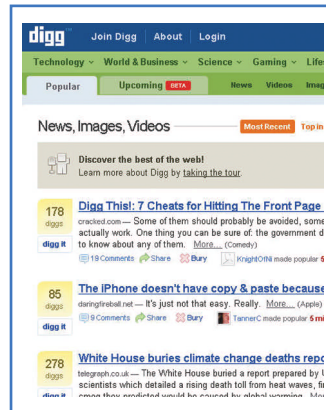
Information offers good guidance on how you can easily set up a free subscription and get started using this online tool.

Digg

Digg is a social networking Web site for news articles or any type of content found on the Internet. Digg's major distinction is that articles that are linked from the site achieve their popularity by receiving votes from those who visit and use the Web site. Articles that receive the most votes rise to the top and are granted a coveted position on Digg's main page.

You can visit www.digg.com to take a look at what others in the Digg community network consider to be the top articles, blogs or other content across the Internet. You can also sign up — for free — to contribute articles you think might be particularly interesting, or of interest to others.

HousingZone.com includes a convenient link to the Digg network on all of its article and blog pages. So when you find that article or blog that you think the world should see, it's easy for you to post it to Digg.



Many other sites like Digg have started to appear on the Internet, including Buzzfeed (www.buzzfeed.com), Filtrbox (www.filtrbox.com), and Alltop (www.alltop.com). They all have their own special nuances but basically serve as a place where articles and information found across the Internet can be shared.

Blogs

Contrary to what one might guess, the term blog was not inspired by a B-movie horror creature, i.e. The Blog That Ate Manhattan. It's actually an abridgement of the term "Web log." Today, the Internet is bursting with blogs. As of December 2007, blog search engine Technorati was tracking more than 112 million blogs.

Many blogs provide commentary or news on a particular subject; others function as more personal online diaries. A typical blog combines text, images and links to other blogs, Web pages and other media related to its topic.

Those involved in the housing industry can potentially use blogs in two ways: 1) To reference and gain knowledge from blogs that are relevant to their business; or 2) To establish their own blog to help establish their credibility and/or promote their business knowledge for the benefit or bemusement of others.

The HousingZone.com group of residential Web sites currently offers nine blogs that address topics relevant to the housing industry. They're authored by editorial staff, columnists who contribute to the print publications and other respected experts in the industry. On a regular basis, they offer keen insights and information that can't fit into the magazines. They also often cover breaking or important news to the residential construction community that simply can't wait for the release of a monthly trade publication.



Additional Internet Resources

The Internet can be a treasure trove of helpful and useful information for homebuilders, remodelers, architects, interior designers, manufacturers and virtually anyone involved in the industry.

Resources on the Internet include search engines, other housing industry related Web sites and news sites from major newspapers around the world. Online resources that business professionals would also find helpful include electronic newsletters, podcasts, Webcasts and something that is just starting to emerge from the world of publishing: electronic magazines. Our own *Housing Giants* magazine recently went to an all-digital format.

Here's a list of some of those helpful online resources:

Search Engines

- Google – www.google.com — the 900-pound gorilla of Internet search
- Zibb – www.zibb.com — the global business search engine
- Yahoo! – www.yahoo.com — Yahoo!'s answer to online searches
- MSN, www.msn.com — Microsoft's search engine
- Dogpile – www.dogpile.com — search engine aggregator
- Ask – www.ask.com — get questions answered at Ask

Housing-Related Resources

- National Association of Home Builders – www.nahb.org
- National Association of the Remodeling Industry – www.nari.org
- National Association of Realtors – www.realtor.org
- American Institute of Architects – www.aia.org
- American Society of Landscape Architects – www.asla.org
- American Lighting Association – www.americanlightingassoc.com
- Urban Land Institute – www.uli.org
- Joint Center for Housing Studies – www.jchs.harvard.edu
- Inman News – www.inman.com
- Partnership for Advanced Technology in Housing – www.pathnet.org
- International Code Council – www.iccsafe.org
- Construction Safety Council – www.buildsafe.org

Government-Related Resources

- U.S. Census Bureau – www.census.gov
- Occupational Safety & Health Administration – www.osha.gov
- U.S. Department of Labor – www.dol.gov

News Resources

- Washington Post – www.washingtonpost.com
- New York Times – www.nytimes.com
- USA Today – www.usatoday.com

Have we reached the end of the Internet yet? Not very likely. But you can start using the tools available out there to bring the World Wide Web a little closer to your own business universe.



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How to Sell Service

Learn to turn the perks and services you offer from price tags to benefits in your home buyers' eyes.

By Jan Mitchell, Contributing Editor

Quality. Value. Integrity. The Defining Values of Weiss Homes

Since 1967, over 3,000 discerning families in Northern Indiana and Southern Michigan have built the "American Dream" with Weiss Homes. You can rely on our entire staff of building professionals to respond to your needs for timeless design, proven quality and genuine value at a level beyond that offered by other builders. We promise you that, regardless of price, a Weiss home is designed for today's lifestyle and built for the future. But don't take our word for it. Just ask one of the many families that has grown into a second, third or fourth Weiss home. Or take a look at the awards we have won. Consider our support for the communities that we build in. Simply stated, only Weiss Homes offers it all. For forty years, we have earned our success, one buyer – and community – at a time. It's no wonder Weiss Homes is known as "Michiana's Homebuilder."



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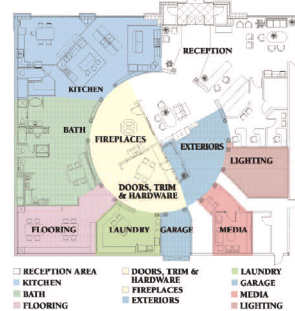
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- Emergency mechanical service available all day, every day
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- Extra paint, shingles and siding provided at closing



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Our Design Studio...Consider The Poss



WEISS HOMES IN INDIANA (ABOVE) touts its "one-stop shop" through prominent displays in sales offices. Centex Homes in southeast Florida (opposite page) differentiates itself in the marketplace by offering a warranty twice as long as most of its competitors.

Photos: Group Two Advertising

The tie-down

Bonnie Alfriend, president of Alfriend Sales and Marketing Solutions in Pebble Beach, Calif., agrees with outlining benefits and believes salespeople need to go one step further. "I find that salespeople are generally good about explaining benefits, but are not so good at getting them to 'buy in.'" When touting a builder's services such as a warranty, she recommends saying: "This warranty will keep your home from obsolescence and maintain value for a period of time. Is that something you would like for your new home?" She adds, "We sell a home in bite sizes, and getting that agreement is just one of the bites."

The one-stop shop

From some builders, such as Weiss Homes in South Bend, Ind., success is all about selling bundled services. Ted Uelk, community manager of Weiss, says the builder's one-stop shop concept includes an in-house mortgage company, state-of-the-art design studio, excellent warranty program and, for the prospect with a home to sell, a full-service, low-commission realty brokerage. "Our value is truly in the total package," he says.

The company's design studios have made a name for themselves in the South Bend area, as Weiss is the only area builder that offers them. The firm created them two years ago in an attempt to differentiate itself from the competition. But how do salespeople communicate the value of it to prospects? Weiss' salespeople follow a consistent system of demonstrating the home, then describing the 24/7 design studio, "established for the convenience of the buyer," Uelk says. "They point out the time and money savings, mentioning how they don't have to run all over town, hoping everything matches at the end."

But what if a prospect turns up his or her nose at one of the services in the package? Take the customer who insists that he or she doesn't need the design center, either because he or she already has firm design ideas or, "there's a sister-in-law who's a designer," says Alfriend. She recommends using the following: "Wow, that's terrific! Feel free to bring her, and we have already done a lot of the homework for her. Our specially trained designers have narrowed down some of the best products and cutting-edge designs for your home, assuring it is fresh and new for years to come. And it doesn't cost you any extra. How does that work for you?"

Uelk adds, "HGTV has created a lot of 'experts,' so our salespeople spend time educating customers that instead of moving in and having work to do, they can move in and immediately enjoy the home."

Overcoming objections

Keep objections to a minimum by personalizing your presentation, says Melinda Brody, president of Melinda Brody and Co. in Orlando, Fla., who conducts sales training and video shopping. "Always ask customers what's important to them rather than immediately launching into a long explanation about your fabulous design center," she says. "Sometimes the customer becomes checked out mentally because the speech starts to sound like a time share presentation."

Brody recommends determining customers' needs and wants by asking deeper questions as a part of the greeting and qualifying process. This ensures you won't waste their

SAY IT'S SO

Some customers may be wary of using the same company for multiple functions. If customers have trouble seeing the benefits of using your in-house mortgage services, design center or other services, a salesperson can say specific things to help them. Below are some examples gathered from our sources.

Feature	Benefit
In-House Mortgage Services	<p>"Our in-house mortgage company has shopped local and national banks to find you the best rates."</p> <p>"Our mortgage company has more motivation to get you qualified."</p> <p>"Our appraisers are familiar with our products, so we can get loans through in timely fashion."</p> <p>Tie Down: "Does that sound like something that would be of benefit to you?"</p>
In-House Realty Brokerage	<p>"Our Realtors know what's happening in this marketplace and can give you a true competitive market value."</p> <p>"Our in-house brokerage will charge you a reduced commission to sell your existing home."</p> <p>Tie Down: "Can I set you up with an appointment to talk with one of our agents, even if you don't end up listing your home with them?"</p>
Homeowners' Association	<p>"You'll have everything from lawn mowing to snow removal taken care of, allowing you to travel whenever you wish."</p> <p>"You'll end up saving money over time, because you don't have to pay bills for cable, Internet or gym membership."</p> <p>"Your property will maintain its high value over time, giving you appreciation if you ever want to sell."</p> <p>Tie Down: "That's a pretty great benefit, wouldn't you agree?"</p>
Design Center/Services	<p>"Everyone wants to design their own home, and it will set your home apart as a semi-custom home."</p> <p>"It will save you time and money, preventing you from running all over town trying to get things to match."</p> <p>Tie Down: "Would you agree that service is something you would like to have?"</p>



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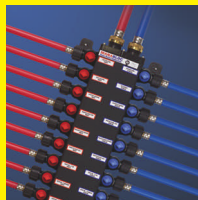
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time explaining services they're not interested in. Questions such as, "What do you like to do in your spare time?" "Do you work out?" "Do you have pets?" and "Tell me about your family," will help the salesperson determine whether to emphasize the clubhouse, the exercise facilities, the pool or the dog park.

Weiss' Uelk agrees. "We don't just dump information on them; we get them involved. We ask, 'Will you be paying cash or financing?' That determines whether they need to know about our mortgage services." Likewise, "Do you have a home to sell?" tells us whether or not they need Weiss Realty."

Selling the warranty

"Most people don't understand warranties," admits Schultz. One way to win in this area is to find the point of differentiation, and position it like this: "We are the only builder that provides . . ." then outline the benefits. He points out that the operative words to use are "insured" and "included." And, he says, it doesn't hurt to add, "We do it because we believe it's the right thing to do."

Centex's southeast Florida division differentiates itself from its competitors by offering a two-year warranty on workmanship and materials, twice what other builders in the area offer. But Richard Elkman, president of Group Two Advertising in Delray Beach, Fla., whose firm designed Centex's ads touting the warranty, stresses that a builder can't compete on a warranty alone but also must successfully position product, location and amenities.

Tracy Gundersen, CEO of Warranty Management Technologies, believes that the better the salesperson educates the buyer on the warranty process, the higher the customer satisfaction rate. The salesperson should explain that there is no such thing as a defect-free home but that the warranty department's policy is to respond to problems within X days. "Companies who do a fantastic job with how to sell their warranties as a benefit are comfortable saying: We know there are going to be issues; we're going to talk to you about it now."

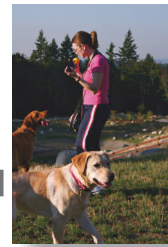
For on-site salespeople who encounter the inevitable customer service or warranty request, Kerry Mulcrone, president of Mulcrone & Associates based in Minnesota, has a warning: "If you fix it, you own it, even if it's not in your area of expertise or job description." Know who within your organization is equipped to do what, and help refer the homeowner. "If you are trying to get credit you will, but then again, you will also get to retain that problem."

Selling service in a slow economy

"The culture of the buyer is different now from the buyer we had a while ago," believes Mulcrone. "We used to have a buyer of selection and now we have a buyer of elimination," she says, explaining that in a buyer's market, prospects are coming in ready to eliminate unless they experience that "wow" factor. That can come in the form of a product or ser-



Puppy Perks



For a builder selling to singles or empty nesters, incorporating pets into the conversation just might be the best way to fetch buyers. Especially for multifamily or active adult buyers, a "bark park" or doggy day care facilities are ideas whose time have come, says Melinda Brody of Melinda Brody & Co. "If you can offer that as a service, this is a huge opportunity to connect to their heartstrings," she says.

Asking qualifying questions such as "Do you have pets?" and "What are their names?" gives you a great opportunity to explain that your community includes a dog park and to mention a fact such as this, says Brody: "We've found that 75 percent of our pet owners like to socialize with others with pets." Chances are they'll fall just as in love with your community as they are with their brown-eyed pooch.

According to Djuna Woods, a Realtor with Coldwell Banker in Menlo Park, Calif., 39 percent of U.S. households own at least one dog, and annual spending on pets is expected to exceed \$40 billion this year. "Dogs have become the new children," she says. Woods specializes in pet-loving properties and maintains a pet blog at peninsulahousehound.com.

Some communities are sponsoring pet birthday parties, puppy petting parties and "Yappy Hours." Metro 417, a Los Angeles luxury apartment community, publicizes its pet-friendly environment with a West Highland Terrier aptly named Metro featured in ads and on its Web site. Metro lives on-site.

To find pet-friendly communities or to list your community, check out PetRealtyNetwork.com.

vice. Again, the best way to make sure they don't eliminate you is to find out their story, she says. "If you ask the right questions, it brings you out of the question mode and into conversation mode."

Elkman believes that wow factors should be incorporated at every stage of the customer's experience, not just in the sales presentation. This may be in the form of extended hours, outstanding entry signage, merchandised models, better collateral material or display signage in the sales center. "The process of selling a home right now has to be smoother than ever before."

Schultz agrees. "When you have fewer qualified buyers than you have desperate sellers in a market, you have to make them understand how and why you are different."

Says Mulcrone: "This is a great time to look at your people and systems, refine, renew, and reenergize." **PB**

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Photo: Taylor Morrison

INSIDE

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Lovin' the outdoors [page 47]

Courtyard homes score sales [page 48]

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[DESIGN TIPS]

Corner-Lot Creativity

By Susan Bady, Senior Editor, Design

Architect Donald Powers of Donald Powers Architects in Providence, R.I., met a threefold challenge of a narrow, deep, corner lot with a design that maximizes curb appeal and floor-plan functionality.

To get the most out of the 35-foot-wide by 130-foot-deep lot, Powers oriented the house toward a screened porch at the rear. The porch opens into a small courtyard formed by the main house and a detached carriage house. "By grouping all of the service elements, including the staircase, bathrooms, kitchen and storage, into an 8-foot zone along the inside boundary of the property, we were able to make the long frontage consist entirely of the large public rooms and a porch," he says. "Those rooms stack along the side of the house and give it a tremendous sense of light and openness."

Placing the entry point at the middle of the long side of the house rather than the front allowed him to consolidate primary rooms into one functional living space. The home feels much larger than its 2,100 square feet.

A 300-square-foot apartment on the top floor of the carriage house is accessed by an exterior



stair. The carriage house's added height "anchors the entire block and creates a nice façade on that side." Powers also used a crossing gable and chimney to create a formal presentation on the long side of the lot. Those elements, combined with the wraparound porch, add up to a design that can be replicated on a variety of lot conditions.

Located in the traditional neighborhood development of East Beach in Norfolk, Va., the home was built by North Shore Construction Co. of Norfolk, Va.

ARCHITECT DONALD POWERS created two appealing elevations: one on the lot's narrow end and another along the side.

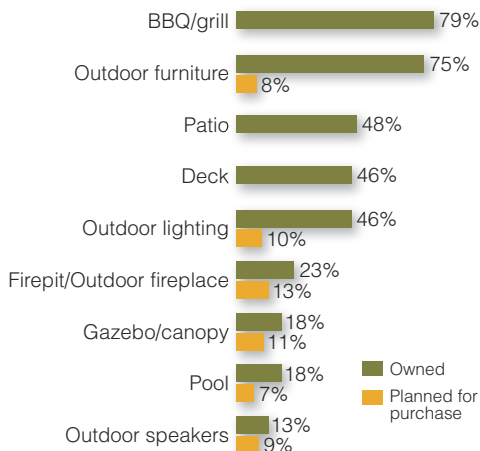


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HOME BUYERS STILL LOVE THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Recent surveys show that outdoor-living fever continues unabated. Our suggestion to builders: throw a party after dark at your model home to wow prospective buyers with your beautifully lit outdoor spaces. It's also an opportunity to show off outdoor kitchens, fireplaces and other accoutrements of the good life.

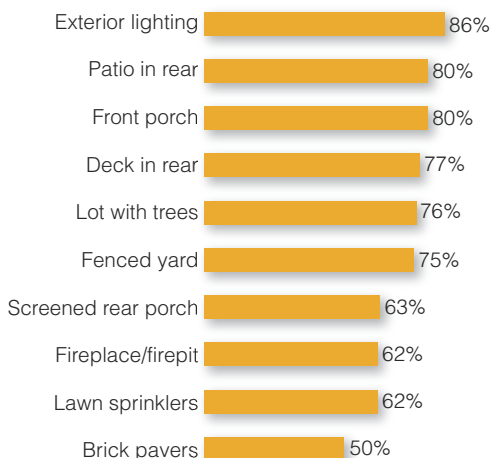
Top 5 Outdoor Entertaining Products Owned/Planned for Purchase



Source: The NPD Group, "Outdoor Entertaining Trends," July 2007

Must-Have Outdoor Features

(Percent of Respondents)



Source: NAHB Consumer Preference Survey 2007

[BEST ADDRESS]

COURTING

Toll Brothers' innovative courtyard model home in the Vista del Verde planned community gives Southern California move-ups a reason to re-enter the market.

By Bill Lurz, Senior Editor

48

THE FRONT ELEVATION of Toll Brothers' new Ironwood model at The Legends at Vista del Verde in Yorba Linda, Calif., gives no hint that the front door opens into an exterior courtyard.

Photos: Eric Lucero

RECOVERY



Sales backlogs are a rare commodity in many markets these days, especially in moribund Southern California. But Toll Brothers is building through 50 sales in two sister neighborhoods that opened models last fall at its master-planned community of Vista del Verde in Orange County. And at least part of the credit has to go to a new house plan the public giant debuted there: the 5,257 square-foot Ironwood, a two-story courtyard model that's spurring traffic to The Legends, a neighborhood of 79 luxury homes on lots 65 feet wide by as much as 120 feet deep.

Toll senior project manager Seth Ring worked with architects Jim Langston and Chuck Steichen, principals of Orange, Calif.-based LSA Architecture, to develop the new plan, which caters to Californians' love of indoor/outdoor entertaining. "As I was setting up the project, it was something I thought would be fun to go through," Ring says, "to create a new plan and see what that's like within Toll Brothers."

Langston believes it's something builders will have to do more of these days to coax buyers back into the market. "Builders need to offer something exciting, something buyers can't find in an existing home," he says. "The Ironwood is like that. Courtyard homes are not completely new, but in California today, you see them mostly in beach communities, and generally they are single-story plans. This is a two-story courtyard home, and it's more formal and elegant than any courtyard plan in this

market. It's been a big winner for Toll."

Toll offers four floor plans in The Legends and another four in its sister neighborhood of slightly smaller homes, The Masters, where lots are 55 feet wide. All are base-priced at more than \$1 million. Yet Toll has already sold 50 homes between the two neighborhoods, including six Ironwoods. The other model home at The Legends, the Trabuco, is neck and neck with the Ironwood for sales leadership.





THE ACTUAL INTERIOR ENTRY of the 5,257 square-foot home is at the foyer (above), where a circular staircase provides a stunning focal point. The courtyard (center) has a design similar to what you'd find in a home's interior. The bathroom (left) features Tuscan styling.



INTERIOR MERCHANDISER Doris Pearlman of Denver-based Possibilities For Design says Ironwood's interior has an old-world feel to match its Tuscan stone and stucco exterior styling. A massive, two-tiered island (above) separates the kitchen from the breakfast nook and family room beyond.

PROJECT PROFILE

Community: The Legends at Vista del Verde
Location: Yorba Linda, Calif.
Model: Ironwood
Size: 5,257 square feet
Builder: Toll Brothers, Orange, Calif.
Architect: LSA Architecture, Orange, Calif.
Interior Designer: Possibilities For Design, Denver

PRODUCTS USED

Appliances: KitchenAid
Carpet: Shaw
Entry door hardware: Baldwin
HVAC equipment: Carrier
Lighting: Progress
Paint: Frazee
Plumbing fixtures: Kohler
Roof tile: Eagle
Stone: El Dorado
Windows: Linford

What makes it work

Peruse the Ironwood floor plan and photography and you should be able to get a sense of how it works. But the real strength of this house is the way it compares to others of a similar size. "Houses of 5,000 square feet tend to be dark inside," Langston says. "The center courtyard of this home brings light into all the spaces, and we have generous windows on the exterior walls as well."

The two-story courtyard doesn't get a lot of direct sunlight, but it spreads diffuse natural light throughout the home. "That natural light is so much more attractive than any kind of artificial light," Langston says. "It's a fun place to be."

And fun is the other attraction; this is a party house. It still has a view plane to the rear, and the pool and deck at the back are accessible to party guests through sliding doors off the family room. But the courtyard and its massive (optional) stone fireplace will pull guests in another direction, through the courtyard foyer and a wide open wall created by an optional telescoping glass. A big flat-screen TV in the loggia — tucked behind the two-way fireplace — adds another attraction. A party at this house will probably flow into every downstairs space except the guest casita. Because the courtyard and loggia seem like indoor rooms, this house lives much bigger than its air-conditioned square footage.

The location factor

Toll's regional president for California, Jim Boyd, admits there are more factors at work in the success of The Legends than just design. Vista del Verde is a hugely successful master-planned community of 879 acres, where Toll began selling houses in 2000 and has already sold more than 1,000 homes. "It was a

great land buy," he says. "Our partner in the development is Aera Energy, a consortium of oil companies that joined all their California land holdings into a separate entity. This property in Yorba Linda was an operating oil field. We donated 200 acres to the city for a municipal golf course. That helped spur approval, and it also enhanced the value of many lots."

Vista del Verde also benefits from being in the highly regarded Yorba Linda School District, and The Legends site is at the highest elevation in Vista del Verde, adjacent to Cleveland National Forest and the golf course. "A lot of people had been waiting for these lots to become available when we opened sales," Boyd says.

The largest segment of buyers come for this project have been Asian and Middle Eastern families, many who are small business owners from towns in the San Gabriel Valley, which has a large concentration of Asian population.

The bottom line

Toll has already sold 21 houses at The Legends, at base prices starting at more than \$1.42 million. The Ironwood starts at \$1.48 million. Toll doesn't build spec homes in the community and charges premiums for view lots. The average finished home price is \$1.55 million. "We've been able to hold our prices without incentives, which is a major accomplishment in this market," Boyd says.

The success of this new Toll model points to product innovation as a key component of recovery. When you're out looking for bargain land, plan to hit that ground with housing product that's new, different and exciting. **PB**



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SOLID AS A ROCK

Builders who want the look of natural stone or granite but don't want installation hassles nor a high price take note: engineered quartzes and other solid surfaces such as Samsung's acrylic Staron Tempest line shown here are just the ticket. These artificial slabs are hardy products that can withstand almost anything homeowners throw or spill on them.

55

Photo: Samsung

INSIDE

Countertops to count on [page 56]

Fill the cracks [page 57]

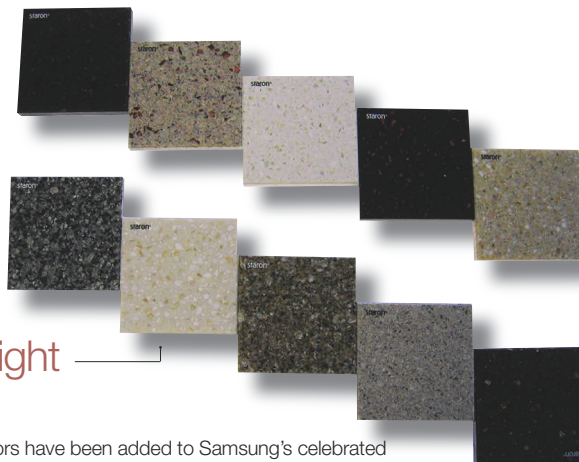
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Look What Just Surfaced



A Radiant Finish

Mineral Ochre, Mineral Sepia and Mineral Jet (shown) are three of six new colors in Formica's Mineral Series with Radiance Finish countertops. These surfaces feature what the company calls a "crystalline" structure, which has holographic facets to reflect light. In addition to the Radiance, six new stone looks have been launched under the Etched and Honed finishes. **For FREE information, visit:** <http://pb.ims.ca/5648-126>



The Right Tones

Ten new colors have been added to Samsung's celebrated Staron Tempest line of acrylic solid surface products. The new color series features natural tones and reflective chips for more brilliance and depth. The series, which now sports 20 SKUs, has been certified by the Greenguard Environmental Institute for low-emitting interior building materials. **For FREE information, visit:** <http://pb.ims.ca/5648-125>



Elegantly Recycled

Looking to green up your surfaces without delving into unknown product territory? DuPont's trusted Zodiac line has four new colors: calm springs, warm taupe, Moroccan morning and mossy green, all of which contain 50 percent recycled material. The Zodiac line is non-porous and can be used for applications such as fireplace surrounds; tub decks; and tub and shower surrounds. A 10-year residential installed transferable limited warranty from DuPont is offered. **For FREE information, visit:** <http://pb.ims.ca/5648-127>

Clearly Quartz

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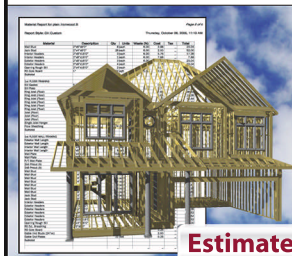
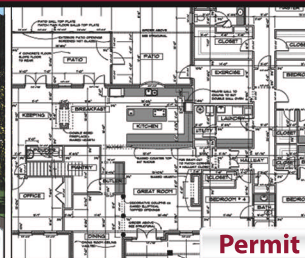
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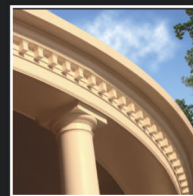
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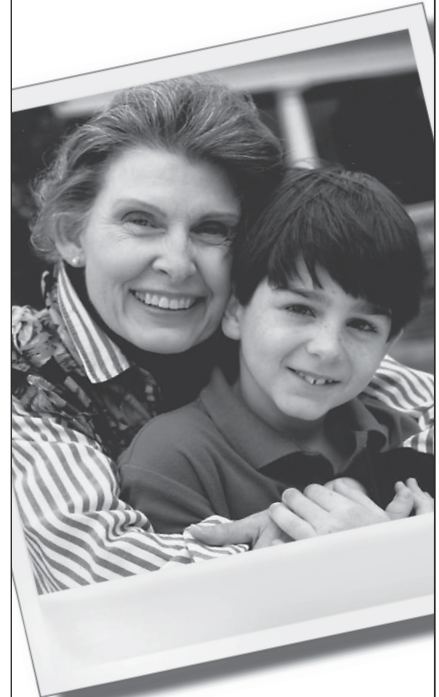
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Think about it

947



Pulte Homes has moved forward into the third phase of its Sun City Shadow Hills project, an active-adult community. There are plans to add 947 homes, a new clubhouse and an 18-hole golf course. When the phase is completed, Sun City Shadow Hills will have about 3,424 homes, two clubhouses and two 18-hole golf courses to choose from. According to Pulte, it has closed escrow on 131 homes since January. Pulte is on a roll!

\$162M

Home builders are buying land again! Lennar spent \$162 million on land in second quarter and plans to spend \$200 million more by end of the fourth quarter, the company reports.

23,000 Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf coast in late 2005. But as of late May, **23,000 families** were still living in Federal Emergency Management Agency **temporary housing units**, according to FEMA.

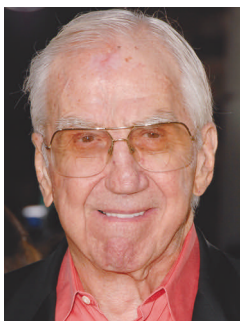


\$4.6 billion The Federal Housing Administration is **expected to lose** \$4.6 billion because it had to pull \$4.6 billion from its \$21 billion capital reserve fund to cover the costs from the **high default rates on home loans**, reports The New York Times.

\$8 In a past issue, we reported that a barrel of oil was \$101 and climbing to a predicted \$120 a barrel, which translates roughly to \$4 a gallon. **Yeah ... we've passed that.** Apparently that won't be the worst of it. MarketWatch predicts **\$8 a gallon for gas by the end of the year.** Ouch.



115,000 New Jersey needs 115,000 **new affordable housing units.** The state may have an answer; for every five units of market-rate housing built, **one unit of affordable housing will need to be built**, The New York Times reports.



\$644,000 Ed McMahon, former sidekick for Johnny Carson on "The Tonight Show," and his wife are **\$644,000 behind on their mortgage payments** on a \$4.8 million mortgage. They're in **negotiations with their lender**, Countrywide Home Loans, to set a foreclosure date.

8 A **survey on housing data** conducted by Global Insight, a financial research firm, and banking corporation National City Corp. found that **only eight of 330 housing markets are overvalued.** According to the survey, housing affordability is back to pre-bubble levels.

The Evolution

1978



1988



1998



2008



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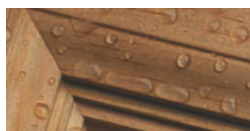
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