

[THE NATIONALS 2015]

sales&marketing

RE-IGNITION

Winners of The Nationals 2015 help generate sales as the housing market returns

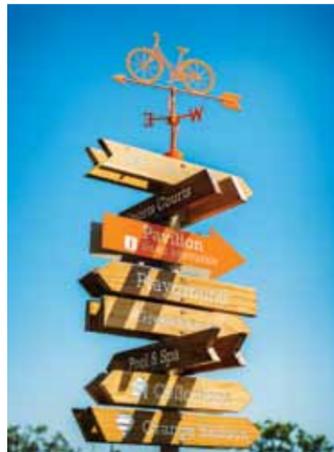
By Pat Curry, Contributing Editor

Jann Rowe was stunned when she dusted off the files of the long-dormant marketing plan for the former El Toro Marine Corps Air Station, in Irvine, Calif. The marketing director for FivePoint Communities, winner of Master Planned Community of the Year for Pavilion Park, says that the logo—an orange bicycle—was as fresh and vibrant as the day it had been drawn years earlier. She could hardly wait to put it to use.

The professionals who are this year's winners of NAHB's National Sales and Marketing Awards showed extraordinary creativity to reengage the buying public. Some were working to rebrand communities that had shuttered sales during the downturn; others were working to help consumers start to dream again about doing more than just getting by. Our coverage looks at just a few of the elements in new-home sales and marketing, including print ads, interior merchandising, sales centers, web-sites, and signage. This exemplary work shows how every aspect of the experience makes a critical difference to a still-recovering housing market.

The information center at Pavilion Park incorporates salvaged materials from the former El Toro Marine Air Corps Station. The entry sign, touchscreen tables, and a video wall all provide neighborhood information in a format that's designed to encourage leisurely absorption. Black metalwork, natural wood, and galvanized steel provide an intriguing textural backdrop.

PHOTO: DAMIAN TSUTSUMIDA



PHOTOS: DAMIAN TSUTSUMIDA AND DAVID LAUER

AN ORANGE BICYCLE CRYSTALLIZES THE VISION OF PAVILION PARK

We can only imagine the sense of accomplishment felt by the team at Lennar Corp. and FivePoint Communities Management at the September 2013 grand opening of Pavilion Park, the first of the Great Park Neighborhoods on the site of the former El Toro Marine Corps Air Station in Irvine, Calif. “So much had gone into bringing this to market,” says Jann Rowe, vice president of marketing at FivePoint Communities, which manages the community and in which Lennar is the majority partner. “The people who had been with us from the very beginning said, ‘Wow. It’s here.’ It was a real celebration—and that really hasn’t gone away.”

The journey to its grand opening, an event that drew more than 28,000 visitors, took years of hard work, patience, and commitment—and really, it was anything but a bike ride. It was big news in 2005 when Lennar was the top bidder—at \$649.5 million—for the 3,724-acre former military base, which had been shut down in 1999 in a round of base closures. It would be more than eight years before Pavilion Park opened for sale.

As part of the sale, nearly 1,300 acres were transferred to the city of Irvine to build the Orange County Great Park, nearly twice the size of New York’s Central Park. While Pavilion

Park abuts the northern edge of the Great Park, the neighborhood’s main attraction is its own large central park shaded by massive heritage trees reclaimed from El Toro. Regularly scheduled activities such as cooking demonstrations, gardening classes, and yoga promote positive lifestyles. One particularly fun amenity is the gift of a branded cruising bicycle at each home closing, designed to promote use of the extensive trails throughout the neighborhood.

Pavilion Park features 726 homes in 10 collections by eight well-known builders: Lennar, Richmond American Homes, Taylor Morrison, William Lyon Homes, Shea Homes, Pulte Homes, K. Hovnanian Homes, and Ryland Homes. Each of the home collections is inspired by classic American architecture and designed to be flexible for multigenerational families. In early January, Pavilion Park was 93 percent sold.

A project of this magnitude and significance needed support from an extraordinarily well-rounded marketing program that was executed well on all fronts. From e-mail marketing to signage to special events, FivePoint Communities succeeded beautifully.

A RIDE IN THE PARK

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ADVERTISING STRATEGY: BE EVERYWHERE, DO EVERYTHING

As the first neighborhood of Great Park Neighborhoods, Pavilion Park was an unknown quantity to the market. To get the widest exposure, Rowe opted for an advertising strategy that used pretty much every available option. Ads were done in black and white with pops of orange, effectively tying the community to the Great Park. And that included the community’s iconic orange bicycle. “The orange bicycle is probably the most profound thing we have going for us,” Rowe says. “Think about what a bicycle is. It is global. It connects people. It is nonthreatening. It promotes health. It brings smiles to people’s faces.”

The marketing group placed ads in local newspapers and took advantage of that media’s digital component. They advertised in consumer retail magazines. Since their target buyers included Asian families, they ran ads in real estate magazines that focused on Hong Kong and Singapore. They invested in Facebook and iPad advertising, as well as other social media channels. “Social media has been an incredible vehicle for us,” Rowe says. “We took a very dormant Facebook presence and expanded it.” Lacking access to billboard space, they made an aggressive buy of bus wraps, giving them rolling billboards throughout the community, and made strong use of graphic fence wraps around the construction site.

They did away with the traditional neighborhood brochure and opted instead for a folio—but with a twist. “There was a time [when] if you were going to invest in a folio, you would call it a newsletter, make it 8 ½ by 11 and put it on a rigorous schedule,” Rowe says. “Everyone on our team realizes you may not have juicy information to give out every month. You have some, but you do that through e-mail. Our folio goes out when we have something to tell to strengthen the drum beat that is Great Park Neighborhoods.”





PHOTOS: WILLIAM WRIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY

ACCESSIBLE ELEGANCE

The Toll Brothers in-house design team wanted to relate to the location overlooking Puget Sound when designing the interiors of this 2,742-square-foot model. Briarcliff at Magnolia is the only new-home community in one of the most desired neighborhoods in the Seattle area.

The team subtly incorporated materials and décor that might be found on a high-end boat, such as the stainless steel appliances, fixtures, stools, and backsplash accents in the kitchen and a sophisticated, plush master suite. The color palette is rich, yet comfortable, with contemporary splashes of blue and orange. White coffered ceilings throughout the main floor provide the sense of sophistication required for a premium community.

And, it was all done for the extraordinary price of just \$29 per square foot.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SCHELL BROTHERS

A LATTE, A SCONE— AND A NEW HOME



Many vacationers to a beach resort town are interested in buying a home there, but how do you get them to leave the sand and the sunshine to look at real estate? That's a hard sell, but it's pretty easy to convince them to walk a block from the beach to grab a coffee and a pastry at a trendy coffee house. Schell Brothers, in Rehoboth Beach, Del., partnered with a local restaurateur to provide a sales center that also serves up premium coffee and treats.

As if that weren't enough to grab people's attention, the team kicked it up a notch, building a fully outfitted kitchen—upside down and protruding from the ceiling of the 1,323-square-foot space. "It's not everyday you find a gourmet kitchen positioned upside down on a ceiling in a coffee shop," says Schell Brothers Marketing Director Christina Harvey. "We wanted to incorporate a remarkable element to the space that would help our new coffee shop stand out in our resort beach town, and we wanted people to remember and talk about their experience in our new-home gallery. Square footage was limited in this space, so it was also a solution and an opportunity to show something home-related in a creative way."

Eye-catching home designs, maps, and photography are on every wall. Interactive, touch-screen technology allows guests to tour each model home virtually while sipping espresso in their flip-flops. Like many traditional coffee shops, the Coffee House has hours that cater to its clientele. During the height of the season, it's open from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m., making it much more accessible to prospects than most sales centers.

The new-home gallery is staffed by Schell Brothers sales team members who are there to make visitors feel welcome and to answer any questions about the company, its communities, and floor plans. "On any given day, you will find the Coffee House full of locals and beach visitors interacting together, enjoying warm drinks, reading the newspaper, and casually chatting with the builder team," Harvey says. "The gallery has truly delivered the builder's culture to the beach, resulting in increased brand recognition and traffic to its communities and models."

STANDING OUT FROM THE CROWD

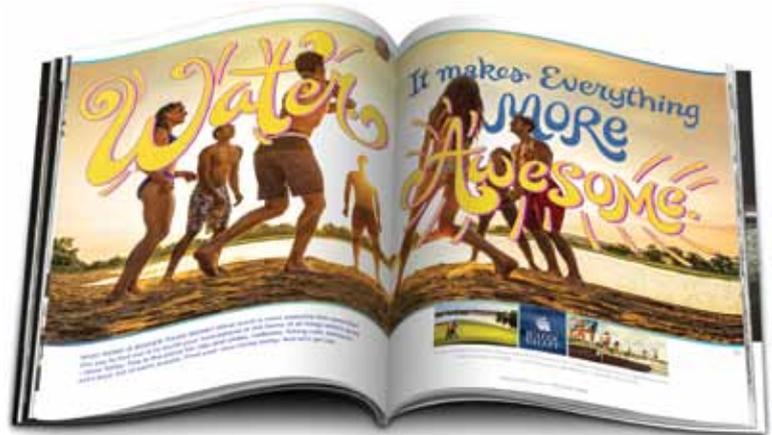
Here's a dilemma that should sound familiar to many builders: How can you reinvigorate a community that halted all sales activity during the downturn? That was the challenge facing the team at Water Valley, in Windsor, Colo. A multimedia marketing campaign designed to rebrand the community included a series of six print ads that showed the numerous ways that residents could enjoy the water there. With six ads to work with, no ad ran more than twice over 12 months in any magazine and no ad ran in the same month as any other ad in any other magazine.

The results were solid. Four hundred of the remaining 500 lots in the 2,500-unit development were sold to builders. Sales projections for 2015 are 150 homes. David Miles, principal of the creative ad agency Miles BrandDNA, says that his firm always includes a print component in its advertising campaigns because NAHB research shows that consumers "still trust print more than online marketing."

It's rare in new-home advertising to have existing amenities to feature—"We're used to getting people to see what the future is like before it's here," Miles says—so the team went all-out with a major, on-location photo shoot. "That really adds to the authenticity," he says. "So much stock photography is used today and so much of it is bad. This really shows why it's a great place to live."

Hand-lettered headlines provided a distinctive look and the two-page spread allows the ad to dominate the space rather than competing with another ad on a facing page. Plus, it's often possible to negotiate a better rate for a two-page spread than two separate pages, Miles says. Even better, the superior quality of the ads typically earned them premium placement because the magazine's ad sales staff could show it to other advertisers.

"It's common for us to get the second or third spread in the magazine," he says.



PHOTOS: KEN REDDING



A DIGITAL REFLECTION OF THE BRAND

A builder's website serves as its front door to the buying public. If it's cluttered, confusing, or difficult to navigate, consumers are likely to move on to others that do a better job of helping them understand the product and the process.

Prefab builder Blu Homes, in Mare Island, Vallejo, Calif., wanted a website that was as clean, crisp, and beautiful as the houses it designs and builds. The top three objectives for the new site were to:

- Provide information on the company and its line of homes;
- Help streamline the design and build process through informational graphics, photos, videos, and data;
- Provide a way for clients and fans to use its proprietary tool, including a 3-D configurator.

The biggest challenge to overcome was switching from its previous website, which was very different in look and design. San Francisco-based Web design firm Nurun provided a new site that offers a clear narrative journey that builds as visitors explore what the company has to offer. **PB**

