



TURNING BROWSERS INTO

Homebuyers on the hunt are obsessed. Here's how your website can capitalize on their drive and focus

By Kevin Oakley, Contributing Editor



Your prospects are obsessed. I'm not talking just about engineering-minded buyers who want to review every framing detail or design hounds who want to pore over the scale of the trim or the taper of the front entry columns. All of your

sales prospects share a similar level of obsession when in the research and purchasing phases of buying a home.

Something strange happens when the search begins. The hunt for school district rankings, floor plans, photos, and any other details you can glean from the comfort of your couch becomes addictive. It's a seeking behavior that generates billions of page views for the largest real estate syndication sites, such as Zillow, Trulia, and Realtor.com.

Builders need reminding that our biggest competition is the used-home market. This no longer means that our competition is the used-home price point or product offering. The competition now includes the depth of relevant and compelling photos, videos, and emotion-filled descriptions available to review online. In the war for potential buyers' attention, you now compete with sites like Houzz and those same syndication sites I listed above.

FROM QUICK VISIT TO DEEP DIVE

When a potential buyer visits your website for the first time, it may be just a quick pop-in. They try to determine as fast as possible if you offer a product that interests them in the locations they prefer. They want to know if you're credible. Allowing visitors to quickly filter product by bedroom count, square footage, style, price, and other basic items is essential. This way you'll capture their attention and hold it during that initial shallow dive into your website.

Once potential buyers find a home that they really like, they'll go deeper and deeper into your site to get as much information about the home as they can get their hands on. They'll look at every photo, read every word, and watch every video multiple

BUYERS

times. Now is when you can create a powerful impression of your product—one that lasts throughout their search.

Believe it or not, nearly all home builder websites are too shallow to slake the consumer's thirst for more information once they find the home or location they love. This lack of depth is hurting your sales results.

HOW MUCH INFORMATION IS TOO MUCH?

The real estate industry is undergoing a revolution in data transparency. Consumers have the information advantage, and they see companies that withhold vital information as suspect. You can't put the genie back in the bottle. But there is information that you should withhold, put behind a registration wall, and require an on-site visit to obtain. Here's what works—and what doesn't.

- **A full option list online is overwhelming.** Consumers will get confused or make incorrect assumptions. Conveying that information is better done over the phone or in person (and it's a great reason to encourage an on-site visit). On the other hand, three bullet points of the most popular options is a great approach. It gives a sense of possibilities without overwhelming.
- **Withholding the basics online is a dangerous game.** Keeping base pricing, included features, etc., off the website may appear to increase your lead volume if you require registration before granting access. Although I've written about the need for more personal and relevant follow-up, a lead funnel filled with unqualified prospects using required registration can slow down your online sales program instead of speeding it up. It takes time for your team to filter through prospects to find the best ones. This, in turn, can lower the overall customer experience for everyone.
- **Launching a new community or phase is the exception.** That's the only time that you can withhold basic info. In this case, it's easy to say that you want to provide the most accurate information possible, and until the details are finalized you don't want to share anything that could change prior to launch. This way, you get to have the

information advantage and use it to build a large list of leads for a bang-up grand opening.

BETTER AND DEEPER CONTENT IS A MUST

Real estate marketing has shifted from trying to grab the attention of the masses to targeting those most likely to purchase. This frees up time and money to invest in creating better, deeper content for those who want to buy a new home from you. Neglect this at your own peril. The following real-life examples tell why.

- A *resale home* in a community that is still selling new homes has more photos than the builder's website and compelling text explaining what it feels like to live in the home and the neighborhood (the builder site just has bullet points). The resale home sold in five days. The builder hasn't sold a home in two months, and the resale was priced higher.
- A *developer* spent thousands of dollars on a slick video intro to a new community a couple of years ago. Now there are four model homes built on site that have no videos or detailed information beyond the basics. A real estate agent took it upon herself to walk through each model with an iPhone and talk about them as she went through. The result: That agent has received 10 times the number of views as the \$10,000 video, and the cost was \$0 beyond her time because she created deeper content that consumers wanted to see.

Content creation isn't easy. What to feature? What to leave out? To get you started, we've assembled a list of more than 25 ideas. You can find them at probuilder.com/content-ideas.

Remember that your best prospects become obsessed about you and your homes. Don't encourage them to continue looking for another builder or an existing home that gives them more of what they want to see. Your competition is only a button click or finger touch away. **PB**

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