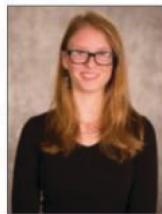




Customer Service Keeps the Homebuilding Market Going

Why customer care plays a huge role in the housing market

By BRIANNA FRIES



The year of 2019 is in full swing and the homebuilding market is looking hopeful. Homebuilder confidence has improved, according to the latest National Association of Home Builders Housing Market Index. Prices seem to be balancing out for multifamily homes, affordable homebuilding is on the rise, and energy efficiency is improving in California and nationwide homes thanks to continued updates to Title 24 standards and other green building codes.

While all of these factors are a signal for a more balanced, more sustainable housing market, it does not amount to much if no one wants to buy the homes. No one will run the race, no matter how great the environment for it, if the prize is not worth attaining.

Homes can be built in the best of areas with stunning design and top-tier energy efficiency, but if customers are driven away based on what they see online or what they encounter when they are speaking to a representative, that builder's investment will start to gather dust. This is why the main focus of this issue, customer service, is so important.

Good customer service is more than just a smile when someone walks in the door. The best builders provide customer care that ensures that the homes they are building and the experience they provide throughout the buying process, will not only generate interest, but hold it from the moment someone sees an ad to the day they buy their home.

As Jonathan Wilhelm points out in his column on page 34, "A successful marketing program for a homebuilder has to have both the science (target audience data analysis) and the sizzle (creative messaging), achieving an effective balance in both the planning and execution of an outdoor ad campaign. Now, add service to that, and you have the makings of an effective campaign."

This is all a part of the customer "jour-

ney," from the signage and advertising for a new development, to a development's online presence, to meeting customer needs based on market trends, and more. If a builder, developer, or architect makes sure that they are designing and constructing a customer journey that provides the best of the best details and experiences in every moment for their prospective customer, they have a much higher chance of turning them into a buyer.

Especially as more millennials, and some members of Generation Z, move into the homebuying market, looking after the customer journey becomes even more important. These buyers are more educated and able to review a multitude of homes online or on their phone before they even decide to come to a model or to view a plot of land. They know a builder's reputation before they pick up the phone and, should they make it through the entire customer journey to home ownership, they will contribute their experience to that pool of knowledge for others to draw from.

pre-consultation expectations, and even selling the value of the service being provided.

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The role of each participant in a customer's journey plays into all of this, too, of course. According to Jason Forrest's column on page 64, "It's your mission to lead the prospect to life improvement, and that means guiding them through the sales process... You are the primary source of confidence, motivation, hope, and certainty for your prospects."

Providing a well-designed customer journey makes a difference. A customer who is paid attention to, provided with information and realistic figures, feels heard, and perhaps most importantly, feels in control, is one that will give you their business and bring in the business of others.

The market will not move if houses do not sell. And even if a house is perfect, people are

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This flywheel effect works both ways: good customer service creates more interest and revenue; bad customer service creates bad stories and hurts the builder involved, no matter how good their product might be.

According to Bob Mirman's column on page 27, even a design center can make a world of difference to someone's customer journey. He encourages positive handoffs between the sales associate and the designer, making sure to reduce a buyer's anxiety, setting realistic

driven away by bad customer care. At the end of the day, it literally pays to make sure that both the house and the customer journey have almost equal amounts of effort put into their creation. **BD**

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