



ListenIn: SECRETS FROM THE FRONT LINES

The Extraordinary Design Center Experience

Five steps to drive sales from referrals

By BOB MIRMAN



It was a brief, but memorable experience. At Edith's restaurant in Cabo, my shirtsleeve caught the tines of the fork and sent it skittering across the table to the tile floor. I retrieved it, placing it on the table's edge, all the while debating whether the 3-second rule applied here. No need to think about it: Within literally 3-4 seconds, our waiter appeared and quietly replaced the fork with a new one.

The waiter later explained that all staff had been trained to look specifically for this kind of small opportunity to surprise their patrons with an unexpected level of service.

Planning the design selection experience

The creation of small memories, like in the example above, can serve as the foundation of a reputation.

Many of your homebuyers made the decision to purchase a new home primarily because of the opportunity to stock their dream home with the latest appliances, design features, and technologies. For these buyers, their time with your design consultant is at the very core of their emotional expectations.

As a designer, how well have you planned the delivery of a memorable experience for your homebuyers?

Based on survey comments from over 2 million homebuyers, here is a summary of some of Eliant's recommended best practices for the design-selection experience.

Goal #1: Positive Handoff from Sales to Designer

Success in the design center is a team event. It will be significantly enhanced by the positive, realistic expectations set by the sales associate (who has already gained the buyer's trust).

Sales associates should hand the buyer a special kind of bio and photo of their scheduled design consultant. This bio is not just about the designer's formal training but about her family and favorite activities: "I'm a soccer mom"; "...two dogs"; act in local theater." The idea is to describe many facets



of the designer's life so the buyer will find some commonalities. (For a sample bio, send request to kim@eliant.com)

Goal #2: Reduce your buyers' anxiety

Regardless of price-point or how many homes they've purchased before, ALL your buyers are anxious because they really aren't sure what your process will entail.

Walk them through your upcoming process, step-by-step...verbally and in writing. Get them emotionally involved from the start by asking questions about their favorite room in the new home, how they will use it, how kids will use their space, etc. Reduce anxiety. Create trust. Drive referrals.

The buyer's perception of the VALUE of the total design selection experience is one of the primary drivers of your customer's 'willingness to recommend' the builder.

Goal #3: Set realistic pre-consultation expectations

Prior to the initial consultation, call the buyer to cover some logistical issues: How should the buyer prepare for the initial meeting? Bring favorite photos? How long will the first meeting take? How many sessions will be necessary? Please find an alternative to bringing your children.

While a phone conversation is strongly recommended, most designers end up doing this via email.


Goal #4: Sell the value of your service

The most common complaint in our design center surveys: "high prices," "gouging," and "...taking advantage".

Explain that some prices will be a bit lower or higher than retail or ecommerce sites. Inoculate against inevitable price-resistance by reviewing the benefits of your design selection process:

1. One-stop shopping
2. 1:1 consultation with a professional interior designer
3. Assistance in selecting models, styles, colors
4. Better control over installation sequence & timing

5. Easier visualization from actual samples vs shopping on-line
6. Additional warranty coverage from the builder

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