

NEWHOMEGUIDE

INDUSTRY OUTLOOK

START AT HOME

when shopping for a home

By Hugh Heron

Today's new-home shoppers are more educated and computer-savvy than ever before. New-home builders understand this, and Internet web sites have become important components of our marketing efforts. Statistics Canada released data from the 2009 Canadian Internet Use Survey (sponsored by Industry Canada), which reported that 80 per cent of Canadians age 16 and older (21.7 million) used the Internet for personal reasons. This was up from 73 per cent in 2007, when the last survey was conducted. This is pretty impressive, but what's that got to do with selling houses? A lot. I am fascinated how this electronic medium has changed home shopping for our customers.

Today's new-home shoppers often start their search online, checking out what's available in new residential neighbourhoods. They can do this in the comfort of their homes, maybe still in their pajamas. This saves a lot on gas and driving time as they narrow down their search. When you think of it, the Internet has brought shopping for a home to people around the world. There are a lot of international buyers seeking homes in the GTA, and being able to surf the web is ideal for them.

Today's web sites contain a wealth of information, from renderings of what the homes and condominiums will look like when complete, to lists of the amenities in and around these communities. Builders usually post features and finishes, and often prices. Most sites also have some sort of builder history, so you can become familiar with what the company has built before. Knowing something about the builders you are considering is a really good idea, considering the fact that a home is most likely the largest purchase you'll ever make.

What's fascinating to me is that nowadays many new-home buyers pre-qualify themselves before they set foot in any sales offices. When they do come in, they've done their homework. They know what questions to ask, which helps sales representatives guide them toward the best home for their needs and within their budget. In fact, our sales representatives at Heathwood say that an increasing number of customers come in with web printouts of the designs they're interested in. They've studied the web site material and are ready to get down to the nuts and bolts of choosing the perfect home. This is why keeping our web sites up to date and as comprehensive as possible is critical. Many new home websites include visual tours of model homes or even virtual tours of selected designs.



Internet users can also find valuable information on other types of web sites. For example, online mortgage calculators can help you find your price range, and the Tarrion Warranty Corp. site explains exactly what is covered when you purchase a new home. The local, provincial and national home builders' association sites contain a wealth of information as well.

Virtual reality is great – but of course, nothing replaces an actual visit to a new home community and seeing for yourself the surroundings and the quality of finishes. When you are there in person, you can more easily envision your life in the community. You can actually see and touch items such as floor tiles, countertops and the like. You can also drive from there to your place of employment to find out firsthand how long your commute would take.

Smart builders know that our customers are armchair consumers first, and we provide them with as much information as possible to help with their "homework" on the Internet. When they do come to visit us in person, the process is more efficient for everyone involved. And the idea of shopping for a home in your pajamas is appealing, isn't it?



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