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A Public Display Of Commitment

March 2, 2011

by Hugh Heron



Let's face it – nowadays, many people do their initial new home shopping on the Internet. They can visit virtual communities late at night or early in the morning when they're in their pajamas, or on the subway on the way to work. Builders' websites are vitally important, because they may create the first impression that will attract the target market for specific communities.

Of course, there's nothing quite like being there in person. When potential new home buyers walk into sales offices, those facilities provide the important first physical impression of the communities and builders they represent. They also offer visitors the opportunity to explore the details of the neighbourhoods in a tactile way. Builders put a lot of thought and expense into creating sales environments that are true to the home styles and environments that surround them, and making the sales offices as customer friendly as possible.

Keep in mind that when looking for a new home, basing your decision on price alone can be counterproductive. Do your homework and look at the big picture. Sales offices help you do that. So do model homes, which can help you visualize what those two-dimensional floorplans can look like. We hear all the time from customers that they love being able to tour a model or models of some of the popular designs for that very reason.

Remember, too, that sales offices and models are expensive to construct. Builders who have a real commitment to the community go to the lengths it takes to offer these sales environments that represent their homes well and make it easy to shop for just the perfect place. This is so important, that over the years we've seen the home builders' associations expand their annual awards categories to include best sales office and website.

When you visit a sales centre, get as much information as you can by looking carefully at the quality of the details. Remember, this is a sample of the builder's work. Walking through a model home is a great way for you to look at a plan on paper and see how it translates to space and flow. Keep in mind that two homes of the exact square footage can look and live quite differently, depending on layout. That's why I caution people against using square footage as their sole deciding factor as well as price.



Ask questions of the sales representatives, too. Find out what features and finishes in the models are standard, and which are upgrades. Ask whether the model home design has been altered from the rendered layout. And if you have any doubt at all what the symbols on the floorplans mean, ask for clarification.

In the 1980s when I was president of the Greater Toronto Home Builders' Association, I told a reporter that I believed people spent more time picking out a pair of shoes than a house. I've certainly changed my tune since then. Today's consumers are much more educated and savvy. A huge shift has occurred in the industry toward showing more respect for the home buying public and toward creating homes and communities that people really want to live in. It has required more flexibility on our part, and I am proud of how developers and builders have adapted to offer more choice than ever before.

The sales office visit is an important step in the home-buying process. This is a place where the builder should put a best foot forward. Ask yourself, does it feel comfortable? Is there attention to detail in the construction and presentation of materials? Are the sales people knowledgeable? Do you feel welcome?

Remember, the sales office and model home are the original 3-D marketing tools for new home builders. Make the most of it by paying close attention and gathering as much information as you can. The best shopper is an educated one!

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