

BUILDING HOMES THAT LIVE WELL:

Wonderful Homes Are The Product of Long-Range Planning

By Debra Bernard

President, Bernard Marketing Associates

As you tour the beautiful model homes and landscaping at a new home community, you experience the results of years of hard work and thinking. Every last detail of the new neighborhood has been carefully hammered out in relation to how it will appeal to you. The entry, the streets, the homes and public areas have all been planned to work well together. This certainly beats purchasing a home in a resale neighborhood, where amenities of the homes and surrounding community are often uncoordinated.

What type of coordination is required to create new homes that excite potential buyers? Over the years, the Bernard Marketing Associates team has created a checklist of all the details that need to come together to make a successful community happen. Following is a thumbnail sketch of this process.

Builders Start Early

Under ideal circumstances, the project team is identified and the budget approved approximately one year before the grand opening date. Market studies researching local demographics, home designs, competition and

pricing are initiated. The marketing manager meets with the building team - the architect, land planner and internal experts - to create the community identity, land plan and product concepts/design.

Starting on the right foot is literally just that - taking a walking tour of the site early on to learn the essential aspects of the property that simply can't be seen on paper. Appealing features in the surrounding landscape and architecture, historic references and special attributes of the property will identify a site's particular personality. These ideas and images are perfect for pulling the marketing concept together - and can influence the community's name, graphic themes, architecture and land plan.

Ten Key Sub-Areas

During the ten to twelve months prior to a project opening, the builder's marketing team tracks ten broad task areas:

- 1 Research/Positioning/Pricing
- 2 Product Design and Specifications
- 3 Financial and Legal Issues
- 4 Advertising and Public Relations
- 5 Brochure and Collateral Development
- 6 Merchandising
- 7 The Sales Team and Sales Plan
- 8 Sales Office Development
- 9 Construction Connection
- 10 Signage Program

At this point, they also add countdown lists for sub-elements such as model home construction, framing, and opening the sales information center. All told, there are more than 250 main elements that must be tracked throughout this process. Staying on top of each creates a critical path toward flawless grand openings.

Contrary to popular myth, the best new home communities each have their own distinctive character. While standardizing can be helpful in lowering home prices, smart builders are sure to allow for each site's special circumstances.

Inevitable changes in weather, the availability of materials and other important factors can move an opening date forward or back, and the builder must be able to adjust for these changes.

Organization Works

As with any business, organization is extremely important. The home builder's accounting department has spreadsheets, construction has schedules, purchasing has computerized budgets and the marketing department has a countdown list. The broad scope of the list ultimately puts every team member on the same page, and lets each know how his or her part fits into the whole.

In addition to builder reputation, you'll know you're working with a great home builder simply by walking the community. When it looks and feels

right, when creativity informs every detail and all elements seem to work well together, you'll know you've found a special place that could soon be called "home."

Debra Bernard is president of Bernard Marketing Associates in Walnut Creek, California. BMA provides marketing and management consulting to builders, developers, banking and other real estate-related clients in the western United States. The company's menu of services includes innovative marketing programs, land feasibility studies and architectural guidelines for all types of residential communities - large masterplanned, conventional, smaller infill, entry-level, multi-million dollar custom and redevelopment neighborhoods; (925) 933-4411; dbernard@bernard-marketing.com.

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Photo Caption: Grand staircases such as this one at Oak Crest at Eagle Ridge in Gilroy by Standard Pacific Homes establish the essence of quality found through the entire community.