

# Chapter Five: Marketing Green Homes

Every green feature provides your customers with a benefit. Communicating these benefits and conveying the superior value of a green home are key aspects of your marketing effort. Train sales staff to tell the stories behind the features. For example, a buyer is more likely to perk up her ears if you talk about lower utility bills and greater comfort than if you merely tell her that the house is energy efficient.

Depending on which green features you offer, your story may focus on environmental stewardship, greater comfort, lower utility bills, healthier homes and communities, or some combination of these benefits. Remember, the story you tell leaves a lasting impression on all your stakeholders—so take the time to refine your message.

## Market Differentiation

In California's hot real estate market, virtually any home will sell, whether it's green or not. But even in a seller's market where homes are sold before they are finished, building green creates a lasting and positive image among buyers, community leaders, government officials and the media. Here are some of the advantages your company will enjoy as a result of your green-building marketing efforts:

- Enhance your reputation for quality. Buyers are becoming more informed as home improvement television shows and mainstream consumer publications like *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Redbook*, *Family Circle* and *Sunset* regularly showcase green homes and products. As a result, today's buyers are increasingly associating green builders with high-quality construction. What's more, many community leaders and government officials associate green builders with companies that care and that are willing to invest in their community's best interest. A solid reputation for quality and caring will serve your business well over the decades, regardless of market conditions.
- Outshine the competition by offering green amenities. As a green builder, you are not asking your buyers to sacrifice anything. Instead you are offering

them additional value—whether it's lower utility bills, the peace of mind that comes with knowing the home was built with healthier products, or the prestige and “bragging rights” of owning an environmentally responsible home. By providing buyers with these valuable amenities, you engender good will and loyalty, which may translate into referrals and repeat sales down the road.

- Reap the rewards of positive media attention. The news and trade media are hungry for positive stories. Green building is still a fresh concept, making your story attractive to them. Media coverage draws public interest and helps you more effectively engage your potential customers. It's possible this positive media coverage may also serve your business well when you are working to gain approval for new developments.

## Educate Your Sales Staff

Sales are everything. It doesn't matter how well built or how green your projects are if your sales staff doesn't communicate the value of green to your customers. Your salespeople are your greatest advocates, so take the time to effectively train them and get them excited about the green features and benefits you offer. Providing people with quality homes is a rewarding profession, and adding the green factor gives your sales staff even more reason to be proud of what they do. Once you sell them on the idea that green building is good for business, good for people, and good for the community, they will enthusiastically convey this message to potential customers.

## Convey the Benefits

It is important to complement green products and practices with a marketing program that clearly identifies the benefits. Homeowners do not always intuitively grasp how they directly benefit from energy efficiency, improved indoor air quality, or resource conservation. One way to address this in your marketing efforts is to sort the features in terms that are important to the buyer. Use the lists below as a tool to assist you in creating marketing materials and assembling the story of how your homes are different from those built by the competition.

The following is a list of green building features that help convey the benefits of building green:

### **BENEFITS: Higher Quality, Low Maintenance, Good for the Environment**

Most green building products were developed to do something better than their conventional counterparts—they may be stronger, last longer, use resources more efficiently, or manufactured in an environmentally sound manner. Consider offering the following features:

- Durable and noncombustible roofing and siding
- FSC-certified or reclaimed wood
- Engineered wood beams, joists and studs
- Resource-efficient landscaping
- Natural linoleum, cork and bamboo flooring
- Recycled-content ceramic tile
- Recycled-content or composite decking

### **BENEFITS: Greater Comfort and Lower Utility Bills**

Comfort drives high energy use. When it gets hot or cold, we turn on the air conditioning or furnace. By designing the home and its systems properly from the start, you can provide your customers with greater continuous comfort while reducing their utility bills. Emphasize that green doesn't necessarily cost more and will generally save money in the long run. Consider offering the following:

- Passive solar heating
- ENERGY STAR® appliances
- Efficiently designed/installed ductwork

- Whole house fans
- Photovoltaic panels
- Improved wall and ceiling insulation
- High efficiency toilets
- Efficient landscape irrigation systems

### **BENEFITS: Healthier Products and Practices for Families**

What is more important than the health of our families?

The public health community has identified homes as one of the most significant threats to children's health. It makes sense to reduce the use of products that are known to have adverse health impacts. Consider offering the following:

- Low and no-VOC paints and adhesives
- Building products with low or no formaldehyde emissions
- Water-based, low-VOC wood finishes
- Exhaust fan in attached garages
- Low-sonne range hood vented to outside
- High quality air filters on heating/cooling unit
- Sealed combustion furnace and water heater

### **BENEFITS: Healthy Communities**

Living green should extend beyond the boundary of the individual home to the entire neighborhood. Healthy communities offer residents opportunities to interact with neighbors and watch out for each other, enjoy walks, bike rides and other outdoor recreation, walk to local services, or use mass transit. Consider offering the following:

- Clustered homes for land preservation
- Mixed-use, walkable communities
- Located near a major transit stop
- Pedestrian pathways to open space, parks, and trails
- Home entrances with porches and views of the neighborhood
- Accessible entrances and pathways
- Rental units

