



By Tim Bailey

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Delight Drivers: Where the best home builders make their difference

In home building, the quest for industry-leading levels of customer delight demands quality and excellence, from sales to service. Several key areas can separate industry leaders from the pack.

Communication

The best in the industry excel in providing accurate information, timely updates, and clear explanations of processes. They understand that everything a homeowner experiences must be part of a carefully designed process, from sales, design and décor to construction or warranty service. The framework for a delighted customer experience means every process must be clearly explained, accurately represented, and timely.

Quality of workmanship

It is better to deliver on quality than to try and recover from a lack of it. When it comes to delivering quality materials and workmanship, leaders in customer experience out- rival the market; a concerted effort in this area elevates customer satisfaction, while reducing future warranty service costs. Customers who become skeptical of quality investigate with a critical eye, necessitating additional service resources.

Condition, condition

Providing pre-drywall walk-through tours for homeowners improves the customer experience and allows many issues to be resolved at an early and more cost-effective stage of construction. Even if a pre-drywall walk-through tour is not part of your process, you can be sure that most homeowners pass by their "work-in-progress" numerous times during construction. The outward appearance of things creates a significant impact on a homeowner's perception of a builder's level of quality and caring. Clean and tidy lots are image enhancers that drive sales while increasing satisfaction.

A ready home

Image is everything in this vital area. The Pre-Delivery Inspection is the time for a home builder to shine and show off expertise and ability. Customers do have a tolerance for some items that may require minor corrections, but a clean and ready home at the P.D.I., and at closing, is critical. This is the "litmus test" time for meeting and exceeding customer expectations, where perceptions of quality, construction problems, deficiencies, and caring will solidify a homeowner's final judgment about his or her builder. Much like trying to work with curing concrete, the window of opportunity for recovery at this point is extremely limited because customers' impressions become firmly set.

Move-in ready

As much as perfection should be the goal, no one expects a new home to be completely free of deficiencies — not even the customer. There is an expectation, however, that a home builder will do the utmost to correct any known items before move-in; failing to meet this expectation is a recipe for dissatisfaction. Home builders with the highest levels of customer delight understand the importance of cleaning up known items before move-in. Unfinished items at move-in frustrate the home buyer, who will be more likely to search out additional items. Correcting known items after move-in costs more for a builder in terms of time, coordination, and resources.

Quick corrections

The nature of home building can create some timing issues or delays when it comes to making corrections. These instances should always be the exception instead of the rule. The leading home builders in customer delight understand the value of timely correction of deficiencies, and the impact this has on their customers' overall experience. What may be just another item on a list for a home builder is a daily reminder for the homeowner that his or her new house needs repair. Quick corrections assure customers that they will continue to be cared for well. In turn, a confident homeowner will reduce demands on staff and resources, while providing referrals for future sales.

Customer-centric warranty

A new home requires service, and how this service is conducted is a significant differentiator for leading builders. Frequent interruptions for warranty service can turn referral advocates into resentful customers. Planning and communication are key drivers for maintaining delighted customers during the warranty stage. It is essential to complete the most amount of work with the fewest visits. Service workmanship must be of the highest quality, and the job not complete until all clean-up is done. Follow-up communication with a homeowner should be a standard practice; it demonstrates a high level of caring and keeps a proactive pulse on any remaining issues. This is an area where "most" is just not good enough; all outstanding homeowner concerns must be resolved for long-term customer delight. To homeowners, any unresolved concern is a permanent blemish on both their home and their experience with their home builder.

Delighted customers do not just occur; they are created by having a thorough understanding of the key drivers for customer loyalty, combined with an unwavering commitment to deliver on these fronts. Industry-leading home builders are well aware that each referral from a delighted homeowner is not a gift, but rather an achievement.