

The importance of customer *feedback*



MOST NEW-HOME BUILDERS RECEIVE A PERCENTAGE of sales as a result of positive word-of-mouth referrals from their satisfied customers. Geranium Homes is no exception, and strives to improve customer service for many reasons that also target increased sales by referral.

Just as it is important for us to know how we are perceived in the online universe, it is equally important that we hear from our most precious audience, our homeowners. I am a strong believer in using comprehensive research and analysis when developing the marketing strategies and advertising programs for Geranium Homes. To help us accomplish our goals, I work closely with CustomerInsight (customerinsight.ca) a company that specializes in research, training and consulting for the residential building industry as well as businesses involved in industrial, hospitality, commercial, retail and renovation.

CustomerInsight's expertise is on the relationship side of business. Collecting data from the builder's customers, staff and trade partners and applying analytics, CustomerInsight helps its clients to improve performance. The company uses a combination of "tools" which include survey programs, market research, sales training, mystery shopping, trade performance evaluations, touchpoint audits and customized consulting programs.

Christian Caswell, president of CustomerInsight explains, "Consumer choices affect nearly every product in the world. We assist our clients by interacting with and soliciting feedback from their prospective customers and buyers, which we then analyze. Our findings provide valuable insight into the emotional benefits that drive and influence a buyer's behaviour. We also track the customer experience through their new-home buying journey and highlight areas in which the builder is excel-

ling as well as identifying areas for improvement."

Caswell outlines some of the reasons people cite for participating in the feedback process: "Customers believe their input helps the builder understand whether or not buyer expectations are being met and where they may be falling short; feedback alerts the builder to correct immediate problems and to prevent similar occurrences in the future. Customers want to help shape the industry by commenting on the functionality of their home, the quality of products used, and the spectrum of customer relations from initial purchase, ongoing communication, through construction and after sales service. This isn't a surprise when you consider the popularity of Twitter, Pinterest and blogs, for example. These are methods of sharing opinions, rants and raves – people want two-way dialogue and to be heard."

Caswell points to Southwest Airlines, Apple and Toyota as leaders in their respective industries when it comes to putting customers first. "We have successfully helped builders change their entire company goals and strategies to be better aligned with customer expectations. By placing the focus firmly on the customer, builders can create exceptional homebuying experiences that drive loyalty and referral business," he adds.

At Geranium Homes, we have experienced the value of having a third party company provide the expertise to help us better understand our homeowners and turn satisfied customers into raving fans. This became crystal clear earlier this year when we won back-to-back top honours at the national and local industry awards.

This is part of a series of articles on topics of interest to new-home buyers, authored by Sue Webb Smith, marketing director for Geranium Homes.