

THE IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING A dynamic public face

THE VALUE OF AN ONGOING COMMITMENT TO A PUBLIC

relations (PR) strategy is difficult to quantify and explain for anyone in the position of marketing director, as I am for Geranium Homes. To communicate a company's goals, achievements and offerings, word has to get out via the media, correspondence and a variety of events and marketing materials. People need to be aware of Geranium Homes in order for them to research our homes and communities, and they have to trust us enough to consider purchasing. We think of public relations as the "gatekeeper" of our corporate image – a function that challenges us to adhere to our corporate values while also helping to establish protocols for communication, supports customer service and even impacts how we treat our employees.

For the past five years, Geranium has worked with Toni Pettit of The Morrison Group to spearhead our PR function. Pettit has over 25 years of experience in the new home building and related industries. Her management of our public relations builds and sustains awareness of our company and assists us in maintaining a good reputation among our customers. She is a critical member of the Geranium team. "Public relations is the channel through which we share a company's story," Pettit says. "With Geranium, we are always finding new avenues to promote this award-winning company's dedication to quality in every aspect of building homes and nurturing communities."

Contributing to our overall marketing efforts, The Morrison Group has devised many successful new initiatives. These are in addition to planning and executing numerous events each year. In our industry, this is often a vital aspect of PR, and for Geranium has included a wide variety of activities. For example, we hold annual gardening events for new homeowners once they've moved in, large community barbecues for several hundred, intimate seasonal soirees and Hard Hat Tours for prospects and buyers. Pettit has also recommended and implemented many of our programs in support of charitable organizations. "PR is dynamic, a continual message delivery system that engages the public's attention, and often, participation. The goal is to have every one of these touchpoints be a positive experience for the audience," Pettit explains.

Another critical component of PR is cultivating a positive and trusting relationship with media representatives. "Facilitating news reports via media releases and interviews promotes the company's brand in a different way than straight advertising and sales presentations," Pettit says. "As an independent representative, I



interact with the media on a regular basis and keep those lines of communication open."

Geranium's twice-yearly newsletter is another important vehicle we've established working with Pettit. The newsletter tells our story in more detail than we can include in media releases or blogs, for example.

In 2010, this combination of fresh ideas, sound advice and attention to detail is what earned our companies' the award of Best PR Campaign from the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD). An award we were also a finalist for this year. As an active member of BILD, Pettit is able to keep up to date with the new home industry.

Geranium's management shares a passion for home building and our PR efforts reflect that dedication. "I feel fortunate to have clients who respect and appreciate my contribution to their overall marketing efforts," adds Pettit. "We get a lot accomplished yet still find time to have fun!"

For Geranium, PR is an integral part of our annual marketing strategy and makes a significant contribution to our ongoing success.

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.