

Tapping High-Tech to Accelerate the Sales Process

By Michael Worthington, BrightDoor Systems, Inc.

For some time now, it's been evident that homebuyers have changed how they shop for homes, preferring to investigate on their own long before engaging a sales person. How can developers and builders connect with the right buyers early on, and also speed the sales process? With high-tech tools that go way beyond Internet listings and websites, taking buyer and seller along a smooth continuum from lead -- all the way to deed.

Everyone is crowding onto the Internet, and this is as it should be. But high-tech can easily give builders and developers more. It can generate early, highly convertible leads and transform them into friendly dialogues while simultaneously reporting actionable intelligence. You can see, for instance, where *all* your prospects' preferences are trending. It enables sales agents to give consistent presentations, tracks inventory in real time, and helps you give favored buyers one-to-one, white-glove attention. You also get the long-desired flexibility to quickly change content, particularly important for master-planned and resort communities – and for all of us during market conditions like these. As this newsletter recently observed, "Target marketing can at times play out differently than planned." (Trends in Development, Market Barometer Aug/Sept 2007)

These wants and needs inspired BrightDoor Systems Inc. to create a full-fledged sales engine especially designed for the real estate industry: One that does everything more efficiently. This is because most generic customer relationship management (CRM) software isn't a good fit for real estate. Internet listings and websites just create the same old stack of blind calls to make. Classified ads are waning, expensive collateral goes stale, inventory is rarely current, and a lot of communities look very much alike. BrightDoor set out to streamline the whole affair. Here's how they've done it.

Begin on the Internet, as nearly 85% of buyers do⁽¹⁾. Consider that most real estate websites and portals are designed to simply lead a buyer to a single listing. Pump in four bedrooms, three baths, and a price range, and one is dished up. The more productive approach is to bring buyers who are shopping the popular real estate sites into a portal where they can shop as they ultimately will: By lifestyle and amenities, which is exactly how builders and developers sell. Buyers select communities that interest them most, often drill down to specifics, and pre-qualify themselves. You can profile them based on where they've spent time and then engage them via automated email or traditional phone call.

Next, consider time savings, highly valued by today's buyers, particularly those searching for a vacation or second (third or fourth) home. Many drive through the mountains or down the shore on a search that they envision will take years. This is where the self-guided touch-screen presentation – with alluring photography and enticing text – delivers subtle, yet extraordinarily productive, persuasion.

Self-guided tours can be located anywhere – at a sister location, a Chamber of Commerce, a Visitor's Center, a private club. With cabinetry matched to the interior décor, this becomes a dramatic lead generator. This method can assist buyers in narrowing down their searches from an impossible 20 communities to an approachable two.

Boomers, Gen-Xers (who are notoriously hard to target), and highly selective luxury resort buyers are drawn to this style of quiet search where they can make their own discoveries. The magic is that you are making discoveries too. You're automatically collecting data every time a user touches the screen. How long did they view this amenity, how many times did they return to this panorama? It all feeds into a CRM database that automatically schedules a sales associate, informs your analytics, and begins tracking this lead to closing and ownership. You can target certain prospects for special treatment and give them their own personal web portal before you've broken ground or after their onsite tour. Imagine a tech-savvy buyer reviewing your latest photos on his/her iPhone®.

Homebuyers are constantly evaluating their experience, weighing whether to stay or go. High-tech touches like these forge the strongest of bonds. The immediacy and the drama are irresistible. Behind the scenes, the streamlined CRM increases productivity, freeing up sales agents, ensuring follow-ups and delivering analytics that reveal vital insights about trends and possibilities for cost efficiencies. Onsite, digital registration and surveying is proven to encourage buyers to reveal far more about themselves, and the sales agent can access their info instantly. Agent-driven presentations take on more excitement as everyone gathers around a touch-screen that displays content on demand and prompts sales agents to make a perfect delivery. The CRM database captures exactly what is viewed, right down to time spent on a particular site plan, favorite builders, and lots with sunset views. The agent prints out their custom, personalized brochure. Brand management takes a quantum leap.

A recent Inman News Special Report on the 100 Most Influential Real Estate Leaders observed that "real estate consumers are back in vogue as many new online applications and real estate blogs attempt to reach out and engage home buyers and sellers." BrightDoor's sales engine goes further, providing a two-way street that has never existed before, engaging the buyer in an easy conversation, boosting productivity, and delivering intelligence that can literally save millions. < >

BrightDoor Systems Inc. of Cary, NC is creator of BrightBase Dynamic CRM, the BrightApps suite of sales applications and the BrightSpot real estate portal, set to launch this fall. BrightDoor's unique real estate applications are deployed throughout the United States, Mexico, and the Caribbean. For details, visit www.brightdoor.com.

⁽¹⁾Source: National Association of Realtors® 2007 Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers