

Building Scene

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING

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Builders take unusual steps to reach buyers

By Gerald Frawley
staff writer

In the vast spectrum of sales, few challenges have proved as daunting as selling new homes.

Some marketing efforts are directed at attracting potential buyers, some are directed at bringing lookers back, and others are directed at people who have already bought — which not only thanks the buyer, but generates good feelings and word of mouth advertising.

NOSAN/COHEN Associates of West Bloomfield introduced its new Woods of Novi development in Novi with a "sneaker" preview for Realtors back in April. "It was a complete success."

President Lawrence Cohen said the marketing effort was aimed at Realtors, not buyers. Cohen said some builders shy away from using Realtors for selling homes and instead rely on in-house sales staff, but he has always believed they can be a valuable component of a sales strategy.

Builders often target Realtors for marketing efforts with the idea of getting them interested in a project. Cohen mailed 1,500 single sneakers in plastic tubes with brochures and an invitation to a "Sneaker Preview" at the development. Invites brought the sneaker with them where they were matched with partners to make a pair.

"Then we sent the sneakers to the Pontiac Lighthouse (an organization that helps the needy) so they could give them to needy children," he said.

Response to the campaign was nearly 70 percent. "That's double what I expected."

"I was never one for grand openings — when people come to grand openings they expect perfect, they expect clean," Cohen said.

"The truth is the landscaping isn't done and the streets are dirty," he said. "Generally, (the developments) still rough around the edges."

So rather than a grand opening, or a sneaker preview, the idea for a sneaker preview was proposed.

The promotion combines the elements of the rough conditions found at building sites in early spring — hence the need to wear sneakers — and the idea of an early opening. The term "sneaker preview" comes from the idea that models are previewed before they are completed.

CLASSIC CONSTRUCTION in



Builders are constantly looking for new ways to make their projects stick out in people's minds. For example, Jalkins Investment Development Corporation in Orchard Lake put on a pig

West Bloomfield raised awareness of its 800-unit Maples of Novi project by targeting a specific group of home buyers — Japanese transferees — with a Japanese open house July 21.

Dave Boisford, marketing director, noticed several months ago that a good number of potential buyers at the development were Japanese transferees or immigrants. On reflection, he said, it made perfect sense.

Western Oakland and Wayne County's Asian population has grown significantly during the past decade as Japanese owned and operated companies have moved offices and technical centers to the area.

But a bigger part of the Maples of Novi's attraction is the on-site golf course. To join a golf club in Japan would cost \$1 million, to buy a home on a golf course would cost \$3 million.

And many Japanese transferees have housing allowances that makes homes in Maples of Novi affordable. Boisford said Classic Construction's Japanese open house was meant to accomplish several things, but the main idea was to make them feel comfortable. Home lists, feature lists, brochures, even advertisements, were translated into Japanese so people could readily understand them.

Japanese foods were served, a for-

mal Japanese tea was given, and interpreters were on hand. "They (the interpreters) worked really well because many of the wives can't speak English."

The initial open house attracted more than 50 couples, he said, but the residual effect has been even more promising. "What we were looking for was to start something that would generate referrals several months down the road."

JALKINS INVESTMENT Development in Orchard Lake took a different tack when it offered a pig roast at its 46-unit detached condominium development Milford Bluffs in the Village of Milford.

Vice president Linda Friedman said the purpose behind the pig roast was to thank new homeowners and enable homeowners to get together with their neighbors.

Builders showing their appreciation to customers is becoming more common, Friedman pointed out. In addition to thanking residents, the roast had another purpose and that was to show prospective buyers the type of development Milford Bluffs is.

Some potential home buyers who had expressed interest in the development were also invited, Friedman said. "We sent some of our sales brochures and follow-up cards inviting

them."

The idea, she said, is to make people feel welcome and to make them feel as if they're part of something special.

A builder does more than sell a home today, Friedman said; they sell a place to live. Activities like a pig roast draw a development together and create a sense of goodwill.

That, in turn, gets people talking, and a builder just can't buy that kind of advertising.

THE HERMAN FRANKEL Organization's Artistry theme uses still another technique to build a marketing approach around the development.

The idea began as a love for a painting, said Laurie Frankel, marketing director for the Herman Frankel Organization.

Her father, Herman, first saw the abstract painting by Helen Caveny about six years ago; that painting is now reproduced on the Frankel signs and sales brochures.

The idea behind the artistry theme is to convey that the company's homes are interesting, good places as well.

Frankel's Woodcliff, Woodcliff on the Lake and Simsbury projects in West Bloomfield are presented as more than just homes — they are creative, she said.

"With our homes, we look into every single detail; so they are artistic in a sense," she said.

After buying the painting six years ago, the idea of how to use it in a marketing effort began to evolve, she said. "Homes are more than just two by fours slapped in a square."

"I think a lot of frustrated artists are architects and a lot of frustrated architects are artists," Frankel added.

The artistry not only includes the art of building, but the decor as well. The Wyndam model home at Woodcliff is decorated with several different kinds of art pieces.

The image of the Caveny painting also serves to generate interest in another way.

"I think the idea intrigues people — people see the painting, but don't know what it is," she said. People are curious, and that leads them to look further.

"I've had people say they thought it was a bunch of balloons and I've had them say it's (a depiction of) flowers," she said.

Architect issues idea magazine to spark interest in new homes

By Doug Funke
staff writer

Robert Bryce enjoys architecture. So much so that the 37-year-old West Bloomfield resident has begun publishing a bi-monthly idea magazine on building, decorating and life-styles as an extension of his architectural practice in that community.

The first issue was distributed free last month to some 2,000 clients, friends, associates and other referrals who may be interested in home building topics. The long-term goal is free distribution of a 178-page publication to 60,000 every other month.

"If someone is planning on building, renovating or remodeling, this is something someone would keep as a reference book, a source book, like Reader's Digest or National Geographic," Bryce said.

"We're trying to make it a combination of Building Ideas Magazine, Homes & Gardens and Architecture Digest. Exactly what our magazine is trying to do is pique interest, create interest," he said.

Most of the articles in the first issue of the Monthly Home Idea Magazine from Bryce & Palazzola were authored by syndicated writers.

ARTICLES TOUCH ON window treatments, payback values of remodeling and ways to cool your home.

Editorial service stories also examine collectibles and cooking, plus locally-written stories about developers James VanderKloot and Richard Koch.

The purpose is to promote good architecture, exhibit good architecture, highlight people capable of doing these things," Bryce said. "It's definitely a good way for us to get our name out in the community, but business has never been better. We're swamped."

Other architects produce sales brochures, but Bryce knows of nothing here that compares to his magazine.

"It seems like they've taken some initiative," said Robert Ziegman, president-elect of the Detroit chapter of the American Institute of Architects, who admitted to not seeing the initial issue.

Companies in other industries put out house organs, so why not architects, VanderKloot reasons. "Architects can capitalize on an exchange of information better than other industries because every job is new," he said.

KNOWLEDGE LEADS to more informed choices, said Lisa Fantuzzi, marketing director for Bryce's firm who is in charge of the magazine.

"It may well spark interest and people will take a more active interest. Maybe they won't rely on an architect to say, 'This is the kind of house you want,'" she said.

"Lisa brought out a good point the other day," Bryce said. "What we want to eliminate is people saying, 'I wish I had done that.' If we can show them, they can do it."

An encounter with a couple from Vermont who hired the firm a year and a half ago to design a house supplied the spark that prompted Bryce to launch the publication.

"The clients put together a book of what they liked, didn't like and wanted. They spent years collecting information. They taped things on blank pages. There were several hundred pages. When we saw this, we said, 'Great.' Clients had brought in pictures from magazines, but never to this extent."

"They did a tremendous amount of research and the result was what they wanted it (their house) to be," Bryce said.



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Robert Bryce, an architect, figures the more people know, the better chance they'll get what they want.