



Marketing Lessons From Home Builders

By Gretchen Johnson

This has been one of the worst markets for new home starts in decades. Yet I often talk to builders who are busy. I've noticed a few common themes among those that seem to be the least affected by the economy and the foreclosure crises, and I think they offer lessons in marketing that are applicable across industries.

First, every builder that tells me they are busy right now also says their main source of new projects comes from referrals. In other words, as marketing guru Tom Peters might say, they've made every project a "wow" project and they've built their business – their brand – on happy clients. If your work is good, if you're known for your integrity and how you manage yourself and your business, you can ride out economic downturns longer than just about anybody else. These builders prove that.

The second lesson is that many have turned to doing more housing remodels than in the past. Across the board they tell me they'd prefer to do build new homes – fewer surprises, you start from a clean slate and it is much easier to predict the path to a satisfying outcome. But they had a plan B – an alternative service in this case – and they're using it.

And finally, those builders that seem to be doing the most business right now are industry leaders within their market and their geography. They've made a point to become professionally credentialed, and in doing so, have demonstrated their commitment to their clients and their work. They also actively work to push their industry forward, and they are constantly learning about the latest techniques and tools available to them.

Two examples of this are John Zito, owner of Coastline Building of Delton (www.coastlinebuilding.com) and Arn McIntyre, president of McIntyre Builders in Rockford (www.mcintyrebuilders.com). I recently spoke to both gentlemen for articles on "green" home building for an upcoming edition of *Builder/Architect* magazine, Southwest Michigan Edition, published by Elizabeth Johnson and Sunshine Media. It is very easy to get excited about home construction when you talk to them. Their enthusiasm is contagious and it's easy to see why both have built solid companies.

Both John and Arn exemplify what I've learned from this market: Do what you love. Do it well. Push yourself to learn more, be better and reach higher than you did yesterday. Good lessons for any industry. Good lessons for life.

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