

# 10 Tips for a Better Web Site Redesign

In this day and age, there's more to redesigning a Web site than adding pretty pictures.

If your Web site is easy to navigate, has current, up-to-date information and you get multiple e-mail leads each day, you might feel good about it. But if you think you are ready to take a breather, think again. Forward-thinking builders are already introducing the next generation of Web sites. How do you measure up?

Over the next four pages, learn what builders did to drive more traffic to their sites, including:

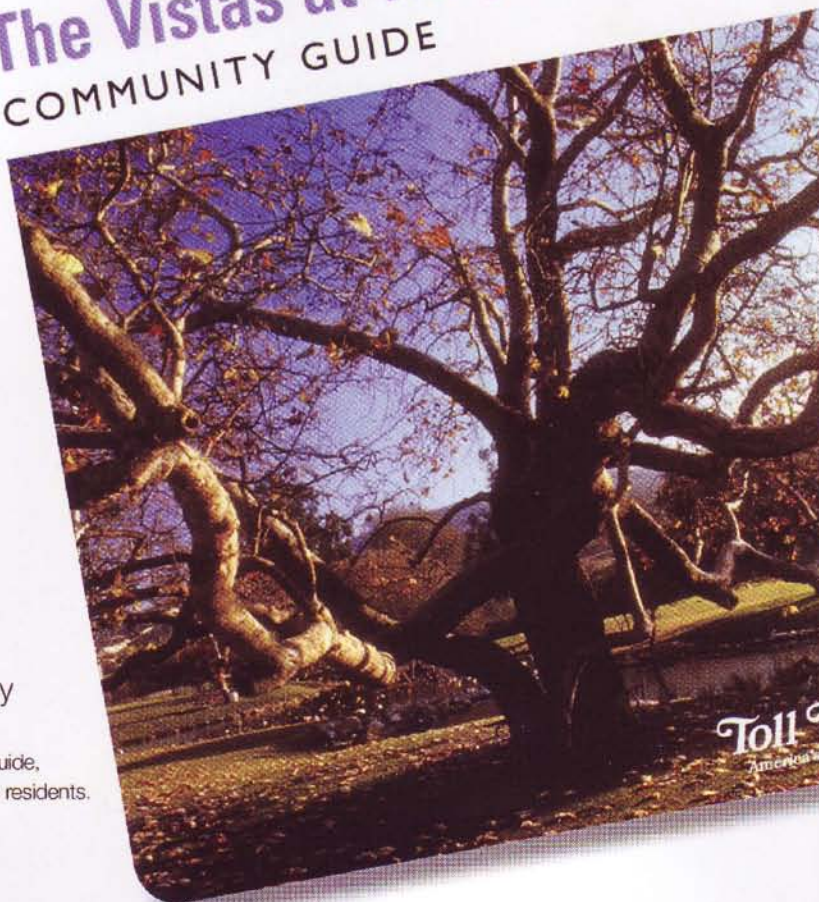
- Adding personalized touches for home owners
- Focusing on community
- Using interactive site maps and floor plans
- Offering special incentives
- Increasing the number of news articles on the site
- Providing video testimonials
- Translating to Spanish
- Relating to Realtors
- Remembering to be customer-friendly

**TOLL BROTHERS** offers this online community guide, downloadable as a PDF, for its current and future residents.



A GUIDE TO THE SERVICES AVAILABLE NEAR YOUR NEW HOME

## The Vistas at Tallyn's Reach COMMUNITY GUIDE



Toll  
America



## 1 A 'Personal' Web Experience

Today's top home builders understand that "one size fits none." This means the best Web sites tailor follow-up to users based on their priorities in selecting a new home. By learning where a customer has spent time on your Web site — for example, in the community section that describes local schools — you can determine the underlying motivations for a home purchase; in this example, it's about family. Then you can personalize future buyer's Web site visits and follow up around those priorities.

## bonus tip

If you are running a promotion on your site, don't forget to include the **terms and expiration date**. Be sure the promotion is removed from the Web site the day it expires.

Begin with the three basic "baskets" that provide the best follow-up:

- Product — what's special about our homes
- Community — why this is a great place to live, e.g. schools
- Builder — what differentiates us from our competitors.

The personal experience comes to play when you send e-mail announcements to previous visitors. Always include an opt-out on e-mail responses. Also remember to budget for professional HTML follow-up e-mail brochures. The days of simple text and auto responses are long gone.

## More Focus on Community Information

Most customers in a focus group will tell you they first selected the community they wanted and then decided on a specific floor plan. Yet many big builders do an extremely poor job in selling their communities online, probably because

each community is unique; selling a community online requires a lot of work to ensure the Web site reflects those differences. The best builder Web sites provide a detailed description of each community as well as the surrounding neighborhood amenities. Include as many photos as possible.

As a home shopper, I hate stock photos — generic shots that could have been taken anywhere. For an elegant approach, use a Flash slide show application (about \$2,000-\$5,000, depending on its complexity), and show 5-10 community-specific photos, but in a way that doesn't slow down the users who

just want quick information. A good example of community information can be found at **Toll Brothers'** site, left.

## 3 Interactive Floor Plans

The most popular activity for new-home Web site visitors is reviewing floor plans. Yet often the floor plan details are lost due to the quality of the floor plan on the screen. If you are presenting your plans in JPEG or scanned images, think again. Every floor plan should be in a vector format and presented in Flash so users can zoom in and view the smallest detail. (Estimated cost for a basic version of this program is \$3,000 for the platform, plus \$400 per floor plan.)

**Morrison Homes'** Web site, below, provides a full assortment of floor plan interactive features.

Flash floor plan presentation can be much more advanced, and new features

**MORRISON HOMES** has turned low-resolution floor plans into an interactive experience.



can be added as the benefits are realized. Some of the slicker interfaces today include: flipping (to show the left/right views), options presentation (with overlays showing price differences), descriptions in multiple languages and even placement of furniture. The key to success is creating technology that is easy to use and gives the viewer control, as opposed to a fast-moving video that can't be stopped or changed.

#### 4 Interactive Site Maps that Create Urgency

Want to create a hit with your Web site users while building customer urgency at the same time? Add interactive site plans with a "reserve now" feature to each community. This element allows users to see real-time which home sites are sold, available or reserved and even display the lot premiums for each available location. Our studies show that serious customers will spend a lot of time selecting the home site they believe is the best fit for them. As every new home sales associate knows, no two home sites

#### WHAT THEY CLICK

Men and women use home-builder sites differently.

WHAT WOMEN USE	WHAT MEN USE
Driving Directions	Location Maps
Interior Model Photo Tours	Interactive Floor Plans
Community Descriptions/Photos	Lists of Features
Video Testimonials	Side-by-Side Community Comparisons
Downloadable Brochures	Printable Community Information Sheets

are the same, so it's easy for a user to see the unique value of a specific available location and become emotionally involved in wanting to reserve it for themselves. A small builder who did a great job with an interactive site map is **Sunset Point of Florida** (see below).

Now comes the urgency factor. Allow your customers to "reserve" a home site for 24 hours when they provide you with a phone number and e-mail address. Don't be afraid you will be taking an available home site off the market — the reservation is for 24 hours,

and you have a great opportunity for a serious customer to send you meaningful information. We find 40 percent of people sending in the reserve now actually show up on your site the next day. Again, the feature doesn't have to be overly costly — perhaps \$4,000-\$8,000 for set up, and approximately \$750 per community.

#### 5 Special Offers and Incentives

Today, builders are offering all kinds of specials to lure potential buyers, yet often

**FLORIDA HOME BUILDER SUNSET POINT** added an interactive element to its Web site: real-time visuals that allow users to see what properties are sold, available or reserved.



**Annual GOLD KEY SALE**

**SAVE TENS OF THOUSANDS\***  
on a new Centex home! NOW THROUGH JAN. 28<sup>th</sup>

**LINCOLN**  
Red Hawk (314) 343-8082  
Haven's Landing (714) 562-0772  
Crest Court (914) 414-1747  
Haven's View (714) 414-0220  
The Ranch (914) 343-8887  
Redwood (714) 562-0552

**ELK GROVE AREA**  
Horseshoe (914) 481-0790  
Oakton Trace (914) 481-5130

**WHITNEY BANCHE • ROCKLIN**  
Rock Creek (914) 343-7769

**WOODLAND**  
Whisper Creek (914) 343-7769

**OPENING SOON**  
Country • Woodland  
Haven • Woodland  
Haven • Woodland  
The Haven • Rocklin

**CLICK HERE TO FIND A HOME**

Please call or visit community for additional information.

**CENTEX HOMES**

#### CENTEX HOMES' SACRAMENTO DIVISION

has built a back-end data field into its site that ties to specific floor plans.



these offers are nowhere to be found on the builder's Web site. Including such offers keeps the site fresh, which is a big challenge home builders face.

The key is to build your site with a back-end data field that provides the interface with a simple promotion that can be tied to a specific floor plan or to homes that meet certain delivery dates, e.g. all homes that will be completed by March 31 in a specific community. Centex's Sacramento division includes this feature in its Web site.

## 6 Realtor Tools

Start building your Realtor database by allowing Realtors to register and easily search the inventory homes. You can even give them the tools to print a brochure for their clients with their logo and pictures (Realtors are always looking to build their name recognition). When you send your Realtor e-newsletter, make sure you embed the link to the Realtor section of your site. Realtors will return to the site only if they believe it provides shortcuts for them.

As you gather your Realtor database for follow-up e-mails, remember that their time is precious. Do an e-mail blast when there is something significant to tell them.

## 7 Spanish-Language Version

The Hispanic market is the fastest growing for new homes. Are you proactive with your Web site? If not, others are.

### TARGET: GENERATION X

#### Top tips for appealing to Generation X

- Make sure floor plans with prices require no more than 4 clicks
- Eliminate slow downloads
- Minimize advertising copy and replace with testimonials
- Allow users to sort multiple homes by price, square footage and delivery date

**BEAZER HOMES** offers both an English and a Spanish version of its Web site.

As you work on providing a Spanish-language version, be aware that dialects differ around the country.

For a national builder, ensure that the dialect being used can cross regional borders, and if you build in only one region, match the dialect on the site to your area. Also, don't trust just one translator – hire a second as a backup to review the work and ensure that you won't look foolish. **Beazer Homes** provides an example on its Web site, see above.

## 8 News Articles

It is very hard to tell on many Web sites that the content is up-to-date. The best you can generally hope for is to see that new subdivisions will be opening some time in the future.

Adding articles or press releases to the site periodically will help keep the site fresh and will also help in getting your site to rate higher in search engine rankings.

Third-party credibility ranks high with Generation X and echo boomers.



## ONLINE SEARCHES

### Top ways people search for new homes on the Web

1. Keyword organic search through Google, Yahoo!, MSN or AOL
2. New home aggregation sites (Homebuilder.com, NewHomeSource.com, local newspaper sites)
3. Paid Placement on search engines
4. Builder's Web site

News articles can be anything from a short item about the company's community involvement to an article quoting one of your company's officials about a certain home building issue.

Gaining such coverage requires an active public relations program, an important part of a well-rounded corporate strategy. Such a program can be driven either by an internal staff member or by working with a public relations agency.



## 9 Customer Tools

Consider adding a customer section to your Web site. It can start with items such as user manuals, important phone numbers and routine schedule reminders.

For the more ambitious, offer a building progress section to add photos of a home during construction, and consider including a list of contractors for maintenance work. (Include wording that states you are not responsible for the contractors' work and that the home buyer needs to make their own decision and do their own research before choosing contractors)

Retaining interest in your company from buyers — and ensuring they have

a way to reach you if they have a problem — can help increase brand awareness and could lead to more customer referrals.

## 10 Video Testimonials

Generation X and echo boomers are reluctant to believe advertising claims. Let them hear about you directly from your customers.

As a way to engage Generation X and echo boomer users, place four real testimonials on your site and one written by the ad agency. Ask them to vote for the fake one. It's a subtle way of reinforcing that these are what people really think about the community while getting a chance for users to leave their e-mail

## RANK YOURSELF

Top metrics for determining your site's effectiveness (listed in descending order):

- Number of unique users
- Average amount of time that each user stays on site
- Number of users who download driving directions
- Number of users who call sales office (using unique phone number listed only on the Web site)
- Number of users who gave you their e-mail address

address to learn if they selected correctly. KB Home has done a great job with online video testimonials. **PB**

KB HOME reports it has been successful with its online testimonial marketing campaign.

**KB HOME** finding your home building your home customizing in your style financing your dream contact us we send your call

Home Site Map About Us Investor Relations Careers Customer Care Realtors KBurban Español

KB Home - Testimonials

### Homeowner Stories

Satisfaction is our job.

"I want to take a moment to let you know what a wonderful experience buying a KB Home has been for my family and to thank your staff for making everything work so smoothly. My KB Homebuying experience is one that I will continue to share with everyone I know."

Shelly W. and Family  
Tolleson, AZ

"Our KB Home Studio consultant was dedicated to helping us decide and explain every option before we made our selections. It was like she could read our minds, and she made herself part of the process like she was family. We don't think we could have made the selections without her."

"From beginning to end, we could see the craftsmanship and care that was being done to our new home. We are glad we picked KB Home, and we want to let you know that KB Home in the Meadowlands has a team that is unbeatable. In the course of our lifetime of buying homes, never have we met such wonderful people, working as a team with the end result of customer satisfaction."

**HOMEOWNER STORIES VIDEOS**

SELECT AND VIEW A VIDEO

VIEW VIDEO

VIEW VIDEO

VIEW VIDEO

VIEW VIDEO

VIEW VIDEO

**"My KB homebuying experience is one that"**

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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