



MARKETING TO THE FORGOTTEN BUILDERS

A Win-Win Strategy
for Building Products Brands

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The Untapped Segment of the Home Building Market

Want to win with home builders? Want to showcase products, build share, increase loyalty and inevitably up your sales?

It's time to think small – think custom – think regional.

These are the builders we at Point To Point refer to as “The Forgotten.” The businesses that altogether represented a cool 46.37% market share of the U.S. homebuilding market in 2015.

They may not be big in annual home starts, but they're a big opportunity for brands. One you must capitalize on in new ways to succeed.

Why cater to this segment, instead of the production builders that make up the other half of the market?

As covered in this blog, the small, regional, green, and niche home builders represent an untapped opportunity for building products brands, because many brands have not considered and addressed the unique needs of this segment. Those that do are likely to build rapport and gain an edge.

How Can Brands Cater to The Forgotten Builders?

For building products manufacturers wanting to win with niche home builders, a great way to build their loyalty is by developing content that will help enrich their connection with customers.

When niche home builders are looking for solutions to their problems, you must be there with the knowledge and expertise they need.

What problems are The Forgotten builders facing that you can help them with?

Start with the homebuyer, who may have specific reasons for selecting green, regional and/or custom builders. Brands can tap into these interests through content created especially for The Forgotten builders to share with their prospects.

For niche home builders wanting to win with prospective homebuyers, the right content generates trust. Homebuyers turning to this particular segment of the building market likely

seek education on the building process, about the circumstances they'll face and the decisions they must make.

When it comes to the products to be used in their new homes, homebuyers are interested, not necessarily in a list of features, but instead in a higher level view. They want to know how certain products will help them avoid problems others may have faced. They're also hoping to allay concerns about the future and achieve the vision of their dream home.

How Building Products Brands Can Help The Forgotten

Why Go to the Trouble?

Providing niche home builders with brand-specific content helps them market their business much more effectively because it provides perspective and saves them time.

Brand-sponsored messaging and content adds credibility and purpose. It shows homebuyers that brands have their backs. That certain products and solutions are designed just for them and will work as promised.

In this way, brand-created content puts the power of the brand name behind the builder's message. It's not about selling certain products, but about building trust in the builder and the brand.

Unlike many production builders, niche home builders may lack the time and resources to create all the educational materials they need to woo homebuyers. Yet homebuyers, who ultimately purchase the building products used in their homes, are interested in this information.

This is exactly where assistance from building product brands, aligned to the value propositions of the Forgotten Builders, and the information needs of buyers, will give brands a competitive edge.

The truth is, homebuyers selecting niche builders need specialized marketing assistance at all major stages of the new home construction journey. Content that does this builds rapport with both builders and buyers: Besides saving builders' time and telling their story, it also boosts their confidence in the brand.

And buyers are likely to favor brands that support their preferred builders. It's a win-win story that results in increased sales.

However, the Forgotten Builders are busy building homes. They don't have the time — or the resources — to create the kind of staged, targeted content that will resonate with homebuyers at specific points in the homebuilding process.

But building products brands do. And this e-book is designed to make the process easy.

On the pages that follow, we present specific strategy ideas brands can use to create targeted content for the Forgotten Builders to share with their customers at each major stage of the home building process.

We also show you the benefits of creating this brand-specific content for Forgotten Builders to share with buyers.

What Types of Content Should Building Products Brands Provide?

Now that you understand the value of brand-created content, let's talk about how to do this for The Forgotten Builders.

Most important is to know that content for buyers, created by brands, for distribution by builders, can take just about any form – like blogs, articles, infographics, brochures, whitepapers, videos and even events.

Whatever type of content is created, one thing is clear: it must address the homebuyer's specific information needs and concerns at each major step of the new construction journey, from engagement and purchase to final move in.

Considering before, during and after the build as the three major stages of the new construction journey, we suggest brands create shared content for distribution by niche builders to homebuyers during each of these stages.

One suggested brand-sponsored content strategy aligned with these criteria might feature three specific resources:

1. A "Before the Build" Guide: A brand-developed resource for distribution by niche builders on how to choose the right niche home builder
2. A "During the Build" E-Book: a digital asset created by the brand to illustrate who does what, when during the building process
3. An "After the Build" Checklist: A list of home maintenance tasks and reminders, created by the brand on the builder's behalf.

As the creators of this content, manufacturers can choose any format that's easy to distribute, post or link to by builders, such as a guide, brochure, video or even an e-blast. We suggest creating a guide because it's flexible in terms of design and helps position both the home builder and the brand, as experts on the topic.

Guides can be any length and can be created in a variety of formats for easy distribution. A digital guide, for instance, can be uploaded to the home builder's website, or printed in bulk with space provided for specific home builder identification. Digital files, meanwhile, allow the builder or brand to print the guide as needed, including the home builder's identity or logo at the time of printing.

But what specific content should the homebuyer guide include? To nail this down, it's best to identify the desired target audience.

Brands should consider helping niche builders engage the segment of the market likely to be most receptive to brand-sponsored or - created support. Individuals that have already built a home already may be familiar with the process, and so will have fewer concerns about the process.

But homebuyers with little or no previous home building experience likely will have a host of

questions to ask, and they're less likely to have established brand preferences for specific building products brands.

Brands who anticipate this need and address these questions in a guide will be able to address homebuyer concerns while at the same time helping builders set themselves apart from the competition.

For that reason, we suggest brands create their Before-the-Build Guide for distribution to homebuyers unfamiliar with the building process. Identifying this specific target audience lets you align guide content for niche builders to their customers with these information needs. At the same time, answering the questions prospective buyers are likely to ask puts your builder in an enviable position with prospective customers as the trusted provider of useful and objective information that's relevant to them.

To help make the homebuyer's decision process as simple and as logical as possible, structure the guide in easy-to-follow steps with clear explanations. On the next few pages are suggestions for the types of content you'll want to include in the guide that will help niche home builders tell their stories.

How To Create A Before-the-Build Guide

1. Explain the differences between custom and production builders.

Since the guide is intended to cater to The Forgotten building segment and their customers, you'll want your Before the Build Guide to remind buyers why niche builders might be right for them.

You can do this by offering descriptions of the two major types of builders, production and custom, listing the typical service offerings for each.

According to the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB), for example, most production-based home builders:

- Offer home and land as a package
- Provide a range of house plans to choose from
- Allow buyers to select their favorite style/design from a menu in several product categories
- This is different from most custom, green or regional builders, who:
- Will build a home on a homebuyer's land
- Allow the homebuyer to supply a floor plan or commission one
- Allow the homebuyer to work with a separate architect and builder, or a single design-build company
- Want the homebuyer involved in the build process as much as possible
- Allow the homebuyer freedom of product choice, rather than selecting from a defined menu of choices

You'll want to point out these distinctions in the guide, so that homebuyers will feel confident they are making the right decisions. Niche home builders also will thank you for highlighting the key value propositions they offer and by lending your support to their cause, which builds credibility for your brand and for the builder.

2. Provide a list of home-building resources for buyers.

Also key to include in a first-timer's home building guide is a list of useful resources for buyers to consult before the build. Buyers still considering which builder to select will appreciate learning about online builder selection tools from the NAHB, such as nahg.org/findanhba. Other national resources to list include BUILDERonline and houzz.com, which offer profiles, ratings and reviews. To make the listing even more targeted, add local lists of home builder associations in specific markets.

3. Encourage homebuyers to visit model or customer homes and to look for signs of quality.

A next logical discussion to include in the guide is information about what homebuyers should look for when they visit model homes. You'll want to remind your audience to look for quality construction and attention to detail in the cabinetry, trim work, paint and more. These are all hallmark signs of a trusted niche builder, and as a brand lending your support, you'll want to point this out.

This stage of the guide may also be a good place to remind homebuyers to consider the building products that a particular builder uses. To get the message across, encourage your audience to take notice of the products their builder has chosen, and whether they're using recognizable brands with well-earned reputations for quality. This is a great opportunity to promote your products, while doing it in a way that also supports niche builder value propositions.

4. Encourage homebuyers to ask questions

Close the guide with a list of important questions you believe homebuyers should ask. Homebuyers with little or no prior experience building a home are bound to have plenty of questions about the home building process. As such, they should be receptive to useful information that will help them make key decisions before their home is built.

The more a homebuyer knows about a potential builder, the more confident he or she will be in his or her final builder selection. But buyers don't always know what they don't know. Brands can help by supplying a list of questions for homebuyers to ask when interviewing potential builders. These can range from the obvious — like does the builder have a financing plan established — to questions covering warranty programs, restrictive covenants, estimated property taxes and even how the local school system is rated.

Some of the more basic questions relate to the type of homebuyers want or need, as they prepare to select a builder, location, style of home or floor plan.

For example:

- What type and size of home does the buyer need or want?
- What is the homebuyer's price range?
- What are the desired location(s)?

Sharing this sort of brand-created content will help builders get customers thinking about these important questions and at the same time allow building products brands to show both builders and buyers that they understand their needs at this stage of the game.

How to Create a During-the-Build E-Book

Now that you've created a guide for homebuyers new to the home building process, it's time to move on to address homebuyers and builders during the next stage of the building process: Construction.

At this point the homebuyer likely has settled on a builder to handle their project and now has a whole new list of concerns and questions to be answered.

The goal for brands now is to create a resource to illustrate and detail the building process and what decisions and problems homebuyers should expect to encounter during this phase.

Again, we suggest tailoring the resource to homebuyers unfamiliar with the building process, as this is the audience most likely to be receptive to and in need of the information you'll provide.

Building products brands can choose any format for their During-the-Build content; we suggest creating an e-book because it offers plenty of flexibility to include visuals and to organize topics by page.

E-books can be any length and they can be customized by home builders at any time. The e-book ideally should reside on the home builder's website, where it can be downloaded by potential homebuyers.

On the following pages, you'll find four specific suggestions on what to include in the e-book.

1. Keep the language simple

Assuming the audience for your e-book is homebuyers with little previous building experience, you'll want to keep the language simple, avoiding industry jargon. Use visuals as well to further illustrate the building process in a way that is informative yet easy for homebuyers to digest.

Again, your home builders will thank you for helping to educate their customers on their behalf, which saves them time and increases the level of customer service they're able to provide. The e-book will also help to establish your brand as one that both parties can trust.

2. Introduce the building team

It's a good idea to use this resource to list who's who on the building team, explaining what each person does in the building process. You may even want to devote a page to each specialization, calling out each professional's goals and areas of expertise.

Consider including information on the following professionals involved in the project:

- Developer
- Architect
- Builder's Sales Consultant/Sales Team
- Design Center Consultant
- Construction Superintendent
- Subcontractors (as a category)
- Inspectors

Having this information at the ready for homebuyers underscores your commitment to both buyers and builders. It also helps builders communicate more efficiently with their customers, who now know which team member is responsible for which part of the project. By sharing this story with homebuyers for your builders, you're saving your builders valuable time in educating their customers with timely information. Sharing these details also can potentially improve the customer's experience, which breeds further trust in your brand among both builders and buyers.

3. Detail the building process

Now that buyers know the players in this project, it's time to show them what happens and when. Here's where your e-book can take the homebuyer through the building process, explaining who's doing what, when and why at every step. This is a great opportunity to educate homebuyers on what to expect.

When providing specific expectations, be sure to include approximately how long each step will take and offer guidelines about when inspections should be expected to occur.

You will want to include information on the following stages of construction:

- Site preparation
- Pouring the foundation
- Rough framing
- Rough plumbing

- Insulation
- Drywall and interior fixtures
- Interior trim, driveways and walkways
- Flooring and countertops
- Exterior grading
- Mechanical trims and plumbing fixtures
- Finish work: mirrors, doors, flooring, landscaping
- Final walk-through

Including all of this information will help your builder communicate a very important collection of details efficiently. The builder may have already shared this information, but will appreciate having this resource to assist inquisitive customers. This resource also will build valued loyalty in your brand among both builders and their buyers.

4. Include product mentions where applicable

The During-the-Build E-book presents another terrific opportunity to mention your products and the solutions they represent, particularly during the build process. But you'll want to be careful not to oversell.

For example, if you manufacture sealing products, you should mention the importance of proper window sealing during installation when windows are being discussed. You can even list your brand along with the top two or three competitive products that could be used.

How to Create an After-the-Build Checklist

Now that you've created a Before-the-Build Guide and a During-the-Build E-book, it's time to move on to the next stage in this process: after the build is completed.

One great resource to consider offering your builders and their customers is an After-the-Build Checklist, in which you share a maintenance to-do list for the new occupants.

Homebuyers will again value information that is presented and endorsed with brand support. And time-strapped niche home builders will be interested in sharing this ready resource with their customers, particularly if it applies to products they've used in the home.

Brands can choose any format for their After-the-Build content. Here we suggest a checklist as a quick and easy reference guide listing the maintenance tasks that must be performed.

Again the format is flexible: You can create a digital checklist for posting on the home builder's website, or print it in bulk, leaving space for specific home builder identification and logo. Brands also can print the checklist from a digital file as needed, including room for home builder customization at the time of printing.

On the following pages, we offer specific suggestions on what to include in the checklist.

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1. Help homeowners keep track of their warranties

Encourage homeowners to become familiar with their warranties, including the length of covered time and manufacturer recommendations for replacements. You may even want to include a special category for warranty information on your checklist.

2. Include information on the costs of home maintenance

According to mortgage firm Freddie Mac, homeowners will spend between 1 to 4 percent of a home's value annually on maintenance and repairs — percentages which tend to increase as a home ages. Share information like this in the checklist to help new homeowners understand the importance of setting aside time and money for regular maintenance upkeep as well as major replacements.

3. Add applicable product mentions

The After-the-Build Checklist presents another great opportunity for manufacturers to mention their brands. For example, a maker of sealing products will want to suggest a product for cracked window seals in the checklist where exterior roof, walls and windows are mentioned.

4. Remind homeowners of the importance of home maintenance and create a list of maintenance tasks. Here you can explain that clean homes are healthy homes, and routine home maintenance can help remove allergens, prevent illness and reduce the potential for accidents and injury.

When building your checklist of maintenance areas, here are suggestions of what to include:

- Yard and exterior
- Basement and crawlspace
- Exterior roof, walls and windows
- Interior walls, ceilings, windows and doors
- Plumbing, fixtures and appliances
- Electrical equipment
- Garage
- HVAC system
- Attic

You'll want to include tasks to be performed for area, indicating when they should be performed: spring, fall, annually, or as needed.

How to Get Started

Creating a home builder engagement strategy is key to ongoing success for building products manufacturers. Brands that use content — particularly digital content — targeted to specific homebuyer concerns at every step of the home building process, will not only help home builders, they will also position themselves as knowledge partners. This in turn builds long-term loyalty and relationships that boost trust in the brand and result in increased sales.

Have we piqued your interest in creating a comprehensive, memorable engagement strategy for home builders? We'd love to help you develop a demand generation strategy that works for you and your customers.

Contact us to learn how we can help generate demand for your business:

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