

## The Eyes Have It!

**SEEING IS BELIEVING.** No matter how good the selling market might be, a community's success ultimately relies on the quality of the sales agents. **Video Profiles** from LeBlanc & Associates capture your agent's entire sales presentation through the eyes of the buyer.

**TRAINING.** Eliminate the doubt. Use a **Video Profile** from LeBlanc & Associates of your best agent(s) to demonstrate what you expect from the rest of the team. What better way can an agent learn than from the best of their peers? LeBlanc & Associates can provide a self-evaluation guide to reinforce the training aspect of the program.

**TECHNICALLY SPEAKING.** All work is done in-house so we have direct control over the entire process. We also offer our clients options including processed or non-processed formats, and VHS tapes or CD ROMS. **QUALITY.** LeBlanc & Associates has established credentials as the premiere sales agent evaluation company in the industry. We have one expertise...new home sales. Fast food restaurants, banks and car dealerships are not our game. We have the best agent capture rate around. Our people are personally trained to focus on the agent. We realize you know what your models look like! **Have you have tried the rest and found ill prepared field personnel? Have you seen more walls than agents? Do ceiling shots make you dizzy?**

**THEN BE PREPARED FOR THE BEST. GIVE US A CALL!**  
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## The Front Porch . . . Continued from page one

sales team that the shoppers are out and about, everyone might score high. Perhaps higher than the person spilling the beans. For competitive people, that doesn't make much sense. So let the process happen. After all, there are quirky buyers in the real world. Shouldn't all agents know how to handle them? Their dollar is just as good as the 'perfect buyer'. After all my years in this business, I still am not sure how you define a perfect buyer. Many people do their homework before venturing into the daunting world of buying a home. Real buyers in today's market are more knowledgeable than they used to be. Thank the internet for providing all kinds of information for the average person.

So agents, when you are presented with an interested and motivated buyer who shows an interest in your product, it could either be a mystery shopper or a real buyer. Assume the latter. Assume the sale. It is up to you. And please, don't make a mystery out of the process. ♥

## What To Do About Sales . . . Continued from page three

slow we don't always notice the sales office 'curb appeal' and overall appearance. What is your message as visitors enter your parking lot?

Back to basics is the key to assure your community is presented in the best way to your prospective buyers. The year end results won't wait.

*Carole's experience spans 20 years in new home construction with the top builders in management as well as a consultant in sales training, strategic and operational marketing and respective budgets. 505-305-0632 cda724@yahoo.com ♥*

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You can receive **The Home Front** by e-mail as a PDF file. You will enjoy the same graphics and layout as the printed version and you can more easily share your copy with other staff and sales agents! Please contact me at [Mary@mleblanc.com](mailto:Mary@mleblanc.com) if you would prefer **The Home Front** by e-mail and don't forget to include your name, company, city and state! You can also visit my website ([www.mleblanc.com](http://www.mleblanc.com)) to obtain previous editions of **The Home Front**.

## The Home Front

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*Serving You, The Nation's Builder Community*

# The Home Front

LEBLANC & ASSOCIATES

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## The Front Porch

After music, my favorite form of entertainment is mystery novels and movies. I love the "who done it" aspect. The mysteries that keep you guessing and take you on a long and twisting path are the most entertaining. You never know who the bad guy is until the end. Many times the authors of the great mysteries have a beginning and an end and then create the in-between. Sometimes they have the in-between and need to create the beginning and the end. The creative process is different for everyone.

So what is the mystery about a sales presentation? In reality there is none. But many agents sure do make a mystery of the process. They take the poor prospective buyer on a long and twisted path to what in their minds is asking for the sale. When I encounter this type of agent, I wonder if they know the proper beginning. Are they aware of what the end should be? They sure don't now how to create the in-between. More and more builders over this past year are contacting us to evaluate their sales agents. Companies have enough challenges to deal with in today's market and do not need any mysteries in their sales centers.

The mystery shopping process identifies the technical aspects of the sales presentation to assess and evaluate the agent's ability to create the sale. The evaluation reports first identify the beginning. Does the agent make a favorable first impression? Do they quickly acknowledge their buyer? Do they offer a friendly greeting? It then evaluates the agents skill level for the 'in-between'. Does the agent assess their buyer's needs, preferences, timing and motivation? Does the agent effectively conduct a good discovery process? Does the agent effectively sell the community and product? Do they use benefit selling language? Do they recognize buying signals? And of course, do the agents lay the proper foundation for the end - i.e. the sale?



Mary LeBlanc, President  
LEBLANC & ASSOCIATES

It is critical when management contracts with us or any other mystery shopping company to keep in mind that the process is about the agent. It is not about the 'shopper'. My accounts frequently ask me if they should put their agents on notice that they will be shopped. While there are some merits to this, such as your agents now consistently do their dog-and-pony show and treat every buyer as a 'shopper', I personally don't like agents to know. The process should capture the agent in their day-to-day selling routine. If the agent is on high alert, two things can happen. They will do the right thing and perhaps pop a sale or two. OR, they will dismiss a legitimate buyer as a 'shopper' and won't waste their time dealing with them thereby losing a possible sale. If there isn't an accurate observation and assessment, how can the report or video be a valid learning tool?

Some agents, if they suspect they are being shopped, love to spill the beans, tell management, tell their fellow agents, tell the mailman, etc. See how smart I am? Really? Haven't they just shot themselves in the foot? If they dismissed the shopper and get a poor scoring report, is that smart? If they did a stellar sales presentation and then told management, is that smart? If they tell all their

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## Summer Madness

By Bill Hurme

There is a bit of Summer Madness going around, by which I mean that builders and developers are hammering their sales and marketing teams to make more sales. When a community isn't selling, or isn't selling fast enough, there are usually a fairly recognizable series of factors that account for the velocity. If you look at price (both actual and as it relates to the competition), home design, amenities, location, sales & marketing effectiveness and general market conditions (including interest rates), most situations become clearer and easier to understand. It is the job of the sales and marketing teams to find ways of keeping absorption levels at an acceptable rate. To do this, the absolute, unvarnished truth must be conveyed to builder clients, and the builder and marketing teams need to come together to correct a given situation. Then everyone wins.

When builders put pressure on their sales teams, it's also important that our side of the desk understand the builder's position: unsold standing inventory with an interest-rate meter that keeps on ticking; bank loans and lines of credit, often accompanied by personal guarantees; substantial monthly fixed overhead; and investor and pro forma pressure. So when a builder asks us to increase the tempo, it's time to roll up our sleeves and work even harder to perform. Usually,

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## Finding Solutions to Key Sales & Marketing Challenges

By Manny Schatz

**Home Front:** Manny, now that we are into more of a "difficult" market in terms of producing sales, how are builders addressing today's market challenges?

**Manny Schatz:** I have interviewed builders of every size and level of sales and dollar volume. Many challenges were similar among those sampled, but their solutions were quite varied.

**HF:** What was their biggest issue?

**MS:** Follow-up by far. I found that most home building companies do not have a true follow-up program in place. Very few companies have a written, clearly outlined follow-up procedure. Absent well-defined guidelines, prospect and customer follow-up is rarely performed.

**HF:** Many agents feel once they make a call or send one email that is the end of their follow-up program. What do some builders require of their agents?

**MS:** From post-move-in surveys we find many new home buyers feel they are neglected. There should be a reason to contact buyers on a continuous basis throughout the buying process. One builder requires his agents have an 8-step follow-up plan. It starts with a thank you letter within one week. The salesperson then identifies seven additional reasons to contact that person and makes at least one contact per week. These contacts are then reviewed weekly.

**HF:** Customer satisfaction is often touted by agents. How is it achieved?

**MS:** A path to ensure buyer satisfaction comes from standardizing company procedures and having appropriate support systems in place. Creating a very thorough checklist of responsibilities is a must. It must be a seamless process that has continuity and is predictable, consistent and dependable. It is also important to empower employees to run the procedures.

**HF:** What do you say to builders to make their agents more effective?

**MS:** Create a franchisee/franchiser relationship with your sales staff. The concept is that each sales representative is running his/her own business. The builder provides the package. The agent provides a maximum number of sales at a minimum of risk with a maximum of profit.

**HF:** Now that we are in a buyer's market, how do agents manage buyer's expectations?

**MS:** People will accept "no" if there is a rational and reasonable answer as to why. Sales agents need to be knowledgeable about the entire home building process so they can explain it to their buyers. By managing buyer expectations carefully, you create realistic expectations and improve communication.

**HF:** Many think the sale stops at the point of taking a deposit check. Your words of wisdom?

**MS:** "Making the sale" accounts for about 20% of the sales process – then the real work starts. Tracking activities related to the complete transaction is critical. Managers and agents must manage the pipeline (mortgages, options, etc.) to ensure all goes smoothly. Work out all construction and sales and marketing issues with the full participation of everyone responsible.

*Manny Schatz, principal of Professional Builder Services, Inc., holds a general contractors license, a broker's license and MIRM certification. Manny was an associate of The Stone Institute and worked with the late Dave Stone. For further information, contact Manny Schatz at (925) 837-1937.*

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## Ten Commandments For Success In A Slower Market

By Dave Harding

**T**hou shalt dirty thy hands in politics...as a core requirement, not just as a reaction to thine current project.

Thou shalt be efficient in *all* parts of thy sales and marketing endeavors, and ye shall so measure after every Sabbath Day.

Thy temple designs and thy presentation skills will be appropriate for *all* of my people, not only for those of thine own tribe.

Honor all cultures upon my Earth.

Train ye and motivate thine own self ... thy sales and purchasing team, money counters, thy teachers and scribes, thy welcoming team, thy carpenters and masons, all thy staff ... at least weekly, for this will give thee an advantage over thine enemies.

Know thine enemies, the architecture of their temples, the sweetness of their wine, the size of their crops, the bounty of their fishermen and their tribal structure.

Thou shalt deliver improved model demonstrations ... even if they are virtual.

Turn every single customer into thy disciple...by surveying thy customers, then improving customer satisfaction rating.

Use thine own efforts to gather disciples to come to your house. Add to the efforts of thine marketing scribes. If ye rely on only the disciples sent to you, ye are adhering to a former religion. Ye should self-generate by the sweat of thine own brow at least three of every ten guests to thine place of business.

Avoid the judgment of those who wouldst banish thee from thine chosen craft, whether they be senators or judges for they know not the purity of thy cause. Neither have they the wisdom of my son Solomon; they share not thy yoke of providing honest labor to shelter my people, and, verily these oxen are a pain upon my ass. Avoid ye this pain.

*Dave Harding is President of Ultimate New Homes Sales & Marketing based in Los Angeles. He is the 2004 NAHB Sales Manager of the Year and won the Design Center of the Year for the States of California, Nevada and Hawaii. Dave is Past President of the Los Angeles-Ventura Sales & Marketing Council and a popular instructor in the United States and Canada. He can be reached at [dgb@unbs.com](mailto:dgb@unbs.com) or 310. 463. 0454.*

## Kudos Korner

***This past quarter proved to be a stellar period for sales agents we evaluated. This time around an agent had to score a minimum of 95 points to make the Kudos Korner. This means all the recent investment in sales agent training is producing the desired results. So from both our Audio and Video Profile series, Kudos to the following:***

### LETHA DURHAM

*Homes By Towne*

Letha scored 98% with a near perfect sales presentation. During her encounter, Letha provided her buyer with a thorough and personalized sales presentation. She demonstrated knowledge of her product and community, and sold benefits and value.

### CHRIS PAPIN

*Richmond American Homes*

Chris also had a near perfect sales presentation. Her 98% rating reflected a perfect discovery and assessment process, product presentation and closing sequence. Little was missed during this Video Profile encounter.

### DANA COLIA

*Richmond American Homes*

Dana is another example of a sales professional who knows how to build value in her product using wonderful descriptive language. Not only does Dana create urgency to make a purchase decision, she also creates a reason to buy one of her homes!

### CONNIE CHRISTIAN

*Centex Homes*

Connie's 98% rating reflected near perfection by meeting most of the essential benchmarks of an effective sales presentation. Added to the mix is Connie's enthusiasm and positive attitude.

### DONNA RICHARDS

*Richmond American Homes*

Donna is an enthusiastic sales professional who provides her buyer with attentive, knowledgeable and courteous service.

### SHERI GRAY

*K. Hovnanian*

Sheri is a sales professional who is attentive, knowledgeable and provides caring personal service to her prospective buyer.

### KELLY WILSON

*Arcadia Homes*

Kelly is an informative sales agent who has a professional presentation and makes her buyer feel at ease. Kelly is approachable and makes her buyer feel important.

### TED WILLIAMSON

*Fieldstone Communities*

Ted is a relaxed and friendly sales professional. His personal approach places a buyer at ease and makes them feel welcomed. Ted demonstrates strong product knowledge and speaks of his builder with true appreciation.

### REBECCA REARDON

*Richmond American*

Rebecca is an accomplished sales professional who shows enthusiasm. Rebecca provides her buyer with a thorough, attentive and structured sales presentation.

***And Kudos to the following agents demonstrating excellence in sales, all scoring 95%:***

*Pinnacle Communities*

**LINDA MADISON • JOY LERAAS**

*Griffin Communities*

**KIM ROBINSON**

*Richmond American Homes*

**KIM CAVIN • LORI ANN LYNCH**

## Summer Madness . . . Continued from page one

builders are willing to accept almost any good idea. We should look at value-added items (e.g. landscaped backyard, washer-dryer-refrigerator, buy down financing options, fencing, options and upgrades, etc.), marketing (signage, fresh ads, targeted direct mail, other media opportunities), re-tooling our onsite presentation including re-scripting or, occasionally, changing personnel from one site to another. This is also a great time to mystery shop our onsite team, with an eye towards keeping them fresh and sharp. Lowering prices, by the way, should only be the last resort, and should only be considered when all of the other options have failed.

*Bill Hurme is President of TeamBuilder JLS, LLC, based in Bellevue, Washington. TeamBuilder is a sales and marketing company that is currently onsite at 25 communities in the greater Puget Sound region, Yakima, Washington and Portland, Oregon.*

## What To Do About Sales

By Carole De Arellano

**A**s many of us have experienced, the real estate industry has taken a turn with overall new home sales remaining sluggish. It is primarily a buyer's market. Investors have scaled back, realtors don't have as many buyers and referrals are scarce. People still want the American Dream of home ownership. So how can builders capture this market and still make a profit?

One question we need to ask is what's happening in the sales offices? What happened to the top producers during the boom?

It's time to get back to basics. Don't overlook the importance of properly trained sales personnel with excellent customer service skills. Do your agents know the answer to a critical simple question, "When does the sale start?" The answer is with the first greeting and it extends well past the contract signing and closing. New referrals have a renewing value to the sales life of a community.

Hiring the right sales management team for support, training and coaching is critical. Many companies are cutting back on these positions and rationalize with 'why hire sales management when we are not generating enough sales?' Companies assume the project manager can handle this daunting task along with all their other responsibilities. Think again. If sales are the lifeline of any business, why not invest in the right professional ready to bring about the best results?

Is your sales team ready for greeting guests, asking discovery questions, and building rapport? Is there a planned presentation or are they winging it? Afterward, what's the follow-up plan?

Sales training is not a once-a-week topic on the sales meeting agenda; it's an ongoing process in the field. Question and evaluate what your sales people are doing and saying about your assets. Mystery Shops can answer some of your questions and ascertain strengths and weakness in the sales presentations and the follow-up. These are valuable tools for training opportunities.

In addition to focusing on your sales team, start with the basics from the outside in for your selling environment. When traffic is

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