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## CUSTOMER SERVICE

The details that set companies apart

» ALYSSON AUSTIN

With the recent downturn of the U.S. economy, many in the homebuilding industry are falling on hard times and finding it difficult to attract new customers. All homebuilders face similar challenges in selling, building, delivering and servicing homes. Especially in today's housing market, homebuilders must work harder than ever before to uncover ways to set their company apart from the competition.

Here we examine some of the commonalities shared by homebuilders across the nation, and explore new ways to attract and retain customers that will keep businesses vital, even through historic lows in the industry.

### THE CHANGING FACE OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

Until recently, many builders equated customer service with simple warranty repairs. One simple way to stand out from the crowd is to implement strategic customer service goals. These initiatives effectively differentiate

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Do you have strategic customer service goals to differentiate you from other homebuilders?

customer experiences from one homebuilder to another. Tactics within the realm of customer service initiatives can run the gamut from buyer satisfaction programs to brand and reputation maintenance.

When homebuilders step out of the box to infuse fresh thinking into the ways they service their customers, the end result is not just the provision of superb customer service, but can also be the defining point that leads a customer to repeat business.

Below are several tips to keep in mind when implementing a customer service program.

» **Service Leadership & Aligning Expectations** It's important that all employees support new customer service goals and messages. Employees ranging from the

CEO of the company to the front-desk receptionist are equally essential in making the company's initiatives successful.

» **Giving the Keys to the Owner** Determine which responsibilities are the homebuilder's and which are the Homeowners Association's duties. Make sure homeowners are aware that once keys are exchanged, any issues that arise are to be handled by the homebuilder's customer care or service department.

» **Warranty Service** Make sure there is an unmistakable understanding of all warranty service and obligations, with every customer, every time. Be aware of service time statutes, and be honest and forthright in all dealings with customers in this regard.

» **Construction Defect Legislation** Homebuilders must protect their companies by understanding current laws and impending legislation that may affect homebuilders. One small oversight can often spell the difference between a company's success and downfall.

» **Get Face-To-Face with Customers** Realize that the relationship between customers and builders should be long term. Educate customers about the homebuilding process to decrease the opportunity for misunderstandings. Go above and beyond during every time for client face-time, and turn homebuyers into "superfans."

Homebuilders are able to create a competitive edge by providing a higher caliber of everyday customer service. Offering more detail and care will not only ensure customers to return but can help build upon the company's reputation.

For more information related to the homebuilding and light construction industry and UC Irvine Extension's Certificate Program in Light Construction and Development Management, please visit [extension.uci.edu](http://extension.uci.edu) or contact Nancy Salzman at 949-824-5524. ■



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