

Marketing Energy Efficient Options

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Few building contractors have a steady supply of clients clamoring for energy efficiency. In today's market energy efficiency is seldom at the top of the consumer's list. The average consumer is more concerned about the color of the carpeting in their new home than about the advantages of energy efficient construction.

Energy details on blue prints are often limited and not up to date. When the contractor is bidding against other local builders, it becomes necessary to "bid the plans" and offer energy efficiency in the form of options. This situation can be beneficial to the builder who uses energy efficiency as part of a balanced marketing approach.

When the builder offers intelligent upgrades to the client a differentiation is made between that builder and his local competition. The average consumer wants a better built home. This provides an opportunity for the educated builder who can inform the client and "sell" the benefits of energy efficient upgrades.

These options evolve as new research points us in different directions. Ideally these "options" will be viable, affordable and effective.

Viable options are ones that can be integrated in the construction process. Many require additional time and effort in the building process. The method which has the least impact to scheduling will have an advantage. The goal is to use techniques which can be successfully repeated in the construction environment.

Most consumers are on limited budgets and cost is almost always a consideration. The contractor should inform and advise the consumer as to the many advantages of these additional expenditures.

ENERGY EFFICIENT OPTIONS:

1. Spray wall insulation
2. Air sealing
3. Sealed and tested ductwork
4. High efficiency H.V.A.C. systems
5. High efficiency light fixtures
6. Insulated slab on grade foundations
7. High performance windows
8. Alternative building materials
9. Mechanical ventilation (technically not an energy efficient option)



SPRAY INSULATION

Studies have shown the importance of insulating walls without voids. One of the easiest ways of accomplishing this is with spray insulation. It can be visually inspected by both the contractor for quality control and by the owner for personal satisfaction. On a typical home the additional cost is a few hundred dollars and many customers are happy to upgrade once the benefits are explained.

AIR SEALING

Sealing windows and doors with non-expansive foam is simple and easy. The tools are inexpensive and readily available. A typical foam gun sells for less than one hundred dollars and the resultant seal is visible and complete. Other penetrations can be sealed with expansive foam available at the local hardware store.

The modified airtight drywall approach to reducing infiltration rates and limiting interstitial air movement in the wall cavity can be a very cost effective way of improving the performance of the home. Drywall can be taped to the floor and electrical penetrations can be sealed with enclosures or approved caulk. Interior and exterior walls are equally critical to this procedure.

SEALED AND TESTED DUCTWORK

Recent studies have demonstrated the unpredictable performance of air distribution systems. Approximately one third of duct systems have „catastrophic% leaks. The only assurance of performance is testing. The generally accepted limit of leakage is a maximum c.f.m. leakage of less than 3% of floor square footage.

H.V.A.C. SYSTEMS

Energy efficient heating and cooling systems are well marketed by manufactures and often requested by the consumer. Energy analysis software such as Energy-10 is very useful in analyzing payback on upgraded equipment. Interestingly, as the performance of the thermal envelope improves the payback period is extended.

HIGH EFFICIENCY LIGHT FIXTURES

There are many choices in energy efficient lighting. Compact fluorescent lights have had broad appeal as a consumer installable upgrade. In new construction T-8 fluorescent fixtures with electronic ballasts provide all of the benefits of traditional fluorescent lights with virtually none of the drawbacks. Efficient electronic ballasts provide instant start up with no flicker. Bulbs are available in a range of color temperatures and T-8 equipment is readily available.

INSULATED SLAB ON GRADE FOUNDATIONS

Pouring a concrete slab floor and coupling it to an exterior masonry stem wall (i.e. heat sink) is common practice in many parts of the country. This can account for one third of the heat loss in a typical home. Various details for insulating slab floors include interior and exterior placement of insulation. The best approach is the one which is most viable for the individual building contractor in concert with his subcontractors and local building practices.

HIGH PERFORMANCE WINDOWS

Window manufacturers have done a lot of advertising and consumers often inquire about upgraded window packages. The reasons for upgrading windows extend beyond energy savings. Aesthetics, noise control, and easy operation are often just as important to the customer.

ALTERNATIVE BUILDING MATERIALS

There is a wide selection of alternative construction materials. Availability, cost, and marketing support will be important to the builder looking at new methods of construction. Consumer awareness has grown steadily and opportunities to sell these new systems has grown as well. This is a trend which can only increase with time.

MECHANICAL VENTILATION SYSTEMS

Although not technically an energy saver, ventilation systems are an integral part of a well designed energy efficient home. There is little consensus on the best method. The builder should offer a system which is not only affordable but integrates well with their building process.

MARKETING TOOLS

Various marketing tools can be employed by the individual building contractor. These include:

- Media ads - radio, newspaper, television
- Direct mail marketing - brochures, info packs, check lists, letters, etc.
- Educational seminars
- Home shows
- Internet web sites
- Niche markets - homeowner association newsletters, etc.

Media advertising includes radio, newspaper, and television. The cost and effectiveness of these formats are different for each builder,s local market. Small communities may provide affordable rates whereas large metropolitan markets may be most viable to large high volume builders. This type of advertising can be combined with home shows and educational seminars to increase attendance.

Direct mail marketing can be very cost effective for the small builder. Desktop publishing has put professional quality brochures within the reach of the average builder. Brochures can be mailed to target markets through the use of mailing lists from local Chambers of Commerce and data base services providing lists of vacant lot sales in the area of interest. A separate printed list of energy options can be inserted into the brochures as well as mail back cards for people requesting additional information.

Educational seminars can be very effective in educating prospects on the advantages of energy details. The builder can be the facilitator or a professional can be hired to provide a professional presentation. One day or even half day seminars can generate a lot of interest and provide credibility to the builder sponsoring the event.

Local home shows can provide the builder with good exposure and the chance to talk one on one with the prospective client. People attending the home show typically have questions in mind and are eager to talk to knowledgeable builders.

The internet has grown to be a powerful method of advertising for all builders large and small. Web page designers are widely available and communication with prospects can be immediate with e-mail. Opportunities are also available with electronic indexes such as US West Direct and linking to other sites.

Niche markets are often overlooked but can provide a valuable source of prospects to the average builder. Many subdivisions have their own newsletters and will insert ads for a minimal cost.

SUMMARY

A well balance marketing plan should be part of the builder,s overall business plan. Energy efficient options can provide the builder with additional tools to market his business and distinguish himself/herself from the competition and provide the customer with a higher quality product.