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Builders Want to Know:

Does My Website Sell or Sink My Homes?

Once upon a time, just having a website was enough to set a home builder apart from the competition. But that was before nine out of 10 home buyers relied on the internet as a primary research source.

Today, [the playing field has changed](#). For more than half of buyers, performing a web search has become the first step toward buying a home. Real estate searches on Google have more than doubled over the past few years.

“In today’s complex, rapidly changing, and digitally driven media environment, capturing a home shopper’s attention ... is tougher than ever,” says a joint report by Google and the National Association of Realtors. For example:

- 40 percent of new-home shoppers conduct online research at least three months before taking any kind of action, such as filling out a contact form.
- The average home buyer requires 52 touch points, from initial research to making contact with a builder, before making an actual purchase.
- 80 percent of buyers will take action online, such as submitting a contact form, before ever visiting the community.

To convert hesitant potential buyers into viable sales leads, builders need to ensure their websites are fully [optimized for their target audience](#)—from content to design to functionality.

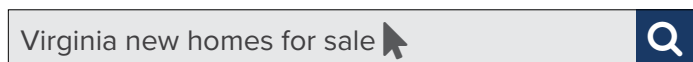
Content and Search Engine Optimization

Home buyers perform an average of 11 searches before taking any action on a real estate site. For builders, organic search results contribute to 50 percent or more of website leads—assuming the site is visible to search engines, that is.

To take full advantage of home buyers' use of search engines to shop for homes, builders need to create robust content that is:

Optimized for Local Search

Nearly 70 percent of home shoppers begin their research using a local search term, such as “Virginia new homes for sale,” “Texas new homes for sale,” etc. More than half of the actions they take online originate directly from a local search.

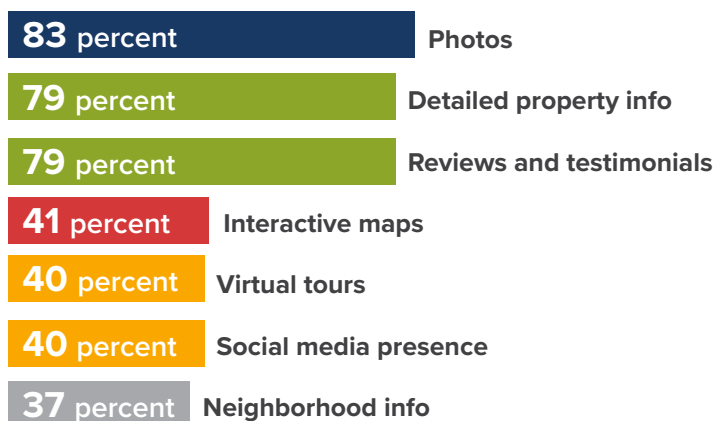


To top it off, geographic-based searches will become even narrower as buyers narrow in on what they're really looking for and begin searching at the neighborhood level instead of by city or region. To remain visible, builders will need to optimize their websites for ultra-local search terms based on districts or sub-cities—such as “Sellwood real estate agent” instead of “Portland real estate agent.”

Useful and Easy to Comprehend

The oversaturation of online content has made search engines more selective about what ranks well. Overgeneralized content no longer serves a purpose. The more specific, niche-oriented and useful your website is, the better the rankings it can achieve.

To be considered useful, your content needs to address home buyer wants. Builders can do this by providing the types of online tools home buyers find most useful, including:



Interactive with a Visual Impact

The more online resources home buyers have at their disposal—and competing for their attention—the more important it becomes to provide content your audience will not only consume, but will also enjoy and act upon. Static content is increasingly giving way to interactive tools.

“By its very nature, interactive content engages participants in an activity: answering questions, making choices, exploring scenarios,” says marketing expert Scott Brinker. “Individuals have to think and respond; they can’t just snooze through it.”

Video is one of the most popular forms of interactive content among home buyers, especially with the rising use of mobile devices. Real estate video views grew 13 percent last year, and one in five future home buyers say they will watch them on their mobile devices. House hunters primarily use video to:

- Learn more about the community—86 percent
- Tour the inside of a home—70 percent
- Obtain general information—54 percent
- Compare features across multiple companies—44 percent
- Understand specific features—38 percent
- Watch customer testimonials—30 percent

Video is also a great way to convey information about structural warranties for new homes. At PWSC, for example, we provide builders with a [customizable warranty video](#) that explains how their builder’s warranty works.

Other helpful interactive tools include:

- ▶ **Interactive floor plans** that allow the buyer to tag on additions, subtract rooms, and more.
- ▶ **Calculators** that help home buyers answer their financial questions and review their options.
- ▶ **Custom dashboards** that allow shoppers to save their favorite floor plans as they navigate your site.
- ▶ **Home buyer’s toolkits** that answer FAQs, provide [structural home warranty information](#), and explain what to expect from a new-home build.
- ▶ **Share buttons** that make it easy for buyers to email you, tweet or share their favorite floor plan, re-pin a photo, and like a blog post.

Easily Shared through Links

If people can’t link to your content, search engines won’t rank it. And that means it won’t generate any traffic to your site. Yet many companies squander their best content by posting it as image slide shows, behind login portals or as content that can’t be reproduced or shared. Written

content (or any content for that matter) should be included on a blog post or a web page. This allows links to that content to be easily shared by website visitors.

“From an SEO perspective, there is no difference between the best and worst content on the Internet if it is not linkable,” says SEO consulting firm Moz.

Even worse, unshareable content can turn your website into a social media pariah. Social media plays a growing role in search visibility and an even more critical role in driving traffic to your content. Ninety-six percent of marketers rely on social media engagement to generate inbound traffic, and 89 percent say it's their top metric for measuring the success of their content.

Emotionally Resonant

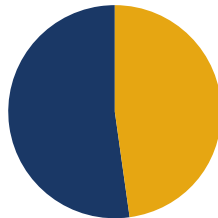
Buying a new home is as much an emotional decision as it is a practical one. But to emotionally engage home buyers, your content needs to hit just the right note. Many builder websites feel sterile or impersonal. Developing a deliberate voice, tone, and style can help improve your ability to forge a connection with each potential buyer.

- **Voice** refers to the personality of your brand, the cadence of the language you use, and the type of vocabulary you employ.
- **Tone** refers to how you use your voice when addressing specific audiences in different situations, allowing you to add a layer of empathy to your content.
- **Style** refers to what your writing looks like, such as when to capitalize and how to spell certain words.

Personalized

BUYERS ARE 48%

more likely to consider a company that personalizes its content to address their specific needs.



Personalized content lets you speak to the heart of the challenges and goals of your target audience. [Targeting millennial home buyers](#) who are researching their first home, for example, requires a different approach than reaching older buyers who are looking for a place to retire.

To achieve this level of personalization, many marketers use buyer personas—semi-fictional representations of the target customer that are based on market research and hard data. Well-developed personas can more than double the effectiveness of your website by helping you create content that speaks directly to your target audience.

Design and Responsiveness

Affluent home buyers are a highly sought-after audience for builders who want to maximize their profits on new homes. But they're not the easiest consumers to reach.



Design, for example, is especially important to them. Ninety-eight percent of affluent consumers believe design enhances their lives, compared to just 68 percent of the general population. Yet many luxury builders alienate these buyers with outdated websites and poor photography.

Before you can sell buyers on your ability to build a beautiful home, you'll first need to show them you're capable of creating a pleasant online environment. To this end, your website should be:

Responsive

Although more than a fifth of real estate-related searches occur on mobile devices, few builders' websites are built to be fully responsive to mobile devices, says online marketing expert Jimmy Diffiee.

Since Google began factoring mobile responsiveness into its search engine algorithm, builders who lack mobile-friendly design have seen a significant drop in organic search traffic. Sites that aren't responsive to mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets no longer appear in Google search results on those devices.

Non-responsive websites also take longer to load on mobile devices. And internet users can be fickle; 40 percent will abandon a site that takes more than three seconds to load.

That's a problem when you consider that 89 percent of new-home shoppers use a mobile search engine throughout the buying process, and 64 percent place high value on a mobile-friendly website. Tablets, in particular, have become a popular way to research home builders.

Trustworthy

Buying a new home is a big decision, and shoppers want to know they're working with a builder they can trust. One of the most important things your website can do for you is establish trust with potential buyers. A trustworthy builder website:

- Makes it easy to reach you, with a contact form and phone number available on each page.
- Displays only current information.

- Appears streamlined and professional.
- Showcases your homes through high-quality, original photos.
- Presents a clear call to action.
- Prominently displays helpful information for decision-making, such as information about structural warranties for new homes.
- Includes individual employee profiles as well as your company's background.

Visual

When you're selling new construction, what you're really selling is potential. Helping home buyers visualize the types of homes you can build is vital. Your site should showcase plenty of professional-quality photos and images of your homes.



If your site includes a portfolio slide show or interactive floor plan, consider placing it front and center on your homepage. That way, the first thing buyers see is stunning imagery that enables them to envision themselves in one of your homes—without even having to navigate the menu.

Functionality for New-Home Buyers

Buyers do a lot of research before choosing a builder. Your website is your chance to make a strong impression and portray both your high-quality craftsmanship and premier service—and it may be the only chance you get. Consider:

- **85 percent of shoppers will abandon a site due to poor design.**
- **83 percent will leave if it takes too many clicks to get what they want.**
- **40 percent will never return to a site if the content was hard to use.**
- **50 percent of sales are lost because visitors can't find content.**

The more user-friendly your site is, the better your chances of impressing potential buyers. Tools and features that

address the specific needs of new-home buyers can make a big difference in your site's success. **These can include:**

Interactive Plat Maps

An interactive plat map offers prospective home buyers real-time data about the lots for sale in your subdivision. The user can select a specific lot to reveal details such as:

- **Size**
- **Availability**
- **Pre-planned model and elevation**
- **Construction status**
- **Lot premiums**
- **Other specifics**

Contact Forms

Visitors to your site have a purpose in mind. For builders, the end goal isn't to make an online transaction. Rather, the next step might be to make an appointment or seek additional information.

Your website should provide an easy way to do this. Placing a contact form on every page gives buyers a clear way to proceed once they're ready to take action.

Home Warranty Portal

A home warranty can be an important selling point—and for some buyers, it could mean the difference between choosing a new home over an existing one. Eight in 10 buyers prefer a warranted home, and 94 percent are more likely to choose a new home with a structural warranty.

One way to add value and functionality to your website is to integrate warranty information aimed not only at prospective buyers but at new homeowners who have already purchased a home from you. At PWSC, our home warranty professionals will not only help you highlight your structural warranty information via video and downloadable content, they can also help you set up a branded online portal that stays connected with homeowners through monthly maintenance reminders based on their home's specifications. As an extension of your marketing arm, we will work with you to leverage your structural home warranty and additional services as sales tools and differentiators in the market.

In today's digital marketplace, your website can either be your greatest asset or your biggest drawback as a home builder. Which will you choose?



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Confidence You Can Build On.

This report is a product of [PWSC](#), a leading provider of best-in-class new home warranty products and home warranty services. They are experts when it comes to [home builder warranties](#), [home warranties](#) for home buyers, and [realtor home warranty solutions](#). We invite you to learn more [about PWSC](#).

Professional Warranty Service Corporation (PWSC) headquartered in Chantilly, Virginia, is the leading provider of new home warranty products and administration services to the largest tier of domestic residential construction firms.