



Using 3D Home Models in the Selling Process

PHOTO: ALEXANDER ALEMAN

Early adopters of 3D design share tips and advice on selling with virtual model homes.

By Jeff Zagoudis, Associate Editor

Model homes have long served as a key tool in the sales process for home builders. As technology has improved, physical homes have slowly given way to computerized ones, culminating in the current trend of 3D home models.

More builders are making use of 3D design technology, which can do everything from show customers a digital representation of a house or specific detail to virtual walkthroughs of a project. It's a cost-effective alternative to building physical model homes that can achieve many of the same functions.

Since the technology is in its infancy, many builders are still trying to figure out how to best utilize it. We talked to a few of the early adopters to see what their experience has been like. Here they offer a few tips for making the most of 3D home models in your sales process:

1. Even if you don't use it in initial meetings, let customers know up front that you have the technology. Obviously, the renderings need to look good, but the simple fact that you use 3D models can set you apart from other builders, according to Grant Giese of Green Goose Homes, Lafayette, Ind.

The sales team at Sivage Homes uses tablet PCs loaded with 3D renderings and plans to guide shoppers on a virtual tour of the builder's models.

2. Just because the technology can do anything doesn't mean it should. Giese counsels builders to not go overboard adding features just to show off their modeling software. Keep in mind both your budget and your clients' budget when building the model.

3. Make the process interactive and let customers play with the technology. The sales center at Sivage Homes, Albuquerque, N.M., features kiosks with tablets, touch-screen computers, and flat-screen TVs to let customers peruse all of the options available to them.

4. Check back frequently with your clients as the design process begins. Three-dimensional modeling allows the home to be built exactly to their specifications, so make sure they're happy with it before

moving forward. Giese recently had clients who were contemplating a coffered ceiling; he was able to model it for them, get an opinion, and continue with the process.

5. Build a database of all your products and offerings to be used in conjunction with the models. Bethesda, Md.-based Camberley Homes is one example of a builder that uses this strategy. They included all of their different models, products, and other options. This allows customers to mix and match as they please while working in the sales center.

6. Make sure to talk up the technology with out-of-town buyers. Since the models are already computerized, they can be shared electronically. This could allow an online discussion via services like GoToMeeting, so the clients don't have to come to you.

7. Let your prospects work with the models from the comfort of their home. Sivage Homes features 3D models on their website, and they find that customers spend an average of 30 minutes at a time exploring the site.

8. Consider generating and sharing the models as 3D PDFs. This allows them to be opened through Adobe Acrobat Reader, a common consumer application, rather than specialized software. Software developer CG Visions recommends this approach to all of its home-builder clients as the best way to take their own customers on a virtual walkthrough of the house.

9. Know the limitations of the technology beforehand. Mike Sivage of Sivage Homes says he was unaware of the incompatibility between Apple devices and his Flash-based website before launch; had he known, he might have chosen a different base program. **PB**