



# CREATING A STAND-OUT COMMUNITY

5 Attention Grabbing Strategies to  
Make You the Customer's #1 Choice

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## INTRODUCTION

Here's the big idea...

**The only evaluation of your community that really matters comes from your customers. You must learn to view your community from the prospect's perspective.**

Suppose you are the general manager of Disneyland. It is 9:45 a.m. and the gates open at 10:00. What are you likely doing?

Hint: you're probably not in a meeting. In all likelihood you are standing somewhere inside the main entrance and you are doing your level best to see through the eyes of your soon-to-arrive guests.

The truth is that even the general manager at Disneyland is susceptible to becoming blind regarding the details of his or her magical kingdom. The only remedy is to constantly, deliberately, and intensely adopt the eyes of the customer.

If you want to evaluate a new home community properly you must begin by asking the question, "What does my customer see?"

This is true as you evaluate your own community, but it is every bit as true when evaluating the neighborhood of one of your competitors. We tend to look through our own eyes and with our own agenda. The end result is a skewed perception that is very much unlike that of our customers.

Here we will look at five perceptions customers rely on when evaluating a new home community. Your job is to strategically and tactically address these key perceptions in order to create a standout community.

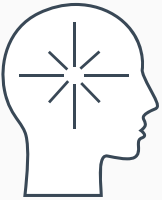
## THOSE FIVE BUYER PERCEPTIONS ARE:



**1 DESIRE**



**2 SKEPTICISM**



**3 SENSORY INPUT**



**4 IMAGINATION**



**5 BELONGING**

The objective is to train yourself to see what a customer sees, physically, mentally, and emotionally.

Let's get started.





## BUYER'S PERCEPTION #1:

### DESIRE

We begin with an important concept that is commonly missed. Customers want to fall in love.

Imagine for a moment that you are heading out to a comedy club. You don't know any of the comedians who are listed on the marquee; you are simply tagging along at the suggestion of a friend.

You enter the club and find a seat in a small, dark, and crowded room. You order the requisite cocktail and wait for the show to start.

The emcee comes on stage to do a few announcements; you are moments away from hearing that first comic.

Which of the following best reflects your mood and mindset in this moment?

- A. "I hope this guy makes me laugh."
- B. "I hope this guy is not funny at all."

It's a comedy club, for crying out loud. You came there to have a good laugh. It would make no sense whatsoever to approach the act with a desire for a horrible experience.

Of course you wish for a great experience; we are wired that way.

This is the power of hope in the minds of our customers. They want to fall in love. They desire to find their dream home in their dream community. Any other aspiration would be nonsensical.



As you approach any new home community, do so with that aspirational mindset of the customer and ask the following questions:

- ❑ Is there anything here that affirms my desire to fall in love with this home and community?
- ❑ What stands out in a positive way? What draws me in?
- ❑ How would my friends feel if they pulled into this community when coming to visit?
- ❑ Do I share the values of others in this neighborhood?
- ❑ What speaks to my heart?
- ❑ When I imagine living here, am I happy?

Desire is a powerful emotion that works in our favor. Our customers want to fall in love.

### FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION:

- What can be done to add that emotional element to your homes and communities?
- What are some best practices that you can borrow from others?
- What is it about the community where you live that drew you in?

### NOW DO THIS!

- ❑ **Hold a focus group.** Find several homeowners (or better yet, undecided prospects) and invite them to a new home community. Tell them to let their guard down and be totally transparent. Ask first about their lives, their dreams, and their home search journeys. Then ask what appeals to them in that neighborhood. Look for those things that hit the mark; do more of that. Look for those things that miss; do less of that.



## BUYER'S PERCEPTION #2:

### SKEPTICISM

Counterbalancing the perception of desire is the very real perception of skepticism.

Every customer carries an element of "I want to fall in love." Simultaneously, every customer carries a counterbalance that says, "Watch yourself."

This is not a negative commentary on the character of your customers. In fact, this is a very normal act of self-protection. Human brains are tuned to desire safety above everything else. As a species humans experience a large degree of threat sensitivity, to their detriment.

Let's imagine that you are walking the exhibition hall at the county fair and you see an energetic gentleman with a boom microphone demonstrating a floor mop. He makes it look like this miracle mop will clean any spill, tackle any job, and solve world peace. You find yourself wrapped up in the pitch, but you also hear this nagging voice that says, "*It seems too good to be true...*"

Every customer carries a sense of self-protection that manifests as skepticism. The antenna is up. While one eye is appreciating the beauty, the other is on the lookout for defects.

This is where a psychological phenomenon called the *confirmation bias* comes into play. This bias is a mental shortcut that causes us to look for evidence to support what we already believe (that is, to confirm our preconceived biases).



What does this mean to the new home shopper? It means that every detail matters.

- ❑ The dead flowers around the parking lot confirm a lack of care in the ongoing upkeep of the home.
- ❑ The door latch that sticks confirms that the builder is cutting corners with inferior component parts.
- ❑ The salesperson who is less than welcoming confirms that these people don't really care...until a customer shows interest in purchasing.

As you approach a new home community it is wise to look for those things that will evoke negative mental stories in the mind of your customer. As you walk through a home, look for things that will potentially turn off a customer. And remember: the little things matter.

Heed the perception of skepticism; it will save you from yourself!

### **FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION:**

- What things do I see my competitors doing that cause a negative reaction to my customers? Do we do anything similar?
- Walk a community with three other people and point out everything that irks you, even in the smallest way.
- Spend some time eavesdropping in your own model homes. Listen to the hidden conversations of your customers.





## NOW DO THIS!

- **Take several people on your team to a new home community and challenge them to find every possible turnoff.** Weeds, displays, fading paint, outdated décor, poor music choice — anything. Then go through the list and ask about the potential negative impact on your customers. What inference would they make? What negative story would they tell? The goal is not (necessarily) to change everything you put on the list. The goal is to look through the customer's skeptical eyes.



## BUYER'S PERCEPTION #3:

### SENSORY INPUT

People don't "see" with their eyes alone. They observe with all five senses in order to gain a broad and complete consciousness of their surroundings.

Restaurants are supposed to be all about the flavor of the food, yes? In a logical world, that would make sense. In our emotion-driven world we know this is not the case.

In my ideal restaurant (and likely yours)...

- The lights are perfectly dimmed to complement the atmosphere.
- The artwork is consistent with the desired vibe.
- The music is selected to flatter the theme.
- The aroma offers subtle hints on what to order.
- The seats are comfortable and inviting.

We are five-sense creatures. When we fully engage the senses, we have a richer experience.

Interesting facts, courtesy of Martin Lindstrom in his book *Buyology*:

1. Using three of the five senses doubles the impact on memory.
2. The sense of touch provides a powerful link back to whatever was touched.
3. The sense of smell is more emotionally powerful than the sense of sight or sound.



Having said that, it is important to note that more than 50% of the brain's sensory perceptions are dedicated to sight alone. This cannot be overstated. The customer's brain follows a very important mental rule: *"What I see is what is."*

As you approach and then evaluate a new home community, do so with a keen sense of observation. Do so with the mindset of a detective, or that of a mystery writer. Catch every detail. After all, your customer does just that.

Some things to look for:

- ☐ How clean is the approach? Do your people look like they care?
- ☐ How many signs do you see as you get out of the car? Are the signs appealing and easy to read?
- ☐ What is unnecessary? What do you see throughout the community that doesn't need to be there?
- ☐ What makes you smile? What perceptions trigger a happy thought in your brain?
- ☐ Is the music pleasant and appropriate?
- ☐ Is the aroma inviting and "homey"?
- ☐ Do you feel comfortable?

### **FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION:**

- Think of a consumer environment where you shop. In what situations or environments do you consciously use more than one of your senses?
- Think of a place that smells good. Now assign an emotion to that smell.
- How can you encourage your customers to utilize more of their senses when experiencing your homes?



## NOW DO THIS!

- ❑ **Go on an observational field trip with several people in your company.** Have everyone verbalize even the tiniest detail.
- ❑ **Make three stops on your field trip.** One at your community and two to nearby competitors that are making a lot of sales.
- ❑ **Stop from time to time and do a “five senses check.”** Ask yourself, “What am I sensing right now in this very spot?”



## BUYER'S PERCEPTION #4:

### IMAGINATION

As much as we attempt to paint a clear picture for our prospects, much of their mental perception will depend upon mental constructs. We use our imagination to simulate our own future, and then we ascribe an emotion to that future. Positive emotion = purchase. Negative emotion = walk away.

The next time you are walking through a Costco I would encourage you to observe people in the act of evaluating sweaters. Watch them pick up a sweater, unfurl the garment, and then hold it up against their torso.

What is happening here? There are no mirrors in the area to see what the sweater looks like. One cannot truly determine a proper fitting by simply holding up the sweater. What is really going on inside the shopper's head?

In these instances, customers are utilizing their imaginations to arrive at an answer to a very important question: "How will I *feel* when I am wearing this sweater?"

Make no mistake; people buy not based on how they will *live* but on how they will *feel*. This is a truth of human nature. We run mental simulations about ownership and then we make a decision based on the emotions embedded in those simulations. If the emotions are positive, we buy. If they are neutral or negative, we don't.

Whether you recall the moments or not, you experienced the same thing when you were evaluating the home you are living in now. You ran a mental simulation about cooking in that kitchen, or sitting in that great room, or swimming in that pool, or walking in that neighborhood. The simulation elicited positive emotions, and that spurred your decision.



Why do we build model homes? Not to show off our decorating prowess or to channel our inner Joanna Gaines, but to provide life to the customers' imagination. They are not evaluating a room based on its function, but rather on its feeling.

### FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION:

- Why is the emotional part of the journey so important for customers?
- How do you evaluate a home (yours or your competitors')? Do you do so with your intellect or with your emotion?
- How can you train yourself to use more of your imagination, just as your customer does?

### NOW DO THIS!

❑ **Call 1 to 3 customers who have each purchased in the past week or two.** (Find people who still carry very fresh memories of their purchase process). Ask them these questions:

- "What struck you as you were driving around the neighborhood? Could you see into the future when you were already living here? How were you living in this future?"
- "What was the most emotional part of the home for you? What specifically did you envision when you were living in that space?"
- "Have you already thought about what this home will be like five years from now? What plans do you have for your new home?"





## **BUYER'S PERCEPTION #5:**

# **BELONGING**

If you study Maslow's hierarchy of needs, you will note that a sense of belonging is one of the core and critical life goals. Maslow rates our need for belonging just above our physical needs and our safety needs.

We were created as communal, relational beings; we are meant to belong to a tribe. Throughout the ages man has gravitated to collective relationships.

You might think, for example, that churches exist for theological purposes, to grow and develop one's spiritual foundation. While any decent church will be based on a legitimate theology, the fact is that we could learn theology in a self-study environment. The purpose of a church is to be involved with like-minded individuals along one's spiritual journey. The commitment is far more relational than theological.

In the United States, we see these communal opportunities at dance clubs, on golf courses, in coffee houses, in recreational sports, and in a thousand other places where we feel a part of something. It is a core aspect of our DNA to be a part of a community.

The irony is that you don't have to have a close relationship to your neighbors in order to feel a sense of belonging in your neighborhood. Environs tend to attract like-minded people. There is safety and security in knowing you are among your tribe, even if your interaction with the constituents is fairly limited.



Our role is not simply to get a home sold but to provide an environment where people feel a sense of belonging. When that feeling is absent, it becomes extremely difficult for a customer to proceed with a purchase decision.

### FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION:

- How “at home” do your customers feel when they experience your community?
- What is it about your neighborhoods that gives your prospects a sense of belonging and connection?
- How do your customers assess their comfort level in this potential new tribe? What evidence do they have that they would fit in?

### NOW DO THIS!

- **Share stories.** Stories give meaning and context to situations. Your customers need to hear the stories of happy, healthy, well-adjusted people (just like them!) enjoying their new lives in their new community. Your salespeople must be trained as story telling machines.



## SUMMARY

Absent from this work is the very specific act of evaluating through the logical eye. How do we size up individual rooms? How do we weigh the price of options? How do we determine fairness in the negotiating price? All of these steps play a role in the process, but we must consider that our customers are dominantly emotional creatures.

In his book *Buyology*, researcher Martin Lindstrom evaluated thousands of consumers using fMRI to measure the actions of the brain during a purchase decision. His conclusion is that the emotional brain accounts for 85% of the purchase decision!

How our customers feel is far more important than what they consciously think. Perceptions matter, not because of our checklist but because of our gut.

## 5 STRATEGIES ACTION PLAN

### STRATEGY #1: MAXIMIZE DESIRE

- **Hold a focus group.** Find several homeowners (or better yet, undecided prospects) and invite them to a new home community. Tell them to let their guard down and be totally transparent. Ask first about their lives, their dreams, and their home search journeys. Then ask what appeals to them in that neighborhood. Look for those things that hit the mark; do more of that. Look for those things that miss; do less of that.

### STRATEGY #2: MINIMIZE SKEPTICISM

- **Take several people on your team to a new home community and challenge them to find every possible turnoff.** Weeds, displays, fading paint, outdated décor, poor music choice — anything. Then go through the list and ask about the potential negative impact on your customers. What inference would they make? What negative story would they tell? The goal is not (necessarily) to change everything you put on the list. The goal is to look through the customer's skeptical eyes.

### STRATEGY #3: ENHANCE SENSORY INPUT

- **Go on an observational field trip with several people in your company.** Have everyone verbalize even the tiniest detail.
- **Make three stops on your field trip.** One at your community and two to nearby competitors that are making a lot of sales.
- **Stop from time to time and do a "five senses check."** Ask yourself, "What am I sensing right now in this very spot?"

## STRATEGY #4: CULTIVATE IMAGINATION

- ▣ **Call 1 to 3 customers who have each purchased in the past week or two.** (Find people who still carry very fresh memories of their purchase process). Ask them these questions:

- “What struck you as you were driving around the neighborhood? Could you see into the future when you were already living here? How were you living in this future?”
- “What was the most emotional part of the home for you? What specifically did you envision when you were living in that space?”
- “Have you already thought about what this home will be like five years from now? What plans do you have for your new home”?

## STRATEGY #5: CREATE A SENSE OF BELONGING

- ▣ **Share stories.** Stories give meaning and context to situations. Your customers need to hear the stories of happy, healthy, well-adjusted people (just like them!) enjoying their new lives in their new community. Your salespeople must be trained as story telling machines.