

BUILDER

DIGITAL MARKETING 101: CONTENT IS KING

The first installment of a five-part white paper from ASTRALCOM on how home builders should use digital media as a sales channel.

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This article is the first in a series of five that outlines how home builders can use content to connect with and engage home buyers throughout the digital journey to a new home purchase.

Presented as a general overview, the white paper and the articles are a culmination of working with dozens of BUILDER 100 home builders over a 20-year span, gaining valuable insight and knowledge, testing our theories in real market circumstances and learning from other industry professionals and thought-leaders. It's a direct result of

delivering outstanding results in content strategy, conversion marketing and customer acquisition for our home builder clients.

Introduction

While the overall psychological process of consumers buying a new home and home builders selling a new home hasn't changed, how consumers interact with home builder brands has. Moreover, the ways and means – the customer touch points – that consumers use to engage with brands is a fluid and constantly changing environment. Yet, amid all that fluidity, marketers search for some method to the madness. Inherently, we all know there is at least one. There must be a “typical” buying process that home buyers today use in deciding on the new home that they ultimately purchase.

With 90% of home buyers searching online during their home buying journey, it makes sense for marketers to understand that process and how typical home buyers use the internet as a way to engage with, and ultimately decide on, purchasing from a new home builder.

From a digital marketer's perspective, this whole course of action – this journey – really boils down to the Four C's;

1. Content
2. Click-Thru-Ratio (CTR)
3. Customer Experience Context
4. Conversion



It is important to note that the Four C's have been listed in order. Content drives CTR into a Customer Experience context, which ultimately drives Conversions. This tenet will become evident further along in this document.

We also know from research and experience that higher cost items (like a new-home purchase) require more content to support a sale than does a lower cost item (e.g., mp3 player). If you've read our [Social Commerce Tactical Guide for 2015](#), then you'll understand the age-old internet axiom: Content is king. But what kind of content? How should it be used? When?

This document serves as a road map for home builders to aid in accomplishing the following fundamental objectives when creating content marketing strategies;

- Understanding the home buyer journey.
- Recognizing channel syntax: What channels and when?
- Defining appropriate content: Which content goes where?

The Digital Home Buying Journey Overview



By understanding the home buyer journey and [effectively leveraging customer touchpoints along the way](#), your brand can develop a quicker affinity and deeper engagement with home buyers.

According to NAR and Realtor.org, in any given year, typically there is a 1.75 million unit inventory of used homes; a four-month supply in a standard 3-4 month sales cycle.



It is this very same 3-4 month sales cycle that has become the home buyer journey to a new home purchase. Along this journey, home buyers will consume various types of content, across multiple channels and in different types of context.

These “accumulated instances” will play a key role as they come to a decision on which home builder they will buy from.

Some important facts from Realtor.org help to underscore the need to meet home buyers at the different points along their journey;

- Real estate related searches on Google.com have grown 253% over the past 4 years
- Buyers use specific online tools during different phases of the home search process
- How important “local” search terms and websites are for buyers
- How mobile technology connects online to offline home buying—including the reading of online reviews
- 31% of home shoppers who take action on a real estate site are aged 25-34, surpassing all other ages

As for first-time vs. repeat home buyers:

- First-time home buyers: 32%
- Median age of first-time home buyers: 31
- Median age of repeat home buyers: 53
- Median household income of first-time home buyers: \$69,400
- Median household income of repeat home buyers: \$98,700

When it comes to the Top 5 home buying reasons:

1. Desire to own a home of my own 30%
2. Desire for larger home 11%
3. Job-related relocation or move 9%
4. Change in family situation 8%
5. Affordability of homes 7%

Each of these facts and others should inspire home builders to create contextual content around their offerings that is designed to be consumed – and acted upon – by home buyers at different points along their journey.

With the Four C's (Content, CTR, Context, Conversion) serving as guideposts, we want to discuss the home buyer online journey as a linear process that begins with creating awareness. As you move along the linear pathway – from awareness, to consideration, to intent and onto decision – you will notice various channel tactics at play. These contextual instances are where content plays a vital role in the customer experience and, ultimately, in conversions.

Next up, Part 2, where we're going to outline the 1st component of the home buyer journey: Awareness. Armed with this information and knowledge, we set the stage for the first part of the digital journey that home buyers undertake in the pursuit of their new home purchase: Awareness. Our next article discusses how to create awareness and why it's so important at the beginning of the home buyer journey. In the meantime, consider this: When a home buyer couple decides that it's time to explore buying a home, they often say, "We're buying a new home!" But do they really mean a "new" home, or just a home that's new to them?