

THE GREEN REVOLUTION MOVES ONLINE

Social networking is providing a new framework to replace traditional advertising.

By PATRICK S. DUFFY



Although most of the attention given to the “green revolution” in homebuilding has been focused on sustainable design, alternative energy uses and low-impact construction methods, another resource-saving trend continuing to impact the industry is how builders and developers market their products to customers.

Whereas advertising-centric messages such as billboards, ads in newspapers or new-home guides and on-site printed collateral certainly remain part of a marketing director’s arsenal, over the last several years they’ve had to expand their artillery to include an online world, which continues to evolve and expand. After all, what better — and paper-saving — way to tell potential customers about the latest updates in green living?

A decade ago, it was considered essential for a serious company to at least have a traditional website. But since then, the combination of ever-evolving technology and shorter attention spans now suggests marketing campaigns should also include website versions for smart phones, traditional blogging, micro-blogging (Twitter), video (YouTube) and regular social networking (Facebook) to connect with potential buyers.

To be sure, most small companies aren’t set up for this additional workload, so many outsource the new tasks to their respective PR firms, or even hire specialists who focus exclusively on helping maintain an online presence. For example, if a builder wanted to launch a comprehensive campaign on their green building practices, a package could include blogging and Twittering several times

per week, reciprocal links with green-oriented blogs and websites in the area, shooting informational videos for YouTube, which rank high on various search engines, and tapping Facebook fans or friends to help consistently spread the word.

At the same time, however, the most successful campaigns manage to pair these online offerings with traditional offline events, such as model opening parties, community gatherings or even charity benefits. The goal of that is also increasingly long-term: if a company shows that they’re truly invested in

the local community, then buyers are more likely to gravitate to their products and services.

Although much of this work is being done by PR firms which specialize in the building industry, generalists with experience in other industries are also beginning to meld their

press contacts and event experience with online social networking. For example, Sharon and Bob Jimenez, who have experience as TV news correspondents and currently co-host the show “L.A. Business Today,” launched ICON Imaging Public Relations in the mid-90s to assist clients in building their own brands in multiple media. With a resume that includes two Presidential campaigns, Common Cause, the City of Los Angeles and several real estate-oriented companies, Sharon was also instrumental in producing 2010’s “Gerrymandering: The Movie” and founded a non-profit to bring jobs in entertainment production back to California.

Of course in the PR world, results are what matter. By merging her offline contacts with the online world, Sharon helped her candidate

raise over \$10 million online and managed to snag a coveted slot in the annual Tribeca Film Festival to promote her movie. Adds Sharon, “Although technology has certainly changed the way we promote a client, the basics of consistency, creativity and authenticity remain the same whether it’s on Facebook, Twitter or simply talking with a reporter.”

For those builders looking to promote green building or sustainability and compete with lower-priced foreclosures — as well as the homes they themselves built just a few years ago — social networking is providing an important new framework in which PR is slowly supplanting advertising. But, like with anything else, the framework only works if it’s intertwined with authentic messages which find the right audience.

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FAST FACTS

- Social networking provides an excellent way to promote green building.
- Online campaigns should use multiple outlets and remain consistent.
- The best campaigns pair online PR with offline events in local communities.