



URBaCS

Homebuilder Photo Galleries

Use Photos to Sell More Homes

Homebuilder Photo Galleries – How to use photos to sell more homes

Most homebuilders today aren't using photo galleries to their full capabilities. This eBook will explore how you can engage prospective home buyers to not only look at your site, but to encourage their family and friends to look also. Photos

With today's down housing market we are all doing business differently than we did just a few short years ago. Most of the old marketing stand-bys don't work like they used to, and we are all looking for new ways to make our marketing dollars stretch further.

It's all about the numbers

Ask any new home sales professional or Realtor and they'll tell you it's always been about the numbers. **X number of traffic units leads to Y number of sales.** Increase the traffic to the model homes and in turn increase sales. Since we know that over 78% of visitors will visit your website before they visit your model home we are going to discuss one of the best ways to increase traffic to your website. Search optimized photo galleries.

78% of new home buyers will visit a builder's website before they set foot in a model home.

Digital photography is now part of our everyday lives. This became blindingly obvious during our last presidential campaign. Do you remember watching Barack Obama give his acceptance speech? When the television cameras panned the crowd all that could be seen was a sea of humanity and flashing lights. It looked as though each and every person in the crowd was holding a camera and snapping pictures.

Photo usage as a way of life

Both [AOL](#) and [Yahoo](#) bring us the latest news as picture slideshows. Digital photography is everywhere and the public wants to see more and more every day. [Facebook](#) users [upload](#) 850 million photos a month to the social networking site and [Flickr](#) users [reportedly](#) upload over 330 million pictures a month. Just those two sites alone account for **over a billion pictures a month posted online.**

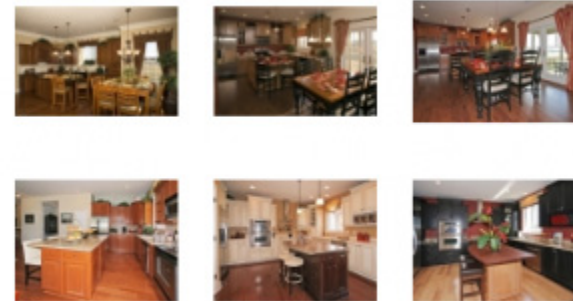
This eBook will provide insights to drive traffic to your website and engage prospective home buyers by effectively using photos. We'll help you get your photos online, help you understand how many and what kind of photos to include and help you make your photos a viral part of your online marketing efforts.

When done correctly your photo gallery can be a tool that will generate organic search traffic to your site and will help buyers talk about you and your homes.

How are homebuilders using photos now?

Most builders already have a series of photos embedded on their website. We don't need to tell you how important it is to have photos of your homes for prospective buyers to see. Later in this eBook, we'll talk about how many photos you should have and what types of things should be included in your online photo gallery.

95% of new home builder photo galleries are absolute garbage. Some aren't easy to find, some are cloaked in bad HTML or built into Flash videos and some are void of any descriptions or tags, which make them completely worthless to search engines.



Creating a great homebuilder photo gallery

First and foremost a photo gallery should be easy to find. A direct link should be present on your homepage (no matter if you build 1 or 20,000 homes a year). A compelling photo gallery should be search optimized and have tons of pictures for prospective buyers to look at. It should load quickly and should give visitors the ability to flip back and forth between photos easily. Every photo should include a title and brief description, and the words used for both should be keyword focused. Search engines can't tell what the photo is unless you tell spell it out, so make sure to label every photo with words that will help prospective homebuyers find you.

Many photo sharing websites will break pictures into albums. This is a great way to separate your photos by floor plan, community or even home. Many times users will have narrowed their search to a specific floor plan or home type so why not make it easy for them to find the exact home they're looking for? Some photo gallery applications will allow you to tag each photo with relevant descriptive keywords to help users find the photo. This is also very valuable for search engines because [Google](#), [Yahoo](#) and [Bing](#) will index the images and relate the tags to the photos.

You need to make it easy for consumers to share their favorite photos with friends and family. They should be able to email their favorite photos to friends. They should also be able to share the photo easily via Twitter, Facebook, Digg and other social bookmarking sites. This creates new opportunities for non traditional prospects to see your homes. We've seen prospective home buyers post photos on their Facebook pages encouraging their friends to comment. This may lead to additional sales opportunities for you.

There are some terrible photo galleries on the web

Too often we see a custom homebuilder photo gallery that is a series of tiny thumbnails that when clicked open the actual JPG file in a new window. (If the photos from your website open in a new window surrounded by whitespace, we're talking about you). We realize that homebuilders aren't web development gurus, but nowadays this is inexcusable. There are tons of free photo sharing applications that are simple to use.

The flip side is overproduction. Many builders that have invested small fortunes in flashy web design are also missing the boat on photo galleries. If your company's photo gallery is built in Adobe Flash you're probably missing out on tons of search traffic. Without getting too technical, as of this writing, the search engines are incapable of reading the content inside of Flash videos. This makes it very difficult to get any value from organic online searches, even if the photos are labeled inside the gallery. Your photo gallery should be easy for customers to use and share. And you should do everything you can to help search engines index your gallery to drive organic traffic to your website.

Free and easy ways to share your photos – Flickr & Facebook

There are thousands of online photo sharing websites on the net. In this eBook, we'll only be talking about two: [Flickr](#) and [Facebook](#). You can post photos on [MySpace](#), [PhotoBucket](#), [Picasa](#), etc. but Flickr is the best website for photo sharing and Facebook is the best social networking tool that integrates photo sharing.

Flickr helps you share your photos with the world. Basic accounts are free and you can upload 100MB of photos each month. Flickr (owned by [Yahoo](#)) has made uploading, labeling and tagging as simple as possible. As we've discussed this is vital to increasing your search traffic.

Advanced functions - Flickr has basic photo editing capabilities built in so you can crop, add text, etc. You can map your photos in Flickr to attach a physical location with your shots. Organization is simple. You can create albums for each neighborhood or each home you build. You have complete control over your privacy settings. You can share some photos and hide others.



To get started using Flickr go ahead and [sign up](#). If you need some more coaxing, take a [quick tour](#).

Here are some builders that are using Flickr well: [Campbell Homes](#), [Lennar Orlando](#), [Stylecraft Builders](#), [MD Custom Homes](#)



Facebook has become the go-to business networking tool over the last year or so. Custom homebuilders are finding ways to engage with prospective buyers and national builders are using Facebook to build tribes around their brand. More photos are uploaded everyday to Facebook than any other website, so it's safe to say that Facebook would be a great place to put photos of your homes and neighborhoods. If you don't have a Facebook Page for your company, [get one](#). The team at Facebook has included some simple tutorials to help you along the way.

Once you've got a [Facebook Fan Page](#) for your company, you can start uploading photos. Again, start by creating albums for your neighborhoods or floor plans. Uploading is simple. Make sure to include keywords in your titles and descriptions to help people find you.

Here are some builders that are using Facebook well: [Jeff Click Homes](#), [Lennar](#), [Bowen Family Homes](#), [Hubbell Homes](#)

If you'd like a little more control of your photo albums another option is to build a photo gallery inside of a blog. This is much simpler than you may think. Blogging sites like [Wordpress](#), [Blogger](#) and [Typepad](#) make it easy to get started with a blog in a matter of minutes. We exclusively use Wordpress because it has tons of third-party plug-ins and is really simple to use. Wordpress is search engine optimized so you only have to focus on posting content, and there are dozens of photo gallery plug-ins that you can use to build a photo gallery in minutes. Here is a [tutorial](#) with step-by-step instructions to set up your own Wordpress photo gallery using the [NextGEN plug-in](#).

How many photos should you post in your photo gallery?

You should upload more photos than you're probably comfortable sharing. **This thought may conflict with traditional "Marketing Director" wisdom.** Don't [blame them](#). Visit any homebuilder photo gallery. My guess is you'll find between 8 and 30 photos. Total. The average new home requires tens of thousands of raw materials and takes about six months to construct. And the best a builder can post is 20 some pictures. Simply dumbfounding.

Most builders that we talk with are worried about controlling their brand. They want to make sure that every photo showcases their company in a positive light. We don't disagree, but if you only have 20 photos that glorify your company or the homes you build...it might be time to reconsider your profession.

We don't see cost as an issue either. Digital photography is cheap. A great point-and-shoot digital camera is less than \$130. You've got superintendents, salespeople and office personnel spending time on the build sites during and after construction. How difficult is it to have them snap photos when they're on-site and simply post the "good ones" in an online album? You don't need to hire a professional photographer or pay graphic designers to doctor up your images. Just post them.

The truth is you should be posting as many photos as you can in as many places as you can. Nearly 80% of homebuyers will visit your website before they visit your model home and before that they must first find your website. Help prospective buyers find you by putting as much good content as you can online.

- Post hundreds or thousands of photos online
- Post pictures of your homes under construction, not just the money shots
- Post pictures of your happy homeowners (with their permission of course)
- Post pictures of Realtor lunches or Builder's Association meetings
- Post pictures of your design center
- Post pictures of your neighborhood amenities
- **Label and tag all photos**
- Use different keywords: (manufacturers, vendor names, neighborhoods, nearby amenities, employee names, floor plans)
- Don't be afraid to misspell. Many potential buyers are bad spellers. Include the occasional misspelled community or floor plan name
- Pair your keywords with descriptive adjectives (stylish, cool, designer, bright, odd colors like "mother of pearl" or "mimosa")

Examples of Builders that “Get It”

We took a look at hundreds of home builder photo galleries. There are some good, bad, and ugly ones out there. Here are three that are worth noting.

Good – American Classic Homes

Washington based, [American Classic Homes](#), does a really good job of including pictures of their homes on their website. A link to their gallery is right in the middle of their homepage so it's easy to find. From there you'll find over a hundred thumbnails categorized by floor plan. Once a picture is clicked a slide show opens up so viewers can navigate from picture to picture and from home to home. The pictures have labels so they can be identified by search engines. The html code behind the photo gallery could use some work. Without getting into too much technical jargon the slideshow is built using JavaScript. The pictures automatically advance, but the text below the images doesn't. Overall, American Classic Homes has built a good photo gallery.

Better – Jeff Click Homes

Jeff Click Homes of Edmond, Oklahoma kicks their photo gallery up a notch. From their [Media Page](#) you can choose to look at homes from a number of different categories (Showcase Homes, Completed and Available, Under construction and Available, Organized by Community, and Organized by Plan). Click on any of the categories and dozens of pictures can be viewed. Links to the floor plan and community are available. Pictures are viewed in an easy to navigate forward and back slideshow. The photos are all hosted on Flickr so they are labeled and tagged and are easily found by search engines. Click on any photo and you will be taken to the [Jeff Click Flickr](#) page. The only downside is that visitors have now left the builder's website and may become distracted by looking at other photos on Flickr. Jeff Click Homes is one of the most new-media savvy builders we have come across. They are active social networkers and have built a great online presence to sell homes.

Best – The Estridge Companies

Carmel, Indiana based [Estridge Companies](#) uses our product, URBaCS Referral Builder, to share photos of their homes online. MyEstridgeHome.com incorporates labels, tags and descriptions for all photos to allow users to browse and search by category or keyword. Photos can be viewed as thumbnails or in full screen as a slide show. Links to floor plans and communities are attached to every picture. The Estridge site is designed to be viral. Photos can easily be sent to friends or posted on social network websites like [Digg](#) or [Del.icio.us](#).

The tools are all out there. Most of them are free (or close to free) and do not require special equipment or training to use. It's a tough market and now is the time to stand out from the crowd and get noticed. A good search optimized photo gallery is one great way to do just that.

Feel free to share this eBook. You can post it, email it, tweet it and print it, but please don't charge for it or change it.