In-house RESEARCH

WHITE PAPER · HOUSEBUILDER CX

What will your buyers remember?

Why the personal touch is what sets housebuilders apart

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For most people, buying a new home is the biggest purchase they will ever make. It is also one of the most emotional. It often comes at a turning point in their life: a first home, a growing family, a fresh start, a move to be closer to the people they love. They have spent months, sometimes years, saving, planning and imagining it.

Housebuilders have rightly invested heavily in getting the fundamentals right: building to a high quality, completing on time and responding quickly when defects appear. Those things matter enormously. But they are now what buyers expect. They prevent dissatisfaction. They rarely create delight.

What buyers remember, and what they tell their friends, family and colleagues about, are moments. The site manager who remembered their children's names. The update that arrived before they had to chase. The handwritten card on the kitchen worktop on moving day. The call on the first anniversary of moving in.

This paper explains why those moments matter so much, where they sit in the customer journey and how housebuilders can find, design and measure them.

Good is not the same as great

There is a big difference between a satisfied customer and a delighted one, and it shows up most clearly in whether they recommend you.

94.8%

of customers who score an organisation 9 or 10 out of 10 for service are likely to recommend it

54.3%

of those who score it 8 out of 10 are likely to recommend it

The UK Customer Satisfaction Index found that one point on a satisfaction scale is the difference between an advocate and someone who is merely content.

For housebuilders, recommendation is commercially valuable. Buyers research builders carefully. They read reviews, ask people they know and visit developments where others already live. A delighted buyer can influence many future purchases. So can a disappointed one.

Research from the United States points the same way. Eliant, which surveys home buyers on behalf of more than 230 builders, reports that the strongest driver of buyers' willingness to recommend their builder is proactive communication about construction progress. In other words, how buyers were made to feel along the way, not just what they received at the end.

How people remember experiences

Psychologists have shown that people don't remember an experience as an average of every moment. Studies led by Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman found that people's memory of an experience is shaped disproportionately by its most intense moments and by how it ended. This became known as the peak-end rule. The evidence has limits, and it doesn't predict every situation, but the principle is widely recognised: a few moments carry far more weight than the rest.

In their book *The Power of Moments*, Chip and Dan Heath describe what makes a moment memorable. It rises above the everyday (elevation), it makes someone feel proud or recognised (pride), it strengthens a bond between people (connection), or it helps them see something in a new way (insight). They also point out that the most powerful moments often sit at transitions and milestones: beginnings, endings and firsts.

A home purchase is full of these. The first visit. Reserving. Exchanging. Seeing the home for the first time. Collecting the keys. The first night. The first anniversary. Each is a natural moment to make someone feel valued, and each is a moment where getting it wrong will be remembered just as vividly.

The moments in a new-home journey

The table below sets out some of the defining moments in a buyer's journey, how buyers are likely to feel and the kind of small, personal touch that can make the difference.

Moment	How buyers feel	A personal touch that makes a difference
Visiting the show home	Hopeful, cautious, imagining their future	A warm, unhurried welcome, a sales adviser who listens before selling, and a development that looks cared for from the moment they arrive
Reservation	Excited, nervous, committed	A personal welcome from the sales adviser, with clear next steps and a named contact
Waiting for the build	Impatient, anxious	Regular, proactive updates and photos of their home's progress, before they ask
Delays	Frustrated, worried about plans	Early, honest explanation, a revised date they can trust, and a call rather than a letter
Home demonstration	Proud, curious	Unhurried time with the site manager, who knows their home and answers every question
Key day	Elated, emotional, exhausted	A warm handover, a photo with their keys, a card from the team, and essentials for the first night
First week	Settling in, noticing snags	A call to check in, and an easy way to report anything that isn't right

Moment	How buyers feel	A personal touch that makes a difference
First defect	Disappointed, wary	A fast, personal response, kept appointments and updates until it is fixed
Living alongside construction	Tolerant, but watchful	Notice of disruptive work, clean and safe routes, considerate site teams, and a contact for concerns
First anniversary	Reflective about the home, the neighbourhood and the builder	A message marking a year in their home, asking how they feel about the development as well as the house, and acting on what they say

The show home deserves special attention. It is where most buyers form their first impression of a builder, and first impressions are hard to change. The welcome they receive, how well they are listened to, and the care taken over the show home, the sales centre and the development around it all tell buyers what kind of company they are dealing with, long before they reserve.

None of these touches is expensive. What they need is the right people, with the time, the information and the permission to make them happen.

> **"We were dreading moving day with two little ones. When we walked in, there was a card from the site manager, milk in the fridge and a toy for each of the children. It's such a small thing, but we still talk about it. We've recommended them to two friends since."**
>
> ILLUSTRATIVE BUYER COMMENT

Communication: the thread through every moment

Communication is the thread that runs through every moment. Most dissatisfaction in new homes doesn't come from the problem itself. It comes from not knowing what is happening.

Excellent communication is:

- **Proactive.** Buyers hear from you before they need to chase.
- **Honest.** Bad news is shared early, with a reason and a plan.
- **Personal.** A named person who knows their home and their situation.
- **Joined up.** Sales, construction and customer care all tell the same story.
- **Closed off.** Every issue ends with confirmation that it has been resolved, and a check that the buyer is happy.

When things go wrong

Every new home has some snags. How they are handled can become a defining moment in its own right.

There is research suggesting that a problem resolved exceptionally well can leave a customer more satisfied than if nothing had gone wrong, known as the service recovery paradox. The evidence is mixed, and no builder should rely on it. The opposite effect is well established: a defect left unresolved, a missed appointment or an unanswered email can undo months of good work in a single moment.

The lesson is to treat every defect as a moment that matters. Respond quickly, keep promises, keep the buyer updated and, once it is fixed, check they are happy. A sincere apology and a small gesture can turn a frustrated buyer back into an advocate.

More than a home: the development and the community

A year after moving in, buyers are rarely thinking only about their house. They are thinking about the place they now live: whether the development feels finished and cared for, whether a community is forming, and whether the promises made in the sales centre have been kept.

That reflection covers much more than the home itself:

- **Living alongside construction.** How buyers have been treated while building continues around them: noise, dust and mud, working hours, site traffic, and safe, clean routes to their front door.
- **Communal spaces and landscaping.** Whether open spaces, play areas, planting and landscaping have been delivered as promised and are being looked after.
- **Roads, pavements and parking.** Whether roads and footpaths are finished and adopted, street lighting is working, and parking matches what buyers were led to expect.
- **Place-making and community.** Whether the development feels like a neighbourhood: somewhere people know each other, feel safe and are proud to live.
- **Management and charges.** Where there is an estate management company, whether buyers understand what they pay for and feel they get value from it.

These issues often sit with different teams, such as construction, technical, land and planning, and the management company, and sometimes with the local authority. To the buyer, they are all part of one experience. They will judge the builder on the development as a whole, and that judgement shapes whether they recommend it to friends and family considering a home on the next phase.

Small gestures matter here too. Examples include a welcome event for new residents, a clear timeline for finishing the roads, a named contact for estate issues, or a quick tidy-up of a muddy footpath before anyone has to complain. Each one shows buyers that the builder still cares about the place after the last home has been sold.

Making it personal, not formulaic

Moments of delight work because they feel genuine. A welcome hamper that every buyer receives is pleasant. A note from the site manager mentioning the family's new puppy is memorable. The difference is people who know their customers and are trusted to act.

The builders who do this best:

- Give sales advisers, site managers and customer care teams the time and freedom to go the extra mile.
- Share what they know about each buyer across teams, so no one has to repeat themselves.
- Celebrate staff who create great moments, so it becomes part of the culture.
- Plan a few key moments deliberately, and leave room for spontaneous ones.

Finding the moments that matter for your buyers

Every builder's customers, developments and teams are different. Research shows you which moments matter most to your buyers, where you are creating delight and where you are falling short.

- **Measure the journey in stages.** A survey shortly after completion captures first impressions, the sales journey, the move and the first contact with customer care. A second survey six to twelve months later captures defects and aftercare, and also how buyers feel about the development as a whole: ongoing construction, communal spaces, roads, landscaping and the sense of community.
- **Ask about moments, not just ratings.** Questions such as "Was there a moment when we went above and beyond for you?" and "Was there a moment when you felt let down?" uncover the stories behind the scores.
- **Track recommendation.** Whether buyers would recommend you to friends and family is the clearest single measure of how the journey felt.
- **Listen to the comments.** Buyers' own words show what delighted them and what didn't. Use them to recognise staff and to fix what isn't working.
- **Act in real time.** Real-time alerts for dissatisfied buyers give your customer care team the chance to recover the relationship while it still matters.
- **Talk to buyers.** Telephone interviews let buyers tell their story in their own words. That is why more than 95% of our housebuilder surveys are completed by phone, with response rates typically 65–70%.

Questions for leadership teams

1. **Which moments in our buyer journey do customers remember most, for better and for worse?**
2. **How often do buyers hear from us before they have to chase?**

3. **Do our teams have the time, information and permission to go the extra mile?**
4. **How do we handle the first defect, and do buyers feel better or worse about us afterwards?**
5. **What proportion of our buyers would recommend us, and what separates them from those who wouldn't?**
6. **How do we recognise and reward the people who create great moments?**
7. **A year on, how do our buyers feel about the place we have created, not just the home we sold them?**

Conclusion

Building good homes, on time, and fixing problems quickly are the foundation. They are what buyers expect. But they are not what buyers remember, and they are not what turns customers into advocates.

What makes the difference is the personal touch: the warm welcome at the show home, the update that arrives before anyone has to ask, the warmth of a handover, the call that checks everything is OK, the small gesture that says "we remembered you". These moments cost little, but they build relationships, loyalty and advocacy that no marketing budget can buy.

Sources

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- McCollough and Bharadwaj (1992) and later studies, summarised in Service recovery paradox

Find your moments that matter

We'll show you which moments your buyers remember, where you delight them and where you fall short.

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