

TEAMBUILDER CONFERENCE: CONSTRUCT A WINNING GAME PLAN, PAGE 93

CHECK OUT OUR
TOP WEB SITE PICK
PAGE 175

Builder

THE MAGAZINE OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF HOME BUILDERS

AUGUST 2008

GOLD NUGGET AWARDS

Traditional Styles Take
Top Honors in the West



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HOME

NEW GADGETS. NEW SYSTEMS. NEW FUTURE

TECH



Star Search

In Builder's first-ever Web site contest, winners show they've got what it takes to draw customers. BY ROBERTA MAYNARD

AS ANY WEB SURFER KNOWS, ALL BUSINESS sites are not created equal. Some are a joy to visit, with constantly updated information, cool graphics, and other fun features that keep us coming back. Others are uninteresting, or worse, amateurish.

To seek out some of the gems in the building universe, we asked readers to tell us about their sites. Three Internet-savvy judges critiqued 160 entries. (See the complete list of winners, page 178. The categories are large-volume builders, small- to mid-size builders, manufacturers, and lumber dealers.) (see page 176)

NEW GADGETS NEW SYSTEMS NEW FUTURE

Web sites, just another marketing tool not long ago, are now indispensable. Prospective buyers, comfortable with online ordering and all manner of information gathering, routinely choose builders based on their sites. Indeed, the online store has replaced the model home as a first point of contact. If buyers don't like what they see on-

line, they don't visit the community. These days, a great site means more than bragging rights—it means business.

So take a look at the following winners and you might find answers to some of your Web challenges. And after reading our story, visit the winning sites online. There are some great tips for the taking!

JOHN LAING HOMES (WL HOMES)

GRAND AWARD: LARGE-VOLUME BUILDERS

This corporate site earned top marks for content, presentation, and ease of use. Cartoon pictures make for clear navigation. A map showing the company's six-state operation easily hotlinks to its separate divisions where thorough information about the divisions' communities is just a click away. Ever-changing "people" photos bring life and interest to the site. Similarly, special attention to the language used adds personality, creates a mood, and succeeds at warmly inviting the visitor to venture further—from map to community to model photo to floor plan (see smaller image, top right).

Buyer-friendly features include the capability to submit warranty requests online, to request the company's newsletter, and to choose the way information is sent. Also on the menu are a mortgage guide, a glossary of homebuying terms, and move-in checklist.



BOWA BUILDERS

GRAND AWARD: SMALL- TO MID-SIZE BUILDERS

Created by the company's construction vice president in his spare time, this site is proof that an effective online presence need not break the bank. A dramatic 360-degree moving panorama of a BOWA home adorns the opening page, and the site is chock-full of photos—more than 800—that show off the work of this Virginia design/build and remodeling firm. In fact, throughout the site BOWA lets images tell its story: A series of photos track the progress of each project (see smaller image, bottom right). On another page, an explanation of the process—from initial phone conversation through construction—helps answer prospects' basic questions. Overall, the site is well organized and easy to navigate and offers good contact information.

