

“Can’t Afford” vs. “Curb Appeal”

Successful Selling in a Price-Conscious Market

By Scott O’Neill

Here in California, we’re struggling every day with a down economy, a housing crisis, and customers who “can’t afford” the price of a new garage door. But I’m finding that the “curb appeal” argument can trump the “can’t afford” argument.

I have two stories for you.

Story #1: Buyer’s Remorse

Last week, one of our customers had buyer’s remorse after having placed an order a week before. We had ordered and received the garage doors on her behalf, only to find she wanted to cancel the order. She voiced that she was overwhelmed with costs and that she “just couldn’t bear the expense right now.”

I immediately adopted a tone of sympathy, agreeing with her about how hard the economy has been on all of us. I then shared my personal second thoughts on buying a new custom door for my home after I ordered the door.

“Mrs. Sanchez, I can tell you I felt the same way. I ordered the door and then found out that my tax situation had gotten tougher than I had planned.”

I explained to her that I thought it through and realized it was too late to cancel. The manufacturer had already built the door.

A Smart Move

“So I just installed the door,” I told her, “and I have to say that the door’s performance and look has made my house look so much better!”

I added that the door was a safety improvement. Since her old doors were ready to fall off the hinges, I knew she could relate to that.

Then I recalled that she was considering selling her house in the next year. So I reminded her how the doors would enhance the curb appeal of the house and help to attract buyers.

As studies have shown, an attractive new garage door can help command a decent price when selling a home.

Guess what? She continued with her order!

Story #2: The High-End Builder

In this economy, we’re even seeing higher-end clients who are pinching pennies. For example, we had a contractor who never worked with us, but found us through referral. He was looking for two custom-faced doors.

He should be an easy sale — a high-end builder who gets a recommendation to buy from us. Right?

Wrong.

Louis, the contractor, told me that price was an issue, since he had been building the house for nearly two years. By the time he was ready to buy the garage doors, his budget had declined.

The house is a spec house — he will build and sell it, but he doesn’t have a buyer yet. Consequently, he said, he has to watch every penny. So I offered some sage advice.

The Big Question

“Louis, just tell me, how much of the front of the house do these doors occupy, visually?”

“The entire front,” he answered. “The house is on a hill behind the garage, sloping downward, so you don’t even see anything other than the garage.”

“Okay, I have a critical question for you,” I said. “How much do you think you’ll ask for this house?”

He paused for a second and then said, “Oh, probably in the \$1.5 to \$1.7 million range. Why do you ask?”

I answered that, for distinguished clientele with discerning tastes, the garage door may be the one critical element that will have a dramatic impact on the marketability of the house.

Curb Appeal at Lower Cost

He confirmed that he and his realtor had already discussed this and agreed with this point. He then pushed for a way to get that custom look with a cheaper price.

So, rather than considering wood doors, we explored steel carriage doors with overlays. It would save him about 25 percent of the cost of the wood carriage doors.

But even after putting together the alternative proposal, he asked if there was any additional wiggle room on my price. I contacted my supplier and negotiated a slightly better price.

I called Louis back and passed the savings on to him. He said that if I could honor that price, he’d go for it!

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The Silver Bullet

Here’s my point. Curb appeal is a powerful sales tool. Even the most desperate customer recognizes that great-looking garage doors add value to the entire home.

As a salesperson, my biggest mistake is not playing the “curb appeal card.” It trumps the “can’t afford card” almost every time. ■

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