



Organizing a New Home Buyer Seminar

In many areas of the country, the New Home Buyer Seminar can be one of the best ways to connect with motivated new home buyers.

As with any other marketing campaign or event, you can present a New Home Buyer Seminar on a very large or very small scale. Individual associates have organized simple seminars on a very limited budget and have realized solid results to justify their efforts. Many say that making one or two good connections can easily justify the time and money invested. On the other extreme, occasionally a larger company-wide event is coordinated and aggressively promoted, yielding much greater turnout and more connections with prospective buyers. Regardless of the size of the event, few other promotions offer a better opportunity to meet face-to-face with individuals specifically interested in the purchase of a new home.

Your options include presenting an in-person event, or instead, presenting your seminar on a virtual basis using a platform such as Zoom. As more people have become comfortable with virtual meetings and events, this option has become more popular, and offers some great convenience, lower expense, and allows you to also record your session for future viewing. You might also find editing short segments from the longer video offers opportunities to create 'quick hit' videos for social media or other online marketing.

To assist you in organizing a high-quality event that will help you reach more prospective home buyers and demonstrate your expertise as a Certified New Home Specialist™, we offer the following suggestions. As you study them, you will find that they are geared to organizing a large event, coordinated by a group of associates interested in working with new home buyers. If you are working alone, or planning a smaller simpler event, these guidelines offer many ideas and concepts that will serve your objectives as well.

1. Organize a Planning Committee

Approximately three or four months prior to your seminar, you should organize a committee of Certified New Home Specialist™ associates for planning and coordination purposes. Depending on your goals as far as the size and reach of your event, this committee could include associates from just one office, or from several offices throughout your market area. It's also a great idea to have an office manager on-board for single office events, or in the case of large company sponsored events, one or more

individuals representing company management. Participation or input from people in your company who have experience organizing seminars and marketing would also be especially helpful. Some of the responsibilities of the committee include:

- Determine the topics and format of the event
- Establish a budget and coordinate finances
- Select time, date and location
- Finalize facility contracts and arrangements
- Select and coordinate speakers
- Seek sponsor relationships
- Develop and implement promotional program and materials
- Determine registration procedures and responsibilities
- Develop program handouts and information kits
- Create a plan for event day preparation and staffing responsibilities
- Establish policy for distribution of prospect leads
- Secure support and approval of management as necessary

2. Make it an 'Event'

The seminar must be designed and promoted as a special event that is professionally organized. If prospects perceive that this is simply a sales promotion, is poorly organized, or of low quality, they will not attend. Everything you do from promotion to registration through follow-up should be done in a way that indicates professionalism and attention to detail.

Whenever possible, the support of sponsors helps in this regard. It can lend credibility when consumers see your event is sponsored by other established businesses and organizations.

3. Schedule Carefully

When choosing dates for your seminars, do your best to discover other events that may conflict or compliment your seminar. Be sensitive to religious observances, holidays or other major local events.

The most convenient time of the week for most prospects are typically Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday evenings from 7:00 to 9:30. Some also report success with Saturday mornings from 10:00 to 12:30. Again, be careful to consider local customs or other events that may create conflicts. To offer some flexibility and make the most of your promotional efforts, you may want to schedule several dates in the same promotion, such as a Wednesday evening and the following Saturday morning.

4. Tie-In to Complementary Events

Look for opportunities to increase the success of your program by tying your timing and promotion to another complimentary event. For example, a 'parade of homes' creates great opportunities to reach your target market. Schedule your seminar two to three

weeks following the parade and promote it along with your Buyer Representation services in up-front advertising and program handouts. Some parades offer exhibitor space at the event where you can meet people face-to-face, hand out literature, and promote your upcoming seminar.

Another event in the spring that offers a similar tie-in is a home and garden type show. This event also offers an opportunity to gain the support of various sponsors.

5. Choose a Quality Location

If choosing to present an in-person event, the convenience of the location and quality of the facilities will have a significant impact on the success of your seminar. Inquire with special event planners throughout your market area for their opinion on the convenience of locations. Ask for input from friends, business associates, and others you may know.

In many areas, it's advisable to choose several locations to increase your attendance. Scheduled closely together, the various locations and dates can be promoted in the same marketing campaign, increasing the importance of your event, and the reach of your promotional efforts. Other location considerations include sufficient parking, the cost of parking, cleanliness, and accessibility from major thoroughfares. It may also be advisable to confirm that no major road construction or facility renovation will be underway at the time of your events.

When choosing facilities, it's also essential that you make a personal inspection before finalizing your decision. Consider carefully the cleanliness, comfort of chairs, and cooperation of the staff in addition to the costs involved. Confirm the availability and costs of audio-visual equipment and refreshments. Discuss cancellation policies and the ability to re-schedule should it become necessary. Also discuss flexibility in changing the size of the room to meet your needs if attendance is significantly larger or smaller than anticipated.

6. Seek Sponsorship Support

Sponsors for your program, also interested in reaching your target market, can offer promotional or financial consideration, as well as enhance the credibility of your event. What's important to recognize here is the power of borrowing "brand equity" from other businesses and organizations. In addition to your company and REbuildUSA, you should seek the sponsorship of your renovation lender partners, title companies, radio stations, newspapers and magazines.

Participation as a sponsor sometimes involves a financial contribution. Others might handle costs and arrangements for the seminar facility or may offer one of their own. Another may offer to facilitate printing and distribution of promotional and handout materials or cover the cost of refreshments. In the case of local media or an organization, the sponsor could promote your event through to their audience or membership for recognition. Some of these companies would also enjoy sending a

representative to participate as a seminar speaker or offer a 2 or 3-minute welcome to the event.

Finalize the details of any sponsor relationships as far in advance as possible and document in writing to clarify the details, such as timing, costs, recognition provided, etc. A simple email outlining the specifics can help avoid confusion later on.

7. Establish a Realistic Budget

As with any other promotion or business activity, the better the budget to support your good planning, the better the results. As soon as you or your committee has outlined the desired details of your program, it is important to realistically determine the costs involved. Typically the most variable area of the budget is found in the marketing expenses. As such, the promotional expense categories are usually the last to be finalized. The typical event expenses include:

- Rental of the seminar facility
- Rental of audio and video equipment
- Refreshments
- Advertising & promotion
- Posters, flyers, invitations, brochures
- Direct mail and postage
- Handouts and information kits
- Registration materials

Early on in your planning it is important to determine the sources of funds to finance your program. Some possible sources include:

- Admission fees (normally not charged)
- Sponsor donations
- Revenues from advertising space in program guide or information package
- Revenues from selling exhibitor booth space
- Company contribution from general marketing budget
- Contributions from participating 203k Specialist™ associates

8. Create a High-Quality Program

As Abraham Lincoln once said, “When I get ready to talk to people, I spend two-thirds of my time thinking about what they want to hear ... and one third thinking about what I want to say.”

This focus, I have found, is an important key to creating seminars and presentations that are well received. Your committee should discuss possible seminar topics as well as speakers who may be appropriate for each. As soon as speakers are confirmed, use their expertise to help you continue to develop the topics and final outline of your presentation.

While one of your primary goals, of course, is to promote the services available through your Buyer Representation Program, the seminar cannot appear to be a “sales pitch.” Your goal in the presentation should be to share as much valuable information as possible that will correspond with the interests of your audience. A high-quality presentation offering excellent information will make the most positive impression. Examples of presentation topics and a sample seminar outline are provided later in this section.

Using a well-organized PowerPoint presentation is the very best way to keep your message on track. This also easily allows you to support your presentation with photos, graphics and other visuals to bring your message to life. You'll notice that in our sample presentation, we're careful to show only a few words at a time. Slides with all the bullet points visible, or those with a great deal of small text are not only ineffective, but distracting. Rather than focus on what the speaker is saying, attendees typically find themselves absorbed in reading all the text on the screen.

The use of flip charts to outline points of the seminar can also be effective, but only with very small groups; usually less than 25 to 30 attendees. The best use of flip charts is in making points or showing numbers supporting the answer to a question from the audience that may not be supported by a pre-designed PowerPoint slide.

We also recommend the use of note-taking handouts or worksheets similar to what you used when completing your 203k Specialist training. Providing an outline for the session that can be filled in by attendees as you go keeps them engaged, allows them to retain more information and gives them some excellent notes to take home with them. They are also more likely to keep these notes for later reference, so packaging these with your other materials and contact information is advisable.

9. Select Knowledgeable, Experienced Speakers

The most common mistake made in programs of this nature is including speakers that are inexperienced, lack depth of knowledge, are poorly prepared or have poor presentation abilities. It is therefore important to select your speakers carefully. While most of us can “speak”, delivering effective, enjoyable presentations is an entirely different skill set!

It's convenient if you or one of your associates can deliver a professional presentation. Even without world-class speaking skills, if you are well organized, knowledgeable, sincere and passionate about helping your audience understand the information and opportunities you're sharing, you will deliver a great presentation.

On the other hand, if this is simply not an area comfortable to you or other associates working on your event, it's best to identify someone who can do the job. In many cases, your lending partner will be qualified to deliver much of your presentation.

When choosing an outside presenter, work only with speakers whose performance can be substantiated by reliable sources. First identify those who may be familiar to

associates on your committee or others in your company. Your local Board of REALTORS® is also excellent source for speaker recommendations.

Initial contact to determine the interest and availability of each speaker is usually made by phone at least 8 to 10 weeks in advance. Once you have finalized your selection, formal invitations to participate should be mailed, along with a program outline. A written confirmation should be requested, as well as a resume, brief introduction, and a detailed outline of the speaker's proposed presentation. The speaker should also indicate any presentation equipment that will be required. You might also request a professionally taken headshot for use in promotional materials.

At least four weeks prior to the seminar, the speaker should provide masters of any materials to be duplicated or handouts for inclusion in the information kits. A week prior to the event, again send a written notice to confirm time, date, location, and include directions and parking information if necessary. Also include a complete copy of the final program outline and all seminar materials. Immediately following the program, don't forget to send a letter of thanks to each speaker and sponsor for their participation.

10. Develop Organized Program Handouts

Nicely organized handouts will enhance the impact of your seminar. A package of 8½ x 11 pages simply stapled at the corner is fine, as long as the design, layout, and reproduction is of professional quality.

The handouts should begin with a cover page indicating program title, date, and major program sponsors. Following this is an outline of the seminar naming the speaker for each segment, major discussion points for each segment, and approximate time frame. Short bios of each speaker should be included, highlighting experience, education, and special achievements, as well as short profiles of the seminar sponsors.

The balance of this handout package should then include the note-taking outline described above as well as any other take-home resources and materials.

11. Organize Effective Registration Procedures

Your goals in this area include making registration easy for participants, using procedures that are organized, and gathering important information to allow effective identification and follow-up of prospective new home buyers.

People interested in attending your program should be able to register by phone, an online registration form or through email. Every printed promotional piece should clearly explain the registration options. Posters are most effective if a pad of tear-off registration coupons are attached with this information.

For telephone registration, it is important that someone who is polite, friendly, and professional in his or her phone communications is involved. Knowledge of the details and topics of seminar, as well as the ability to "sell" the benefits of participation is also

important. Consider this carefully when selecting responsibilities for telephone registration.

During registration, it's a great idea to gather basic contact information that allows you to follow-up if necessary. For those who register, but do not make the event, this allows you to contact them to either invite them to another event, or simply offer your services.

One week prior to the date of the program, confirmations should be emailed to all registrants, reminding them of the time, date, and location. We also find that following this reminder with another one just a day or two before the event is helpful. For this reminder, we suggest sending it in the form of a text message if possible. Text messages for this purpose are usually appreciated and result in more folks actually noticing your reminder. This last minute reminder will definitely improve seminar turnout.

It is also helpful to include a map showing directions, parking and entrance location. You may also want to suggest that attendees bring a sweater or light jacket to assure their comfort if the room is cool. Don't forget to thank them for their participation. For those who have not responded to your email or text reminders, you may want to follow up with a phone call to verify attendance – even just leaving a friendly voice-mail message.

At some point, it's helpful to ask of each of the registrants is how they learned about your seminar. This will help you measure the effectiveness of promotion, make any last-minute adjustments if necessary and provide feedback that may help you in the promotion of future events.

The day of the seminar, check-in should begin at least 30 minutes before the start of the program. With larger groups, 45 minutes to an hour may be required. In either case, make sure to have a registration list with names, addresses, and phone numbers along with a space to check off participants as they arrive. Confirm participant information and gather anything missing. Be prepared with forms for any “at the door” registrations. Also, be sure to have plenty of help to register people quickly, distribute name tags, handouts, and registration packages, answer questions, and direct them to seating and refreshments.

It is also important to recognize the significance of making friendly, personal contact with participants as much as possible. Certified New Home Specialist™ associates, wearing nametags should mingle and socialize prior to the presentation, at breaks, and again at the end. This contact will make the seminar experience more pleasant for attendees, will make them more comfortable in asking questions, and may make them more receptive when following-up with prospects later.

12. Create a Successful Promotional Campaign

Once you have created a quality program, you must create a plan that will most effectively stimulate the interest of prospective home buyers and encourage their participation. Some promotional elements that can contribute to your success include:

- Direct Mail and/or email to your 'sphere of influence', known prospects, or neighborhoods identified as good prospect locations
- Social media is also an excellent channel for your promotion. Don't forget to create a short video introduction and a link to a landing page that describes your event and allows for registration.
- Local neighborhood or community discussion forum or online newsletter.
- Invitations to media representatives, leaders of community or business organizations, and other key individuals
- Phone calls to any of the above to announce the event or follow-up invitations, to confirm attendance
- Press releases to local media
- Posters with tear-off registration coupons located throughout the community
- Other forms of advertising can be effective depending on your market, including newspapers, homes guides, radio, or other channels

13. Patience and Persistence

One unfortunate reality of promoting seminars is that attendance is extremely unpredictable. Many factors come into play that can impact the success of your event. In spite of this challenge, a well-planned and well-presented seminar offers a great marketing option that can allow you to position yourself as an expert directly in front of those you would most like to reach with your message and services. Keep in mind that it may take a number of attempts and some time before word-of-mouth starts to spread about the value of your seminars and services. Patience and persistence will be your best friends as you build your success.