The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Building America research partners have demonstrated that high-performance homes can boost sales but it doesn’t happen automatically. Marketing these homes requires a tailored, easy-to-understand campaign that focuses on their high-performance benefits—not the technical details behind them.

Spurred by the housing market downturn, LifeStyle Homes worked with the Building America Partnership for Improved Residential Construction (BA-PIRC) team in late 2009 to certify a DOE Builders Challenge home. Encouraged by positive market feedback, company managers developed the LifeStyle Homes SunSmart® Energy Initiative: every home scores 60 or lower on the Home Energy Rating System (HERS) Index using a standardized package of climate-appropriate, cost-effective strategies that are designed to work together.

SunSmart marketing includes a modified logo, weekly blog, social media, traditional advertising, website, and sales staff training. Marketing focuses on quality, durability, healthy indoor air, and energy efficiency with an emphasis on the surety of third-party verification and the scientific approach to developing the SunSmart package. For buyers who want technical depth, LifeStyle’s website showcases SunSmart homes with interactive illustrations of SunSmart features and specifications (Figure 1). Simplified cost-of-ownership comparisons to typical new and existing homes help buyers quickly grasp the value of SunSmart.

The big-picture message: LifeStyle has done the homework for buyers. Marketing Director Karen Kicinski says, “It’s the communication of the overall benefits of SunSmart that sells the homes, not a description of the individual components.”

Figure 1. On the website cutaway, each yellow marker links to a SunSmart element with brief overviews and “Why you should care” explanations.
**Multifaceted Marketing and Branding**

Business district sales center promotes multiple LifeStyle Homes communities.

Company branding with modified logos for SunSmart and Solar Powered homes.

Online gallery helps buyers visualize a zero energy home. A hover feature shows model name, area, and HERS Index score.

For more information, see the Building America report Approaches to 30% Energy Savings at the Community Scale in the Hot-Humid Climate at ba-pirc.org.

Image credit: All images were created by the BA-PIRC team and LifeStyle Homes.

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**Marketing Lessons Learned**

- Inspire buyer trust and provide an unbiased platform for comparing competitors. Use third-party oversight, such as home energy ratings and the HERS Index, to help accomplish these goals.
- Simplify discussion of complex, high-performance concepts. SunSmart communicates that LifeStyle has covered all the details.
- Give satisfied customers a voice. “Energy Savers Spotlight” highlights owner testimonials on the corporate blog and in social media.
- Use visual tools such as mock-ups and scale models in sales centers. Show buyers the hidden construction differences that comprise the “whole-house approach” to construction.
- Anticipate questions and arm sales staff with answers that highlight benefits.

**Looking Ahead**

SunSmart evolved in the spirit of “doing the right thing,” an approach that permeates LifeStyle’s corporate culture. As technology improves and evolves, this builder will continue to collaborate with Building America. “We will soon prove that we can deliver truly affordable zero energy homes with sufficient energy production and/or storage capacity to power not only the home, but to recharge an electric automobile as well,” stated Hufford.