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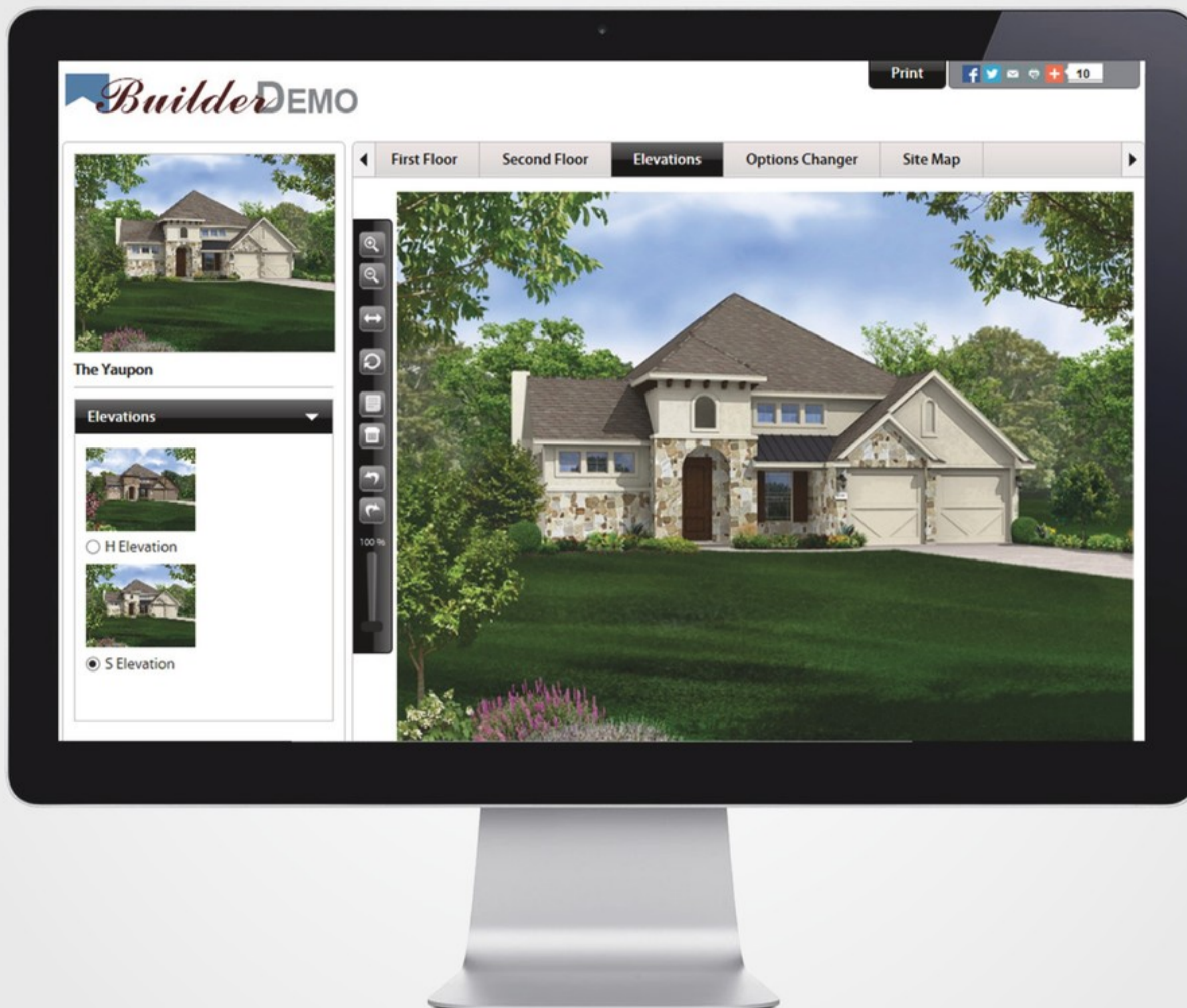
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Building Connections



Investing in the Big Picture

Technology has not only changed the way we sell homes, but also the way consumers shop for them. Ninety percent of home shoppers begin their search online, so builders must engage them throughout the buying cycle, from the first click of their mouse at the beginning of their search to when they close on their new home.

Homebuyers crave customization, and they want technology solutions to help them customize their home. Since we cannot take a physical home and put it in the buyer's back pocket, instead we give them a

technology tool so they can access it wherever and whenever they might want it.

In order to empower a customer, gain their trust by giving them the tools they crave. Through each section of your website, buyers are becoming more involved with your products and hopefully the end result is selecting you as their builder. Seventy percent of shoppers expect to “see” your product on webpages accompanied by comprehensive and complete copy. But how do we accomplish this when you might not have a model of each of your elevations?

Interactive floor plans (IFPs) are a way to bring your rich media elevations to life and allow shoppers to design their new home before setting foot in your design center. According to a Bokka Group study, 87 percent of repeat buyers feel it is important for a builder to have interactive floorplans when researching home builders through their websites. IFPs dramatically increase the amount of exposure of your model homes, and the process to create one is not as complicated as it may seem to be.

The first step in designing an IFP is done from your AutoCad drawings. From there, “stages” are created and typically include first floor, second floor and elevations. The next step is to consider is the type of floor plan you want to use: 2D or 3D. Using three dimensions will bring the plan to life and give the consumer the immersive experience they crave.

When designing your interactive floor plan, going beyond the basics can help bring the home to life for the buyer. Here are some features to include to make the most of an IFP:

- 1. Drag and Drop Furniture Libraries** – This feature gives shoppers a more realistic sense of flow and layout of the home rather than a traditional static 2D graphic. Incorporating furniture really brings the IFP to life.
- 2. Social Media Integration** – According to Facebook statistics, 72% of adults online use Facebook at least once a month and 968 million adults log on to Facebook each day. The ability to share homes to Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest accounts directly from the IFP gives shoppers the ability to share your product with their social media network. Who wouldn't want to show off what the perfect dream home would look like?
- 3. Customizable Hotspots** – Use hotspots to highlight specific products or features offered in your homes with images, videos or external links. With the simple hover of your mouse over thoughtfully placed hotspots, buyers can get information about what interests them the most; quickly and efficiently.
- 4. Notes** – “*What was that cabinet color and design we so loved again?*” Eliminate the nitty gritty details that can make home shopping a bit overwhelming by allowing users to add notes about what they like about each plan and so they can reference it later.
- 5. Options Changer** – Integrate interior and/or exterior options so the home shopper can research and compare options, view products available for their favorite homes and create their

wish lists of options to save. You can then view your buyer's selections prior to their visit to better understand their needs and target upgrade opportunities. Can you imagine how valuable that information would be for your sales team? Easily referencing a buyer's preferences and pulling them up digitally makes the buyer feel like they really were involved in the customization of their home in a special way.

- 6. Brochures** – Once the homebuyer has designed their home, include the capability to print or email the design to them. This will keep your home and company at the top of their mind. No more loose papers just thrown amuck in the backseat of the car after leaving your sales center! They get it where they most likely are multiple times a day: their email.

Betenbough Homes in Lubbock, Texas, has implemented an IFP and said it has been useful tool for the sales team at multiple points in the sales process. “The hotspots within the IFP are a particularly valuable resource as it allows home buyers to view a snapshot of the interior of the home, which is convenient when comparing floor plans,” they said.

Once you have your interactive floor plan, make sure you are getting the most use out of it by posting it not only on your website but on your home buyer portal, kiosks in your sales center and on social media sites such as Pinterest and Facebook. Consumers will view your content on many different platforms, such as a desktop computer, tablet and smart phones. It is crucial to ensure they have an optimal viewing experience on all devices. Creating this piece with HTML5 will achieve a responsive and fluid layout.

Interactive floor plans are a modern and fresh approach to showcase all of your floor plans, upgrades and options. With the digital landscape of home shopping continually evolving, stay ahead of the curve and start creating content that shoppers will use to design their new home. **SMI**

Ashlei Valles is the marketing manager for Builders Digital Experience (BDX), a leading provider of digital marketing and sales solutions for home builders. In addition to hosting the top new home listing site (NewHomeSource.com), and providing distribution of new home listings to hundreds of real estate websites, BDX offers website development, interactive floor plans, photo realistic renderings, and digital sales solutions to builders and real estate developers. Together these online and interactive resources help builders create a true digital experience for their buyers. For more information, visit theBDX.com.