

Builder/Architect

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Tony Caciolo,
Monogram
Custom
Homes



Phone: 610-282-0235
Fax: 610-282-0237
www.monogramcustomhomes.com

Stretching the Status Quo

Common Sense, an Outside Perspective, and a Business Outlook Drive Value into *Monogram Custom Homes*

Cover Story Reprint

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By Elizabeth Kelly

Some of today's most intriguing businesses began as simple concepts, nourished by individuals who came from other professions, and who themselves had a need for such products or services. eBay, the popular on-line auction site, began with a simple desire of selling PEZ

candy dispensers. Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream started in a renovated gas station by two high school buddies with a love for ice cream. Lands' End, the direct marketer of apparel, began by selling mail-order sailboat fittings. A fresh perspective on serving customer needs and the ability

to see things from the outside turned each of these businesses into industry leaders.

An intriguing young home builder with a similar simplistic start is Lehigh Valley-based Monogram Custom Homes. What started out as two Lehigh University classmates building a few homes has grown into a successful organization, serving the new home needs of home buyers in communities and on scattered sites across the Lehigh Valley. With a heavy focus on adding value and providing total customer satisfaction, Monogram Custom Homes stands out in many ways.

Value in a Commodity World

"We differentiate ourselves by including products as standard for our customers that add a lot of value, but don't add a lot of cost," explains Tony Caciolo, partner, Monogram Custom Homes. Tony, along with his partner Lewis (Chip) Shupe, realizes that the customers that they serve look for value and name brand products. "We really play up name brands like Pella Windows, Jacuzzi Whirlpool Tubs, and Slant Fin hot water baseboard heating," continues Caciolo. "But what really distinguishes Monogram and allows us to add additional value is the way we purchase items. Cabinets, granite countertops, appliances, heating systems, and whole-house audio are examples of products where we have established a unique relationship directly with the manufacturers." These relationships

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The products that home buyers find in Monogram's homes not only provide extra value, but also become alternatives to the typical products found in many new homes. Jenn-Air cooktops and wall ovens are a good example of a value-added name brand product, and one not typically offered in new construction. Photographic presentation by S.A. Shane Photography.

and the products that home buyers find in Monogram's homes not only provide extra value, but also become alternatives to the typical products found in many new homes. Monogram's use of Jenn-Air cooktops and wall ovens as standard is a

good example of a value-added name brand product, and one not typically offered in new construction. "We found that at the price range in which we build, people are concerned about value," comments Shupe. "They want to see

that they are getting good value for their dollar."

Doing the Right Thing— Customer Service

"We typically do things out of the ordinary to achieve better results," says Caciolo, "and that includes the

relationships we have with our customers.” Having previously worked for Xerox and Bell & Howell, Caciolo learned the magnitude of achieving total customer satisfaction from industry giants. “For Monogram, we realized that to succeed and to really be at the top, we have to take care of customers no matter what. And that is what we do.” Guided by the company’s philosophy, “The Customer’s Perception is Our Reality,” Monogram has reaped considerable rewards for doing the right thing to satisfy their customers. “We believe customer service begins the moment that home buyer walks in the door. Everything is up front, open and honest.”

The Big Picture

Guiding Monogram’s unique

value-added purchasing approach and their commitment to customer satisfaction is a keen business perspective. “We look at things from a business standpoint,” confesses Caciolo. “Did someone teach us to buy products a little differently so that we can give our customers more value? It was a common sense approach.

“We look more long-term than short-term, focusing not on how much money we can make on a house, but how happy we can make our customers so they will tell their friends about us. Any extras, any change orders, anything like that that our customers request, we do at cost. Why? Because it allows us to end the job so that when our customer has their house-warming party, they can rave to all their

friends how much value they were able to add to their home at very little cost. I’ve seen many companies maximize their profit in a shortsighted way and not look long-term. That is not what drives success. We look long-term.”

Tying into the principles of looking long-term, building customer referrals, delivering total customer satisfaction, and providing added value, Monogram realizes that all of this hinges on building being a fun experience. “The last line in our building contract says, ‘signed in the spirit of friendliness and neighborliness,’” emphasizes Caciolo. “And as corny as that may sound, I tell everyone about that right up front, in the first meeting we have. This is the way our transaction is expected to proceed.”

B/A

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