

Deluxe Interiors is needed to provide flexibility of usage when planning floor layouts



Reality check



With the growth in virtual reality property tours, **KATE HAMILTON** asks if there is still a market for the traditional show home

The modern world is becoming increasingly digital and, as a result, it has changed many industries that were thought unchangeable.

Marketing is no different. In the past decade, B2C marketing has changed so much that any company worth its salt now has a social media expert. And now, with the growth of virtual reality, housebuilders are wondering what the future holds – especially when it comes to the show home.

Virtual reality software means that prospective buyers can now have a virtual tour of the property that they are interested in – so will they still need to tour a traditional show home?

"Absolutely – the show home is essential," says Dawn Kitchener, managing director of Blocc Interiors. "Buyers relate to the space – it's very difficult to envisage proportion and size unless you are actually there. Virtual reality is great to give a flavour and indication, particularly to forward sell from plan – but people like to get the tape measure out and imagine how they would live in the space. Also, the show home is crucial to demonstrate the specification, particularly the kitchen and bathroom."



Sara Braham, managing director of Interhouse Design, agrees: "Most buyers struggle to imagine themselves living in a property when the only means of viewing the property is off-plan, CGI or VR. These exciting technical developments are a fantastic additional tool to the traditional show home but could never replace the feeling of standing in your potential new home. We use all of our senses when visiting a show home to take everything in and this isn't 100% possible with VR. It's also a lone activity and part of the excitement about potentially buying a house is sharing the viewing experience with your partner, friends or family."

It seems that the show home is still a housebuilder's main selling tool, as people still like to touch, feel and generally experience the property as they would when they are actually living in it.




"A well-designed show home can be a developer's most powerful sales and marketing tool; it serves to show a property at its best and helps potential buyers envision themselves living in that space," explains Richard Clayton, managing director of Jane Clayton.

"CGIs and more recent technologies such as virtual reality can further reinforce these points; however, they can't begin to replace the tactile, real-life experience of visiting a physical show home. For us, as interior designers, it's about creating a feeling when someone walks in through the front door; a sense of 'this is where I want to be'."

After all, many people buy a property based purely on 'the feel'. When quizzed by friends and family on why they choose that particular home, many often can't put a finger on any specific reasons – it just 'felt right'.

"The show home allows prospective purchasers to experience the property, feel the quality, imagine living there and emotionally commit to the purchase," says Iona Newton, Oakeve Interiors managing director. "While virtual tours are amazing these days, providing incredibly realistic representation, what they can't do is deliver that undefined quality that makes someone fall in love with a home."

Andrew Henry of Andrew Henry Interiors agrees: "First impressions are critical and an appropriately targeted show home can have buyers ▶

 Claude Hooper stays on top of the design fashions to ensure the show homes stay on trend
 Alexander James Interior Design's knowledge of trends and suppliers is first-class
 PIC Kilburn Quarter, London. Interior: New Ltd Interiors; Developer: Network Homes

