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## Selling Surveys

**F**or high response rates on client surveys — and positive survey comments that can become glowing marketing testimonials — inform clients early on that they will be surveyed and that their response is important to you. Invite them to contact you any time with suggestions for improvement because you want their experience to be good. Remind them of the survey's value when you send it, and make it easy for them to complete and return it.

Regular calls from a familiar voice ensure a 100% survey response rate for Fannin Remodeling, of Maumee, Ohio. Office manager Sharon Young mails clients a welcome letter at the beginning of the project, calls them biweekly to see how the job is going, and, 30 days after completion, mails them a post-project survey with a stamped and addressed envelope.

Young also calls clients at this time. "I tell them that we consider the survey [to be] our company's 'grade card' and [that we] really want their honest feedback," she says. "The customers appreciate it."

The survey has 12 questions. Four invite open-ended responses, and the remainder ask for specific ratings on a scale of 5 (excellent) to 1 (poor).

Owner Chuck Fannin says that only about half of the surveys came back before Young became the consistent point of contact. He suspects that her friendliness and listening skills are behind the turnaround. In those biweekly phone calls, "she can tell from the [client's] voice if there's an issue." If there is, the company is on it. —L.T.

## Rebound King

**D**ramatic rebounds come rarely to remodelers these days, but a happy exception is the case of Mills Builders, of Sacramento, Calif. The eight-year-old design/build firm's new campaign of homeowner seminars has proven "wildly successful," says Jonathan Mills, president. "We would be in dire trouble had we not begun this program late last summer."

The company mails 30,000 to 40,000 postcards (shown) every three weeks, encouraging targeted recipients to call or visit [www.millsbuilders.com](http://www.millsbuilders.com) for dates, locations, and other details. Seminars are free to attend but require advance registration.

The real key, however, is the seminars' format: scripted and educational, elegant and friendly, and free of sales jargon or pressure.

Mills and his staff spent about three months preparing the program, setting out to clear up confusion about remodeling and "to give [homeowners] an absolute primer on how to be successful going forward," he says.

Attendees enjoy a colorful 79-page



PowerPoint presentation, a catered meal, and a 90-minute talk about a broad range of remodeling considerations.

The seminars aren't cheap to produce — the catered meals alone cost about \$500 per seminar — but "we've dodged the current bullet," Mills says. Specifically, as of early May, each of 10 seminars had attracted an average of 15 to 20 homeowners, about 15% of whom (so far) had signed design contracts worth more than \$2 million. Actual construction projects have ranged from a \$5,000 bathroom to a \$1 million whole-house remodel.

For his \$5 million company, Mills anticipates, "conservatively," that seminars will generate half of sales this year. —L.T.



See a slide show about the seminars at [www.remodelingmag.com/webextras](http://www.remodelingmag.com/webextras).

## Peeves Don't Do This

**T**he competitive market underscores the importance of avoiding behaviors that frustrate homeowners. Marla Selko, owner of Urban Referrals, has distilled those pet peeves into six general areas:

■ **Slow follow-up.** Respond quickly to inquiries, preferably within 24 hours.

■ **Unkept promises.** Set and meet your own deadlines, but be sure to work sufficient time into those schedules.

■ **Ambiguity.** Frankly discuss budget and time frame, and ask if there are any events that could affect the schedule.

■ **Mutual mystification.** Don't presume that each party understands the other's concepts of schedule, design, or anything else



orally discussed. Put all details in writing, and jointly sign off on changes.

■ **Avoidance.** Own up to problems or surprises. There's nothing worse than bad news delivered at the last minute, Selko says.

■ **Apples to oranges.** Ask who else they're talking to, and be prepared to explain how you're different, especially if you cost more. Encourage them to check you out.

Learn more about Urban Referrals, with operations in the D.C. and Phoenix areas, at [www.urbanreferrals.com](http://www.urbanreferrals.com). —L.T.