

Family Ties Bind

Quinn Mortensen and Kristen Nilssen are brother and sister but also partners in Gold Medallion Homes, which builds on the Wasatch Front near Salt Lake City. It's an unusual partnership that pulled a never-before-seen combination of top scores to win the AVID Award for customer satisfaction in the small-builder category (below 50 closings).

This is the first winner ever to chalk up its two top scores from the "options, upgrades and colors" category, then follow that up with landscaping/grading, before finishing off with two more conventional attributes:

- (1) Reasonable cost of upgrades
- (2) Presented wide selection (options and upgrades)
- (3) Landscaping/grading
- (4) Perception of walk-through items
- (5) Value of home

The partners specialize in what they call "not-so-big" houses — 1,100 to 1,700 square feet — on high-density lots of 50 feet or less in width. Their smallest model is 850 square feet; the largest, 1,800 square feet. Prices range from the high \$100,000s to mid-\$200,000s. The firm has closed 38 homes this year, with 12 more under construction. "We hope to hit \$12 million in revenue," Mortensen says.

That's a far cry from the



Photo: Lance W Clayton/Getty Images

Brother and sister business partners Quinn Mortensen and Kristen Nilssen pride themselves on making the selection process fun, even for first-time buyers of their "not-so-big" homes.

firm's peak of \$34 million in 2006 on 120 closings.

Our analysis of Gold Medallion's ability to keep its head above water in Salt Lake centers on the combination of customer satisfaction leadership and design leadership.

Design Mavens

This company is delivering what it calls "micro-lot prod-

uct:" two-story, detached homes with very traditional exteriors and open, light-filled interiors. They're on rear-loaded, 35- by 75-foot lots in a traditional neighborhood community — and all at entry pricing for the Salt Lake City market.

Called the "Charleston Collection," the entry-priced homes have windows on three sides to enhance light

penetration. But yards are so small that landscaping and fencing become a high priority. "We use a lot of rose-covered, white picket fencing to soften the density," says Nilssen, who also designs the homes. That explains why Gold Medallion scores well for landscaping, and delivering detached homes at townhouse pricing may explain why it scores well on value. But what about those top two scores: cost of upgrades and selection of options?

The firm has a "selection gallery" of 1,200 square feet where a specialist meets with buyers to present options and upgrades as well as select colors. "We have interactive displays that allow customers to pull together floors, countertops and cabinets," Nilssen explains. "We make selections fun, which is important with first-time buyers."

She adds that the selection specialist is a salesman, not an interior designer. "He does a great job of explaining the value of the various choices," she says. "He loves to sell, and he's good at it."

The partners also point to well-oiled production building processes that minimize the number of items at walk-through, and customers seem to agree.

Gold Medallion's success in customer satisfaction proves there's more than one formula for getting to the top.