

# Should You *Expand, Extend, or Enrich* Your After Move-In Services?

Amid ever increasing expectations for service and attention, many builders are exploring possibilities for providing new levels or kinds of service to home buyers. Builders debate the cost/benefit ratios of a growing list of ideas, such as--

**Extended Limited Warranty**--traditional warranty coverage, but for a longer time such as two years instead of one.

**Maintenance Menu or Service Packages**--offerings can range from cleaning gutters and caulking to preventive maintenance on HVAC systems

**“Late Option” Service**--Installation of specified items that were outside the home buyer’s budget at the time of purchase--ceiling fans, crown mold, plate or chair rail, other built-ins, decks/patios, patio enclosures, pools, or fences.

**Concierge Services**--Assist with unloading belongings, or provide dollies, protective pads, tools; walk the dog, line shelves, help unpack; install drape rods, hang pictures, mirrors, or wind chimes; connect the ice maker or clothes dryer; remove packing boxes; schedule touch-up paint service

**Decor Services**--Professional assistance with selection and installation of window coverings, wallpaper, custom paint, built-ins, and other interior design elements.

Looking for innovations in customer service is commendable. Think through potential ideas carefully to update your service program and delight all involved. Evaluate any idea you are considering objectively, searching for surprises or hidden implications. The list of points that follows can get you started.

1. Define your company’s **objective(s)**. What do you hope to accomplish with this new service?
  - Reinforce client satisfaction
  - Stimulate referral sales
  - Differentiate our company from competitors
  - Develop a new profit stream
  - Create career opportunities for company personnel
  
2. Anticipate and list the **practical implications** of each proposal you are considering--
  - Hard costs of performing the actual services
  - Manager to oversee the program: source, cost, office space?
  - Administrative personnel to process paperwork for the services: source, cost, office space?
  - Technical personnel required to perform the services offered: source, cost, office space?
  - Service days and hours
  - Access: keys or appointments only?
  - Long term record keeping requirements and methods--files, computer, or software needed?

- Warranty coverage or satisfaction guarantees
  - Liabilities such as insurance requirements, risk of damage to home or homeowner's personal belongings
  - Design and production costs of printed materials and forms to promote and administer the program
  - Storage space for printed materials and supplies for performing the services
  - If homeowners are to be charged for the services you would offer, how will payments be collected and processed?
  - Time table from a decision to implementation
  - Is piloting the new program possible?
3. Identify **potential trade contractors** who would be involved in the proposed program. How would the additional work impact their organizations?
- What is the profit potential for trades?
  - Would such profit be interpreted as a benefit to working with your company (increasing loyalty) or would the "extra" work be seen as a nuisance?
  - Are the trades' staffing levels sufficient to service production, warranty, *and* expanded homeowner services as well?
  - Anticipate trade turnover and the resulting need to re-educate replacement trade personnel
  - What warranty coverage would you expect on the trades' extra services?
4. Establish **success criteria**. For example, you might–
- Add relevant questions to homeowner surveys. If increased client satisfaction is your goal, how much of an increase are you seeking and what are you willing to invest to get it?
  - Track how many buyers mention the expanded services as a factor in their purchase decision.
  - If profit stream is one of your objectives, set a dollar amount, percentage of sales revenue, percentage of warranty budget, or some other measurable goal to define success.
5. How do each of the services you are considering compare to those offered by your home building/remodeling competitors? To the services that other businesses offer?
6. Consider hosting a focus group or conducting a survey (written or phone) to ask homeowners what additional services *they* would be interested in and what value they would place on those various services.

One caution: Before venturing into the exciting world of extended/expanded/enriched after move-in services, make certain you are doing the basics correctly: align expectations with good information, communicate regularly during the building process, deliver the home complete and clean, and respond promptly and effectively to warranty requests. Customers take a dim view of companies that offer frosting when they don't even deliver a cake. Get the fundamentals under control, than add sparkle.