

2024

5TH ANNUAL ONLINE HOMEBUYER MYSTERY SHOP REPORT

2024 Was a Year of Mixed Signals and Missed Opportunities



melinda brody
& COMPANY

denim
MARKETING

REPORT OVERVIEW

For the fifth consecutive year, Melinda Brody & Company, partnering with Blue Gypsy, Inc. and Denim Marketing, conducted its comprehensive annual evaluation of how home builders handle digital inquiries. We've set out to answer that age-old question, "How well do home builders respond to online leads?" This report compares the 2024 results with past years to highlight trends, strengths and areas for improvement in lead follow-up processes. The analysis focuses on response times, Online Sales Counselor (OSC) presence, diversity of follow-up channels and messaging frequency. We've found after another year of analysis, that while builders have improved in some metrics, email response time and OSC performance, there are significant missed opportunities. This duality underscores the need for more consistent and comprehensive follow-up practices in the homebuilding industry.

WHO WE MYSTERY SHOPPED

We selected 50 builders, some from Builder Magazine's 2024 Builder 200 List and others at random throughout the industry. We focused on the following five diverse sub-groups, comprised of 10 builders per group:

- National Production Builders, building 9,700+ homes
- Large Production Builders, building between 4,100 and 8,500 homes
- Medium Regional Builders, building 790 to 2,700 homes
- Small Regional Builders, building 150 to 500 homes
- Small Local Builders, building 100 to 400 homes

With each production and regional builder, we picked one market to shop, and we did not shop any one builder in more than one market.

THE MYSTERY SHOP PROCESS

Mystery shoppers visited individual builder websites during normal business hours (Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. local time), completing contact forms with their name, phone number and email address, and including a relevant question about a specific community. Builder follow-up responses were tracked for 30 days, and the resulting data was compiled and examined for three distinct groups: all builders and builders with and without OSCs.

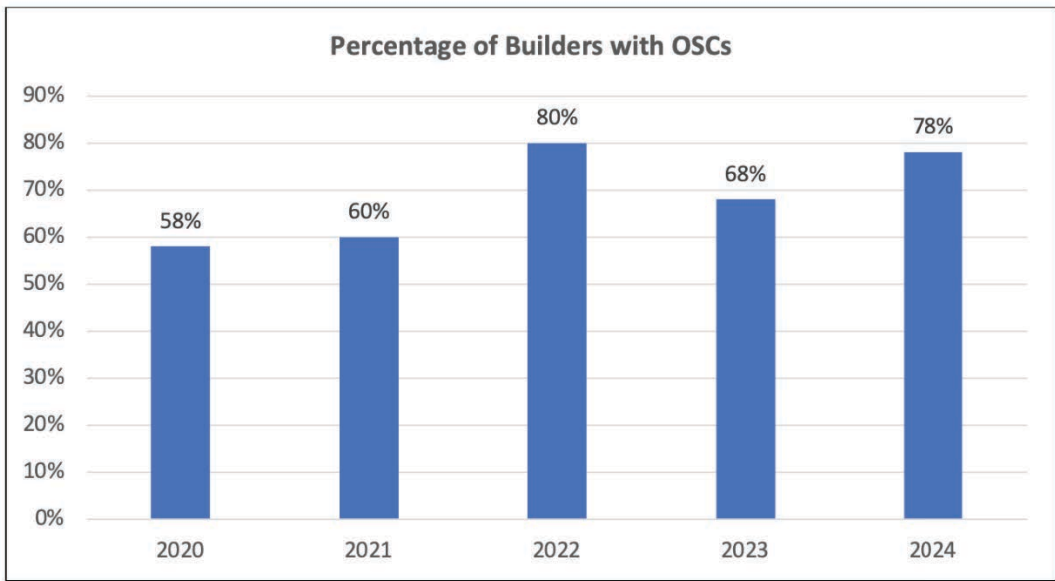
WHAT WE MEASURE

Over the 30-day tracking period, we evaluated and compared several key areas, including:

- What percentage of builders have OSCs?
- How do builders respond to the initial inquiry?
- How quickly do builders respond with personalized emails, phone calls and text messages?
- How frequently do builders respond with personalized emails, phone calls and text messages?
- Did any send video emails?

ONLINE SALES COUNSELOR PRESENCE

OSCs have been around in the homebuilding industry for about 20 years. Foremost, OSCs play a vital role between marketing and sales, helping to develop incoming leads. By building rapport and trust, and providing stellar customer experience, strong leads are handed off to onsite sales agents and can reduce the time from first visit to close.



By closely reviewing the follow-up emails of the 50 builders we mystery shopped in 2024, we determined that 78% of the sampling had OSCs. That’s up 15% from 2023 but below the 2022 peak of 80%. Still, 22% of builders shopped this year didn’t appear to have a dedicated online sales professional.

WEBSITE PRESENCE OF OSCs

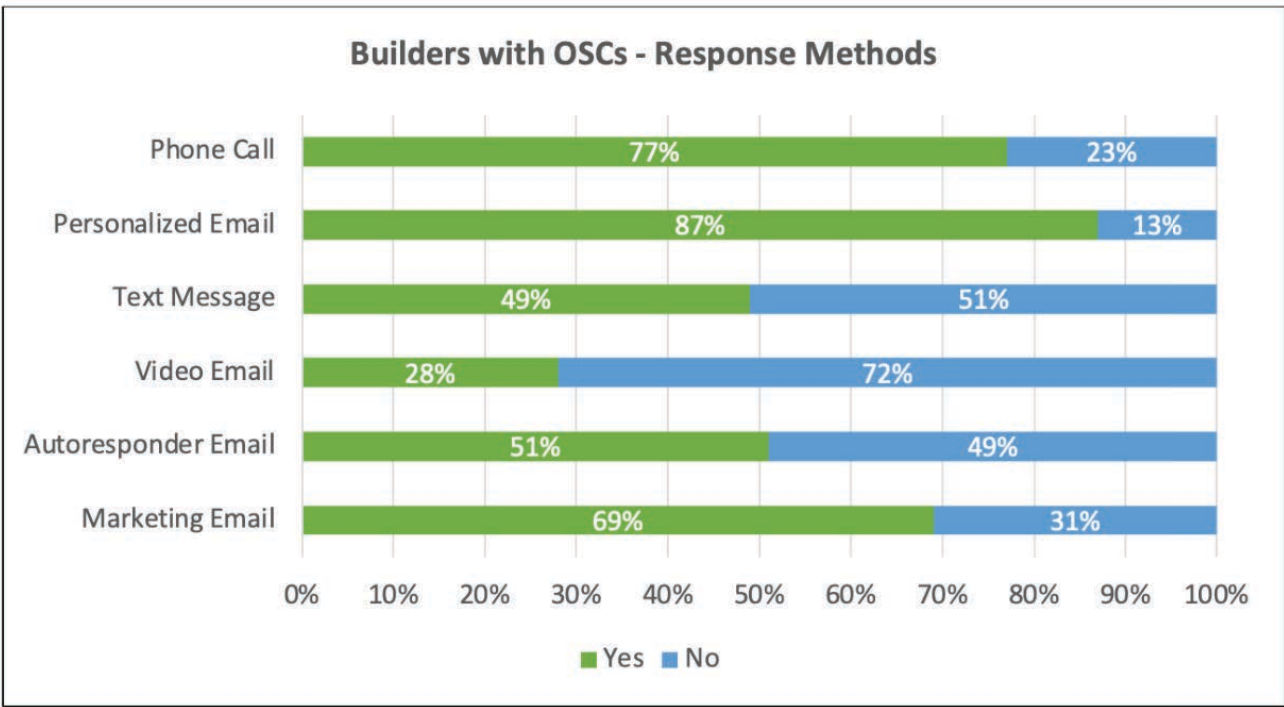
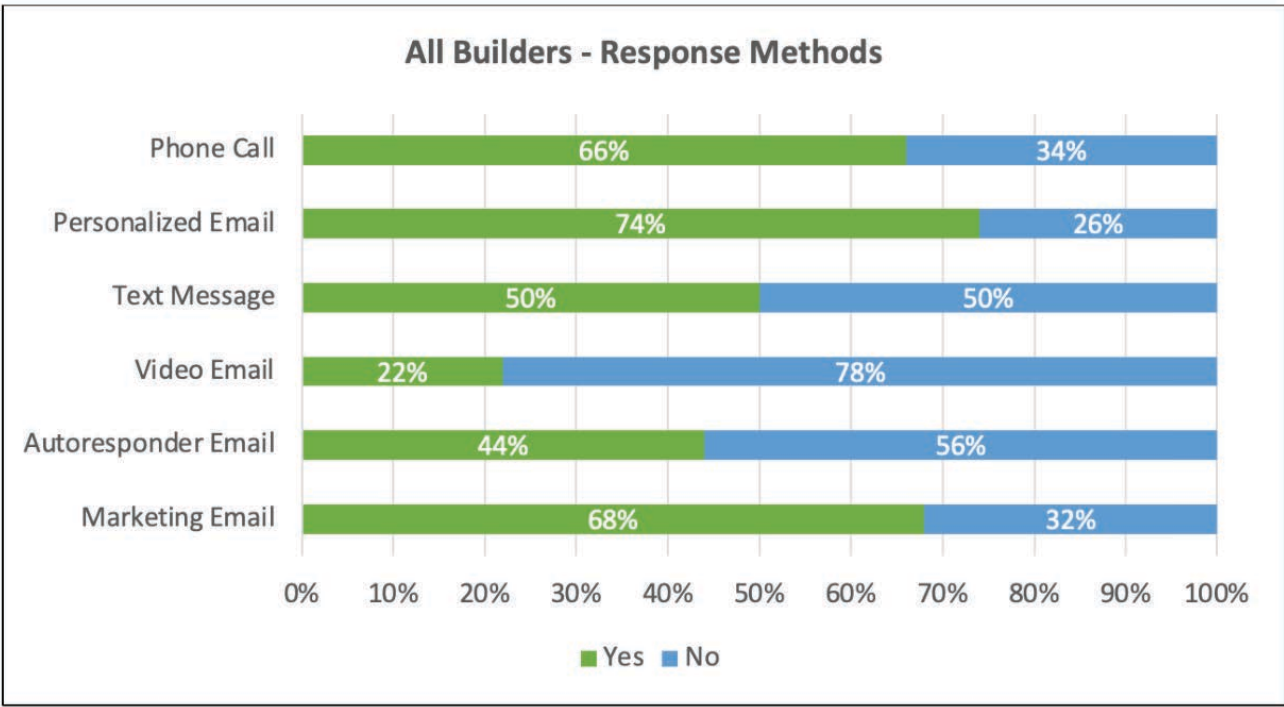
Builders who prominently market that they have a dedicated human to help prospects, create a stronger human touch on their website. In each annual report, we always uncover that some builders who initially didn’t appear to have an OSC based on their websites actually did according to the follow-up emails. Of the builders who did have OSCs, only 49% had an actual web presence. This is down from 65% the previous year, and shows a continual decline in the number of builders willing to use their OSCs as the face of the website.

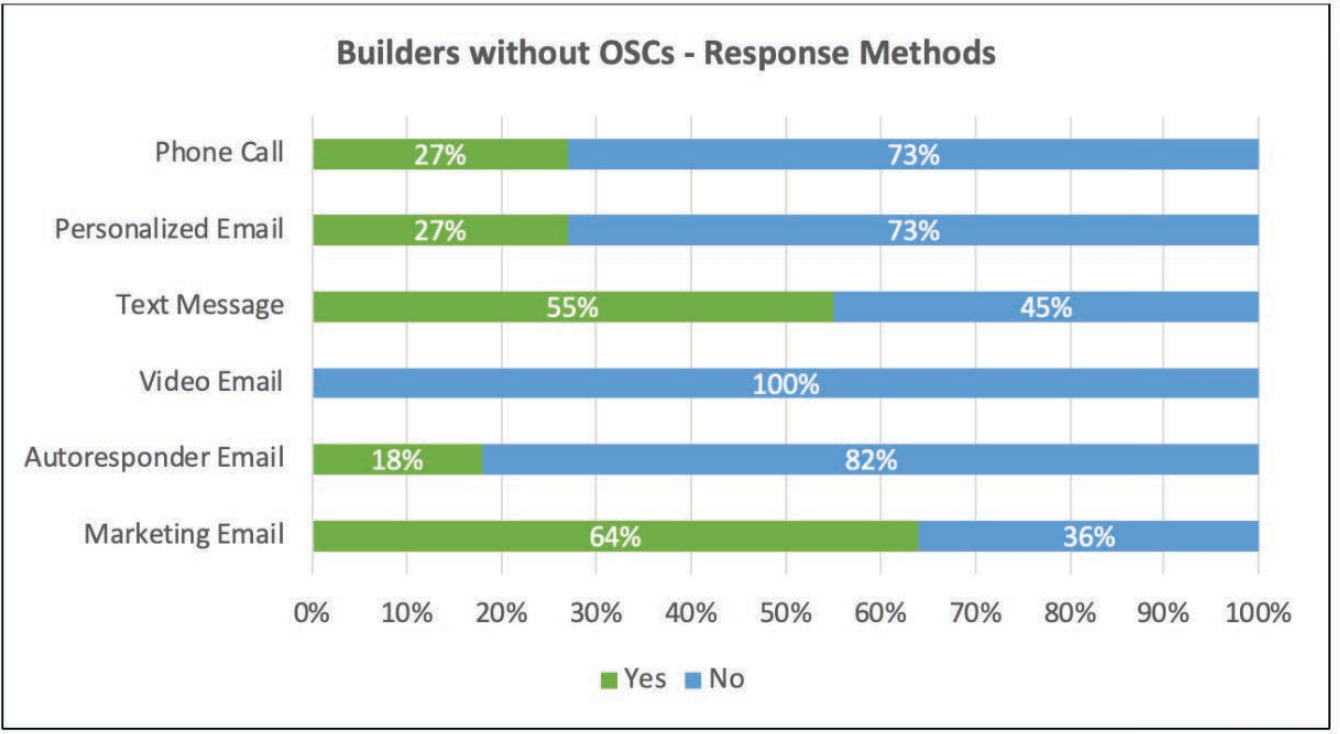
Comparing the Builder Sub-Groups: Who has OSCs and OSC Web Presence in 2024

Detailed information regarding who has OSCs and OSC web presence for the five builder sub-groups is included in the Report Appendix.

HOW DID BUILDERS RESPOND TO THE INITIAL INQUIRY?

Initial responses on follow-up should be fast and personalized, and it should be across multiple contact channels. Not all buyers want to communicate in the same way. Some will respond to calls while others prefer emails or even text messages.





HOW QUICKLY DID BUILDERS RESPOND TO THE INITIAL INQUIRY?

When a buyer finally reaches out, they’ve likely been researching you for days, weeks or months – maybe even years. If they reach out to someone for more information via an online form, live chat or a phone call, we’ve got to be prepared to reply to them as quickly as possible. Ideally, we should begin our follow-up in 5 minutes or less whenever possible.

We created a scale we will use throughout our report to indicate speed to lead.

Response Time - Scale					
Preferred	Desirable	Reasonable	Bordering on Unacceptable	Ridiculous	Shameful
5 minutes or less	Within 30 minutes	Within 4 hours	Within 24 Hours	Beyond 1 day	Never Responded

COMPARING ALL BUILDERS TO THOSE WITH AND WITHOUT OSCS: SPEED - PERSONALIZED EMAIL RESPONSES IN 2024

Speed is decreasing – last year we had at least 4% of inquiries answered in 5 minutes or less via email compared to none this year. Only 14% were answered in 30 minutes or less compared to 20% in 2023. While this starts to look bleak, the good news is that only 26% of builders never followed up this year, compared to 34% the previous year.

In 2024, there were 11 more builders with OSCs than there were in 2023. But the results continue to slip. Builders without OSCs maintain a steady consistency, but it's nothing to brag about!

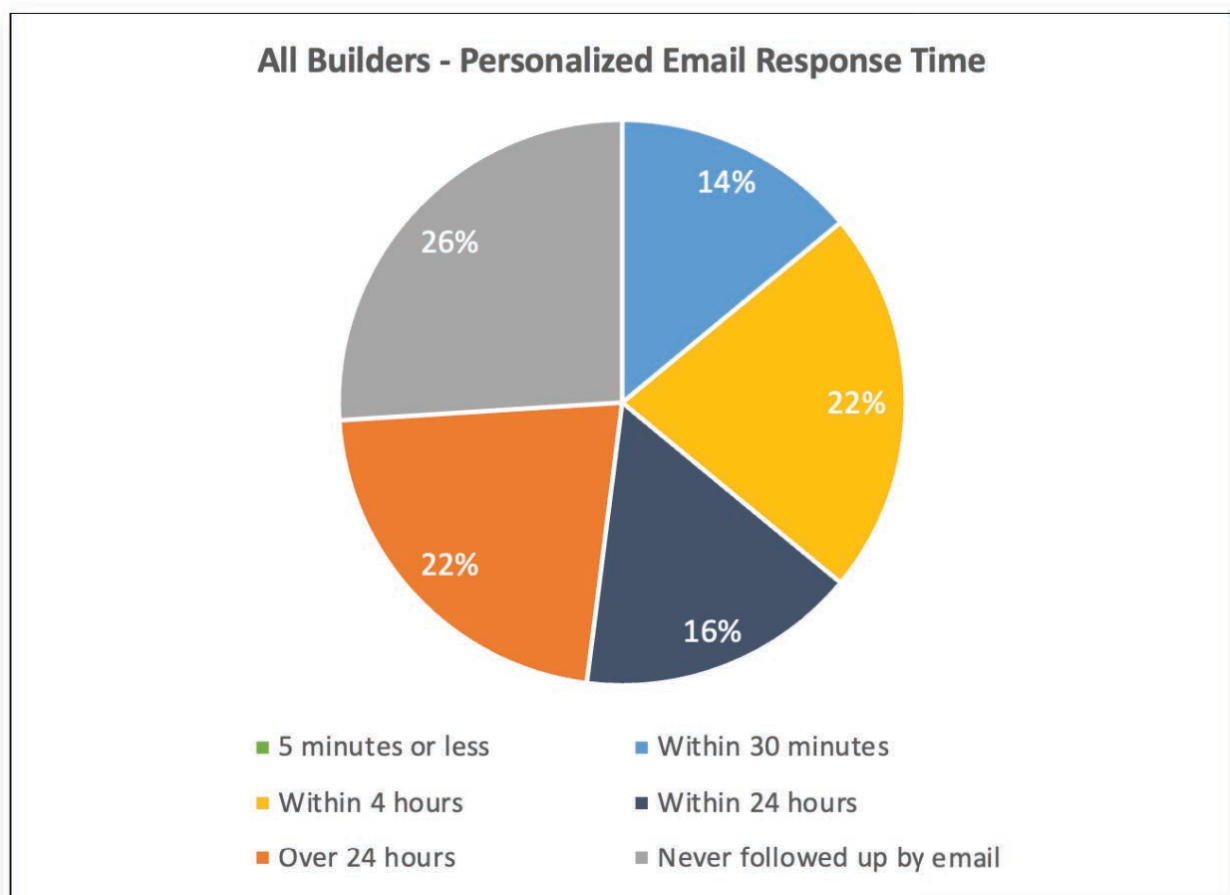
Let's break this down and look at a few key points:

In 2023: 3% of OSCs never sent a single personalized email (1 out of 28 OSCs).

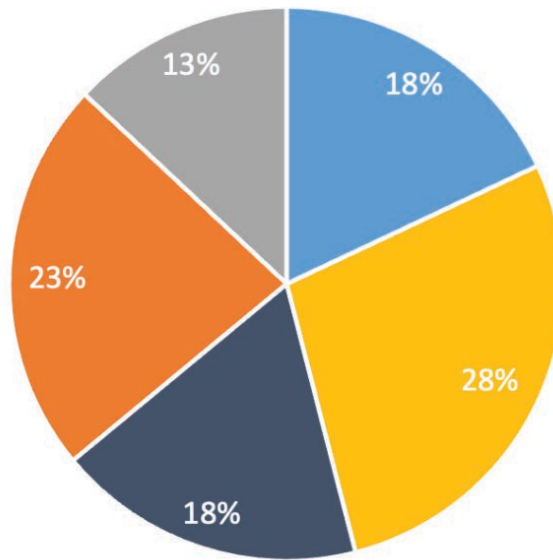
In 2024: 13% of OSCs never sent a single personalized email (8 out of 39 OSCs).

In 2023: 77% of builders without OSCs never sent a personal email (17 out of 22).

In 2024: 73% of Builders without OSCs never sent a personal email (8 out of 11).

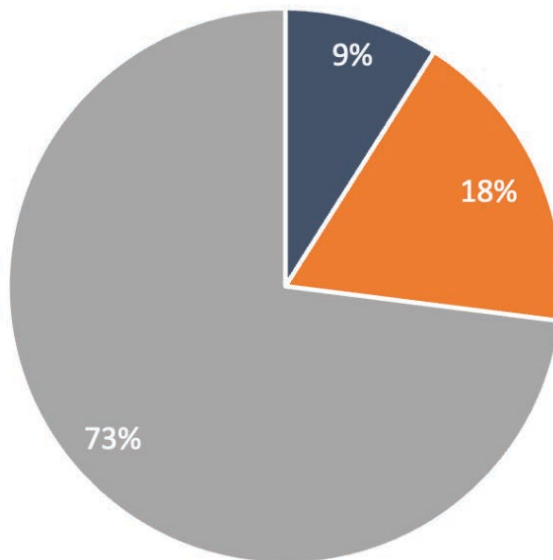


Builders with OSCs - Personalized Email Response Time



- 5 minutes or less
- Within 30 minutes
- Within 4 hours
- Within 24 hours
- Over 24 hours
- Never followed up by email

Builders without OSCs - Personalized Email Response Time



- 5 minutes or less
- Within 30 minutes
- Within 4 hours
- Within 24 hours
- Over 24 hours
- Never followed up by email

COMPARING THE BUILDER SUB-GROUPS: SPEED - PERSONALIZED EMAIL RESPONSE TIMES IN 2024

5 Minutes or Less (Preferred):

- 0% of all builders sent a personalized email in 5 minutes or less
- This number is down 100% from last year's report

Within 30 Minutes (Desirable):

- 14% of all builders sent a personalized email within 30 minutes
- This number is down 30% from last year's report

Within 4 Hours (Reasonable):

- 22% of all builders sent a personalized email within 4 hours
- This is up 22% from last year's report

Within 24 Hours but Greater than 4 Hours (Bordering on Unacceptable):

- 16% of all builders that responded in this window
- Data not found

Beyond 1 Day (Ridiculous):

- 22% of all builders took more than a day to respond
- This is up 120% from last year's report

Never Responded (Shameful):

- 26% of all builders never followed up by email
- This is down 24% from last year's report

SPEED: Comparing the Builder Sub-Groups - Personalized Email Response Times in 2024

Detailed information regarding the response time for the five builder sub-groups is included in the Report Appendix.

SPEED

COMPARING ALL BUILDERS TO THOSE WITH AND WITHOUT OSCS: PHONE RESPONSE TIMES IN 2024

Amazingly, one area of improvement was phone follow-up. This year, 66% of builders followed up by phone. Last year, 60% NEVER picked up the phone.

In 2023, we were shocked that it took one builder 29 days to make a phone call, which broke our previous record of 26 days back in 2021. This year however, more builders made phone calls, and the longest outlying phone call (within the 30-day shop) was 11 days. But don't cheer them on yet, that same builder didn't send their first email until 11 days into follow up...so in reality, it isn't a good look. This builder did not have an OSC and tried no other contact in the rest of the 30 day shop.

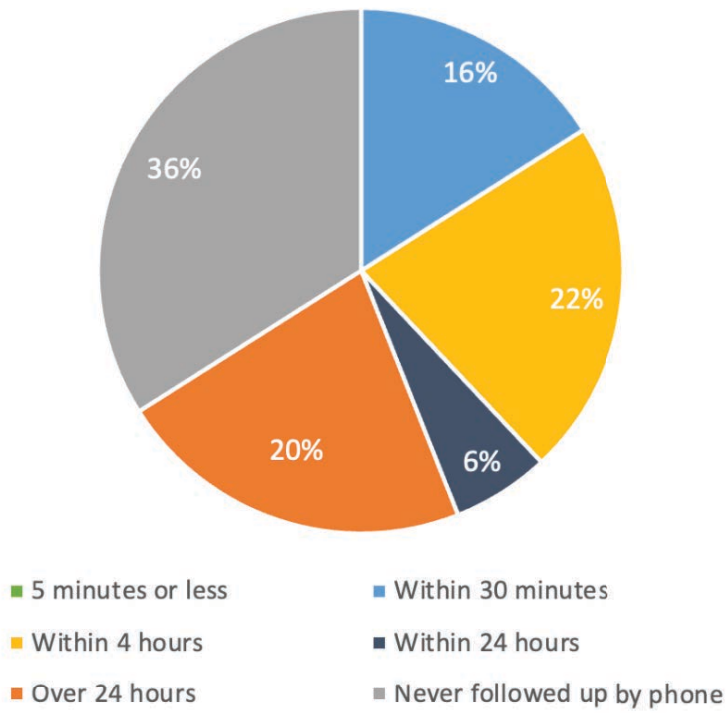
We did clock one builder who finally picked up the phone 43 days after receiving the lead! To their credit, they did send an email in the first 21 minutes, then put the mystery shopper on an automated plan for the next 30 days. No calls were made, but they sent emails. And yes, this builder had an OSC.

Here's more speed to lead data on phone calls:

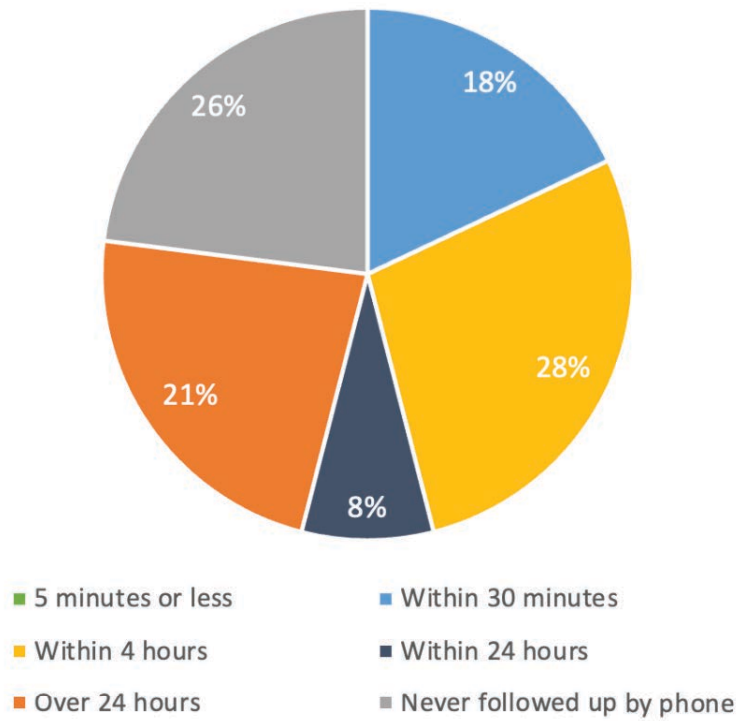
- 36% of builders never followed up by phone. A major improvement from the previous year where 60% never picked up the phone.
- 26% of OSCs never followed up by phone compared to the disappointing number last year when 50% of OSCs didn't pick up the phone.
- 73% of non-OSCs never picked up the phone, compared to 81% phone-shy builders last year.
- 0% of builders picked up the phone in 5 minutes or less compared to 2% of builders who met the speed to lead threshold last year.
- 21% of OSCs took more than a day to respond, while only 9% of OSCs took more than a day last year.

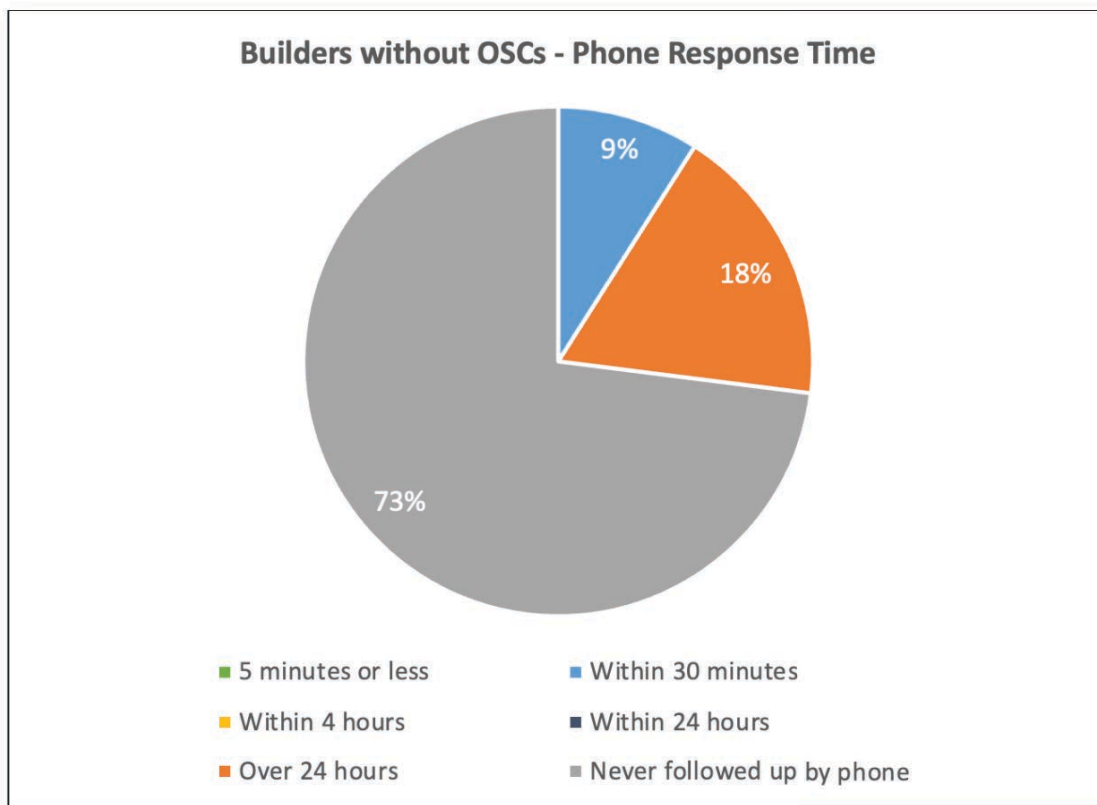
2 out of the 3 builders without OSCs who followed up by phone took over 3 days to respond.

All Builders - Phone Response Time



Builders with OSCs - Phone Response Time





SPEED: Comparing the Builder Sub-Groups - Phone Response Times in 2024

Detailed information regarding the response time for the five builder sub-groups is included in the Report Appendix.

SPEED AND AUTORESPONDERS - DO THEY COUNT?

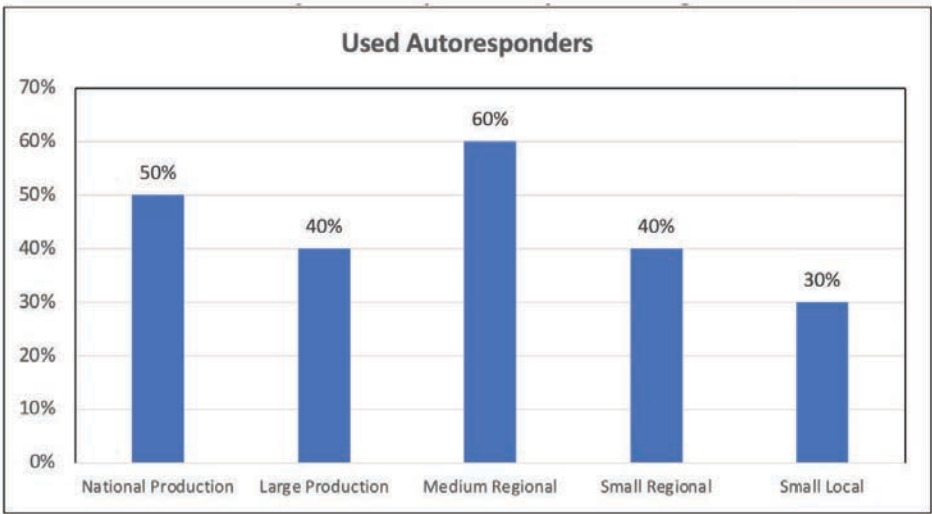
When we look at the speed of email response time, we look for a response to the mystery shopper’s community- or builder-related question submitted with the online form to know this isn’t just an autoresponder. However, if you have a high volume of leads, an autoresponder can buy you some time, or at least allow a prospective buyer to know someone will be with them shortly (hopefully). And there is no rule that says an autoresponder can’t sound warm and personal.

When we looked at the use of autoresponders, this is what we found:

Autoresponder Usage by Builder Group - Comparing 2024-2023

Group	2024	2023	Difference
All Builders	44%	50%	12% decrease
Builders with OSCs	51%	56%	9% decrease
Builders without OSCs	18%	38%	53% decrease

All Builders by Sub-Group: Autoresponder Usage in 2024



PERSONALIZED EMAILS VS. MARKETING EMAILS

While it's important to have marketing messages regularly distribute to your database, personalized emails are much more likely to elicit a response. A message can simultaneously sound personalized and yet be automated. Automation is not the death of personalization; you just need to monitor how and when you are using it.

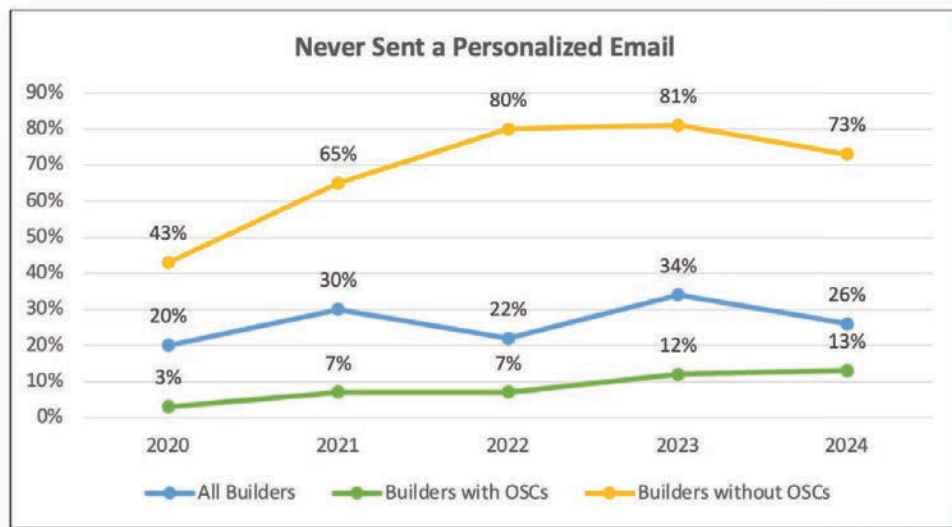
You should be auditing your messaging every quarter and adjusting whenever there are sharp changes in the market, in your communities or your company. This is especially important if you've set up a lot of automation, as it is a recipe for sending out information that is not applicable to certain situations.

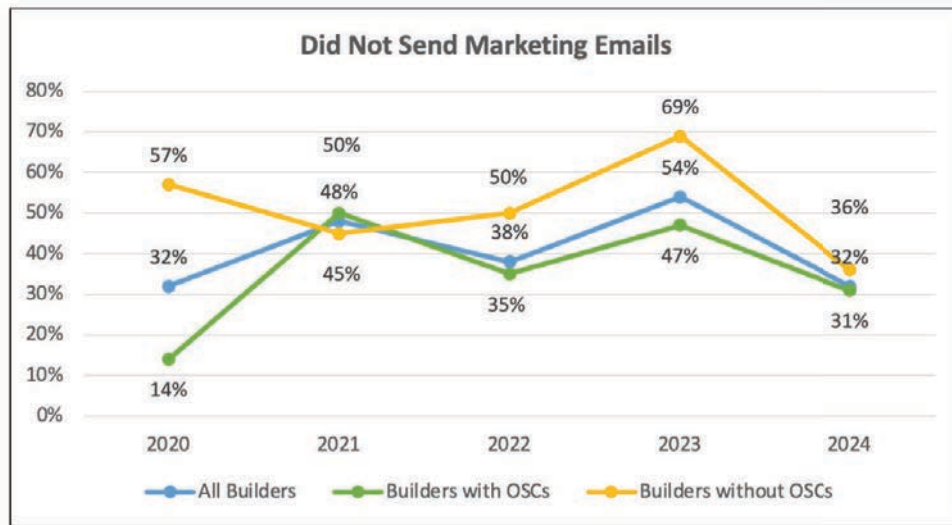
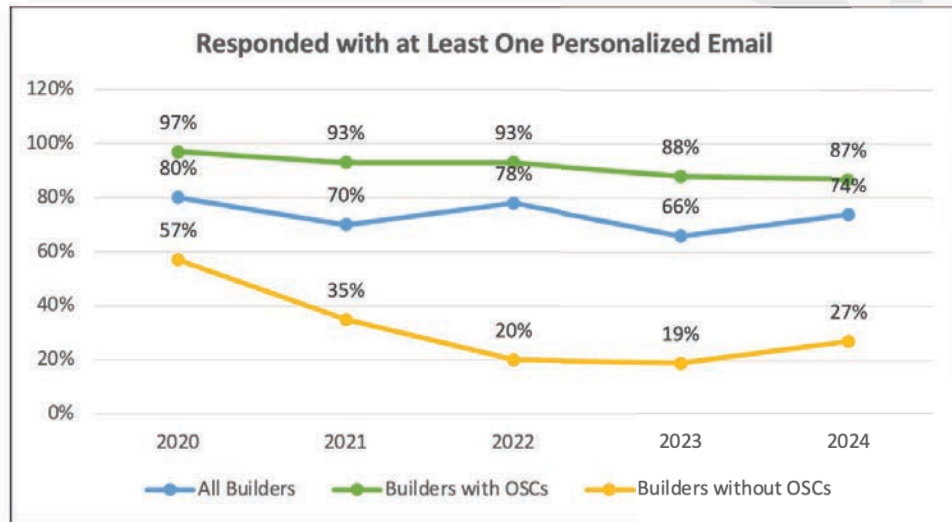
If lead volume is dropping off and it's possible to remove some of the automation for more customized and personalized emails, the response factor will be stronger. But if you don't remove automation, at the very least, you must make sure the messaging is still on target.

Comparing our most recent mystery shop results to prior years, we found:

When looking at the data on never sending a personalized email, we see that there is a tiny improvement of builders without OSCs sending emails. Overall, it still is disheartening to see the huge year-over-year decrease in email follow-up.

While the number of builders with OSCs has increased, the decline in follow up indicates a lack of understanding or accountability in the role. Still, overall, builders with OSCs are better, by leaps and bounds, at their follow-up than builders without them.

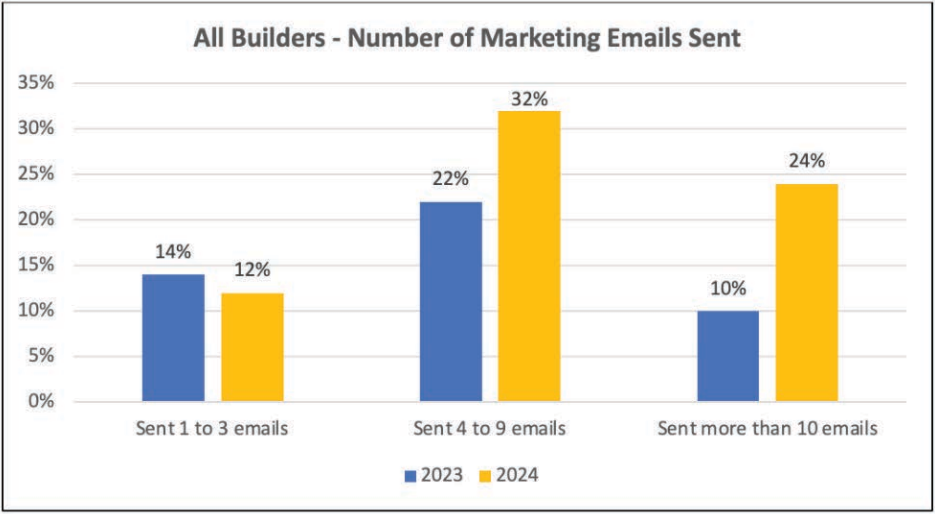




Marketing Emails - These are always different than the personal follow-up sent by the OSCs. These usually include pictures, are templated, and are worded as marketing messaging instead of personal contact.

One builder sent 38 marketing emails in a 30-day period, with another close behind at 26. Both supposedly had OSCs, were national builders, and did send what looked like an initial email from the OSC. Only one attempted a single phone call. All these factors create a recipe for unsubscribe. If you have an OSC, set your program up in a way that is valuable to the company and the prospect. Make your OSC emails count by designing them to look different from your marketing emails. Your marketing emails are pretty templates and sound like marketing. Your OSC emails are more personalized, warm and don't sound like an ad for your homes.

In a 30-day period:



FREQUENCY AND DIVERSITY OF TOUCH-POINTS

Quick follow-up is crucial, but persistence matters, too. Buyers are busy and may not respond to your first outreach. Strong CRMs make personalized follow-up plans easy—automated but human-like. The key is blending channels: email, video, text and calls.

Remember, buyers are likely browsing competitors, so stand out with diverse touch-points. Not everyone responds to emails, but a video or text might grab their attention. Equip your team with the right tools to connect and convert.

Frequency of the Messaging

Taking a “one and done” approach is not the way to convert marketing dollars into leads. An inquiry is just the first step in lead generation. It’s important to try to get a response. That’s why frequency and creativity in your messaging is so important. Remember this is not a cold call, it’s a warm lead and someone who has asked for information. Consistent, persistent follow up is the name of the game.

Of those that responded with personalized emails:

- 16% of all builders who responded never sent more than 1 email – this is a 42% decrease from last year.
- 38% of all builders sent 5 or more personal emails – this is a 38% increase over last year’s numbers.
- Of those that sent 5 or more emails, 100% were OSCs.

Of those that responded by phone:

- 24% of all builders who made one call never attempted another. This is down 8% over last year’s numbers.
- 30% of all builders made 2 or more phone calls. This is up almost 67% from last year.
- Of those that made more than one phone call, 100% were OSCs.

Of those that responded by text or video emails:

- 50% of all builders sent text messages – 76% were from OSCs.
- 22% of all builders sent video emails – 100% of those were OSCs.

Overall, 68% of builders had 5 or more touch points with 2 or more types of follow up.

DIVERSITY OF TOUCH-POINTS

This is important in any follow-up process. People will respond differently to different types of contact. Phone calls and emails are not dead, and video has a high engagement rate when done right.

Personalized Emails - 26% of all builders in 2024 never followed up by email. This is an improvement from last year, where 34% of builders never followed up by email.

Phone Calls - 36% of all builders in 2024 never followed up by phone, another improvement from last year when 60% of builders never followed up by phone.

Video Emails - Video emails are on the rise with 22% of builders utilizing the tool, whereas last year, only 12% took the time to send video emails.

Text Messages – Text messaging has skyrocketed from past years with 50% of builders using text, a huge leap from last year at only 22%.



DIVERSITY OF THE CONTACT Comparing the Builder Sub-Groups in 2024

Detailed information regarding the diversity of contact for the five builder sub-groups is included in the Report Appendix.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The 2024 report highlights significant progress in diversifying follow up channels and persistence. Text messaging usage skyrocketed to 50% of builders, while video email adoption nearly doubled to 22%, demonstrating stronger engagement strategies. Builders sending 5 or more personalized emails rose by 38%, and non-responses via email and phone declined significantly, showcasing improvements in outreach frequency and consistency. Additionally, 68% of builders achieved five or more touch-points across multiple channels, reflecting a growing commitment to engaging prospective buyers effectively.

Needs Improvement

Despite progress, critical gaps remain. OSC web presence declined sharply to 49%, weakening the human touch on builder websites. Response times worsened, with no builders meeting the 5-minute benchmark and fewer responding within 30 minutes compared to last year. Furthermore, 13% of OSCs failed to send a single personalized email, and 26% neglected phone follow-ups entirely. Over-reliance on autoresponders and declining urgency in follow-ups indicate missed opportunities for timely and meaningful engagement.

In Summary

This study highlights the critical need to value every lead, as each inquiry represents a potential buyer on their journey to homeownership. First responders play a pivotal role in setting the tone for this journey, emphasizing the importance of timely, personalized and meaningful engagement. To improve outcomes in 2025, builders must focus on creating replicable processes that ensure consistency and efficiency across all touchpoints. Structured training for OSCs and sales teams is essential to equip them with the skills to handle inquiries effectively and build trust with buyers. By prioritizing training, structure and the implementation of scalable processes, builders can enhance customer engagement and maximize the value of every lead.

Paint by Numbers

Numbers don't lie. This year's numbers reveal a widening chasm between the performance of builders with OSCs and those without. Builders with OSCs consistently outperform their counterparts, achieving significantly higher rates of follow-up diversity, frequency and responsiveness. OSC-led teams accounted for 100% of all video emails and the majority of text follow-ups, highlighting their ability to engage leads through varied and effective methods. In contrast, non-OSC builders rely heavily on minimal or automated responses, leading to missed opportunities and weaker buyer engagement. This gap emphasizes the critical role of OSCs in lead conversion and underscores the need for non-OSC builders to invest in similar structured sales programs.

How do you think you'd measure up?

Mystery shopping your entire sales process including lead initiation, appointment setting, on-site visits and follow-up is an excellent way to determine whether a team needs more training. Melinda Brody & Company offers a comprehensive mystery shopping package to evaluate both the online and on-site teams. Please ask about its 45-day online mystery shop bundled with an on-site video shop.

Do you need trainers?

Once you have the shop results and you don't have an in-house trainer to work with your OSCs and sales associates, the two Leah's can help. Leah Turner with Melinda Brody & Company can bring her expertise and decades of training experience to your onsite team and Leah Fellows with Blue Gypsy Inc. can bring her online sales expertise to improve your online sales program.

Do you need more information on how to set up an online sales program or audit your current program for success?

For more information on how, when and why to use each follow-up type and to set up a winning online sales program, Blue Gypsy Inc. is your go-to resource. Blue Gypsy Inc. specializes in online sales counselor consulting and training, providing detailed insights and help to get the best out of your lead management and development. Utilize a free consultation to find out more about what you might need.

Is your marketing designed to drive leads and engage your buyers?

Marketing always needs to be on point. If your lead generation is not where it should be or you'd like professionals to look at your marketing campaigns and provide insight and ideas, then reach out to Denim Marketing.

APPENDIX

All Builders by Sub-Group: Autoresponder Usage in 2024

Sub-Group	Builders Shopped	Have OSCs	OSC Web Presence
National Production Builders	10	80%	30%
Large Production Builders	10	80%	60%
Medium Regional Builders	10	90%	50%
Small Regional Builders	10	70%	40%
Small Local Builders	10	70%	20%
Total	50	78%	38%

SPEED

Comparing the Builder Sub-Groups: Personalized Email Response Times in 2024

ALL BUILDERS

Sub-Group (All Builders)	Total #	5 Min. or Less	Within 30 Min.	Within 4 Hours	Within 24 hours	Over 24 Hours	Never Responded
National Production Builders	10	0%	20%	30%	20%	20%	10%
Large Production Builders	10	0%	10%	30%	10%	20%	30%
Medium Regional Builders	10	0%	20%	10%	10%	30%	30%
Small Regional Builders	10	0%	20%	10%	0%	40%	30%
Small Local Builders	10	0%	0%	30%	40%	00%	30%

BUILDERS WITH OSCs

Sub-Group (Builders with OSCs)	Total #	5 Min. or Less	Within 30 Min.	Within 4 Hours	Within 24 Hours	Over 24 Hours	Never Responded
National Production Builders	8	0%	25%	38%	25%	12%	0%
Large Production Builders	8	0%	12%	38%	12%	25%	13%
Medium Regional Builders	9	0%	22%	11%	11%	33%	23%
Small Regional Builders	7	0%	29%	14%	0%	43%	14%
Small Local Builders	7	0%	0%	43%	43%	0%	14%

BUILDERS WITHOUT OSCs

Sub-Group (Builders without OSCs)	Total #	5 Min. or Less	Within 30 Min.	Within 4 Hours	Within 24 Hours	Over 24 Hours	Never Responded
National Production Builders	2	0%	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%
Large Production Builders	2	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Medium Regional Builders	1	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Small Regional Builders	3	0%	0%	0%	0%	34%	66%
Small Local Builders	3	0%	0%	0%	34%	0%	66%

SPEED

Comparing the Builder Sub-Groups: Phone Response Times in 2024

ALL BUILDERS

Sub-Group (All Builders)	Total #	5 Min. or Less	Within 30 Min.	Within 4 Hours	Within 24 Hours	Over 24 Hours	Never Called
National Production Builders	10	0%	30%	20%	0%	20%	30%
Large Production Builders	10	0%	20%	40%	0%	10%	30%
Medium Regional Builders	10	0%	20%	10%	10%	20%	40%
Small Regional Builders	10	0%	0%	10%	20%	40%	30%
Small Local Builders	10	0%	10%	30%	0%	20%	40%

BUILDERS WITH OSCs

Sub-Group (Builders with OSCs)	Total #	5 Min. or Less	Within 30 Min.	Within 4 Hours	Within 24 Hours	Over 24 Hours	Never Called
National Production Builders	8	0%	25%	25%	0%	25%	25%
Large Production Builders	8	0%	25%	50%	0%	12%	13%
Medium Regional Builders	9	0%	22%	11%	11%	22%	34%
Small Regional Builders	7	0%	0%	13%	29%	29%	29%
Small Local Builders	7	0%	14%	43%	0%	29%	14%

BUILDERS WITHOUT OSCs

Sub-Group (Builders without OSCs)	Total #	5 Min. or Less	Within 30 Min.	Within 4 Hours	Within 24 Hours	Over 24 Hours	Never Called
National Production Builders	2	0%	50%	0%	0%	0%	50%
Large Production Builders	2	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Medium Regional Builders	1	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Small Regional Builders	3	0%	0%	0%	0%	67%	33%
Small Local Builders	3	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%

DIVERSITY OF THE CONTACT IN 2024

All Builders by Sub-Group: Diversity of the Contact in 2024

Sub-Group (All Builders)	Total #	Sent more than 1 personalized email in the first 30 days	Made more than 1 phone call in the first 30 days	Sent at least 1 video email	Sent at least 1 text	Sent at least 1 marketing email
National Production Builders	10	70%	30%	30%	50%	70%
Large Production Builders	10	60%	40%	20%	80%	60%
Medium Regional Builders	10	50%	40%	20%	40%	60%
Small Regional Builders	10	50%	20%	20%	40%	80%
Small Local Builders	10	60%	20%	20%	40%	70%

Builders with OSCs by Sub-Group: Diversity of the Contact in 2024


Sub-Group (Builders with OSCs)	Total #	Sent more than 1 personalized email in the first 30 days	More than 1 phone call in the first 30 days	Sent at least 1 video email	Sent at least 1 text	Sent at least 1 marketing email
National Production Builders	8	75%	38%	38%	50%	75%
Large Production Builders	8	75%	50%	25%	88%	75%
Medium Regional Builders	9	56%	44%	22%	33%	67%
Small Regional Builders	7	71%	29%	29%	43%	71%
Small Local Builders	7	71%	29%	29%	29%	70%

Builders without OSCs by Sub-Group: Diversity of the Contact in 2024

Sub-Group (Builders without OSCs)	Total #	Sent more than 1 personalized email in the first 30 days	More than 1 phone call in the first 30 days	Sent at least 1 video email	Sent at least 1 text	Sent at least 1 marketing email
National Production Builders	2	50%	0%	0%	50%	50%
Large Production Builders	2	0%	0%	0%	50%	0%
Medium Regional Builders	1	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
Small Regional Builders	3	0%	0%	0%	33%	100%
Small Local Builders	3	34%	0%	0%	66%	100%



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