

# Proposals made perfect

by Leslie Stevens

A lot is at stake when a builder engages the services of a technology integrator. Success starts with getting work and timetables agreed upon in writing

**W**hen homebuilders engage the services of a home technology integrator, a well-written proposal is the starting point for any successful project. An effective proposal clearly maps out all aspects of a job so that there is little room for mistakes. It effectively communicates exactly what, how, and when specific aspects of the installation will be done, not to mention specific products that will be installed and total cost. All elements of the project should be included to ensure project accuracy. Technology integrators handle a wide variety of wiring installation needs — including in-wall and in-ceiling audio, home theater systems, home security systems, computer and online access lines, and lighting control systems. Whatever the needs, if even one element of a proposal is missing, it can dramatically affect the outcome of the installation. Generally speaking, one of two scenarios will occur:

1. Builders will have to re-work and/or change construction plans. This might delay project for other subcontractors (e.g. the primary electrician, drywall installers, etc), costing extra time and money.
2. System integrators will have to change their design, costing them money, which they will probably

pass onto the builder. Either way, it will result in higher costs and wasted time. The net result will be frustration and disagreement between the builder and integrator—and ultimately the homeowner.

ExecDigital asked Tim Bigoness, vice president of marketing at D-Tools, for his advice on what should be included when drafting a proposal between builder and integrator. D-Tools, based in Concord, Calif., produces a software application that helps integrators to create detailed designs and manage projects with data-driven proposals. Here are Bigoness's thoughts on how to make sure builder and integrator are in agreement on who does what, and what completing the job really means.

## **ELEMENTS THE INSTALLER NEEDS TO INCLUDE TO ENSURE WORK IS DONE AS PROMISED**

Timelines are often the most critical aspect for a project, and clearly defining dependencies up front can help eliminate costly delays and miscommunication later on. The integrator and the builder need to discuss timelines of all subcontractors involved so that the project can run smoothly.

There is obvious reliance that needs to be as clearly defined up front. The proposal should identify what work has to be completed prior to running wires or installing any equipment. Furthermore, the integrator needs to specify when they will need access to the house, both inside and out.

A good proposal identifies space requirements for all the electronics to be included in the final design. This is important because otherwise builders might omit certain areas in their framing that are required to house that equipment. All components and accessories should be clearly identified, as well as the access needed to run all wiring from and to all points throughout the house. Furthermore, the installer needs to make certain of product availability for when it needs to be installed.



While there will always be changes and modifications to any project, there is a difference between customer-requested changes and alterations due to inaccurate time and labor estimates.

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## HOW BUILDERS CAN MEASURE THE QUALITY OF A PROPOSAL, AND ULTIMATELY ITS SUCCESS

Builders should first look for the items listed in the sidebar to make sure the system integrator accounts for all potential delays, hazards and challenges. Once the project gets underway, if many alterations and changes need to be made, the original proposal was not accurate.

While there will always be changes and modifications to any project, there is a difference between customer-requested changes and alterations due to inaccurate time and labor estimates. Builders can measure the ultimate success of the proposal by comparing it to the final outcome of the project. ☺

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## Top 10 items to include in a proposal

- Estimated time for rough in, pre-wire, drilling & installation
- Equipment to be installed
- Any dependencies that could negatively impact the schedule (i.e. pre-wire needs to be completed before the sheet rock is installed)
- Labor and allocation
- Client training on how to use the system
- Clean up process every day and at the end of the installation
- Wire requirements and distances for each wire run
- Programming time, including the length of time it takes to program the electronics, & the time it takes to integrate it with different components
- Identify type of structure, such as closed ceiling or vaulted ceilings. Reason, for example, if ceilings are vaulted (no attic space), dealers must drill through walls and ceiling, which will take longer to run wires and cost more
- Identify type of foundation, such as cement slab. Reason, for example, it's difficult to install underneath the house, so another option must be explored for installation

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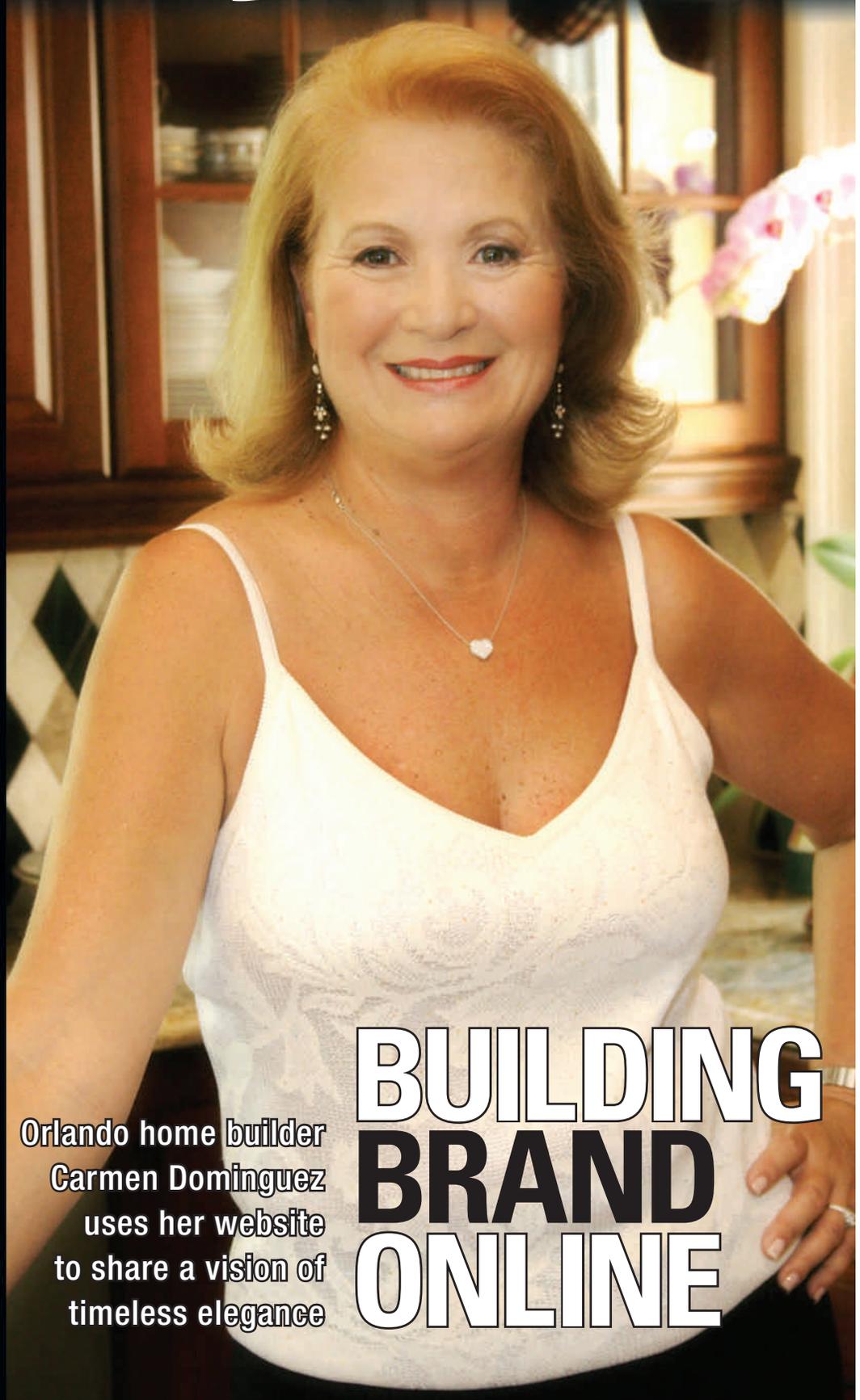
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