



case 1-428-714
January 1, 2008

LivingHomes

Now comes the hard part, which is creating a sustainable business.¹

Steve Glenn
Founder and CEO, LivingHomes

In March 2007, Steve Glenn put down the phone and stared outside at his thirsty yard. He was still living under a temporary occupancy permit after eight months, and the new plants had to be hand-watered daily. Los Angeles County officials said they couldn't find a "mountain or rural inspector" to review the design of his gray-water system for permit approval and system startup.² If he was having these problems in a progressive city like Santa Monica, what would happen to his customers across the country? Would they encounter the same delays and barriers? Would these challenges discourage them from buying his prefabricated green homes? Would the homes' green features be disabled because of inexperienced zoning and building code inspectors? This was no small issue. Even before construction, Santa Monica's zoning laws and height limits reduced the size of the home's modules and required a split-level foundation.³ And these were just a few of the concerns when tapping into the emerging green building market. Glenn wanted to revolutionize the home building industry in the United States by merging product attributes of high-end style and green design with process attributes of home prefabrication and delivery. While each of these may have had independent market representation, few companies linked them all in one offering. He wanted the process of home construction to be not only quicker and less expensive, but also green and beautiful.

LivingHomes' target market included people who "drive Priuses, buy Bosch appliances and Design Within Reach furniture, shop at Whole Foods, and give money to the [Natural Resources Defense Council]."⁴ To serve these customers, LivingHomes selected brand-name architects who specialized in a modern aesthetic. The homes' luxury provided every convenience for the high-end consumer. The homes' "green" attributes provided higher performance, less material and water waste, a healthier environment to live in, and greater energy efficiency than normal construction. And prefabrication embraces mass-production and scale benefits through the notion that customers should be able to buy a house no differently than the way they buy a car—in choosing a product that matches their market segment.

Glenn's thoughts were interrupted by the doorbell and another prospective customer tour of his modern, Ray Kappe-designed home. This was the first LivingHomes structure, and was "installed" in an astonishing eight hours.⁵ The 2,480 square foot house received the very first Platinum Level LEED® for Homes Certification

Published by GlobalLens, a division of the William Davidson Institute at the University of Michigan.



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