
The State of Luxury Residential Web Presence

A 2026 benchmark of 154 firms across 15 states, and the gap that quietly decides referrals.

154

FIRMS EVALUATED

15

STATES

4

DISCIPLINES

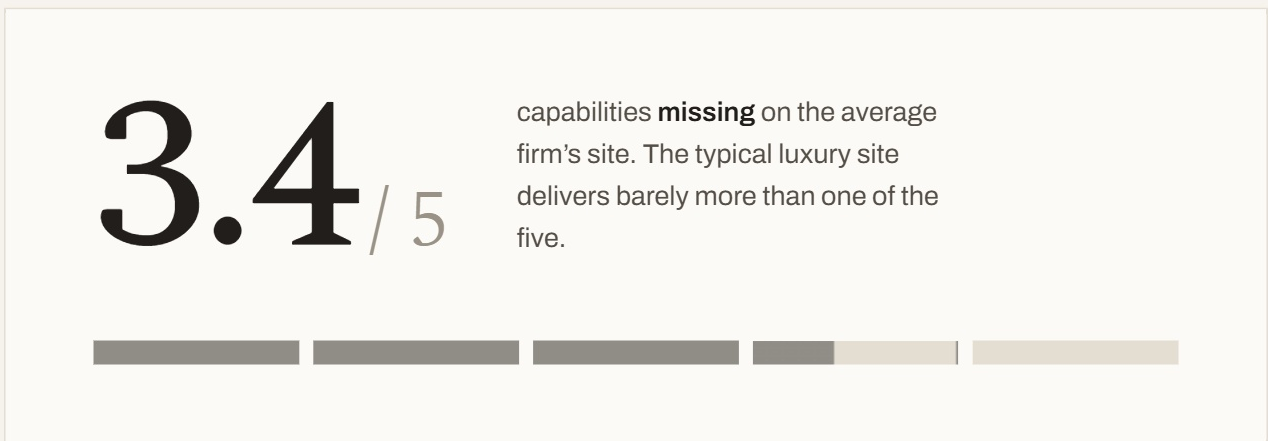
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CAPABILITIES SCORED

THE ONE FINDING THAT MATTERS

In luxury residential, the next client is almost always a referral. Before they call, they search the firm by name, and that single search either confirms the recommendation or quietly undercuts it.

We evaluated the live websites of 154 luxury residential firms across 15 states. The pattern was clear and consistent: these firms do exceptional work and document it beautifully, but they present it through sites built for *browsing*, not for the head-to-head comparison a referred prospect actually makes.



4 in 5

firms were missing at least **three** of the five capabilities.

50%

were missing **four or more** of the five.

Put plainly: most luxury firms have built a site that delivers fewer than two of the five things a referred prospect is looking for.

HOW WE MEASURED IT

The five capabilities a referral site needs

We scored the public sites of 154 custom home builders, residential architects, interior designers, and landscape architects in the high-end segment. Each capability was marked present or absent based on what a referred prospect would actually encounter on the live site. This is a structured assessment, not a survey of opinions.

01 Referral Validation

When someone searches the firm by name, they land on its best work immediately, and the search confirms the recommendation.

02 Portfolio Filtering

A prospect can sort projects by location, style, budget, or scope and find work like their own in seconds, instead of scrolling one long gallery.

03 Dynamic Team Integration

Every project shows the full team and partners behind it, and every team member shows the projects they delivered, so depth is visible by clicking, not by explaining.

04 Team Credibility Showcase

Team pages connect each person to real projects, publications, and partner relationships, not just a headshot and a paragraph.

05 Social Proof

Awards, press, and testimonials are woven through the experience at the moment of decision, not buried on a separate page.

A site that delivers all five confirms the referral. A site that leaves gaps lets a referred buyer talk themselves out of the call.

WHERE THE GAPS ARE

One gap is nearly universal

Portfolio Filtering is the most universal gap: nearly every firm presents its work as a single long gallery that can't be matched to a prospect's own project. Team cross-linking is second: most firms collaborate with architects and designers but never connect those relationships on the site.



Work shown as one long gallery, not filterable to a prospect's project.



Architects and designers not cross-linked to the projects they share.



Awards and press buried, separated, or absent at the decision point.



Team bios disconnected from the projects each person delivered.



The one capability most firms get right — when the name is distinctive and the site is current.

Where Referral Validation breaks is specific and fixable: a name generic enough that directories crowd the result, an identity split across mismatched or stale domains, or a landing page that opens on a mission statement instead of the work.

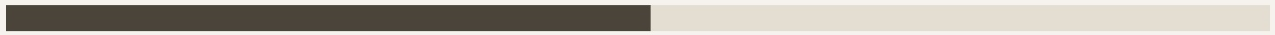
Share of 154 firms missing each capability.

WHERE THE GAPS RUN DEEPEST

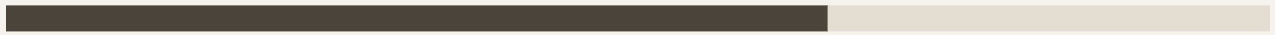
The gap is worst where referral matters most

The gap is national, but not evenly distributed. Firms in established, competitive metros present slightly tighter sites; the deepest gaps cluster in resort, coastal, and mountain markets, where demand is driven by referral and reputation and a polished web presence has never been the thing that wins the next project.

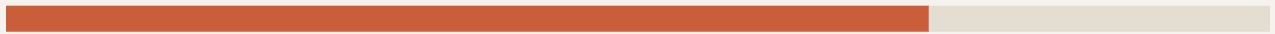
Strongest markets Carolinas, parts of the Southwest 2.4–2.7 / 5



Middle of the field Mountain West, Pacific Northwest, Texas 3.1–3.4 / 5



Deepest-gap markets Resort California, coastal Florida, Montana 3.5–3.8 / 5



The pattern is its own finding: a firm in Carmel, Tahoe, or on the Florida coast is competing on reputation in exactly the moment its website is least ready to carry it.

WHAT THE TYPICAL FIRM LOOKS LIKE

Three firms, one pattern

Three composites, drawn from the assessment, show how the gaps actually present. None is a real firm; each is a pattern that recurred across the field.

CUSTOM BUILDER · MONTEREY, CA

Decades of Old-World craftsmanship, celebrity clients, regional press. The reputation is real and the proof exists — but the testimonials sit on a separate page, the awards are mentioned in passing, and the work is a single gallery with no way to sort it. A prospect who wants coastal estates like their own scrolls past everything to find two. The firm's strength never reaches the screen at the decision point.

COASTAL BOUTIQUE · NEWPORT BEACH, CA

Multimillion-dollar oceanfront projects, a shelf of industry awards, genuinely stunning photography. But the site is built around the founder, the team is a row of headshots disconnected from the projects they led, and the architects and designers who shaped each home are never named on it. The site reads as one person's firm when the work was clearly a collaboration, and the depth a referred client is trying to gauge stays invisible.

MOUNTAIN BUILDER · LAKE TAHOE

Award-winning, published in the mountain-living press, deeply established. The homepage opens on a mission statement; the projects are organized by resort community rather than filterable by what a prospect wants; the press lives on a page few visitors reach. Everything that would confirm the referral is present on the site and absent from the moment that counts.

In every case the raw material is excellent. What is missing is a site structured to put it in front of the right prospect in the right order.

The expensive part is already done

99%

had already invested in professional photography and detailed project documentation.

Across the firms we evaluated, the content was rarely the problem. The expensive, hard-to-replace part is done. What is missing is a foundation that lets that work perform. Filtering a portfolio, cross-linking teams, and connecting projects to the people behind them all require a platform built to manage related content — and most luxury firms are not on one.

48%

on WordPress installs held together by plugins.

2%

on Webflow or a modern platform capable of the job.

51%

serve their sites without a content delivery network.

22%

missing the structured data that wins a brand-name search.

Nearly half are on WordPress installs held together by plugins; another fifth on custom or undetermined stacks; much of the rest on template builders — Squarespace, Wix, Duda — that can't model those relationships at all. Plugin-dependent sites are harder to secure and effectively impossible to maintain without a developer on retainer: the firm owns the site but cannot touch it. This is why integrating the capabilities and moving to a modern platform belong together, and why the work is an *upgrade*, not a *teardown* — the existing work, familiar look, and years of history preserved and refined, while the foundation underneath becomes faster, more secure, legible to search, and maintainable by the firm directly.

The work is done. The platform isn't.

99%

have invested in professional photography and project documentation.

2%

are on a platform built to make that work perform, filter, and cross-link.

The gap between those two numbers is the opportunity.

WHAT IT MEANS

The firms that win the referral moment aren't the ones with the most projects. They're the ones whose sites are structured so a referred prospect instantly sees the right work, the full team behind it, and the proof, in the short window before they decide whether to call.

See how your own site performs against the five capabilities.

Next Drop Design offers a short, no-obligation referral-validation review of your current site.

[Book a Free Consult](#)

or call today at (702) 321-0790.



nextdropdesign.com