



# The future of home

## Picture this: it's your first night in your new home.

Your furniture and belongings are all unpacked and put away in the correct spot, nothing damaged, nothing missing. The utilities are set up so you can check your email and then watch the hockey game. You order pizza from your new local spot, and sit back and relax. Tomorrow, you will check your new mailbox for the bank and insurance documents, all finalized and already on their way to your new address — and a copy of each and every document already stored electronically in your secure home history. In a few days, the lawn maintenance company will come cut your grass. A week after that, your trusted home cleaner will arrive.

You reflect back on the journey into your new home: the search, finance, purchase, move has all been a dream — so seamless, you barely even realized. From beginning to end the journey has been painless and stress-free, your home concierge managing all of the details and controlled at your convenience from a tap of your phone.

While you might think this scenario is pure fantasy, there are thousands of Virtuo clients who would say otherwise. Since 2016, this local Calgary startup has been delivering exceptional move-in experiences on behalf of some of the biggest home builders and community developers across Western Canada, supporting new homeowners to save time and turn the moving pains into an enjoyable new home experience.

Gone is the fragmented and stressful experience we've all come to know and expect when it comes to purchasing and moving into a new home. In its place is a whole new way of doing things, one that is accessible and personalized to the individual needs of every homeowner.

"This transformation has been our mission from the start," says Casey Kachur, CEO of Virtuo. "We've been proving it out on the biggest pain point of the end-to-end journey — the move. We would partner with new home builders and developers, to deliver a personalized move concierge service for their new homeowners. For each client we would get a clear understanding of their situation, requirements and budget. Based on this, we build out a personalized plan — and for the client, the rest is smooth sailing."

As COVID-19 has shown us, technology can play a vital role in making everyday life better. Less need for in-person meetings; ordering meals and delivery on demand; managing

all your finances and banking online — experts estimate the uptake in technology has been accelerated by a decade throughout the pandemic. "At its core, the promise of technology is to deliver what people want or need," says Kachur. "We fundamentally believe that promise should include the most significant purchase of our entire lives — our home."

"With this in mind, we look for how we can leverage or build technology wherever we can to simplify, support, and streamline processes and tasks. We prioritize our development on the real-world impact for our clients — saving either time or money, or adding trust and transparency to the process. For example, we identified people calling multiple movers for a competitive quote often would take up a significant amount of time, particularly when detailing out the contents of your entire house. So now clients can simply take a short video of rooms in their home, and we use computer vision to detect, categorize and estimate the size and weight of every item. It takes clients 2 minutes, and the movers get a detailed packing list allowing a more accurate quote and plan, sent to the client ready to approve. The client feels confident nothing has been missed and with comparable and complete quotes there won't be any nasty surprises on the day."

As much as solving the pains of moving is one thing, Kachur believes there is much, much further to go to truly solve this significant yet painful experience.

"There's so much more than just the move. We've been working with a number of partners here in Alberta to make this end-to-end process seamless, rather than a collection of necessary services in the journey to your new home. Our goal is to deliver the best home purchase experience possible — and make people wonder why this hasn't been solved previously."

Virtuo isn't alone in thinking this system is ripe for disruption. Executive Chairman of Hopewell Group, Sanders Lee, believes the entire process needs to be redesigned to work better for everyone involved.

"I believe this vision of a connected homeownership journey is the future — and has benefits for both homeowners and businesses involved. Given the importance of home to people, it makes a lot of sense to build the ecosystem around their needs. Everyone is looking for solutions to their needs rather than just individual services, so empowering homeowners to take control of their experience is extremely powerful," says Lee.

Lee also sees this as an accessibility and mobility issue, that can give people more flexibility and control.

"Removing the friction that makes the home purchase painful could also mean more opportunities for people — the ability to move and change your home more regularly to meet changing needs and desires."

It's not just traditional industry leaders who believe technology can play a part in providing a better experience. Dan Belostotsky, Founder of HonestDoor.com has set out to demonstrate how technology can make information more accessible, and add value and trust within the larger journey.

"Technology and real estate are intersecting beautifully like never before. Consumer and industry empowerment through a transparent process are key to a successful transaction, and will provide significant value to homeowners," says Belostotsky.

The new home journey and subsequent move in are just one half of this story. "It's where we direct most of our attention — as the time we are making a lot of the important long-term decisions," says Kachur. "Finding your new home is one thing — but unfortunately the backward system continues once you've moved in and settled!"

Rebuilding this experience requires buy-in from the providers in the ecosystem to truly deliver a system centred around people, and already a number of builder and community developers want to be a part of delivering this future.

One such partner is Qualico Communities, who is currently working with Virtuo to roll out this redesigned home living experience in 7 of their Calgary communities. Daisy Lieu, Marketing Manager at Qualico Communities believes this is an opportunity to provide more to support communities — on their terms.

"We know how important the move-in is for a great new home experience — and now we're focused on elevating the ongoing experience for residents living within Qualico communities," said Lieu. "Providing a central home hub through the Virtuo platform allows for better communication throughout the community. Now we are able to quickly connect with residents on what's important to them, supporting a great experience long after a homeowner has moved in."

In the end, transformation of a system takes momentum from people and industry — up until the point where it appears to reach the tipping point and become clearly obvious. Consumers will naturally gravitate to the ecosystem that best meets their needs — and these days it's technology platforms that are providing that value to people.

"From years of experience in this industry, and being homeowners ourselves, we know first-hand the frustrations people experience," Kachur muses. "People deserve better — and we're building the platform to connect the experience, but no one party can solve it alone. It will take a collective effort from all sides of the industries involved to make a difference." And if it is successful?

"We will have positively changed one of the most painful yet significant experiences in people's lives today — and people will wonder how it didn't happen sooner." 🏡

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