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Coming to VR: Austin startup's tools for customizing a new home

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Real estate is rife with digital disruption, and Austin-based MyHouseBy is looking to bring that kind of innovation to the homebuilding industry.

MyHouseBy CEO Gregg Alvarez said the company — an online marketplace for homebuyers — will change the way builders sell homes and make the buying process easier for consumers.

MyHouseBy.com, which initially launched March 15 in San Antonio, allows homebuilders to virtually construct a house they can buy and have built in select neighborhoods. Then the buyers can walk through the home, using 2D or 3D images or immersed in a virtual reality experience if you own a high-priced headset such as Oculus.

Think of Zillow but instead of searching for a move-in ready house on the market it is for building a house from scratch.

Right now, buyers can select from builders such as Bella Vista Homes, Rausch Coleman Homes and Kindred Homes in San Antonio; next month Blackburn Communities and other builders in Austin will join the fold. MyHouseBy plans to expand the service to Houston and Dallas later this year.

Alvarez said builders have been building and selling homes the same way for the last 50 years: they buy land, build a model house, put up signs, hold open houses and hope potential buyers will show up. Buyers then have to drive from neighborhood to neighborhood to assess their options while still looking at many of their customizable options for their new home in a catalog, he said.

Through MyHouseBy, buyers can select where they want to build a home, what amenities they would like nearby, their price range, the style of house they want and what types of rooms they would like to see in their house. Other customizable options include the type of bar or island that should be installed in the kitchen.

Alvarez plans to take MyHouseBy nationwide. He said the platform will save homebuilders millions of dollars because it will do away with the need for model homes.

“It significantly reduces the cost of acquisition and the cost of sale for the builder, so they make more money,” Alvarez said, “and the consumer has a more modernized experience that is more reflexive of how we shop for other goods and services today.”

The use of virtual reality and augmented reality in the real estate industry is growing. More than 14 percent of consumers have used either VR or AR when searching for a home, according to a 2018 study by virtual home-staging startup Roomy, as reported on by real estate publication [Inman](#). Further, seven out of 10 people have viewed a home online before seeing it in person, according to Roomy’s survey that had 1,500 respondents who were looking for a home or had recently bought a home.

Architecture firms are using VR to walk clients through homes they have designed. During South by Southwest San Antonio-based Overland Partners used VR to show off innovative designs for homes built using 3D-printing technology [from Austin startup Icon Technology Inc.](#) Consider MyHouseBy’s platform an extension of that same concept.

Business plan, explained



ARNOLD WELLS/STAFF

MyHouseBy expects to generate revenue in a few ways. First, it will receive "a flat-rate success fee" when it brings a customer to a builder who signs a contract and makes a down payment.

The company will also sell its technology to developers and builders to use on their websites. MyHouseBy offers targeted marketing solutions as well. "We have the ability to help builders and community developers target consumers off of our platform," Alvarez said.

MyHouseBy was the brainchild of architecture firms Gomez Vazquez International and Casas De Mexico, Alvarez said.

Alvarez, who is also a partner at brokerage Hindsight 20/20 Real Estate in Austin and a real estate investor, said he was brought on as a co-founder of MyHouseBy in mid-2017 because of his experience in building consumer-facing internet marketplaces. Alvarez said he was part of the early team Cars.com and helped take it nationwide.

The MyHouseBy platform has been under development since August 2018 and that startup went through Capital Factory's accelerator.

"It's been a Herculean effort — a world-class execution — to get such a complex product developed in such a short amount of time that features machine learning, artificial intelligence, VR ... and do it in eight months on a shoe-string budget," he said. "It's quite an accomplishment."

Recent hires at MyHouseBy include Chief Technology Officer Rich Robison, a former Amazon.com Inc. software development manager who founded health care software maker InPharmics in 2013 (it was acquired by Omnicell in [2017](#)); Senior Marketing Manager Amie Thronson, formerly in marketing for Dell, Walmart and LiveWorld; Senior Vice President Sean McDonald, formerly division manager of homebuilder Gehan Homes.

SunnyHill Financial signed on to provide financial content on MyHouseBy and enabling buyers to prequalify for financing on the site. MetroStudy is providing new construction home data.

MyHouseBy competed as an alternate in the SXSW Pitch Competition this year, giving Alvarez the opportunity to give a one-minute pitch in front of a host of venture capitalists and other potential investors.

MyHouseBy didn't win, but Alvarez said the exposure was invaluable and being at SXSW gave him the opportunity to meet with a variety of potential investors.

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