

BY GARRY UPTON

Over the course of 2009, this space will identify opportunities within customers' homes that you may not have observed in the past. The opportunities are based on a recent homeowner survey conducted by Decision Analyst, Inc.

**Q** *Is the economic downturn causing more homeowners to stay put?*

**A** The new American Home Comfort report is officially out, and there's so much in it, I'm having trouble focusing on what to write about first. Let's start with the decision to replace rather than repair.

While more homeowners are buying with an eye to higher-efficiency, system breakdown or increased service expense are still the main reasons why homeowners replace their HVAC systems. If you keep records on the age of your customers' HVAC systems, you probably have a "war room" map that pinpoints the communities within your city that will require the greatest number of replacements this season.

- Nationally, the average home is 33 years old. The average number of

years lived in that home by its present resident-owner is 11 years. That means that many are content with the home and the neighborhood.

Going forward, we've seen some changes to the length of time residents feel they will remain in the home. Only one in five say they're sure they won't stay more than five years.

Comfort is often an unmet homeowner desire. When compared to ongoing repair costs and uncertainty about fluctuating energy prices, their best decisions will often be for the higher efficiency, improved design systems that you can provide.

This year, there's so much to say about an economy no one can track. However, if trends continue and history repeats itself, even more homeowners will stay in their current homes for a longer period of time. They'll be

more interested in seeing first costs for the equipment versus monthly energy costs going forward. Many, when presented with comparisons, will choose the more efficient unit. They'll also be more interested in added comfort options, especially the Baby Boomer group. You can be especially heroic in helping meet homeowner comfort needs and budget constraints when you help them use government tax credits, utility rebates, and any manufacturer rebates that apply. Needless to say, your bottom line will grow, too.

What steps have you taken to "own" this information and fit it into your sales and service presentations? **B**

**Garry Upton**, of *Decision Analyst, Inc.*, shares his interpretations of its *American Home Comfort Study of homeowners*, and explores what customers look for in HVAC contractors. To learn more about this study, or to purchase it, contact Garry at [gupton@decisionanalyst.com](mailto:gupton@decisionanalyst.com).