



2026 ServiceLink Loan Officer Report

An Originator's Playbook to the Modern Homebuyer

What's inside?

Fix frustrations

Solving borrower constraints:
Loan officers have ideas.

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Digital first

Why originators should be tapping
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Fee education

Borrowers don't know as much
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Introduction

Loan officers view the mortgage loan origination process through a unique lens. Their close proximity to the borrower – from pre-approval all the way to the closing table – provides them with an unparalleled understanding of their mindset, habits, behaviors and needs. Utilizing this firsthand knowledge can help lenders and other key stakeholders in the origination process streamline and enhance their workflows to better meet borrowers' needs and improve the overall experience.

To that end, ServiceLink surveyed 507 loan officers across all generations with at least three years' experience, who work for organizations of all sizes and backgrounds, including national and regional banks, credit unions and independent mortgage banks, digital lenders and brokerages. The majority (53%) of respondents had between six and 15 years of industry experience.

Through their insights – along with the findings of our 2026 ServiceLink State of Homebuying Report, which surveyed 1,554 U.S. residents (18+) who purchased a home in the last two years – we pulled together this playbook to guide originators through the steps to better meet the needs of today's borrowers. These findings will help originators identify and eliminate borrower frustrations, meet their technology desires and provide education to reduce knowledge gaps, leading to a winning season.

Play #1: Fix frustrations

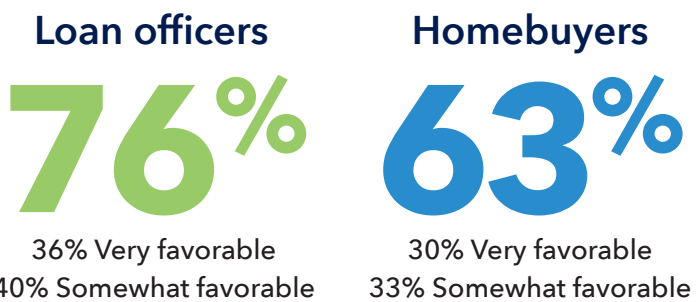


PLAY #1:

Fix frustrations

Amid the challenges of the current housing market, loan officers largely retain a positive outlook, with 76% viewing current buying conditions as favorable. But while they consider the housing market to be approachable overall, they still cite areas for improvement within the mortgage process itself.

In 2026, conditions for buying are favorable

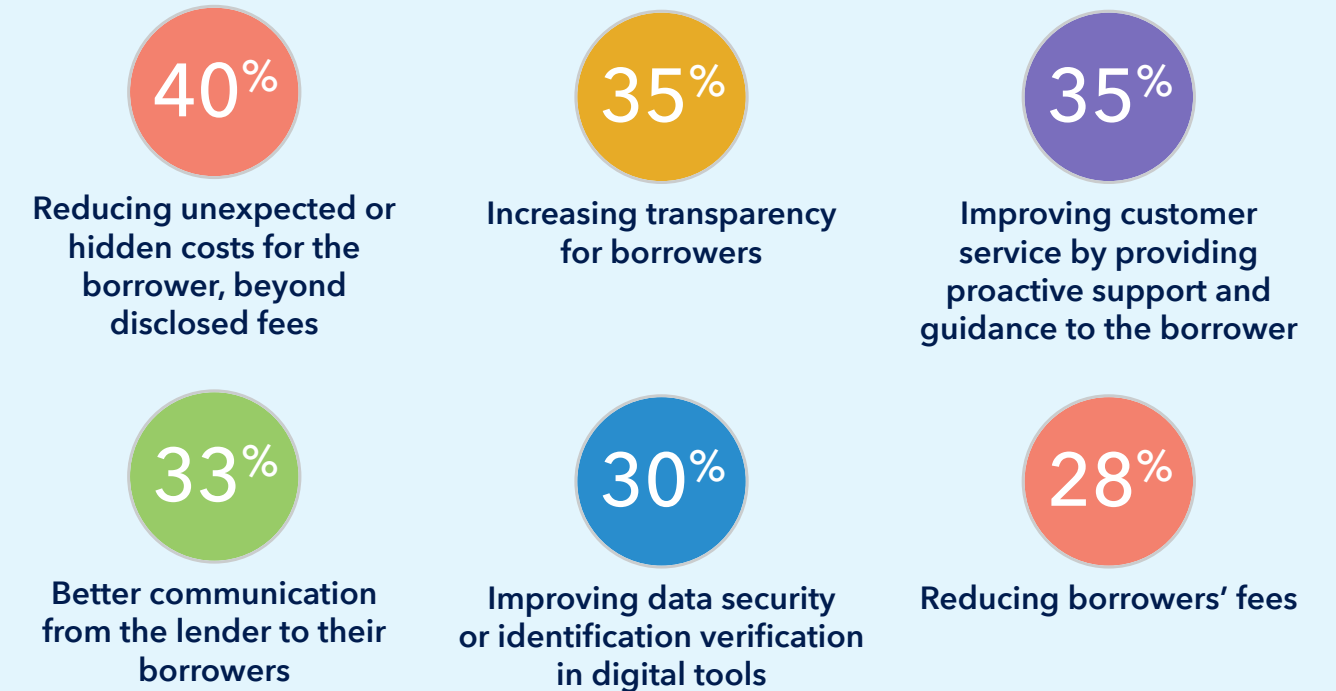


"[Borrowers are] surprised by last-minute fees, lack of guidance, feeling unprepared and not receiving clear, proactive advice [and] poor communications."
– Male, millennial, brokerage

Source: 2026 ServiceLink Loan Officer Report and 2026 ServiceLink State of Homebuying Report. Question: In terms of buying a home, what is your outlook on the housing market in 2026? Conditions for buying are...5-point scale, top 2 boxes, very favorable, somewhat favorable.
Source: 2026 ServiceLink Loan Officer Report. Question: In terms of areas of improvement within the mortgage process, which of the below should the industry focus on most? Select up to 3. Top 6 boxes.

PLAYING THE PERCENTAGES

Which areas of improvement within the mortgage process should the industry focus on most?



Many loan officers have identified areas of improvement the industry should focus on to make the mortgage process better for borrowers. It will take intentionality for originators to implement these improvements – as it includes more targeted borrower education and transparency about the mortgage fees and origination costs, as well as proactive communication to consumers with key milestone updates along the way.



PLAYING THE PERCENTAGES

What would borrowers like to change about the mortgage process?

When asked what they thought their borrowers would like to change, loan officers pointed to a speedier process (65%), greater transparency (62%) and less paperwork (52%) – their thoughts aligning closely with 2026 ServiceLink State of Homebuying Report respondents. These desires point to solutions for originators like using digital tools that can help streamline the mortgage process, providing better education to borrowers on fees and timelines and improving communication so borrowers aren’t left feeling uncertain about their next steps.

Speedier process

 **65%** Loan officers
39% Homebuyers

More transparency into the steps and fees

 **62%** Loan officers
39% Homebuyers

Less paperwork, more electronic forms

 **52%** Loan officers
36% Homebuyers

Not having to submit documents multiple times

 **48%** Loan officers
29% Homebuyers

More education from their real estate agent/lender

 **42%** Loan officers
34% Homebuyers

Having fewer in-person interactions

 **24%** Loan officers
23% Homebuyers

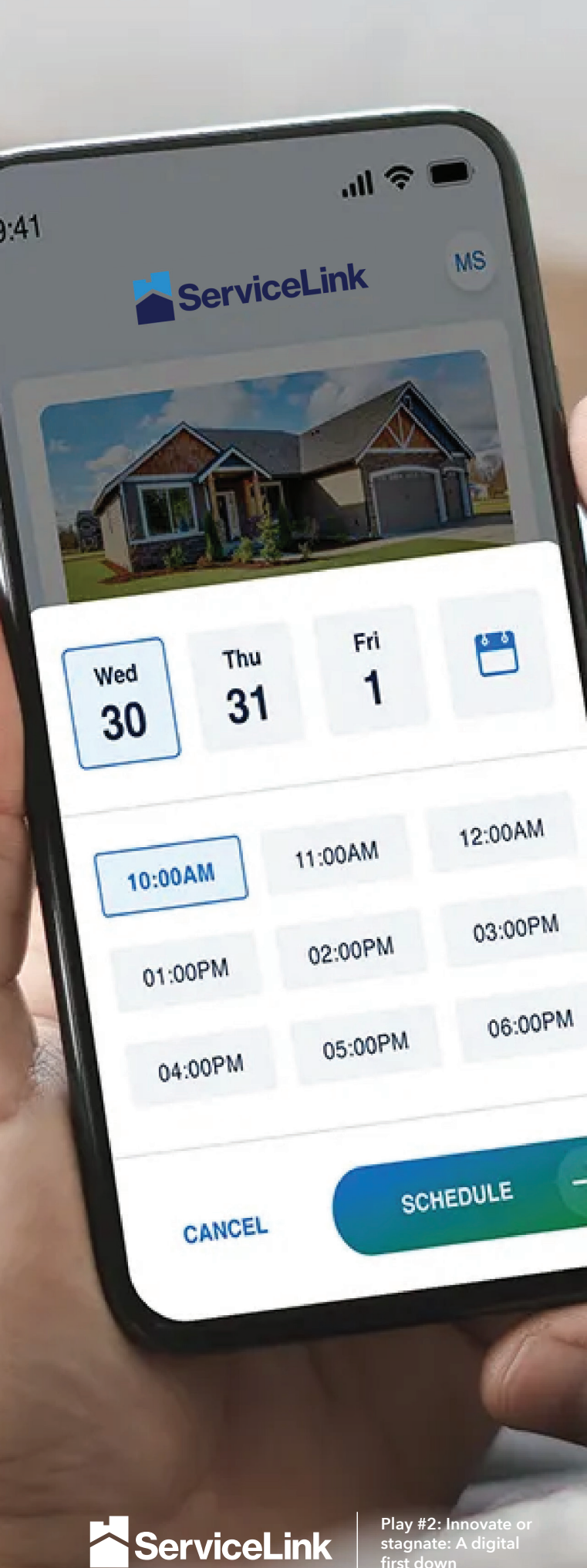
Source: 2026 ServiceLink Loan Officer Report. Question: What do you think borrowers would like to change about the mortgage process? Select all that apply. Source: 2026 ServiceLink State of Homebuying Report. Question: In terms of the mortgage process, what would you change about your experience? Select all that apply.



FLAG ON THE PLAY

Loan officers are raising their own concerns in the current mortgage market. 69% are concerned that borrowers are taking on more of a mortgage than they can realistically afford. Borrower education from a trusted source – originators – is key. It’s imperative that borrowers understand the full cost of buying their home, including fees and additional costs like property taxes, and how their loan will be paid off over time.

Play #2: Innovate or stagnate: A digital first down



PLAY #2: Innovate or stagnate: A digital first down

Today's borrowers have made it clear: They want a faster, simpler mortgage experience and they see technology and clear communication as key components of getting there.

Loan officers also see the value of infusing more technology into the homebuying process. From time savings to convenience to keeping borrowers better informed, utilizing digital processes has its perks. If loan originators want to win, digital tools must be part of their playbook.

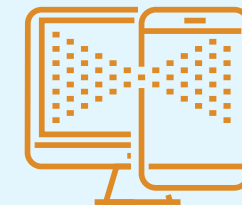
PLAYING THE PERCENTAGES

Loan officers reveal the biggest benefits of using technology in the mortgage process



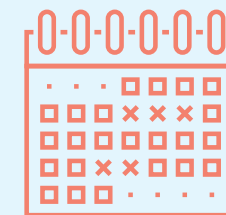
60%

Time savings



59%

Convenience/
ease of use



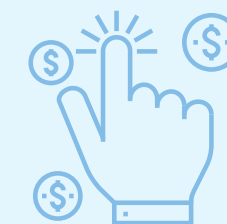
48%

Flexibility to
make progress
on their own
schedule



54%

Staying informed
throughout the
process



45%

Cost savings



The eClosing advantage

With a long list of benefits, it's no surprise that **84%** of loan officers say they're seeing a moderate to substantial uptick in the use of eClosings throughout the industry in the last two years. The excitement is there for borrowers, too, according to loan officers. In fact, **85%** of loan officer respondents said today's buyers are somewhat to very enthusiastic about eClosing options.

But, despite the widespread momentum behind eClosings, fully digital closings - i.e., remote online notarizations (RON) - remain far from mainstream.

Question: What type of uptick are you seeing, if any, in the use of eClosings throughout the industry in the last two years? Select one. 4-point scale, top 2 boxes, substantial uptick, moderate uptick. Question: How enthusiastic are today's borrowers about utilizing virtual closing options (eClosings)? Select one. 5-point scale, top 2 boxes, very enthusiastic, somewhat enthusiastic. Source: 2026 ServiceLink Loan Officer Report. Question: What are the main barriers preventing you from using eClosings with your clients more frequently or at all? Select all that apply, top 2 boxes, lack of borrower interest or comfort with digital closings, personal preference for traditional processes. Source: 2026 ServiceLink State of Homebuying Report. Question: How much would the availability of the following technology influence your decision to work with a specific mortgage provider? If the provider offers...single select grid, 4-point scale, top 4 boxes.

So, what's causing the holdup?

Loan officers say numerous barriers are keeping them from using eClosings more frequently – or at all. But many of these perceived barriers can easily be overcome with the right strategy.

“What are the main barriers keeping you from using eClosings with your clients more frequently or at all?”

PERCEIVED BARRIER:

Lack of interest

45% of loan officers said the lack of borrower interest or comfort with digital closings

REALITY:

Borrowers are fans

Despite their excitement, loan officers say a lack of borrower interest or comfort with eClosings is the top constraint. But borrowers tell a different story. Today's borrowers want digital offerings and eClosings to be readily available. In fact, having the opportunity to eSign some or all closing documents would sway **88%** of recent buyers surveyed to work with a specific lender. Having the option to use a smart phone or tablet to self-schedule an appraisal or closing appointment for the exact date and time desired would influence **87%**, while the opportunity to hold a closing virtually would motivate **82%**.

PERCEIVED BARRIER:

Personal preference

40% of loan officers said it's a personal preference to utilize traditional processes

REALITY:

Call an audible

A majority of recent buyers said they prefer lenders who offer modern, digital processes – proving that it's likely not borrower resistance, but originators using the same old strategy to close loans, despite evolving borrower habits and preferences. In fact, **78%** of recent homebuyers said they would switch to a specific lender who offered the opportunity to conduct the *entire process digitally*, with no in-person appointments.

(Continued)

"What are the main barriers keeping you from using eClosings with your clients more frequently or at all?"

PERCEIVED BARRIER:

Technology availability

37% of loan officers said the limited availability of fully compliant eClosing technology and 34% said technical issues or platform reliability concerns

REALITY:

Overhaul your roster

"The reality is that not all settlement service providers are equipped to provide the level of support required for a seamless transition – so selecting the right partner is key. When filling out your roster, seek out a partner that offers a panel of experienced, RON-ready notaries that span a broad scope of states and work across a variety of platforms. Find a player that has experience with RON and can provide the necessary support to ensure a smooth process."

– Marc Bator, Vice President and Senior Director of Strategic Partnerships

PERCEIVED BARRIER:

Regulatory restrictions

31% of loan officers said state or regulatory restrictions on eClosings

REALITY:

Huddle up

Nearly all states have adopted laws that allow for some form of RON implementation. However, acceptance of eRecording – filing of digital copies of real estate documents – can vary at the county level. To streamline the process, it's important to work with a partner that has a deep bench of notaries across the country but also has deep expertise in various state and county regulations to help you navigate this evolving landscape.



Loan officers are doing what they can to stand out from the crowd, and that includes offering technology-enabled solutions as a way to differentiate themselves.

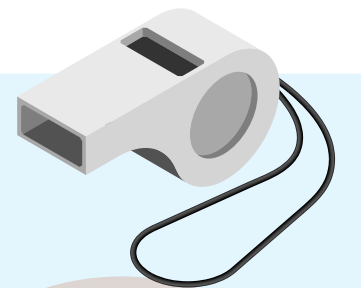
There is an opportunity here for originators: Offering borrowers the flexibility to close when and where they choose creates a customer experience advantage that competitors may struggle to match.

PLAYING THE PERCENTAGES

Loan officers say they differentiate themselves through

- 69% Excellent customer service
- 62% In-depth borrower education
- 54% Attractive rates and offers
- 52% Technology-enabled solutions

COACH'S CORNER



"The question for loan originators is no longer whether borrowers are ready for digital transactions. The data tells us they are. Today's borrowers are seeking speed, convenience, transparency and cost savings, and digital offerings allow lenders to provide that. Those offering eClosing transactions, including hybrid and RON, are positioning themselves to win. Now is the time to make the move and turn digital closing technology into a powerful customer acquisition and retention tool."

– Barry Coffin, Managing Director, Home Equity Title and Close



Play #3: Know the X's and O's of fee education

PLAY #3:

Know the X's and O's of fee education

When it comes to fees, many borrowers say they have at least some understanding of their purpose – especially when it comes to high-visibility ones like taxes and realtor and appraisal fees.

For other fees, like application and document fees, private mortgage insurance and lender origination fees, borrower understanding is lower. While roughly half of borrowers say they fully understand them, loan officers have a different perspective from the sidelines. They say in reality, borrowers understand fees less than they think they do.



PLAYING THE PERCENTAGES

There is a clear knowledge gap when it comes to borrowers' perceived understanding of fees and loan officers' perception of what borrowers fully understand

APPLICATION AND DOCUMENT FEES

Borrowers who say they fully understand this fee

53%

Loan officers' perception of what their borrowers fully understand

39%

PRIVATE MORTGAGE INSURANCE (PMI)

50%

27%

LENDER ORIGINATION FEES

47%

28%

For loan officers, this knowledge gap presents a clear strategy – more borrower education. Borrowers don't struggle with understanding every fee equally. Naturally, the fees that are less visible or require deeper explanation are ones that borrowers understand the least. Even when borrowers think they know what they're working with, education would be beneficial.

Source: 2026 ServiceLink State of Homebuying Report. Question: How would you rate your understanding of the following fees?...single select grid, 4-point scale, focusing on 3 of 8 fee categories. Source: 2026 ServiceLink Loan Officer Report. Question: How would you rate your borrowers' understanding of the following fees?...single select grid, 4-point scale, focusing on 3 of 8 fee categories.

GAME-DAY GLOSSARY*

Need help as you huddle up with your borrowers? Clip this glossary and share it with your borrowers as a brief synopsis of common, key fees that they may come across.

Application fee: Covers the processing and reviewing of a loan application.

Appraisal fee: Covers the cost of a professional appraisal to determine the property's fair market value.

Credit report fee: Covers the cost of obtaining and reviewing a borrower's credit history.

Flood determination fee: Covers the cost of verifying whether the property is located in a federally designated flood zone.

Home inspection fee: The out-of-pocket cost paid to a professional inspector to evaluate a property's physical condition and major systems during a real estate sale.

Loan document fee: Covers the preparation and processing of documents needed to close the loan.

Origination fee: Covers the charge to process, underwrite and fund a loan.

Broker fees: Commission paid to the real estate professionals involved in the transaction. The amount is negotiable and may be paid by the buyer, seller or both, depending on the terms of the agreement.

Title fees: Covers services related to issuing title insurance policies and providing closing and settlement services.

Homeowners association (HOA) fee: Under most circumstances, it is a fee paid monthly that covers shared community expenses and amenities in neighborhoods with a homeowners association.

Mortgage insurance: Protects the lender if a borrower is unable to repay the mortgage loan. Mortgage insurance may be paid in several ways, most commonly through monthly payments added to the borrower's mortgage payment or as an upfront payment at closing. The availability and structure of mortgage varies based on the specific transaction.

*This glossary list is provided solely as a general summary of certain fees that may be associated with a transaction and is not intended to be all-inclusive. It is provided for informational purposes only and should not be relied upon as legal, tax, financial, regulatory or other professional advice. Borrowers should consult their own advisors regarding any questions relating to their specific circumstances.

Summarizing the playbook



Plan your next move

Loan officers and homebuyers have made their play, now it's time to build a strong defense. Here's the quick plan of attack on what originators can do to win big and turn their borrowers into lifelong fans.

PLAY #1: FIX FRUSTRATIONS

Loan officers are optimistic about the current housing market but high home prices and interest rates are very real obstacles for homebuyers. Originators have the opportunity to coach their borrowers on the real cost of homeownership. Maintain transparency and increase communication throughout the process so borrowers feel more confident in their decisions, understand their budget and know what needs to be completed and when.

PLAY #2: INNOVATE OR STAGNATE: A DIGITAL FIRST DOWN

Today's homebuyers want a fast, simple homebuying experience. Infusing technology throughout the process can help make it happen. eClosing options allow for quicker turn times and greater flexibility that can bring the speed borrowers are looking for. Borrowers say they're also looking for digital tools like eSigning and self-scheduling. Despite perceived barriers, originators can and should push past them to help bring greater convenience to borrowers. As technology continues to evolve in the mortgage space, originators who have already begun to embrace it will be ahead of the game when it comes to creating an exceptional borrower experience.

PLAY #3: KNOW THE X'S AND O'S OF FEE EDUCATION

For those in the mortgage industry, it can be easy to forget that many homebuyers are learning about the fees involved in the homebuying process for the first time. It's unfamiliar territory, and they may not even realize what they don't know. Helping them understand what they're paying and why is key. Offer them guidance on each fee – clip the game-day glossary for an easy touchdown – and don't be afraid to go the extra yard answering questions they may have to provide a customer service experience your borrowers won't soon forget.

A COMPANION
PIECE TO THE 2026
SERVICELINK STATE OF
HOMEBUYING REPORT



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