



Marketing To Drive Growth At Senior Care Facilities

Assisted Living

While demographics are generally supportive of the pool of potential residents for assisted living, facilities are still suffering from persistent vacancies. Business development professionals know that challenges have grown since the crash of the housing market in 2008; families, both seniors and their adult children, are still faced with financial stress as well as many competing residential options and modes of care. With such a broad array of choices available to seniors, it is incumbent upon Senior Care Facilities to execute a well-designed, long-term marketing plan to drive growth.

Assisted living has long been considered needs-driven, but care at a facility or residence is increasingly viewed as an “optional” purchase for addressing those needs, especially for adult children under financial strain. “Aging in Place,” the practice of keeping elderly parents in their homes longer than they may have historically, is often viewed as a path to saving money, though that “independence” has many, often hidden, costs. Home improvement to provide accessibility, on-

call transportation services, maintenance, just to name a few, all add-up and are frequently underestimated by families when considering costs and benefits.

Increasingly, seniors are also moving-in with their adult children to both preserve assets and in some cases, support their children. Unsurprisingly, this has led to an increase in the number of community-based services for seniors, as well as visits to both physician offices and emergency rooms. This arrangement also places significant strain on a family emotionally, particularly if active grandchildren are in the mix.

There are also many new alternatives to facility care, as well as technological advances, which allow for home monitoring and long-distance caregiving that have made competing options more plentiful than ever before.

In this environment, it’s not hard to see why waiting lists, once the industry norm, have become a thing of the past! Relying on how things were done by previous owners or successful facilities in previous years is no longer a guaranteed road to success. Instead, facilities need to work harder on

their marketing plans than they ever have before.

To address this competitive marketplace, communicate their value proposition and drive growth, assisted living and senior care facility marketing plans must address two constituents at the same time.

1. The family members of the clients that you wish to serve.
2. Enticing those senior clients themselves.

These groups respond to your message in different ways, but ultimately seek the same goal: quality of life that makes financial sense. Identifying your target demographic (if you do not know it already), finding out whether your buyers are more likely to be senior citizens or their adult children, is the first step in building a successful marketing plan.

It bears mentioning that some facilities at this stage of the marketing plan take an easy, well-worn route that can short circuit the organization in the long run. Instead of building a road map to increased occupancy, some facilities move straight to discounting - reducing entry fees,

reducing monthly fees, or a combination of the two. Some offer special deals such as home staging services, moving allowances, upgrade packages, or even waived fees. Unfortunately, none of these solutions are viable in the long term.

CUTTING CASH FLOW IS NOT A GOOD WAY TO MARKET YOUR BUSINESS, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT CAN END UP BEING PERCEIVED AS A "SINKING SHIP" OR "CUT-RATE CARE" TO PROSPECTS.

Instead, a better solution is to look to independent-living marketing to utilize the strategies that have been successful in that sector. The tactics and strategies that work for independent living facilities have a high crossover rate with those used in senior care facilities. Remember, assisted living facilities do not merely offer custodial care. They can offer lifestyle services including nutrition, monitoring of medication, security, and activity programs in order to help seniors flourish and thrive in the setting of an assisted care facility.

Next, plan the tactics that should be a part of every senior care facility marketing program. Each of these tactics can be tailored to your target market. These tactics should include the following:

- Building relationships with clients and potential clients through networking and customer service. An outstanding network and reputation for excellent client service creates fertile ground for referrals, which is the single best route to new clients and income.
- Customer Relationship Management (CRM). It can be as simple as a system that tracks and manages leads in Excel

or as elaborate a system as Salesforce.com. But a database that you manage and use to track all leads that you receive and their connections to one another is vital for marketing success.

- Follow-up. It sounds easy, but following-up is so infrequently executed. Creating a habitual schedule of follow-up on any lead is extremely important. That one follow-up phone call could mean the difference between a sale and losing a customer.
- Use analytics. The more data you can gather, the better. What does it cost you to make each phone call? How much is each potential client worth to you? How many calls does it take before you convert a new client? Building metrics around your pipeline and quantifying the "costs" of establishing and converting leads can help to focus your attention on the most fertile areas to find and convert prospects.
- Set goals for calls, tours, and appointments. Look at last month. How many calls did you make, how many tours? Set an aspirational goal for next month and then next year for each of the key metrics that you use to gain new clients. Similar to analytics, tracking your progress can help to motivate and focus your marketing attention.
- Evolve your approach to direct contact. When specifically targeting adult children, direct physical mail and bulk messages are a thing of the past. The key is to use targeted email messages. Make sure that the message you send is educational, straightforward, and aimed at solving a "pain point" (a problem) that your prospects may have.

Next, with your improved pipeline of prospective occupants, it's not going to be enough to talk about what you offer. You have to excel at the "reveal," that moment where you make the experience real to your prospective residents and their families. It almost goes without saying, but it is essential that you present your facility as attractive and proactive. Potential clients won't convert on sales pitch alone, they need to see what you can offer and must

believe in the care you provide. Ultimately, seniors and their adult children want to find someone they can trust and an institution designed to help them. Make a concerted effort to point out exactly what you provide at your facility, what it can do to help them, and how it can solve problems.

Finally, you can help adult children understand what types of signs they should look for in order to know when their parents need help. These are the elements that take the family and the senior away from the competing residential options and narrow their focus to the services that only a facility like yours can provide. This might mean creating a checklist, putting one front-and-center on your website is a great way to lead families into an open conversation that puts your facility at the forefront of their minds. You can even provide adult children with tips on starting the conversation with their parents and give them resources to help them understand the value that they will be receiving.

These are just some of the ways facilities can think about designing an effective marketing plan to communicate your facility's extraordinary services. Marketing and signaling effectively to families and seniors in a crowded market is the only way to be successful; those that don't will fall behind. Ultimately, the world is changing as much as the world of the senior care facility industry. Be on the right side of that change. +



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