100 BEST SENIOR LIVING MARKETING TIPS
That’s right. We have compiled the 100 Best Senior Living Marketing Tips as determined by us. Now, we think that after three decades of senior living marketing experience, we have some insight into this and have developed a pretty good list. But by no means do we actually think we have the definitive list, nor have the tips in the only order that makes sense. But we like a challenge, so we put ourselves to the test. In truth, it was a bit harder than we had imagined. Not so much in finding 100 to list, but in finding 100 that were both distinct and substantial enough to make a difference in the success of a community’s marketing efforts.

Enjoy.
BE OPEN TO NEW IDEAS

Sometimes new tactics can stir up the marketplace in a positive way. Don't be afraid to think outside the box and create some buzz!
Leverage your board of directors. A community’s board should be ambassadors as well as business advisors and a source of referrals. Keep them well versed in the community’s position, and make sure they can accurately and succinctly describe the community’s benefits. Just because they’ve joined the board doesn’t mean they understand the product. Then periodically remind them of their role in generating buzz and referrals.

Event success is influenced by more than weather. You can’t control weather once you’ve planned an event. But before you schedule your event, check for popular sporting or city events that may conflict with your date.

Plan for event follow-up. Event marketing begins with the event, but it doesn’t end there. Make sure staff has time to contact all attendees after the event in a timely manner. Their goal is to qualify leads and move them to a one-on-one appointment.

99. **Leverage your board of directors.**

98. **Event success is influenced by more than weather.**

97. **Plan for event follow-up.**

96. **It’s better to over-communicate than under-communicate.** When in doubt, check in with leads. They’ll tell you when enough is enough.

95. **Help your connections make more connections.** Increase the number of referral leads your community gets by making referral packets to be distributed to your board of directors, executive team, associates, residents and family members.

94. **Find out about your residents’ social groups.** Birds of a feather flock together.

93. **Clean up your database.** While you’re on the phone with leads, update your database by getting new addresses, phone numbers and emails.

92. **Let leads and prospects know friends are welcome at events.** It’s always implied, but call it out in invitations and follow-up calls.

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1. **It’s better to over-communicate than under-communicate.**

**HAVE A CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN**

Having a plan can reduce negative issues and possibly create a positive result out of a crisis.
Make it easy to RSVP. Phone calls are great, but people often like the convenience of completing a form while they’re on your website. Use both an automated message to acknowledge receipt of the RSVP, and request their phone number on the form to confirm their reservation or change of plans.

Take photos of everything. Document marketing events, social events, speakers and special visitors. Then post them on your website and social media sites. Use them for newsletters, internal communications, press releases or media pitches.

Evaluate the quality of leads (both good and bad) generated from online directories. They should ultimately be judged on their conversion to move in, and it’s important to communicate any feedback to the people responsible for evaluating them. There are many options out there with senior directories, and it’s best to concentrate on those that generate the best-quality leads.

Offer staff as speakers to civic organizations, Chambers of Commerce, schools/universities, churches and other local organizations. Find a unique topic you can speak to, such as aging services available in your community, or dealing with dementia as a family, and use this to gain interest. Start with organizations of which you or staff are members.

Reach out to community leaders through announcement and update letters. For example, communicate with the city council, Chambers of Commerce, pastors, fraternal organizations, etc., via letters or emails, and don’t forget to connect with them through social media.

Host events with no-cost speakers. Coffee with the mayor, local historians, resident panel discussions and even your own staff. Highlight the expertise of your staff members in cooking demonstrations, Medicare 101, senior living options, active living, fitness classes or continuing education.

Make your website responsive to mobile platforms. Smartphones and tablets have changed the way websites are accessed.
85. **Work ahead for cost savings in printing.** This allows for alternatives – type of press, paper stock and when it’s printed. Bid the job with multiple printers. Find a good partner, and print in bulk if possible.

84. **If you’re a Marketing Director, consider changing your title to Senior Living Counselor.** It may be subtle, but titles matter. Yes, prospects know you’re the salesperson, but when you’re successful, haven’t you counseled more than sold?

83. **Use cost-effective mailing formats.** Are you getting the best mailing rates? Pay attention to design details – weight, size, aspect ratio, corners, paper stock and tabs/closure. There’s a lot of good information at www.usps.com.

82. **Always ask about not-for-profit media rates or any special rates for the senior living category.** Some newspapers are trying to entice greater spending by certain categories, and have developed programs that sometimes have better rates than not-for-profit. Always ask and compare rates.

81. **Avoid common words with negative connotations – facility, nursing home, institution, etc.** The choice of words will change the perception.

80. **Consider everyone a qualified lead.** Just because a prospect pulls up in an old car or their ZIP code isn’t in a high-home-value area doesn’t mean they can’t afford to move in. Begin by establishing interest in making a move, and then pursue their ability to afford it.

79. **Understand that one senior doesn’t speak for all seniors.** Don’t get too worried about one or two complaints … but don’t ignore complaints, either.

78. **Sometimes “The way we’ve always done it” just doesn’t work anymore.** Regularly evaluate your marketing/sales and operational strategy. Get in the habit of asking “Why?”
71. **Just because they’ve joined the board doesn’t mean they understand the product. Periodically remind them of their role in generating buzz and referrals.**

72. **Try devoting at least 10%-15% of your media budget to trying something new. Options are endless: You can try different sections of the paper, different ad sizes, running different days of the week, try a new publication or station. Even if it doesn’t work, you’ll have learned something and can dedicate your budget to things that do work.**

73. **Get to know your local media. Build a relationship with key editors and reporters, be a resource and understand what’s really relevant. Solid relationships get your news releases read and could be helpful in a crisis situation.**

74. **Follow up an appointment with a thank-you call in a timely manner. They may never be more interested in moving ahead than right after an appointment. Don’t assume they need time to consider their situation. Follow up and let them tell you how they would like to proceed.**

75. **Don’t always follow the competition. Senior sections, for example. Be unique. Stand out on your own. And don’t forget direct mail is the most effective way to get your message to the right audience.**

76. **Your conduct during a prospect’s community visit speaks volumes.** When touring a prospect, speak to every employee or resident you meet.

77. **Be sure every direct mail piece has an offer. “Call today” is not an offer. Seminars, luncheons, open houses, even free gifts and other incentives are offers. And make sure your offer is relevant and appropriate. A $25 gift card may not mean much to higher-net-worth prospects. Know your community audience.**

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80. **When asking your media partner for added value, consider having them add on something you haven’t tried before, instead of just getting a lower rate. It’s a low-risk way to see if you could test something that might be a strong performer for you.**

81. **Just because they’ve joined the board doesn’t mean they understand the product. Periodically remind them of their role in generating buzz and referrals.**
70. **Use call-outs to support events.** Try calling leads in addition to mailing invitations. It costs less per attendee. It’s a reason to call. You’ll see strong acceptance rates.

69. **Use email marketing to help develop relationships with leads.** Provide an opportunity on your website to opt-in to receive email communications. Send simple group newsletters regularly, event invitations, etc. Send personal email with links to topics of interest or other relevant information. Utilize an inexpensive, Web-based email tool for email marketing.

68. **Send leads a cost comparison analysis of their financial situation,** then invite them to a personal appointment to help them take the next step.

67. **Be sensitive when working with adult children.** They’re in the midst of one of the hardest decisions they’ll ever have to make, and they’re balancing it with the struggles of their daily work and family life. Be a resource for them.

66. **Create co-op events with business partners.** Share the costs and enhance the content. Good partners might include home health agencies, your food service provider, banks or senior organizations.

65. **Have some sales-focused fun.** Hold contests for sales team members to generate appointments: Every six weeks, designate a two-hour window at the end of a work day to make phone-outs. Give away prizes for most connected calls, most appointments set, etc.

64. **Extend your community’s culture and personality out into the public.** You can do this through your brand, the types of events you hold, your staff, outreach to community, news releases, social media, etc. Give people a reason to think you’re unique, interesting and worth checking out.

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**CREATE A TOUR PREPAREDNESS CHECKLIST.**

Start the day with a 15-minute “show ready” check. Scuffed or chipped paint makes an impression, and not a good one.
63. **Build a community channel on YouTube.** It’s free and you never know when a new Internet star will be born. Do this even if you post video on your website, as the two venues serve different audiences.

62. **Mail to individuals 75 years of age or older for independent living direct mail.** There are a few exceptions to this advice, but for most communities and most types of residences, very few individuals move in before they’re 75 years old. Mail to those with the greatest likelihood to be interested.

61. **Be responsive to your leads.** Be timely in fulfilling requests for information. The experience a prospect has with the sales team sets their expectation for the service level of the entire community.

60. **Manage your online reputation.** Have a plan in place to monitor and respond to positive and negative comments or reviews.

59. **Testimonials are always valuable.** Share resident stories about why they chose your community. Videotape their stories for the website, send out personal letters from them to your lead base, and feature them in your advertising and on Facebook.

58. **Use events that occur every year.** Winter, tax season and New Year’s are examples of regular events that can be used as a backdrop to marketing messages. You know what your audience is thinking at these times, so make yourself relevant.

57. **Create an “Ambassador” program for your best salespeople – residents.** Formalizing resident involvement with prospective residents can help control interaction and ensure someone is always available. Form a volunteer group of resident Ambassadors who are identified as good spokespeople for your community. Include a mix of single men, women and couples.

56. **Vary your method of contact with leads.** Call them, write them, send little notes, email or text them to let them know you’re thinking of them. They should hear from you at least every three months.
56. **Vary your sales approach based on discovery.** Different people make decisions in different ways. Some are motivated by the numbers (cost of health care, tax benefits of Life Care, estate protection), while others will base their choice to move on less tangible things (style of apartment, social activities, maintenance-free living, dining services, etc.). It’s important to remember that there are wide-ranging personalities out there, so make sure you reach them all by having a varied approach.

54. **Don’t forget reminder calls, emails or even texts for events to reduce “no-shows.”** This is important for Monday and Friday events, morning events, early RSVPs and difficult directions.

53. **Always market as a community.** As the marketing staff, remind everyone that you’re always marketing. Something as simple as the freshness of the cookies served to the women’s group you’re hosting at the community may lead to a positive or negative comment to your next best prospect. Your reputation is built through the collective experience of everyone who comes in contact with your community.

52. **Create a culture of team selling.** While individual goals are important to build productivity and reward success, don’t overlook the power of team success and the energy created when salespeople are working with each other, rather than against each other.

55. **Volunteer your space to area organizations.** Are there groups in your community that need a place to meet once a month or once a quarter? Volunteer your community chapel to a prayer group or let Girl Scouts plant flowers in your garden. Or create community traffic with tie-ins, such as hosting a blood drive, polling location, food drive or toy drive. This will undoubtedly increase your community’s exposure and awareness.

51. **CLEAN UP YOUR DATABASE**

While you’re on the phone with leads, update your database by getting new addresses, phone numbers and emails.
Help prospective residents feel like they’ll fit in. Unfortunately, this is a concern with many people throughout our lives – we don’t leave it behind in high school. Match up prospects with residents who have similar backgrounds or personalities. Or make sure prospects meet lots of residents to give you the best chance at a positive connection. Be sure your website and Facebook pages have lots of variety as well.

Implement “try-it” programs for hot leads. Letting them experience the lifestyle at your community may be just what they need to make the move. And it doesn’t need to be an overnight stay, something that can be uncomfortable to many. A day-long, well-orchestrated stay that involves a lot of current resident contact is most effective.

Invest in Wi-Fi for your entire community. It’s becoming a necessity and tool for residents and family members to connect and communicate.

Conduct sales training. It’s an investment, not a cost.

Consider a paid search program. Even the best-optimized site can’t anticipate every search term. A well-defined paid search campaign helps put you in front of the greatest number of prospects. Paid search is particularly important in large or heavily competitive markets.

Count an email contact as a solid contact for sales goals. With email communication so prevalent, be sure to credit email contact with leads the same as a phone contact when tracking weekly “call-outs.”

Don’t assume residents don’t want to be paid for referrals. Give them the option of a charitable donation in their name, just in case, but make sure you have a formal referral program in place and promote it often. Don’t miss out on the window for the best and most referrals – soon after a resident moves to your community.

Sometimes the best solutions are the tried-and-true methods, such as informational luncheons or direct mail.
Be a student. The more you know, the better service you can provide, and being of service is a big part of relationship selling. Of course, know your community and product, but also seek opportunities to learn more about the senior audience, the issues individuals face as they age and other options they have, such as other communities or in-home help.

Optimize your website for organic search results. Search engines are becoming more sophisticated in evaluating relevance of website information. What you say and how you say it is critical to getting top listings for the prospects and keywords you want to target.

Engage on social media. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest … social media is a huge part of everyone’s lives – including seniors. Interact with prospects and adult children on Facebook. Recruit talented staff on LinkedIn and Twitter. Showcase your community’s lifestyle on Pinterest.

Create opportunities on your website to convert visitors to leads. Drive inquiries or email registrations with offers such as “How Tos,” FAQs, tips, newsletters, videos, articles, etc. Consider using “quick-forms” with minimal fields to make registering easy.

Strive for consistency in marketing materials online and offline. Everything you do is a reflection of your community and your brand. The look, feel and message of all your marketing should be similar. Even the look and attitude of your staff and the presentations you give should have a similar feel. It may get stale to you (because you’re looking at it all the time), but to a prospect, changing logos, colors, typefaces and tones is confusing and decreases the brand’s impact overall.

Conduct regular sales meetings to keep the team focused. Share ideas. Reinforce selling skills. Ensure accountability. And keep the energy up.

Do this even if you post video on your website, as the two venues serve different audiences.
Offer training for various positions that may come in direct contact with prospective residents. Educate your entire staff on your core benefits through orientation, staff meetings, marketing updates and new service announcements.

Have a crisis communications plan. Dealing with the practical issues of a crisis are difficult enough without having to also determine how, when and if to communicate with important audiences such as residents, families, associates and the media. And be sure the plan addresses the use of social media in communicating with these audiences. Having a plan can reduce negative issues and possibly create a positive result out of a crisis.

Coordinate marketing and resident lifestyle activities. When planning events, don’t forget to look at what events are already happening at your community for residents. Perhaps open up an event to the public or schedule a repeat event/speaker for another day that’s open to the public.

Don’t overthink it. Sometimes the best solutions are the tried-and-true methods, such as informational luncheons or direct mail.

Claim and optimize local business pages. Local business pages are much more prominent on organic search result pages, as search has become more local. Having a well-optimized page helps your rankings and also provides a platform for consumer reviews – another Web element that’s growing in importance as it relates to search and consumer behavior.

Know where your leads are coming from and allocate budget resources accordingly. Keep the best and then put some budget toward trying new things, still keeping careful track of response metrics, so you know what to repeat and what to change to keep the leads coming in.

Set a goal to respond within a few hours. A missed Web opportunity is a missed sales opportunity.
32. **Create a tour preparedness checklist.**
Start the day with a 15-minute “show ready” check. Scuffed or chipped paint makes an impression, and not a good one.

31. **Be prepared for tours.** Establish a tour committee, including marketing, administrative and operations. Tour at least once a month as a committee, so everyone is seeing the community through the same eyes.

30. **Walk the walk.** Nothing kills a bad product like good marketing. Make sure your operations meet the expectation set in your marketing materials. Do everything you can to excel, and then make sure that you promote all the positive activity at your community.

29. **Know the stories of your residents and share them.** Keep your eyes and ears open. Telling resident (and staff!) stories is a great way to connect with your prospects, create content for social media channels and garner positive media coverage for your community. Stories are real and powerful.

28. **Respond to all online leads in a timely fashion.** Set a goal to respond within a few hours. And have a back-up procedure for email/online inquiries, as you would for phone calls. A missed Web opportunity is a missed sales opportunity.

27. **Aggressively capture email addresses.** Email is a preferred way to communicate with leads (email blasts, e-newsletters, event reminders, etc.), especially when you’re engaging with adult children. Ask everyone for their email address … and keep asking.

26. **Keep your website fresh.** Update photo galleries, testimonials, calendar of events, etc., so people see there is life at the community. This also tells search engines you’re relevant and improves search results.

**CONDUCT SALES TRAINING**

It’s an investment, not a cost.
Capture information on the first call. Train everyone who answers the phone to always ask for the basic contact information and the reason for the call. Don’t risk losing a lead. Use call sheets, have event overflow dates identified and never say, “We’re already full.”

When giving a tour, get your residents involved. Invite them to lunch with your lead, or stop on tours to meet them and let them show off their home. Host events where residents answer the questions.

Answer the phone. A missed phone call is a missed sales opportunity.

Create content every week – lots of it. Photos, videos, articles, you name it. Then strategically share this content in multiple marketing channels – website, community blog, media outlets, Facebook, newsletters and internal communication.

Establish personal relationships with your leads. Get to know as much as you can about them – birthdays, anniversaries, pets’ names, favorite foods, etc., and then use that information to reconnect. We all buy from people we like.

Evaluate your marketing results. Take time to evaluate the cost per lead for your entire program, and for each specific event and tactic, so you can better plan for future marketing efforts. Know what works, and review and re-evaluate at least annually.

Be sure your website is responsive to mobile platforms. Smartphones and tablets have changed the way websites are accessed. More and more visits to senior living sites are coming from these devices. Be sure your website displays in a mobile environment, or create a dedicated mobile site to meet this need.

Invest in Wi-Fi for your entire community. It’s becoming a necessity and tool for residents and family members to connect and communicate.
18. **Communicate your uniqueness.** The core benefits of a senior living community are similar, but individual communities aren’t. Identify what differentiates you and clearly communicate those defining points. For example, if you have organic food items on your menu or have an association with a local college – don’t forget to mention it. That’s what makes your community unique!

17. **Planning your inquiry generation is essential.** Hope isn’t a plan. Know what you plan to do to get new leads and work your current lead base. Efficiently using your available budget comes from planning all your marketing activity together. Knowing if you’re on track comes from having a plan to measure against. Making it up as you go along is always more work, more expensive and rarely produces better results.

16. **Have fun!** Don’t underestimate the senior audience’s sense of humor and desire for something a little out of the norm.

15. **Set sales goals.** How do you know if you’re successful if you don’t set goals? How much investment is needed? As a community, “we want to be full” isn’t a realistic goal. Most of us work better when we know what we’re trying to achieve. Be specific and realistic in setting goals, and track your progress.

14. **Make sure marketing doesn’t stop at the marketing/sales director’s door.** Inspire everyone in the community to be part of marketing. Include them in celebrations when sales goals are met. Recognize associates who go above and beyond to assist the marketing team. And share the marketing plan with department heads to get input on collaborative activities.

13. **Vary your method of contact with leads.** Call them, write them, send little notes, email or text them to let them know you’re thinking of them. They should hear from you at least every three months.

12. **Be PASSIONATE about your product.** Selling is about relationships, and relationships are about trust. If you believe in what you have to offer, prospects and their families will believe in you.
12. **Work your lead base.** Especially the cold ones. We have a tendency to think about new leads, but there are some great leads in your database whom you haven’t connected with in a while. Those people who were “too young” four years ago may be ready to move today.

11. **Have a mini-marketing plan for each warm/hot lead.** Personalize your approach based on what is relevant for each one, with the goal being to make/strengthen your connection to them, and their connection to you and the community, with each contact.

10. **First impressions matter.** The marketing team is the voice and the face of the entire community. Always remember to pay attention to how people are greeted — in person or by phone — and put your best foot forward. And don’t forget to evaluate your website experience, because this is often the very first contact a future resident has with your community.

9. **Consistently market your community, no matter what your occupancy level.** Seems simple, but it’s surprising how some communities let lead generation fall to the wayside when they’re relatively full and stable. It’s easier to maintain awareness than re-establish it, and often actually less expensive in the long run.

8. **Referrals are usually the least expensive leads to generate, so actively pursue them.** Don’t wait for your residents to come to you. Create ways for them to make referrals, such as having a formal referral program, hosting a “bring a friend” lunch, or simply asking to meet the friend who comes every week to visit.

7. **Your website: Gateway to your community.** After referrals, your website is by far your most cost-effective lead generator. What impression does it make? Does it provide a high level of customer service? Does it truly reflect the feeling of your community? It should be a hub for all marketing activity.
1. **Answer the phone.**

   A missed phone call is a missed sales opportunity.

2. **Become a master of discovery.** The more you know, the easier it is to position your community as the right choice. Have different questions for different types of individuals, and create an environment, such as a model apartment, that helps put people at ease. Find your own style rather than “learn” a process. If you aren’t effective at discovery, you won’t be effective.

3. **Be an advocate, not a salesperson.** The best salespeople don’t sell, they serve their clients. A senior living community isn’t the right choice for everyone who shows interest. Put the prospect’s needs first and give them the best information you can about your community, as well as other options they may have.

4. **Be benefit-driven.** Individuals need to know what’s in it for them. It’s not enough to say “CCRC,” “Life Care” or even “maintenance-free.” Focus on how the features of a senior living community translate to tangible quality-of-life factors for a person – the benefits will make the sale.

5. **Recognize that your number one competitor is the prospect’s decision not to leave their current house.** You lose more sales to no decision than to someone deciding to move to a competitive community. Do you know how to sell as well against the prospect’s house as you do against the competitor across town?

6. **Leads have monetary value; treat them as such.** Communicate this to all staff, not just marketing staff. Your community invested significant resources – both dollars and time – to create each and every inquiry. Know what it is, and treat each lead in a manner commensurate with an item of that value.

3. **Be passionate about your product.** Selling is about relationships, and relationships are about trust. If you believe in what you have to offer, prospects and their families will believe in you.
One more tip. Read the GlynnDevins blog, Insights