



Keeping Your Old Perceptions Alive is Killing Your Sales Engine

By Susan Saldibar

We have a big perception problem in this industry. And it's having a direct impact on the number of people attending our community events, touring our communities and generating new move-ins.

The question is, who will step up and do something about it?

Not the huge conglomerates. They continue to churn out commercials that, while sweet, seem out of step with reality. Consider the recent commercial in which the staff member says "Alice Anne Likes vanilla ice cream with chocolate syrup and rainbow sprinkles." Seems harmless, but it's a commercial that could have been made thirty years ago! It feeds the perception that senior living communities exist only to take care of those folks who are "far gone" or "at the end of the line". Rainbow sprinkles? Come on. It does nothing to advance the new model of senior living we want to promote. And it does even less for producing a consistent flow of prospective residents inquiring about their senior living options.

It's time to get out of the "Instant Gratification" marketing mindset.

What's great about Bob Wilgus, Director of Marketing and Strategic Digital Communications for [LeadingResponse](#) (a Senior Housing Forum partner) is that he gets it. He knows the problems faced by today's senior living community marketers. And he sees the mistakes being made. Here are a few of them:

- No one is stepping up to challenge and changing old, outdated perceptions of senior living.
- We continue to treat our communities like used car lots, counting on events to generate traffic (read desperate people) through our doors.
- We too often ignore the huge population of mid and long term prospects, the ones who want more information before they're ready to take a tour.
- In the battle to put "heads in beds" our sales teams skim the "cream" leads off the top of our databases and work like hell to meet quotas.
- While doing that, we let the cooler leads sit and grow colder. Ultimately, they either 1) go away altogether or 2) only come knocking when they are desperate (to our used car lot).
- The result is a vicious cycle of a small number desperate, acute need individuals coming through our doors. And every other community in the area is competing for these potential residents.

Did I leave anything out here? Or is this depressing enough?

But Bob is no naysayer. He's a solutions guy. And he holds great hope for senior living community operators who can step up to the challenge of changing the way we market and sell. LeadingResponse markets off-site educational dinner seminars to baby boomers for all kinds of industries, by the way. And these events are attracting a healthy mix of affluent and motivated prospects; short, mid and long term buyers. So Bob has a handle on what marketers (community sales teams) need to do to get out of the instant gratification trap. Here is what he knows works:

- 1. Admit you have a problem.**

"That's step number one," says Bob. "Continuing to remain in lock step with – and advancing - the tired, old public perception of senior living will keep you stuck with weak attendance at your community events and chasing unqualified, yet expensive internet leads. Only when you break free of that model can you begin to change the way you approach and adjust your marketing. Believe in your ability to stop the madness that leads to that frenzied race to pull in quick move-ins."

- 2. Use proven marketing techniques that will give you a consistent flow of short, mid and long term leads.**

Nothing does this like off-site educational dinner events (and he has the data to back that up). That's because most of the mid and long term residents and their families are not going to come through your doors.

"Continuing to hold events on-site will bring fewer, and more desperate, attendees through your doors," says Bob. "That's what I call the 'used car' mentality --- get them on my lot and I'll sell them. But most of your future residents' families aren't ready to come through your doors. But, you will get them to attend informative lunch or dinner event though. And I can guarantee it." (Bob is referring to the money back guarantee LeadingResponse offers its clients.)

Furthermore, according to Bob, your community can become their resource. And, being that trusted source of information positions your community at a significant advantage when decision time rolls around.

- 3. Prune and water all of your leads. Don't let mid and long term leads drop off.**

"Check your data," says Bob. "Are you updating your CRM regularly? What are you doing besides pounding the phones? Do you have outreach programs to educate future residents? Or are you just inviting them in when you want another 'head in a bed'?" Bob believes the secret is in lead nurturing. "Prune them, water them," he says. Even if they don't evolve into move-ins, chances are they will become a good referral source.

Self-Examination

Above all, Bob believes the time has come for senior living community operators to do some self-examination. "Tell yourself, okay, now moving forward I'm going to stop the crazy quest for "heads in beds" and start educating my future residents and caregivers," he says. "Do it right and you'll get your fair share of short, mid and long term residents." But, what Bob really stresses is that you'll also be doing your part to transform the perception of senior living as an end-of-life industry, into a vibrant, sustainable one.

"A rising tide lifts all boats," says Bob. "Isn't that the long-term goal of why we do what we do in this industry? Isn't this part of caring? Or we are just car salesmen?"

To learn more about the LeadingResponse community event marketing program and 100 attendee guarantee, click [HERE](#).



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