



Leverage AARP's Marketing Secrets to Grow Your Occupancy

By Susan Saldibar

Which community operators are going to be the first to toss the old nursing home sales manuals and start marketing like AARP?

Future residents and families are out there, ready to listen to those who give them information that they can use. And, right now, they may be more attracted to topics like retirement planning and social security than they are moving into a senior living community. AARP isn't waiting until people are old to market to them. Why are you?

Bob Wilgus, Director of Marketing and Strategic Digital Communications for [LeadingResponse](#) (a Senior Housing Forum partner) knows all about the AARP model and what makes it work so well. In fact, much of its philosophy can be found in his model for senior living (more about that later). Here are just some of the AARP benefits geared towards engaging people who are still 10+ years away from retiring.

Do these sound like services for people ready to lie around in a hammock all day?

- Your Health (brain health, conditions, treatments, products)
- Social Security and Medicare (Q&A, benefits calculator, news)
- Caregiving (resources, provider locator)
- Job Resources (Tips, job search tools, start a business)
- Take Action (Events, volunteer opportunities, advocacy)
- Have Fun (entertainment, travel, quizzes, games)
- Mobile apps, blog, videos, webinars, etc.
- And of course, AARP discounts (hot deals, discounts, etc.)

The point of listing these services is that AARP knows that the demographics of retirees have changed dramatically over the last 20 years or so. And they are able to get out in front of them early and educate, nurture and become a “go to” resource for their future members. That makes a lot of sense – and generates a steady flow of prospects!

Which communities will step up to the plate and capture the market?

Now back to LeadingResponse and Bob’s thoughts on AARP. Why can’t senior living communities think more like AARP? Why is it so hard to get out of that chronic cycle of squaring off with competitors for a small patch of acute need residents, while a mass of future residents sit, untouched? Makes me think, if AARP marketed this way, you’d never hear from them until you were 65!

“If you think we’re a nursing home than you don’t know [insert your community name].”

But AARP isn’t waiting around until we’re ready to retire. And they never have. As Bob explains, “AARP recognized a long time ago that, if they want to be relevant and grow, they had to condition pre-retirees. Their end-cap tagline said it all ‘...then you don’t know AARP’”. So, what would that tag look like the world of senior living? How about “If you think we’re a nursing home then you don’t know (insert your community here).” Sound good?

Who wouldn’t want 83% more attendees at events?

According to Bob, community leadership is starting to wake up to this larger universe of virtually untapped future prospects. LeadingResponse’s social, off-site dinner events have been effective at attracting all three levels of need; short-term, mid-term and long-term prospects. Because, in addition to those who have immediate needs, there are those who are not ready to personally visit a community (Adult children and caregivers), but want more information on senior living options. This, less intrusive way of getting your brand across, has been proven to garner 83% greater event attendance than those requiring attendees to walk through senior community doors. And, Bob tells me that LeadingResponse’s events are averaging 150 reservations per campaign. (When was the last time your onsite community event had that many reservations?)

At the end of the day, senior living community operators need to find ways to transition from only seeking those prospects ready to move in tomorrow to all prospects, near and long term. And, whether you’re a fan or not, AARP provides a great example of doing just that.

Bob’s message makes a lot of sense. “We, as senior living professionals need to look at wisdom of companies and organizations who are bigger, faster, smarter,” he says. “If AARP is doing it, why aren’t you?”



This article has been brought to you by [Leading Response](#) in partnership with [Senior Housing Forum](#).