



The 6 Things Communities Do That Win Leads

By Susan Saldibar

Win more leads. Win more tours. Win more move-ins.

If you're rolling your eyes and saying "Yeah, right," then you haven't talked with Bob Wilgus, Director of Marketing and Strategic Digital Communications for [LeadingResponse](#) (a Senior Housing Forum partner).

I always find my conversations with Bob enlightening because he knows what works and refuses to do things that don't. During our last discussion he told me, "We can't just market for new residents anymore, we have to compete for them!" And to do that you need to win the hearts and minds of your potential residents, along with their families.

Compete to Win

With that intro, here is Part I of our "Compete to Win" series. I'll share with you what Bob has found to work in this industry. In fact, he guarantees it will work, as long as you follow his tips consistently and don't get off track.

1. Know your unique value proposition. Sound like a no-brainer? It's harder than you think. As Bob says, "it's not 'family atmosphere', 'great people', 'excellent care', 'beautiful restaurant', 'beautiful grounds' - everyone says that!" You need to know what separates your community from all the others in your area.

2. Throw out those postcards with vacant tag lines. If your tag line could fit another community, it is not unique.
3. Integrate your fresh, new value proposition into every single marketing piece, including direct mail.
4. Find a resource that can provide you with refined demographic lists. Today it is possible to identify those prospects who are a perfect match for your community. That includes financial viability. It doesn't make sense to market to those who will never be able to afford to move into your community. Make sure your list provider is able to offer a high degree of granularity.
5. Use your lists and design a direct mail program that is highly targeted to your market.
6. Craft your direct mail program around an invitation to an offsite community dinner event with a topic related to senior living and of interest to them. (FYI: LeadingResponse tracks the topics that generate strong response rates).

Optimizing the ROI

I asked Bob for more details. How can an operator optimize the ROI of a dinner event? Here's what he had to say:

- Host your community events at a local, American cuisine restaurant - on neutral territory. "This is a life event. It is not a 'let us show you our kitchen' event," explains Bob.
- Invite a sufficient number of people. "To meet or exceed your occupancy goals, and given the increased competition for the same new move-in, you need to put your sales team in front of 70-100 fresh prospects each month," says Bob.
- Focus the content of your community events on EDUCATING attendees about their senior living options – not on selling the property or amenities. People attend offsite events because they will feel less pressured and more relaxed. That doesn't mean you can't get up and say a few words about your community and invite people to visit.
- Ask for referrals. As Bob says, "This is a life event, not a sales event. I guarantee, every person you talk to at your offsite events and tours know other families in the same situation."
- Don't forget to survey the people after your event (according to Bob's research, 85% of those who hold events don't!) This is crucial to understand what they think of your presentation, venue, community and if it did or didn't motivate them to take the next step.

The Old Ways Won't Work

"The old ways won't work anymore," Bob tells me. "Occupancy rates are down and new construction is up," he says. Vacant tag lines, plain vanilla direct mail pieces and events that force your prospects to walk through your doors, turn people off, he explains. "The winners will be those communities that are able to get prospects to know you, like you and trust you. And he goes on to say, "A quick review of the results from communities following the offsite community event program, proves this program will move your community in that direction."

Stay tuned for Part II.



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