



Getting the Move-In: How to be Top of Their List

By Susan Saldibar

Consider this. Everyone who tours your community will also tour 3-5 others.

Now you can argue as to what that number is. But knowing this can make the period of time between a tour and a decision excruciating. Bob Wilgus, Director of Marketing and Strategic Digital Communications for [LeadingResponse](#) (a Senior Housing Forum partner) has made a science of understanding the journey a prospective resident takes from initial inquiry to move-in.

The period between tour and move-in decision doesn't have to be a nail-biter.

Bob tells me that how the post-tour period is handled says a lot about the relationship with the prospective resident. After the tour, many sales people will sit and wait anxiously. Others will frantically call and call again, afraid their community will fade from memory. But for those who do things right, the period leading to a move-in decision is just a natural progression of an already established relationship. They can pretty much tell you where the prospective resident is in terms of mindset. According to Bob Wilgus, that's because the prospect not only knows their community, they like their community and have grown to trust them. And he knows this because senior living communities that are using LeadingResponses' Offsite Community Event Marketing Program have been trained to leverage the social dynamics to achieve the "know, like and trust" relationship.

"Think of it from the prospective resident's point of view," says Bob. "At this point they are weighing the pros and cons of your community against others in the area. This is when it pays to have engaged with them right from the start in meaningful ways – during the offsite community events."

Keep as much communication face-to-face as possible.

Of course, the most meaningful way to engage is face to face. And nothing, according to Bob, does that like a live event. "A dinner event, held on neutral territory, is a great way to start building trust with your prospects from day one," says Bob. "Give them a good meal and an interesting seminar on a topic of interest (i.e. senior living options) and they will open up to you and create a bond that's much more powerful and secure than just a phone call or exchange of emails. Your messages and community's value proposition received and absorbed much more easily than trying to force them through the front door of your community," he adds.

So, let's say you've done all that. You still have that nail-biting period after a tour when a prospect might say "Thanks, we'll think about all this and get back to you." What then?

Here are Bob's tips to keep the prospective resident engaged in the period between the tour and the decision to move-in:

1. **Communicate with them in ways that keeps them tied to your value proposition as it impacts them.** Emails, calls, direct mail, all can be used. But each should be tailored to fit each individual, in terms of where they are in the process and their personal situation. If you're taking notes during the community event and again during the tour, you'll have all the talking points you need to keep your prospects engaged and keeps your community in the running.
2. **Find ways to distinguish yourself.** "You want them to remember you as 'Of course, they are the community that has.....you fill in the blank,'" says Bob. As an example, having a senior living options seminar, helps brand your community as an expert and a partner in helping them better understand issues that concern them. It can quickly set your community apart from the rest, according to Bob.
3. **Be an ongoing resource.** If you have already built a relationship with a prospect, you know what their specific challenges are. "Find out how you can be of help," Bob suggests. "Do they need to find an elder law attorney? Could the family members benefit from a support group? Find out what their needs are and become part of their solution." That way, even if they take their time to make a final decision, your community will always be uppermost in their minds. "And the bonus is that they will probably tell others about your community," Bob says.

By doing these things in a sincere way you will be building trust, Bob says. And trust is huge in the decision-making process. The key is to keep the points of communication and reinforcement ongoing and consistent. "Never assume that a decision has been made one way or another," says Bob.

It's not just about features anymore.

And Bob warns us that assuming the beautiful new kitchen or bubbling fountain in your lobby is going to clinch the deal may leave you on the decision sidelines.

"Remember that you can't compete successfully by just touting brick-and-mortar features anymore," Bob says. "You are now competing to win the hearts and minds of your future residents and their families."

And that, Bob tells me, is something marketers need to keep uppermost in their minds, especially in this industry. "This is an emotional decision," Bob says. "Keeping that in mind will help grow the number of attendees at your community events, the tours you give and the number of move-ins."



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