



2 Experts Reveal Secrets for Great Events

By Susan Saldibar

Recently Bob Wilgus, Director of Marketing and Strategic Digital Communications for [LeadingResponse](#) (a Senior Housing Forum partner) held a telecast that included two of his industry marketing experts; Valerie Whitman, who covers the assisted living and memory care space and Jodi Egger, who works within continuous care retirement communities “CCRCs” and independent living. Both had some great insight on lead acquisition strategies for the new year. So great, in fact, that we decided to turn it into a 2-part series.

If you caught the [first part](#), you were probably pretty impressed by the conversion rates that Val and Jodi told Bob they were getting for their off-site events. These events are gaining traction, not only in the Assisted Living/Memory Care space, but also in the CCRC space.

But Bob and his team also make the point that conversion rates like these don’t just fall out of the sky. A shift in the way we approach prospects is an important part of why the LeadingResponse off-site event model works. Bob, Val and Jodi shared some pearls of wisdom from each of their perspectives that I’ll share with you below. (Of course you really should listen to the [telecast](#) to get the full impact.)

1. **Stop selling “lifestyle”** -- This is particularly true for those who run CCRCs. As Jodi points out, “The market has basically come back to us and said ‘I already have that lifestyle. Why do I need to move to your community?’ So It’s really about emphasizing the long term care aspect, along with the financial benefits and the insurance behind it, and what that will leverage for them in care going forward in the future.” This, as she points out, represents a real shift over the last five years, in terms of how the marketing is being handled and the type of events being held. There is a re-education needed, Jodi says, to focus more on helping individuals understand what their options are.
2. **Meet them where they are most comfortable** -- Bob has told us over and over again that there is a large number of prospects who want to get to know your community but are not comfortable walking through your doors. As Val says, “The bottom line is that people would rather meet you

off-site; there is this level of anxiety that exists. This is a very emotional, complex sale, so the idea that they can be in a social, neutral environment, like a local restaurant, makes them feel more at ease. They're interested in learning, and they're building that relationship with you to then take that next step to come on site and tour."

3. **Don't feature-dump** -- Val mentioned how toxic feature-dumping has become. Instead, she urges operators to center the discussion around each family and what's important to them. The goal is to build relationships so that they will have a sense of a connection to your community. Jodi agrees. "No more 'look at what we have, our features, etc.' Sales pitches won't work. We are careful not to sound salesy. We work closely to make sure every point is educational and answers their questions. We need to tell them 'We are going to take care of you' and that has not been getting across in the past."
4. **Share costs and how those costs are covered** -- Bob, Val and Jodi all agreed that today's prospects want to know about costs. Val explains, "Remove misconceptions. Give them cost ranges. You need to share costs. Different care levels; range of costs, etc. Then explain how you cover those costs!"
5. **Look beyond next week's move-in** -- This is a point Bob is really passionate about. "What we're hearing from those communities [who conduct off-site events] is; not only are they getting those urgent need people -- those who need to make a decision within the next 30-60 days -- they are also seeing move-ins 60 days, 90 days, 120 days from that campaign that only lasted 2-3 nights," Bob says. "So you're getting clients coming back to you who held events last year at this time and they're still getting move-ins, so it's giving these communities a real pipeline of prospects, as opposed to trying to throw something together to get a dozen people onsite to try to get them to tour."

And there's a bottom line to all this, as Bob points out towards the end of the podcast. Namely, that you need to look at the longterm ROI of these off-site events. And it's pretty impressive. According to Bob (and he has the research to back it up) LeadingResponse leads that result in move-ins will cost about one third of what you'll pay a referral company. Bob cites a 16 to 1 ROI. Jodi compared the cost of on-site events to offering incentives. "The knee jerk reaction is to offer incentives, which are typically the way communities go," she says. "Just one can cost around \$25,000 in entry fees for a community. Save yourself over \$10,000 and do an offsite event," she suggests. "Build a pipeline; build the future instead of panicking to get that one immediate move in."

The consistent reaction that LeadingResponse is getting from senior living operators and from the attendees of the off-site events is positive. In fact, one could argue, better than positive. As Val says, "Clients tell me it was beyond their expectations." Not a bad takeaway for a prospect!

