



You Will Not Believe What Resident Photos and Videos Are Proven To Have The Highest Impact

By Susan Saldibar

Quite some time ago I came across this YouTube video of a woman playing cards in an assisted living community. It was memorable in that she was wearing one of those oxygen nasal cannulas. She was so animated and laughing with her cards that she made me laugh along with her. The oxygen tube across her face made me like her even more. As hard as I've tried to find that video again, I've never been able to.

This all came back to me when I spoke with Debra Gawet, Social and Digital Content Strategist for [Sage Age Strategies](#) (a Senior Housing Forum partner). We talked about the reluctance of so many senior living communities to showcase residents with walkers, wheelchairs and other aids for fear of creating anything less than a vibrant, healthy image of their communities. Debra understands this, having worked in many senior living communities. But she had some words of wisdom that I think bear sharing.

Don't let a walker or wheelchair get in the way of a great photo.

We all know that stock photos are far less effective than photos of actual residents. Yet we use them, in part because it's easier to find a stock photo than to bring in a photographer. Debra agrees.

But there's also the fear of how a photo of an actual resident might be interpreted by the viewer. "Many communities are especially hesitant to share photos of residents who are using wheelchairs, walkers, oxygen, etc. for fear that the photo will cause the viewer to have a negative impression of the community," Debra tells me. "They may feel that the majority of the residents are medically 'needy' and the community may appear more like a 'facility', a word that congers up all sorts of negative images," she adds.

The good news is that, according to Debra, it needn't play out this way at all. There are moments that can be captured and ways to enhance those moments that make an impairment negligible. Here are some of her suggestions:

- Be creative. Don't pose people in unnatural positions to try to make them look younger or more vital. Instead, find ways to engage them in an activity that will animate them. Give them an opportunity to laugh or gesture. I remember a photo on a senior living website of a older man with very yellow, stained teeth. He was laughing. He was well dressed and looked healthy and happy. Most importantly, he looked real.
- Have patience. Great photo moments are spontaneous, not staged. Make sure whoever is taking your photos has the patience to "wait it out" and get some natural photos that show involvement.
- Use copy to augment your photos and videos. "When posting, use clever, engaging, witty copy paired with an appropriate emoji," Debra tells me. "It adds life to the photo and draws in the viewer."
- The more photos and videos you take, the better. That way having some with folks sitting in wheelchairs or with an oxygen tank nearby are balanced with photos of more mobile residents. It creates a nice mix that reflects the real world and adds an air of authenticity.

All this makes sense on so many levels. Who hasn't noticed today's commercials featuring people who look less like models and more like real people? I've seen ads featuring kids with Downs Syndrome. We are now seeing more people in wheelchairs on TV and in movies. What a breath of fresh air. Debra agrees. "We are living in a time where transparency is more important than ever to consumers. Instead of hiding those residents with disabilities, bring them out from the shadows and celebrate their stories and lives. It's not only good for your marketing efforts, it's good for your community."



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