



What You Don't Know WILL Hurt You: Q&A on Digital Marketing

By Susan Saldibar

Digital marketing is connected to just about everything. If you don't think so, answer this: Where do you go to find out about a new product, a restaurant or even a senior living community? Almost everything we experience online is touched by digital marketing. As a consumer, I love it. I can access videos, articles, blogs and everything in between instantly. Ads are targeted to things I'm actually interested in – the sale items at Chico's. Or a deal on the alert system I've been considering for my 93-year old mom. And, yes, I'll bite. I admit it.

But there is a lot more to digital marketing than just getting people like me to "bite". I caught up recently with Debra Gawet, Social and Digital Content Strategist for Sage Age Strategies (a Senior Housing Forum partner). Debra knows a lot about the expectations of a new generation of consumers and how they are driving the need for digital marketing in senior living communities to turn that first bite into a relationship and, ultimately, a move-in. I had a few questions, so we decided to do a Q&A. Here goes...

1. What do you think has changed the most in the last year with digital marketing?

Debra mentioned a few things:

- Increasing use of digital marketing to build trust. We're seeing social media enabling communities to provide meaningful content that is helpful to those visiting their brand, whether it's on the website or social media channel. Companies are building real relationships through interactions on social media. They are responding to comments, tweets, messages, etc. with meaningful and personalized responses made in a timely manner. Through these concentrated efforts trust grows over time. Relationship marketing is now considered key to gaining prospects' trust. Too often communities miss this integral piece.
- A heavier focus on Visual Content Marketing. While visual content marketing has always played a big role, it has become even more important to use it across all social media channels. People desire immediate access to information. Visual content is very direct and elicits a high level of engagement. We have some really [surprising statistics](#) about visual content marketing that further emphasize just how powerful visual content marketing has become.

- An increase in Live Streaming. [Our data shows](#) that individuals are indeed engaging more readily with this kind of content. Communities need to find ways to bring it into their social programs.
- Messenger Bots popularity is increasing. This is the service that allows bots to interact with users on a community website. Now it is also available on Facebook Messenger. It provides an immediate way to interact and get questions answered quickly.

2. **What misconceptions do you think senior living community operators have about digital marketing that you'd like to clear up?**

- Lack of understanding the need for integrated marketing. Based on my experience, many senior living operators don't fully understand the purpose of social media marketing and how, when combined with other digital tactics, it helps improve the results of the marketing campaign.

By definition, the term "Integrated Marketing" is just that: an integrated approach to creating a unified and seamless experience for consumers to interact with a brand. If done correctly, it melds all aspects of marketing communication together. That means advertising, sales promotion, public relations, direct marketing, and social media, all through their respective mix of tactics, methods, channels, media, and activities, so that all work together as a unified force. It is a process designed to ensure that all messaging and communications strategies are consistent across all channels and are centered on the consumer. That is the real definition of integrated marketing.

- Expecting immediate results. Another misconception is the idea that as soon as a campaign launches, there should be leads immediately and occupancy should be filled.

The truth is that social media marketing involves relationship building. This takes time. Remember that not all prospects who visit the social media channels are at the same spot on the customer journey funnel. The purpose of social media is to provide helpful, relevant content that helps guide your prospects through the funnel. This is especially true for Facebook campaigns. There is this belief that because there is money being spent on Facebook advertising there should be immediate results. These campaigns have various goals, whether growing the number of "likes", retargeting for landing pages, increasing engagement for a post, etc., but there are many factors that can affect the results. Again, this takes time.

- You can do it all organically. The truth is that you need to have some paid advertising. Due to all the changes to the algorithms for the various social media channels, paid advertising should be strongly considered. It's just not enough to rely on organic tactics. Paid advertising efforts only can strengthen the success of a campaign.

3. **What should marketers be thinking about as we head into budget season? Where should they put their money?**

As marketers head into the budget season, they should consider their goals for 2019 and develop a plan for each quarter. They should concentrate efforts on digital marketing tactics as well as traditional marketing efforts.

4. **What did I leave out? Any other thoughts for senior living community operators?**

Don't be afraid of digital marketing! If you work with the right company they will explain what it's all about and walk you through the steps. Make sure you choose a partner with longevity in the industry. They should be able to provide samples of their work over the years. Make sure they can truly provide the services they claim they can provide. There are agencies that work in the industry who claim they do all this stuff, but when you really go and look you wonder how they can make that claim! I see some of the so called 'experts' and am surprised at how lacking the quality of work can be.

The bottom line is that, in today's world, digital marketing is the cornerstone of effective marketing. It's important to get it right!



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