Lead Generation Outlook for 2019 - Part 1

By Susan Saldibar

By now your 2019 sales and marketing plans are being pressed into action. Your budgets are (more or less) approved and you have high hopes for making the new year a better year. But will it be better? How do you know?

I caught up with Valerie Whitman, VP of Senior Living for LeadingResponse, (a Senior Housing Forum partner) to do a little Q&A on the lead generation outlook for 2019. As someone who keeps close tabs on consumer behavior and isn't afraid to get into the weeds of things like cost per conversion, I knew that Valerie would have some words of wisdom for those operators out there smart enough to listen.

And I wasn't wrong. In fact, Valerie shared so much great insight in the Q&A that I decided to break it into two parts. Here's Part I.

1. **What do you see as emerging challenges for senior living operators in 2019? Any new threats or opportunities specific to marketing?**

   Like we all see, I see competition continuing to increase, with many new developments and expansions of existing communities across the country. It's hard to find any areas where new communities aren't being built. Competition with programming will continue as well, making it harder for older models to compete.

   We'll also see expectations continue to rise. Consumers keep getting savvier and, like all of us, expect transparency. They are aware of what is available to them in terms of new options and new providers. That's why it will become more important than ever to pay attention to the consumer.

   Relationships will become more critical. Your lead generation efforts need to be relevant and personal, so your access to data will become more important than ever. This is especially true for older communities that hopefully can access the wealth of data around current residents and lead demographics. If you have data newer communities don't have yet, such as impressive lengths of stay for residents and staff longevity, you can bring that to the consumer.

2. **As we head into a new year, what old habits should communities leave behind? What new ones should they cultivate?**

   One that definitely has to go is the habitual mindset we often times fall into of quantity over quality. We all have our metrics to hit and we know that more activity equates to more sales. However, these activities have to be more meaningful and based on strategy. Not just checking the box for "completed activity."

   Instead, sales needs to understand where the prospect is in his or her journey. Assuming they've applied active listening skills and discovery questions during the initial conversations with the family, they should have a great deal of information to help form their next steps in terms of strategy. Ask questions like, "What is my strategy with this family?" "Have they already toured?", "Should I call and leave a voicemail, or do they prefer email?" and "What is a meaningful next step or gesture that helps further my relationship with this family and helps them with their decision making process?" Sales needs to allow themselves to take a few minutes and really think about the best strategy and next step for each lead. So, if you've had a conversation with them, use what you already know about them.

   As for new habits, learn to listen. Frankly, sales counselors tend to talk too much. That's what our Mystery Shops reveal. You need to turn that around and start asking great questions and actively listen to their responses.

   On the marketing side, stop re-using your old plans. Dig into your data. You should, at any point, know what your cost per acquisition and conversion rates are based on your data. What can work better in the new year with some tweaks? Maybe it's the call to action. Maybe something else. Use that consumer behavior data to provide relevant content for the family. For example, this could be as simple as tweaking your event start times to meet the needs of your adult child target audience. If you ask them to attend before 6:00 PM, you'll miss opportunities because they just can't get there before then! Data shows us that they are still active, working, caring for teenagers or grandchildren, managing a household, etc.

   Finally, I'd say to learn to walk away from lead sources that don't give you a strong cost to conversion rate. Of course, be sure to understand, using data, why the conversions aren't there before ending what could be a great lead source that simply needs a few tweaks. And, yes, if you are going into another year of trying to decrease your digital aggregator costs, start by cutting last year's spend by 10% and reallocate that towards other lower cost per acquisition efforts.

Lots of good solid insight here to mull over as we dig into a new year. And more coming in Part II. You owe it to yourself to stay tuned!

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