

SPECIAL ISSUE

brief



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Redefining Marketing: Trends for the Next Generation of Active Aging

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Redefining Marketing: Trends for the Next Generation of Active Aging

INTRODUCTION

Marketing trends in the coming years will spring forth from the concept of redefinition and align with the unique generational value system of baby boomers. The incoming generation of retirees — and the influencers of today's prospects and residents — value youth, exuberance, and the concept of unlimited potential. At the center of consumer culture for their entire lives, they bring with them the expectation that all is forthcoming, and all will be tailored to their needs and desires. Retirement for them will not be a time to fade away. Rather, it will be a time to **reinvent and redefine**.

Active aging communities and senior communities alike must embrace this concept of redefinition, first by developing a keen and nuanced understanding of their new customers through comprehensive market research, and then transforming that understanding into highly targeted, emotionally charged marketing concepts. This means a *literal* redefinition of terminology, marketing methods and outlets, and sales approaches in order to reach and inspire the next generation.

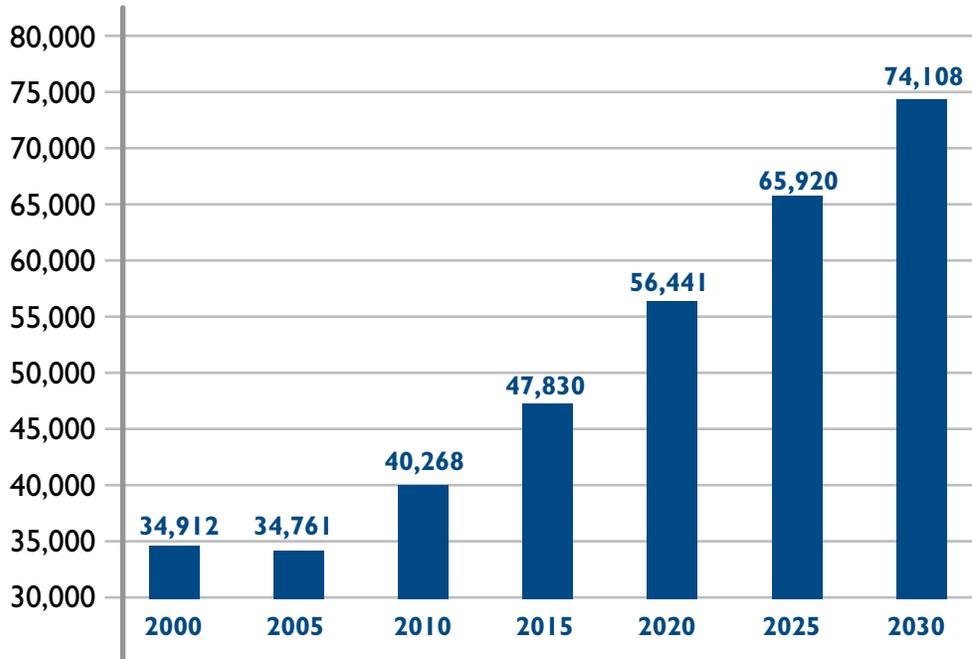
For CCRCs / LifePlan Communities and Independent Living operators, meeting Baby Boomers' high expectations for personalized services and a personalized marketing experience — an experience that doesn't even feel like marketing — is paramount.

The New Demographic

The influx of new retirees that began at the dawn of this decade will continue for the next seven years, with 10,000 Baby Boomers a day turning 65. At the center of consumer culture for their entire lives, they bring with them high expectations for service that is not just steered toward them generationally, but fully customized for them personally.

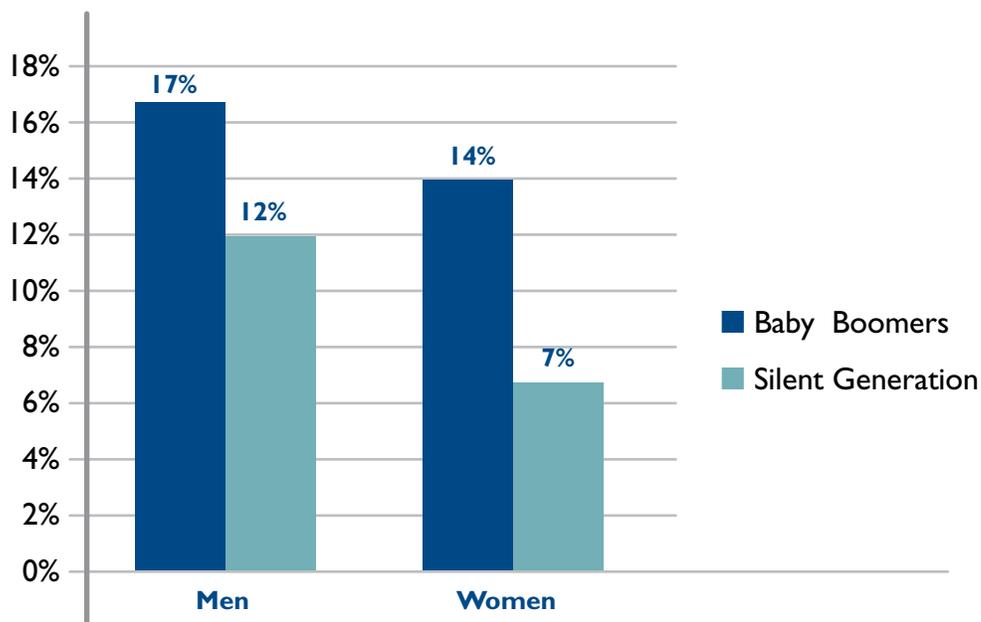
U.S. Population Age 65+ (in Thousands)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau



% of Population with Bachelors Degree +

Source: Pew Research Center, 2014





Baby Boomers are generally better educated than the generations that preceded them, with smaller families to provide financial and social support. The values that influence their consumer behavior vary significantly from their parents as well: where their parents were inclined to respect institutions and accept what was offered, Baby Boomers came of age in an atmosphere that questioned authority and celebrated individuality. To successfully engage them is to celebrate their individuality as they express it — and redefine it — in retirement, or non-retirement, as it may be.

REDEFINING TERMINOLOGY

Redefining CCRCs: The LifePlan Community

To meet the needs of the next generation, traditional CCRCs are shifting from the role of care provider to the role of “vibrant village,” supporting the aspirations and ideals of Baby Boomers in retirement. As that role shifts, the terminology is shifting as well to reflect the consumer driven changes in the industry.

Hence, the “LifePlan Community,” the first industry-wide movement into the hearts and minds of Baby Boomers. Although just beginning to gain recognition among consumers and operators, the name change is of utmost importance and signifies an important shift in the industry. More than a change in nomenclature, it is an acknowledgement of the changes in services and lifestyle that communities are offering, and to whom. (See www.lifeplancommunities.org)

Redefining The Consumers

Terms that the industry has taken for granted for decades, such as “senior,” “elderly,” “aging,” and “retirement,” are becoming terms of the past.

A generation bent toward youth and individualism simply will not call itself “senior,” or “elderly.” These terms could apply to any generation as it ages. Baby Boomers are Baby Boomers, and they will be so throughout the many stages of their lives.

Redefining Retirement: Aging vs. Reinventing

Creating options for the incoming generation means speaking to them in their own language, a language that speaks to an atmosphere of individual purpose and creativity. Even the term “retirement” itself means something different to Baby Boomers.

Unlike their parents, who anticipated retirement as a time to rest and retreat, Boomers view retirement as a time to reinvent themselves. As they move into retirement, their priorities are adventure, giving back, spending time with family, and downsizing or “right-sizing” their lifestyle. Many are launching second or third careers, volunteering full-time, exploring passions set aside during their householder years, and finding new passions to keep them engaged and fulfilled.

Likewise, as this generation moves into their retirement years they are less motivated by the “care” portion of senior housing options. They know that they may need care one day and are prepared to plan for it, however they are moved in greater numbers by the promise of the next exciting stage of their lives.

Redefining Marketing: Marketing vs. Real-time, Responsive Storytelling

Today, enlightened marketers consider marketing a **collaborative conversation rather than a monologue.**

Marketers of active aging communities often see themselves as curing deficiencies and solving problems for their prospects, but Baby Boomers may not believe they have deficiencies or problems. They are more likely to present values, interests, and goals for the next stages of their lives.

Prospects are seeking support in creating a meaningful retirement, rather than a solution to the “problem” of aging. In other words, the model is moving from “what’s the matter with you” to “what matters to you.”

The tone, then, must shift from consultative to collaborative throughout the marketing process, from a list of facts and features to an exchange of ideas. Speaking to the values and aspirations of a consumer requires a different kind of communication than simply offering solutions to the



problem — for example, the problem of having too much physical work to do in their own home. More powerful is a story about what they could be doing with their time instead: living their dreams and engaging in meaningful activities.

“People buy on emotion and justify the purchase with facts.”

This communication happens on an emotional level rather than a logical level, and centers on storytelling rather than facts. The facts are still present, however they are delivered within a larger narrative that touches emotional motivations.

Research over the past ten years has delivered two key pieces of information about storytelling for the enlightened marketer: 1.) During storytelling, areas of listener’s brains activate as *if they were in the story themselves*,¹ and 2.) consumers view advertising more favorably when it is in the form of a narrative.²

Together, this information is driving a move toward marketing via storytelling. Telling a story into which prospects can insert themselves is an exceptionally powerful method of accessing the emotions that drive the decision to move. **In the process of receiving stories about life in an active aging community, prospects emotionally rehearse what it would be like to live there themselves.**

Marketing through storytelling means making prospects a part of the story on the website, in social media, in print advertising, and then throughout the sales process.

Redefining Sales: Transactions vs. Relationships

As the tone of marketing shifts from consultative to collaborative, the sales process shifts as well, from a transactional exchange to a personal relationship. Personal relationships value prospects’ unique identities, goals, and aspirations, and address the emotional motivators in their decision-making.

To form personal relationships with prospects, sales people must create real conversations. They must first listen to their prospects’ stories about their lifestyle — Baby Boomers expect to be heard and understood. For them, a list of benefits is not enough. Thus, the storytelling that begins in marketing continues into the sales process, and evolves into an exchange of stories and ideas between the prospect and sales person.

REACHING THE NEXT GENERATION: THE MEANS MATCH THE MESSAGE

Where Baby Boomers Get Their Information

As the messaging for tomorrow's consumers evolves from traditional and fact-based to personal and relationship based, so, too evolves the means by which the consumer is reached.

The message must find Baby Boomers where they are. That includes both traditional media and digital media.

Baby Boomers are online researching topics of interest first, however they do still open mail and read print newspapers. Traditional media will continue to be a part of a comprehensive marketing strategy.

Word-of-Mouth in Modern Marketing

The most powerful source of information and strongest referral always has been “word-of-mouth.” That has not changed, however “word-of-mouth” itself has been redefined. Word-of-mouth might now include shares of videos, pictures, and articles on social media, forwarded emails, and blogs. Surprisingly, however, only about 7% of word-of-mouth referrals happen online.³

Generating word-of-mouth referrals in the next generation, online and offline, follows the overall trend away from transactions and toward emotional relationships. While traditional referral programs are still effective, keen understanding of the emotional motivators behind sharing is central to increasing word-of-mouth referrals.

“Harnessing the power of word of mouth, online or offline, requires understanding why people talk and why some things get talked about and shared more than others.”

— Jonah Berger, Author of “Contagious”

According to Jonah Berger, author of *Contagious: Why Things Catch On*, consumers are motivated to share information by the experience of high-arousal emotions (among other factors). Whether it's sharing their own experiences with friends and acquaintances or sharing content online, the emotional state that is evoked is key to the motivation to share.

High arousal emotions that prompt sharing include awe, excitement, amusement, and anxiety and/or anger. Low-arousal emotions, such as contentment or sadness, are less likely to be shared.

	HIGH AROUSAL	LOW AROUSAL
POSITIVE	Awe Excitement Amusement (humor)	Contentment
NEGATIVE	Anger Anxiety	Sadness

Traditional and Digital Tactics: Strength in Numbers

Traditional tactics such as newspaper advertising and direct mail continue to be successful with Baby Boomers and are integral to a solid marketing strategy. As previously noted, while Baby Boomers spend a great deal of time online, they still turn to print media at a significant rate (and that rate can vary considerably geographically).

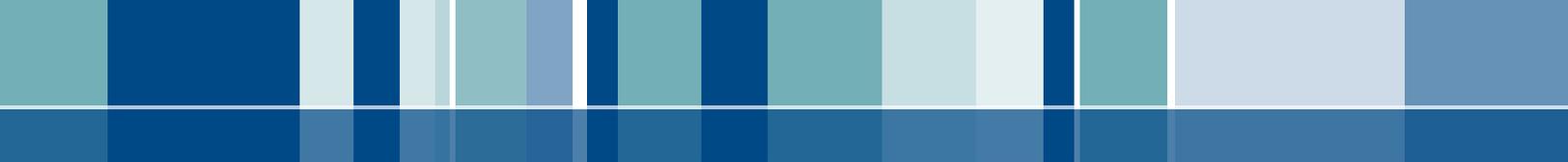
What has been redefined in traditional media is its *purpose*. At one time, a print advertisement or direct mail piece might have been the primary means for reaching consumers. Now, traditional media serves to drive consumers to the information source where they feel most comfortable starting the relationship. For many, that will be the community’s website or social media, while others may pick up the phone immediately.

Traditional media is the start of the conversation and a tool for building awareness. It should pique interest and spark the curiosity of consumers enough for them to respond by seeking out more information.

The messages in traditional media and digital media serve to reinforce each other. A consistent, focused, and *emotionally engaging* message that speaks directly to the values and imagination of Baby Boomers reinforced in print and online will begin to tell the story of why a community is the best possible choice for them.

Digital Content Strategy: Destinations vs. Platforms

As the purpose of websites has been redefined, so too has the content. Websites once were merely a “destination” for information about a business. Now, a community’s website is a full platform for getting a share of prospects’ attention, employing authentic content that the community can use beyond the sales cycle.



A website's content encompasses written copy, images, videos, and downloads. The best content is based on solid research about what consumers want, and is continually refined based on qualitative and quantitative feedback from website and social media analytics, survey data, and focus groups. (See below, "Building A Story That Sells.") Evocative, informative, and personalized content drives every aspect of digital marketing. Content is the strongest driver of how a website will be found and shared by consumers, and the basis of a successful social media presence.

Content strategy must acknowledge the visitor's unique position when they arrive on the site: that they are likely beginning an intensive research process around a complex decision. Speaking to that decision-making process, the visuals and copy must be cohesive and well-structured, anticipating visitors' factual and emotional concerns.

Effective content is also efficient. A single image or short video can evoke powerful emotions and invite the visitor into the story of the community. These visuals are a critical part of setting the tone for the conversation, and answer questions that visitors have about the intangibles, like the feel of the community and whether they'll feel accepted there. At one time, a website was merely an online brochure; now it's a multimedia experience designed to start a conversation.

Quality Content Is King In Modern SEO

The three cornerstones of a successful SEO campaign are quality content, good technical construction (making it easier for search engines to navigate), and links to and from other quality sites.

Quality content stands alone as its own category, and it is also integral to the other aspects of SEO. Engaging and informative content that is well organized (for people and search engines) brings visitors to the site and keeps them there.

Quality content also creates opportunities for link building by partnering with other organizations. Partnering is an excellent opportunity for increased visibility. Successful partnerships might include reciprocal links, guest bloggers, and cross-promotions with related organizations (e.g. arts organizations with which they partner, advocacy groups).

Website Preferences and Pet Peeves

Popular Features				
Easy Navigation*	74%			
Integrated Search*	74%			
Printer Friendly*	67%			
Links to Other Sites/Information (55+)	40%			
Text Resizer (55–64)	22%			
Video (55–64)	19%			
Pet Peeves		55–64	65–74	75+
Requires Sign Up		82%	77%	77%
Navigation: Where do I go?		59%	61%	56%
Can't find contact info		57%	64%	47%
Need special apps		54%	48%	30%
Slow		45%	30%	28%

Source: Creating Results, LLC. "Social Silver Surfers"

*Includes all respondents, ages 40+. Creating Results reports these preferences to be consistent across age groups studied.

Social Media

Contrary to popular belief, **Baby Boomers spend more time consuming content online than Millennials and Generation X.** Twenty-five percent of Boomers consume more than 20 hours of content weekly, and 17% consume between 15–20 hours per week, significantly edging out Gen Xers and Millennials in both high-use categories.⁴

“If content is worth sharing, consumers will become surrogate marketers.”

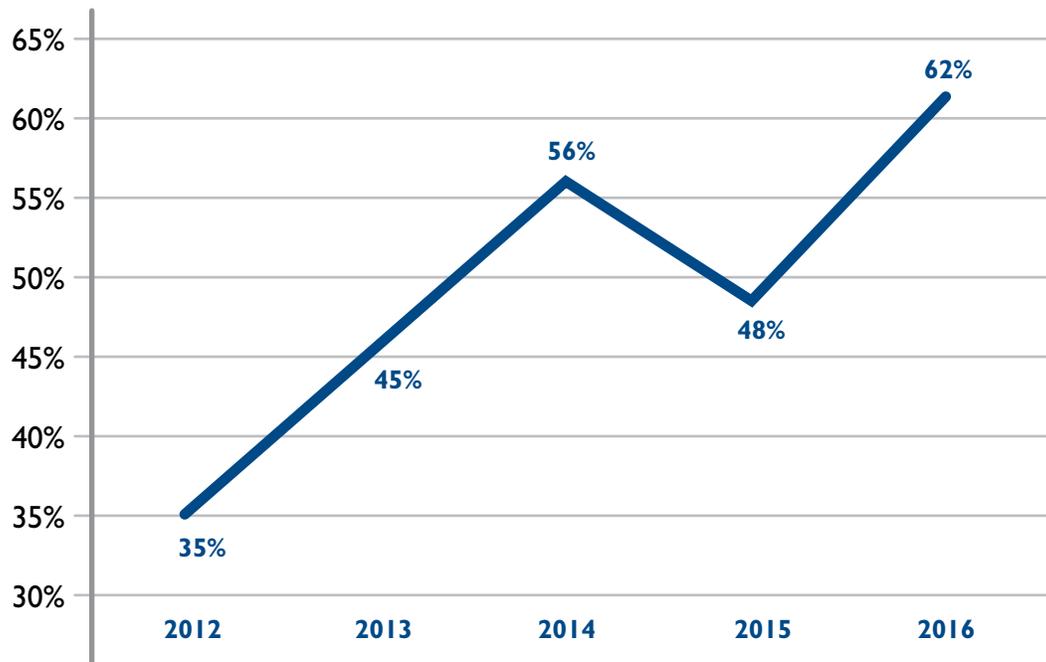
While they're online, Baby Boomers are heavy users of social media, and their numbers on social media are increasing rapidly. **In fact, 62% of people age 65+ who are online reported using Facebook in 2016, an increase of 14% from just the year before.**⁵

Reaching Baby Boomers on social media is of utmost importance. Fortunately, social media marketing is designed for highly targeted and precise communication. Marketers are able to reach consumers based on age, location, and specific interests (that can imply home value and income level). This allows for delivery of highly personalized messages that get the attention of just the right prospects.

Baby Boomers are also the most likely generation to share content. **This is the great magic of social media: if content is worth sharing, consumers will become surrogate marketers.**

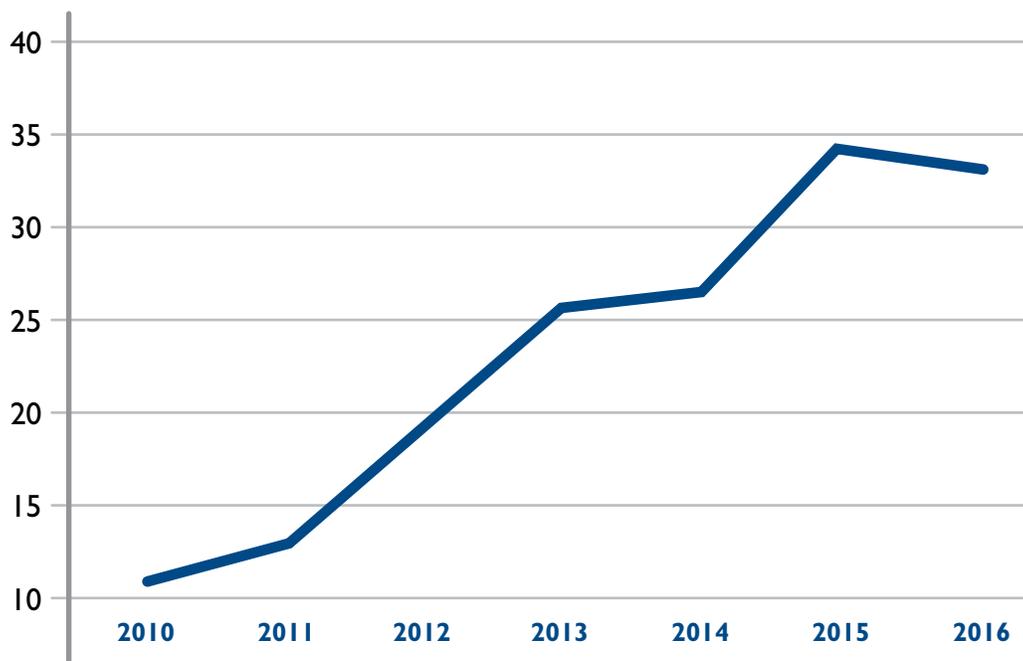
Internet Users 65+ on Facebook

Source: Pew Internet Study, 2016 Update



65+ Internet Users on Social Media

Source: Pew Internet Study, 2016 Update



Building A Story That Sells: Intersection of Qualitative and Quantitative Data

Among the most exciting and useful changes in the marketing of senior housing is the sheer volume of data available to steer decisions, and the speed at which data is available.

An abundance of qualitative and quantitative data offers nearly instant feedback about the strength of the marketplace, the strength of a campaign, and direction for future efforts.

Traditional demographic data can show the depth of the market, but making the most of a deep market requires strong qualitative information as well. Smart marketers *must* know more.

To create a relevant, credible, and authentic marketing experience, marketers must tap the souls of their prospects to understand their emotions, create excitement and move them to act. There are an unprecedented number of tools to help gather and measure information, but humans act on emotion. The technology we have, ultimately, is measuring an *emotional* response.

A campaign that yields real, measurable results in terms of sales requires in-depth information about the consumer's interests, ideas about the industry, fears, desires and expectations.

These will be at the forefront of developing a story that creates an emotional response, influences consumer perceptions, and ultimately yields sales.

A Fresh Look at Focus Groups

Focus groups have long been a mainstay for gathering information about consumer preferences. As with other marketing practices, technology has changed the focus group, with tools for greater speed, precision, and flexibility.

The focus groups of today allow decision makers to gain key insights in a nanosecond, and to define the question even as they are getting the answer. While the technology for decision makers to observe focus groups has long been available, instant communication via text to a skilled moderator with a smartwatch can seamlessly steer the course of the discussion without interruptions that might influence the responses of the participants. Thus, the questions and responses are more nuanced and targeted than the focus groups of old.

As operators get to know their new market more deeply understand their stories, the marketing message will reflect their story back to them.

Survey Data

A strong, well-constructed consumer survey in concert with focus groups yields quantitative data about consumer preferences and interest. Survey data can confirm focus group findings and identify areas for further exploration. Surveys of focus group members also provide information that participants may not be willing to share in a group.

Taken together, focus groups and survey data combine to steer powerful messages and the best use of vehicles for getting those messages into the marketplace.

Website and Social Media Analytics

Gathering solid consumer research data starts a rapid cycle of campaign development, testing, refining, deploying and retesting. The speed at which information is available allows for a dynamic marketing effort that responds to consumer preferences and behavior in real time.

Feedback, particularly from social media analytics, is nearly instant. Metrics such as likes, shares, and reach of a given post give quantitative information about the success of the campaign, its content, and which consumers in particular found it relevant or entertaining enough to share. Clicks from the post to the website can offer guidance about the utility of the campaign — whether the post piqued interest in the community itself, or was more suited to awareness building. A review of comments offers qualitative information about viewers' emotional responses.

Website analytics also give insight into success of social media campaigns and outlets. Visits related a particular post or outlet that show strong engagement can be a measure of success.

Website analytics speak volumes about the relationship visitors are developing with a community online, from how they're finding the community to the kinds of information they're looking for, and areas about which they want more information.

Key metrics to investigate are how visitors are finding the site (including source, medium, and keywords), how long they're spending on the site, which pages they're visiting and for how long, and what they're searching for once on the site. While there are some benchmarks for these metrics, they can vary significantly and are best viewed as a trajectory of improved engagement over the long term.

Using Social Media to Build Relationships

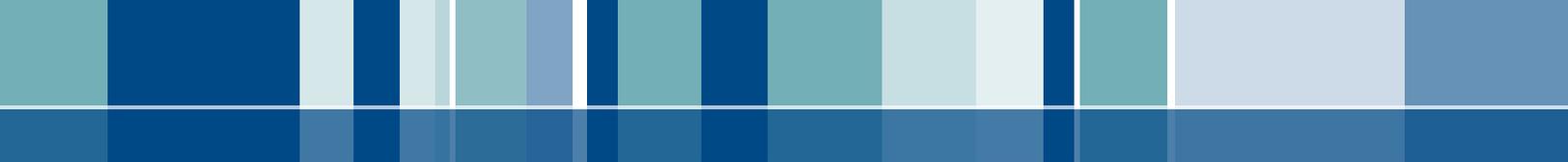
Social media is a tremendously powerful medium among Baby Boomers. A strong social media strategy invites them in, keeps the community top of mind during the sales process, and ultimately converts followers into surrogate marketers.

Followers on social media can be a community's strongest allies and most powerful messengers.

Baby Boomers are the generation most likely to share content on social media.⁶ Their shared content is a new form of word-of-mouth referral.

When Baby Boomers share content, they're sharing it with their cohort: friends and acquaintances who share a similar demographics and world views. Building relationships via social media starts with giving consumers a reason to follow your community. Social media strategy should include:

- Useful content that anticipates the interests and values of the audience.
- Entertaining content that evokes emotion, whether funny, inspiring, heartwarming, or exciting.
- Content that invites people to interact, whether through contests, asking users to share their stories, or other means.
- Processes for keeping the conversation going, including consistent monitoring and responsiveness.
- Weekly (minimum) news stories about the community.
- Content that draws users to the community website.
- Overtures to influential bloggers to cover stories about the community.
- Dedicated time and resources to uncover stories at the community that seniors and families would find interesting. What is ordinary to the community may be novel to others.
- Participation in conversation by staff, residents, and family members (always being mindful that staff are fully trained on appropriate content).
- Consistent evaluation of analytics.
- Consistent refining of message and content based on analytics.



Video Rich Content

Video is one of the most powerful means of storytelling. Video testimonials and resident stories instantly personalize a community's website, and generate a sense of connection and familiarity before prospects ever walk through the door.

Video is also highly sharable, and easier to offer than ever. While professionally produced content is important and should be included in any marketing budget, spontaneous video of special moments adds character and emotion to a blog or social media feed.

THE REDEFINED SALES PROCESS

Marketing to Baby Boomers brings a more fully educated consumer to a community's sales staff. The sales process begins with a prospect who has been researching online and likely knows more about the community than the individual sales person knows about the prospect.

The sales process, then, must become personal quickly, going right to the prospect's unique emotional motivators, determining what matters to them, and steering the conversation to meet that need.

Building a Relationship vs. Furthering the Sale

As Baby Boomers take the first steps in the complex decision to move into retirement housing, the sales process must reflect their independence, individual aspirations, and high expectations for personalized service.

The most successful sales people build strong relationships with their prospects in person, over the phone, and by email, so that they can learn about their prospects and speak their language.

A sales person who solicits and listens to the personal stories of prospects makes them feel valued and understood, and reveals their motivations, values and priorities.

Once the motivations are understood, offering stories about their personal experience with residents who have moved into the community conveys the specific facts of the community that will excite the prospect enough to take the next step. In this way, **the sale is furthered by deepening the relationship.**

“Stories are facts wrapped up in a narrative.”

For example, a marketer might relay the story of a resident who was reluctant to sell her big home, but after moving to the community was able to fulfill her dream of writing a novel. The fact of having more time with a maintenance-free lifestyle is embedded in the story, and prospects can emotionally rehearse having greater freedom to pursue their goals.

“A story is the only way to activate parts of the brain so that a listener turns the story into their own idea and experience.”

With a generational bent toward individualism, Baby Boomers will resist a “hard sell.” The impetus to make a move must feel natural and self-directed, and this form of rehearsal in storytelling is the most direct route. According to Uri Hasson, a researcher from Princeton University, a story is the only way to activate parts of the brain so that a listener transforms the story into their own idea and experience.⁷

Looking Ahead

Marketing to Baby Boomers in the coming years will be characterized by redefinition: Baby Boomers redefining themselves in retirement, the industry redefining its products to meet their needs, and redefining the terms used to describe those products.

As this generation continues to reach retirement age in unprecedented numbers, they are not content merely to ride off into the sunset as their parents and grandparents did. This generation challenges ideas about retirement, and the marketing to drive their decision-making must meet those challenges head-on. That means deepening relationships online and offline through solid, consistent research that evolves into highly targeted, inspiring marketing practices that feel authentic, personalized and natural.

Our industry is on the cutting edge. There is so much information and so many opportunities, and it is changing as we speak! The basic principals of marketing — knowing the industry, and knowing the clientele — come with experience. To succeed in the future, those principles must be meshed with the latest and most relevant research every day, consistently refining and redefining messages and practices.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ “Your Brain On Fiction,” March 17, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/18/opinion/sunday/the-neuroscience-of-your-brain-on-fiction.html>
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- ⁴ “Infographic: How Millennials, Gen Xers, and Boomers Consume Content Differently,” May 19, 2015, <https://contently.com/strategist/2015/05/19/infographic-how-millennials-gen-xers-and-boomers-consume-content-differently/>
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- ⁶ “Infographic: How Millennials, Gen Xers, and Boomers Consume Content Differently,” May 19, 2015, <https://contently.com/strategist/2015/05/19/infographic-how-millennials-gen-xers-and-boomers-consume-content-differently/>
- ⁷ “This Is Your Brain On Communication (Subtitles and Transcript),” May 2016, https://www.ted.com/talks/uri_hasson_this_is_your_brain_on_communication/transcript

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

BARBARA KLEGER

Barbara Kleger has been serving the senior housing industry since 1978 when she was Vice President of a public company that developed Continuing Care Retirement Communities. She has expertise in strategic planning, consumer research, and marketing solutions for the mature market. Ms. Kleger co-authored the *Senior Housing Marketing Specialist* certification courses for both retirement communities and assisted living residences, and was among the first in the country to be recognized as a Certified Active Adult Specialist in Housing. She has been a certified teacher for these courses and has lectured throughout the United States.

Barbara was involved in several White House Conferences On Aging and has received numerous distinguished service awards throughout her career, including the prestigious National "Icon of the Industry" award from the National Association of Home Builders 55+ Housing Council. This coveted honor recognized her as an outstanding industry leader who has made a lasting impact on the senior housing industry. A graduate of Temple University, Ms. Kleger began her career as an auditor with the United States General Accounting Office. During the past three decades, she has served over 350 clients/communities and surveyed over 1 million households and has been instrumental in the development or purchase/sale of numerous communities, surveyed. Ms. Kleger is a sought after speaker and has led focus groups and seminars for developers, architects, investors, health care providers, seniors and baby boomers throughout the United States, Canada, Mexico and England.

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