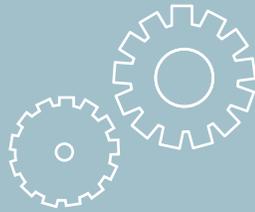


# SENIOR LIVING

*MARKETING GUIDE*



Picture this: you walk into your office at the start of a new workday and you're already overwhelmed by the different hats you're expected to wear: journalist, marketer, salesperson, marketing automation strategist, search engine optimization guru, and expert on senior living. You struggle with keeping up on the demands of your time—which role should you focus on today to reach your goals?

*Does this scenario sound familiar?*

# Your Guide to Winning in Senior Living Marketing This Year

If these challenges are what you face day-to-day as a senior living marketer, this guide is for you.

Senior living sales and marketing leaders are facing four trends that have emerged over the past few years, and the pace of change continues as we progress into 2018.

1. The rise of the digitally savvy senior.
2. The intense need for differentiation across service lines given the shift in living preferences.
3. Declining occupancy rates and increased competition forcing investments in technology and innovation to stay ahead of the pack.
4. Greater integration of traditional and digital marketing programs and intense scrutiny of marketing's return on investment.

Our goal for this guide is to *help people like you*, senior living sales and marketing leaders, face and address their unique set of challenges pertaining to resident acquisition. The insights in this guide are gleaned from interviewing over 200 senior living sales and marketing leaders in 2017 and the beginning of 2018.

Over the following 9 pages, we'll review the current state of occupancy and marketing budgets, reveal our findings on the most common challenges faced by senior living sales and marketing leaders, and share five actionable recommendations you can use to set yourself up for success in your role as a "multiple hat-wearing" marketing and sales expert at your senior living organization.

## The Current State of Occupancy

Based on our research, the senior living occupancy rate continues to be flat, or even slightly down. This is consistent with other industry sources. According to the National Investment Center for Senior Housing & Care (NIC), the occupancy rate for senior housing properties averaged 88.8 percent in the third quarter of 2017. This is unchanged from the prior quarter and down 0.9 percent from the previous year. As you know so well, there are many factors that can influence the occupancy rate beyond the scope and influence of the sales and marketing team. For example, inventory growth has exceeded demand nine out of the past 12 quarters.

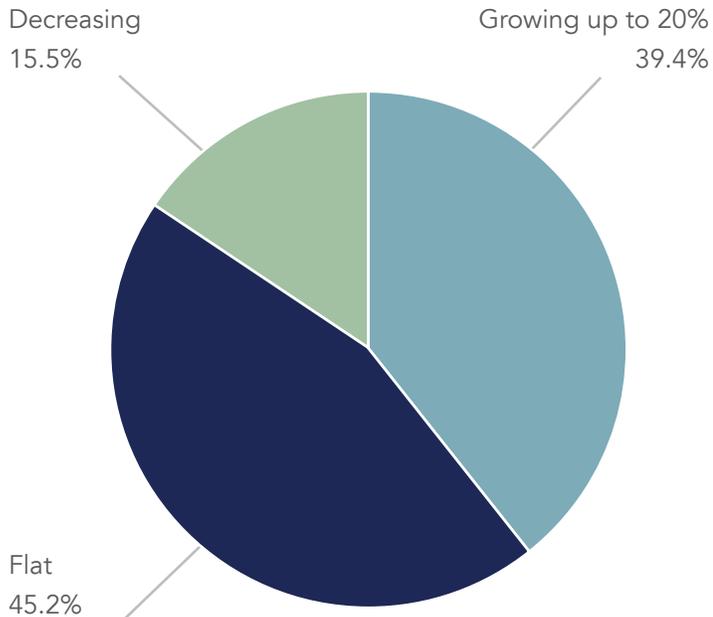
However, much of the responsibility of the occupancy rate is placed on the sales and marketing leader. Based on the research we've conducted, we found that the primary metric to judge the success (or failure) of marketing programs in the occupancy rate, because more than 70 percent of our respondents to the survey said they are held directly accountable for upward movement on this critical metric.

This information probably comes as no surprise to you, since you're living this pressure every day. With the continued emphasis on the occupancy rate, it's important to understand the most cost-effective and impactful way to drive resident acquisition strategies, given the majority of marketers are tasked with doing more work on the same—if not smaller—budget.

*Challenge accepted.*

## Marketing Budgets and Allocations in 2018

### Marketing Budgets in 2018



### Budgets: Doing More with Less

While marketing budgets may not have increased, the expectations from management have. Are you finding yourself in this situation?

*You're not alone.*

In today's business environment, almost everyone is expected to do more with less. 60 percent of respondents have seen their marketing budgets stay the same or go down in this highly competitive environment where supply outstrips demand. Yet, it's widely thought that if you're not moving forward, you're moving backwards.

More specifically, 15.5 percent of respondents have seen their marketing budgets decrease and roughly 45 percent are doing more with the same. Despite this, the survey reveals that the expectation is to expand the scope (not the budget) of marketing programs to support the launch of new services.

For example, Facebook is a highly effective tool in the senior living marketer's toolkit. Facebook continues to evolve not only as a way to build a sense of community, but also to cost-effectively acquire new residents through

content marketing paid amplification programs. However, the cost of Facebook Ads were up 40 percent in Q4 2017. To maintain momentum with this program, budgets must be reallocated from other more traditional, and possibly less effective, programs.

The good news: 40 percent of marketers surveyed are working with a growing budget, and the research states that the investment is being allocated into marketing channels where the business impact can be closely tracked and monitored.

So, where is more of that investment being allocated? For more than half of respondents, the website is becoming the foundation of the entire community's marketing program. Almost all marketing activities and investments are being integrated into the website, so marketers can better track performance.

For example, proven methods like direct mail and events can both be tied directly to the website to track the effectiveness and return on investment (ROI) of each program. This tracking requires the proper set up of both the website analytics (e.g. Google Analytics), call tracking and CRM. While this integration might be challenging the first time it's done, it becomes well worth it. It's not difficult to execute if you have the right partner.

We already know flat occupancy rates and budget constraints are the universal backdrop impacting many marketers. But what other challenges are they facing that impact their sales and marketing decisions on a day-to-day basis? Let's explore this further.

### Biggest Challenges Facing Senior Living Marketers in 2018

#### Finding High Quality Leads

Research has found that many senior living marketers still do not have a cohesive marketing strategy where the business goals and marketing strategy are directly aligned to the programs and channel execution. We've observed that the website and digital marketing strategy are not



By far, finding high-quality, move-in ready leads is the biggest challenge senior living marketers face in 2018. Everyone wants to know how to meet the right people and to understand where they are in the research process. Some leads might be ready to move, while others might simply be curious and very early in their research process. For some individuals, senior living is not a need, but a choice, and these motivating factors can put leads on a varying timetable.

directly in line with the lead generation strategy, the latter of which is usually more focused on grassroots activities in the community.

For example, many respondents do not have a well-defined search engine optimization (SEO) and Pay Per Click (PPC) keyword strategy focused on capturing leads for non-branded searches. There seems to be an emphasis on promoting the brand name of the community, but not on competing for conditions or need states that also drive lead flow.

This is a huge area of opportunity for savvy senior living marketers. You could be missing out on high quality leads! Before learning about your brand, potential residents often search for answers to their questions around conditions or geographic, local offerings, and they don't often contain a branded community name in the search query.

The resident and their family are often on an emotional journey and each stop on the path is meaningful—even the early phases before they know your brand. Those in the beginning of the research process are typically seeking solutions to problems and are not yet brand loyal. This can be a very important lead source for communities.

By targeting more non-branded keywords in your digital marketing efforts, you can ensure these individuals come across your brand and your website before a competitor's.

### Limited Reporting of Marketing's True Business Impact

The second most common challenge is an over-reliance on disconnected technology which limits the ability of marketing programs to show direct impact on occupancy rate.

While there might be a healthy supply of tours happening, the ability to zero in on exactly the origin of the lead and where they are in the sales process, as well as what lead source was most effective, is a limitation. How can you do more of what's working if you can't state with a high degree of precision what's most effective?

For example, our research showed that in many cases, forms on the website were not set up to alert the proper people and to route into a CRM system, if there is one. It's common to find that leads are kept in an Excel file and the point of origin is unknown. Insights are difficult to collect and it's hard to learn over time if there is a lack of continuity in the tracking program. Plus, the technology responsible for the lead sits in a silo.

A significant challenge that many senior living marketers face is not only a lack of integration across the website and CRM, but also the entire marketing technology stack. It's been observed that many communities do not understand what they are actually buying and may end up chasing bright and shiny objects. It's so important to not over reach and understand if the tool will actually integrate into the existing environment.

### The Competitive Environment

The third most common challenge is the competitiveness of the senior living landscape. As you probably already know, there are many existing, and also emerging, competitors.

According to NIC, the number of individuals aged 75 and older "will continue to grow at a steady pace for the next 10 years, at which point the percentage of seniors in the age group is projected to grow at a much more significant rate due to the aging of the baby boomers."

This could be looked at as a positive development, since the demand for senior living will likely grow with this increasing population. However, with the emergence of increased demand comes the emergence of increasing competition not just from other senior living facilities, but from other businesses that allow for seniors to live at home or with loved ones longer.

For instance, the US Department of Labor, Bureau of Statistics states that home health aide and personal care aide occupations will grow by 41 percent between now and 2020—much faster than the industry average for all occupations. This equates to over 1.2 million new home health workers vying for business from seniors and providing services that allow seniors to live at home longer.

The rapidly growing ride-sharing industry allows seniors to live at home longer because caregivers can easily book affordable transportation for their loved ones through companies like UBER and Lyft. The seniors themselves don't have to be technologically-savvy enough to utilize UBER—it's often their children who are setting up rides for them.

*“Ride share and self-driving cars are a big threat to senior living communities.”*

Brad Breeding, myLifeSite, LLC

Both of these competitive threats will have an impact on the state of senior living for years to come.

### Too Much Work, Too Little Time

The fourth challenge our research identified is that most senior living marketers have too much to do and not enough hours in the day to do it. Not only are sales and marketing leaders responsible for organizing and implementing grassroots efforts in the community, they're also expected to monitor and update the website, conduct digital strategies, and respond promptly to inbound leads from those efforts.

It's true that 60 percent of leads come from online sources, and those who respond rapidly have an increasingly better

chance of converting those leads—but have those marketers been able to adjust their schedules to allow for more time responding to leads coming from the website? In most cases, no.

According to Jason McCloud, the leaky funnel is real and marketers are not there to pick up on the digital signals. It's a common challenge that automation is not set up to acknowledge and continually communicate with leads as they progress through their “buying” journey, and much of this can be attributed to the sheer lack of time marketers have to place on this area.

Many senior living marketing professionals simply haven't gone far enough and fully committed to an automated organization—not because they don't want to, but because they don't have time to.

Do these four challenges explained above ring a bell for you? Have you been nodding your head as you read? We can all agree there are challenges to overcome in regards to marketing your senior living community—but you can overcome them. Next, we share five tactics as a good place to start in tackling these challenges and setting yourself up for success in 2018.



## Top 5 Tactics for Winning in 2018

### *Tactic #1: Make the Website the Center of Your Entire Marketing Strategy*



As a savvy senior living professional, you know it's unlikely that a senior or caregiver will be driving by your community and randomly decide to stop in for a tour. Choosing a senior living community can require days, weeks, or even months of research, thought, and conversations between a senior and their loved ones. Where can they go throughout that process to gather information that gives them confidence in choosing you?

Your website.

The resident journey is supported by many marketing channels—some generate awareness, some support the consideration phase, and others provide a direct response—but none have the reach, impact and longevity of your website. The website supplements the resident journey and it's a fact that it can be 1 of 10 or more sources of information they'll review before they call and schedule a tour.

In today's day and age, your website is your most important, most influential marketing resource.

Whether the prospect receives a direct mail piece for an event, sees your commercial on television, reads your ad in the local newspaper, or finds your organization on aplaceformom.com, they are likely going to self-educate by searching for you or your services online before they reach out.

Will your website, your most valuable marketing resource that acts as a published record and should always be up-to-date, provide what they need?

*In this dynamic environment, things change quickly.*

Shifting your focus to the website as the hub of your entire strategy overcomes all of the common challenges we covered in section two of this guide. Your website should

be the official published record of your scope of offerings, service lines and current status. It's a dynamic publishing platform that can be updated to represent the community as it emerges. There are no limitations as to who can gain access to the best information to represent you community.

### **Start with SEO**

Making sure your website is first and foremost optimized for non-branded and branded keywords so that users can easily find you on search engines is step number one. You need to be visible next to or above your competitors on major search engines.

Next, focus on providing a great user experience (UX) and utilizing conversion optimization (CRO) tactics to capture the people who do visit your website. Make sure your website is filled with helpful information for the visitor, not stale content that only promotes your services or offerings. Keep the user in mind with everything you publish on your website. Make it easy to find any page on the site—optimally, the user should be able to find anything they need in three clicks or less. All of this will help convert your website visitors into leads.



### *Tactic #2: Invest in Technology and Automation to Scale Your Communications*

Nurtured leads produce, on average, a 20 percent increase in sales opportunities versus non-nurtured leads, according to HubSpot. Using technology to automate your communications with leads is an effective way to combat the challenge of not having enough time, while not letting any leads fall through the cracks. HubSpot also reports that "marketers using automation software generate 2X the number of leads than those using blast email software and are perceived by their peers to be 2X as effective at communicating."

Even though marketing automation will do some of the work for you to allow you to focus on other initiatives, be advised that automation isn't a "set it and forget it" tactic.

The ability to impact the sales cycle in a measurable way for your community will take some upfront work from your team to develop workflows and figure out how marketing automation will work best for your organization. To get you started, here are six ways you can get your marketing automation efforts off the ground:

1. Don't let the automation drive the strategy. The strategy should drive the automation of your marketing processes. Your first step should be to game plan the proper workflows and sales process that you want your automation efforts to support.
2. Identify the technology and software provider that fits you best. When attempting to identify the best partner for you, ask the following questions. If you have trouble answering these questions yourself, a valuable partner should be able to walk through the answers and help you develop your game plan.
  - a. Do we really understand what we're buying and does it make sense?
  - b. Can we integrate it today, and will it work in our environment?
  - c. Does it reflect the values of our organization?
  - d. Can we measure its impact and ROI?
3. Upon implementation, make sure your marketing automation is well-integrated with your website and CRM system. Integrating your marketing channels in this method will allow your visitors to have a positive, seamless experience with your brand and your sales team will better understand the current state of the visitor, as well as their goals and timing.
4. Make sure your automation is providing valuable resources to your potential residents. This automation can keep your brand top-of-mind while helping to shorten the sales cycle and building trust with seniors and their families. Use resources and education-centric content in your communications, not promotional, brand-focused content. The best partner will help you understand the best types of messaging and content to use for your audience.

You're only one person. You only have so much time in one day. You can only do so much. Marketing automation that keeps in touch with your audience and improves the productivity of both you and your sales teams can help you accomplish more in the same amount of time.



### *Tactic #3: Publish, Publish, Publish*

How well will your SEO and marketing automation efforts perform if you don't have content? Not very well. Tactic three is essential if you want your digital marketing efforts to be successful and reap results. You need to think like a publisher and generate loads of helpful, relevant content to fuel your SEO and marketing automation strategies.

Turning your brand into a publishing brand involves many steps, and can be a lot of work, but will bring results in the long run. Make sure your publishing strategy includes the following:

- **Assign roles to team members.** It's not a bad idea to have someone on your team "own" the content aspect of your digital marketing initiatives because in some cases, it is the most time-consuming work. Make sure you don't bite off more than you can chew, and find someone to take responsibility for writing, editing and publishing content—even if that means looking outside your organization for help.
- **Get a full understanding of your audience through buyer personas.** What's the best way to engage the people you want to become leads? By thinking like them. And the only way you can think like them is if you understand them. Creating a semi-fictional representation of your audience based on data and insights can help ensure every piece of content you create is designed with your audience in mind.
- **Map your personas to the buyer's journey.** Not every person who comes to your website is in the same phase of the buying process. Some are just beginning and are in research-mode, while others are ready to make a

quick decision. Knowing where your audience is and having content ready for them no matter where they are in their journey can give them a positive experience with your brand.

- **Amplify your content.** Content creation is only half the battle. The “publish and they will come” mindset is a thing of the past—you have to make sure your audience can easily find your content, and you do that by promoting it across various marketing channels, based on what type of content it is.

Fresh webpages, blog posts, infographics, videos, whitepapers—all of it can build trust with your audience by answering their questions, providing advice, and making their search for senior living options easy—which in turn will help you build brand affinity. Over time, this tactic will not only power your other digital marketing efforts, it will build such strong relationships with your audience that the leads will come pouring in.

#### *Tactic #4: Generate Quick Wins with Paid Media*



At this point, your website is rocking, content is rolling in and your marketing automation strategy is set. But why is your competition still getting sold out tours, and you're not? As your newly implemented search optimization strategy takes months or longer to move your website to the first page of search engines—consider this: you can pay to get to the top of Google.

Paid media can help generate serious brand awareness and inquiries quickly for those searching online for your services with campaign time horizons in the short, mid and long-term. Paid efforts are also perfect for retargeting those who are already familiar with your brand and may have been on your website, which can keep you top-of-mind throughout the rest of the buyer's journey.

One form of paid media, paid social, can be a cost-effective (though increasingly competitive and more expensive) way to cut through the noise and ensure your ideal audience is finding you online. The audience targeting features on social media allow you to be more strategic

with where your content is going, and how your marketing dollars are being used.

What's great about paid media (other than the granular targeting options) is the high level of accountability and tracking that comes with it. You or your agency can evaluate spends on a cost-per-lead (CPL) or cost-per-acquisition (CPA) basis to ensure it aligns with your business and marketing goals.



#### *Tactic #5: Own and Command Your Data with Analytics*

Don't be blind to the progress or success of your marketing efforts. You're spending numerous hours and dollars on the previous four tactics—it's worth it to throw a little bit more in the ring to see whether or not your efforts are working, and if not, what can be tweaked to ensure they do.

Data should be used to drive your program strategy over time, so you're not making changes to your strategy based on hunches. Your data is your intellectual property—you should own your data. Having the data at your fingertips is just one part of the equation. You also need to be able to know how to use it—understanding the data is key.

Another point to consider is whether your data is “clean”. Is your tracking set up properly to give you accurate analytics and insights, every time? How can you make strategic decisions based on data if the data isn't right? When is the last time you verified your data integrity for the following accounts/tools?

- Google Analytics (filters, setup, tagging, etc.)
- Call tracking provider
- CRM
- EMA

The last step of this tactic, and sometimes the most difficult, is knowing what data points to look at for each campaign or channel. You have a lot going on, now you need to know how to analyze each of the campaigns and platforms you're using. Remember one of the biggest challenges faced by senior living marketers like yourself

—not enough time? If this is the case for you, don't hesitate to find a partner who can dive into the data and provide you with the insights you need to do your job at a high-level, without getting lost in the weeds.

## Wrapping it All Up

Budget, time, competition and limited reporting—all challenges faced by your peers that may be seemingly difficult to overcome. But you can. There is a way to bring it all together by making your job easier while producing the results you're being held accountable for. You may be wearing many different hats, but it can be one of the most exciting parts about being a marketer.

We hope you gained some valuable insight from this guide, and that you can use these insights to kick-start your digital marketing efforts this year. Our goal for you is to see you "win" in 2018. We wish you the best of luck, and if you need more from us, we're here to help. For more information or questions, please contact Evan Horomanski.

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## Acknowledgements

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## Research Overview

From November 2017 to January 2018 an online survey was conducted of more than 200 sales and marketing leaders from senior living communities across the US. In addition, interviews were conducted with leading industry experts on the headwinds and tailwinds facing senior living communities as part of our online video series called "Fresh Insights from Fresh Faces."

## About Linkmedia 360

Linkmedia 360 is a leader in Occupancy Marketing. We are a digital marketing agency that creates and implements comprehensive lead generation programs using digital, social, mobile and traditional media channels for senior living communities.

*"The only dynamic tool we have to tell our story, that is completely within our control, is our website. And unfortunately, it does not get the attention it deserves."*

*April LaMon, LeadInsite*





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