



Who Will Get Those New Leads? You or Your Competitor?

By Susan Saldibar

I sat down recently with Valerie Whitman, VP of Senior Living for [LeadingResponse](#) (a Senior Housing Forum partner) to do a Q&A on lead generation challenges this year.

Valerie shared so much valuable insight, that I was worried it might get lost in a single long article. So, I split the Q&A into two sections (you can read part I [here](#)). During the second part, we talked about the fact that so many marketers find themselves retreading last year's plans and hoping for better outcomes. Why is that? And what can senior living marketers do this year to turn things around?

So here is part II, with some great insight from someone who knows this industry and how to use better data to get higher qualified leads that convert to move-ins.

1. **What are the top misconceptions about marketing and lead generation that operators have?**

Two things. First there are misconceptions about consumer behavior. We still hear from providers who think an 11:00 a.m. onsite Sunday brunch will get prospective residents and families through their doors. And I'm sure there are a few places that have decent luck with that. However, massive amounts of data tell us that the consumer doesn't want to go to your community at 11:00 on Sunday. They'd rather be on the ball field to watch grand kids or involved in other family functions. Nor will you get an adult child to attend given they've worked all week and have errands to do, church to attend, or simply trying to grab a bit of relaxation before the weekend is over! Use your consumer data! It will also tell you that you shouldn't ask financial questions before acknowledging the sensitivity of the question. For example, approach it like this... "I realize this is a sensitive question, however important for us to better understand and support your loved one, can you tell me about your dad's finances?" The window shades may be down. How do you pull them up? Use your data to build a better relationship.

The other misconception is that sales and marketing are ALWAYS working together effectively. But we still see finger pointing. As an example, marketing puts a program in place to drive leads to sales. Sales gets overwhelmed after connecting with the first few leads, saying "These leads aren't qualified" without providing

that constructive feedback to marketing so that tweaks can be made for future campaigns. Also, important to recognize is that we all know leads take time. They take consistent nurturing and strategic follow up. Make sure sales is giving that effort enough time before marketing changes course. Use marketing automation to help with the consistent nurturing of these leads, providing them relevant information along the way. Hopefully this finger pointing isn't the case with your sales and marketing teams, however we still see it more often than we'd like. You need to make it a partnership. Be more collaborative.

2. **For those communities struggling with lead generation, what would you recommend for 2019?**

Start by doing a deep dive of your last two years' worth of marketing plans and results. How many leads did you have, how many new leads did you cultivate? How many move ins, move outs? Was it enough? What is your true cost per lead, cost per tour, cost per move in conversion? Ask quantifiable questions. Where are your conversions right now versus where they need to be? Use data analytics to determine how many new leads you actually need. If you only increased last year by 350 new leads, don't set an unattainable goal this year for 700 more new leads, unless you've substantially increased your marketing budget!

Once you have a realistic set of goals, create an integrated strategy. Remember that consumers use all types of communication. That means you need to use multiple lead generators to follow their journey. And recognize that with those different communication types comes different conversions and expectations of those leads. A digital lead who is not ready to talk to you or meet you face to face is not the same lead as someone attending your educational seminar.

By the way, I also recommend that you get input from your nursing team. They will know how many at risk residents you have that could lead to move-outs. Make sure you're in sync and your budget reflects reality. The budgeted move outs may not exactly match what nursing's at-risk report looks like, given that it is a fluid document versus a set budget. For example, your director of nursing partner may be forecasting 50% more move outs this year than last. In that case, marketing needs to get to work; how can you at least get coverage plus enough more business to grow? Be informed!

3. **Any last words of advice?**

Measure, measure, measure! Look at all the data you have available. If you need a data point that you don't have, advocate for it! Some things are harder to quantify but do the best you can. Cost per acquisition is critical, for instance. Some sources such as word of mouth and drive by are hard to get a cost per acquisition for, as opposed to digital leads generated from PPC campaigns. But quantify as best as you can. Use as much data as you can. Really dig deep into your reports. Then measure, measure, measure. Put timeframes on how long you'll run a campaign and have realistic goals for those campaigns.

What are you planning on doing differently from last year? Whatever you do, your plan shouldn't be a static document, unless of course you are happy with the same results you had last year. "Re-allocate those dollars if lead sources aren't converting as they should be," Valerie suggests. Be sure to understand why they aren't converting before making a change. Is it a lack of quality strategic touch points to the lead or truly that the lead isn't qualified? "Test new things. Break free of old habits that aren't working. That's how you'll have the opportunity to achieve great results!"

