

April 2008

Second Issue

Welcome to the second edition of Love & Company's e-newsletter!

Our goal is to deliver timely, digest-style information tailored specifically for people who market to seniors. We hope you'll enjoy our quick tips and speedy surveys, too. And, should you wish to discuss a topic in more depth, we're always open to your calls!

F A S T F O R W A R D

Keeping you ahead of the curve in understanding and reaching the seniors of today and tomorrow

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& COMPANY

Experience. Passion. Results.



Branding strategies that work with seniors

BY TYLER SPRECHER

Vice President, Creative Director

In marketing, words like "branding" and "positioning" are often batted around like tennis balls and used interchangeably. Not surprisingly, people become confused about their meanings and functions. Although very different, branding and positioning do work hand in hand.

To clarify, *positioning* involves identifying your key strengths—and determining which of those strengths older consumers value most. *Branding* takes these strengths and expresses them to seniors in a way that is both meaningful and memorable. If your positioning provides the "who, what, where and when" of your product or service, your branding must deliver the "how"

Continued on page 4

Drawing on more than 20 years of experience in visual communications, Tyler leads Love & Company's creative department. A graduate of Shepherd College, Tyler began his graphic design career at Xerox Corporation. He has been recognized for his design and technical expertise with awards from the Mature Media Awards, the Printing Industries of America, *How Magazine*, *Print Magazine*, Xerox Corporation and the Greater Frederick Advertising Federation.

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MARKETER'S FORUM

In each issue we ask a marketing-related survey question and recap the responses to the previous issue's question.

How has the economic downturn over the past year impacted your sales ratios?

Many communities are reporting that closing rates have dropped significantly in 2007, while others say they've remained consistent. What has your experience been? Please complete our survey and we'll include the results in our June issue. As always, we will report the statistics without revealing the identities of individual communities.

▶ [Submit your survey response here.](#)

MARKETER'S FORUM RESPONSE

Has the sluggish real estate market impacted sales in your community?

Thanks for your responses to our initial Marketer's Forum survey. In this article, Lynn Scrivner, Love & Company's vice president of senior living marketing, blends your responses with other insights on how best to respond to the real estate slowdown.

With media attention highly focused on the real estate market, the sub-prime mortgage meltdown and unfavorable economic indicators, seniors are nervous. Headlines scream of double-digit dips in home prices and of homes remaining on the market for many months. Many clients are asking us for advice on how to sell independent living in this challenging market. In this issue, we offer you some tips. But first, we'll give you some facts about seniors' perceptions of the market.

Love & Company recently completed a wait list survey for a client in Pennsylvania that revealed some interesting data. When wait list members were asked if the value of their homes had

Continued on page 2



MARKETER'S FORUM RESPONSE

Has the sluggish real estate market impacted sales in your community? (continued from page 1)

changed in the last year, 12% of respondents thought their homes were worth more, and 22% thought their homes were worth less. Another 40% thought their homes were worth the same amount, and 25% of the respondents were *uncertain*.

When asked how long they thought it would take to sell their homes in the current market, only 5% said two months or less. Another 40% felt it would take between two and six months, and 13% said it would take six months or more. Forty-two percent were *uncertain*.

When asked if a declining or stagnant real estate market would affect their decision to move into senior housing, 31% said it would have no effect. There were 34% who would either reconsider whether to move or wouldn't move until the market improved, and 35% who were—again—*uncertain*.

Notice that, in each case, one of the highest responses was, in essence, "I don't know." Uncertainty causes many seniors to freeze in their tracks and do nothing. Indecision is bad for your sales. So, what can you do to help your move-in rate?

Listed below are some concepts and suggestions that will help you deal with the situation in your market area.

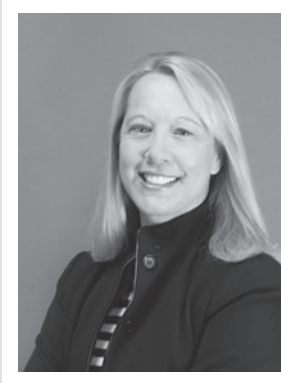
1) Analyze the real estate situation in YOUR primary market. Don't just accept the nationwide news that all real estate markets are bad. You have to understand, market by market, what is happening in your primary service area.

Here are two examples. First, according to the National Association of Realtors, the median price of a home in Jacksonville, Florida fell by 1.6% from 2006 to 2007. Meanwhile, just a few hours down the coast in the Palm Bay/Melbourne area, prices fell 13% for the same period. Showing even more variance were the statistics from two California cities. In San Jose, home prices were up 11.2% from 2006 to 2007, whereas in Sacramento, they dropped 18.5% during the same period—almost a 30% difference!

So get the facts for your market area. Identify your target ZIP codes and ask for assistance from a local real estate professional in determining the local situation. Develop a strategy based on facts, not media hype aimed at a national audience. Understand pricing increases or decreases, length of time on market, asking prices versus selling prices and the size of the used home inventory within the markets that are affecting YOUR potential residents.

2) Help prospects work through a move. Develop partnerships with firms that can help seniors sell their homes more quickly—freeing them to move to your community. Senior real estate specialists can help prospects understand local market trends, provide pricing advice and assist with tips on curb appeal. Lenders can provide information on bridge loans to cover entrance fees during the period before the house sells. Specialty firms offer moving coordination and services to facilitate downsizing possessions prior to a move. Companies that "stage" a house to make it more attractive inside can make a difference between a quick sale and a slow sale.

One community we know had its move-in coordinator start doing some of these tasks as part of her regular work schedule. The program was a tremendous success and didn't



Lynn Scrivner directs Love & Company's senior living marketing and sales management efforts. With more than 25 years of sales and marketing experience, including 12 years in senior living, she is particularly strong at analyzing communities' existing programs to determine how they can improve their marketing and sales results. A highly experienced sales trainer, Lynn has developed and implemented successful sales training programs, working closely with teams and individuals to improve skills and instruct them on effective use of the REPS lead management system. She has extensive background in census and revenue development, collateral and brand development, and management of community advertising campaigns.



MARKETER'S FORUM RESPONSE

Has the sluggish real estate market impacted sales in your community? (continued from page 2)

cost the community any extra money. Some communities offer financial assistance to pay for the costs associated with these services.

3) Help prospects understand the consequences of waiting to make a decision. Price increases and health concerns could wipe out the possible advantages of waiting for real estate markets to recover. Recovery is uncertain in both scope and time period.

4) Equity is relative. The real estate market continually fluctuates—that's the nature of the beast! When working with seniors who have become paralyzed with indecision as a result of decreases in home value, try to shift their focus away from the equity "lost" in recent market changes. Instead, try to discover their initial home purchase price and the amount—if any—they owe. Use this information to return your prospects' attention to the long-term view, focusing on the equity they have gained overall and the considerable profits they will realize now.

5) Consider meaningful incentives. Why not offer interest-free loans on entrance fees to entice seniors to move to your community prior to their home's sale? Monthly fees are generally the heart of an operating budget. Wouldn't it be great to have money coming in and occupancy higher, even if your community waits a bit to collect the entrance fee?

Rental communities need not miss out on incentive opportunities. Why not work with the listing agent of a prospect's home to offer a large bonus (equal to 2-3 monthly fees) to the buyer when the sale closes? Incentives to homebuyers can tip the balance in favor of one home over another. This approach also ties your prospect to your community in a spirit of mutual benefit. Empty apartments are not good business. Be creative in your incentives.

See the Marketer's Forum in the next issue of Fast Forward to learn more about what you can do to sharpen your sales process in the current economic climate.

Ways to make your Web site work harder!

QUICK TIP

In 2004, when Love & Company originally surveyed seniors about their computer usage, two-thirds of CCRC prospects we interviewed reported that they regularly "surfed" the Internet. Of seniors participating in a 2007 Internet-based survey, 47% of the 75-79 age group and 37.8% of the 80+ age group said they used the Internet for *more than 20 hours a week*. With usage continuing to rise, we advise clients to review their Web sites to make sure they meet the following criteria:

Easy navigation Seniors find their way most easily through sites that have consistently placed navigation tools. Stay away from roll-over menus; they're difficult for seniors to use. **Easy to read** Seniors appreciate sites that give them the option of enlarging the type size on their screen. In addition, they find it easier to read dark type against a light or white background. **Easy to find** Copy should be well organized, with brief paragraphs and bullet points, making information easy to locate. **Relevant information** Your Web site needn't tell your whole story, but it should provide a good general overview. For senior-living communities, the most requested items have consistently been photographs of the community and its residences, residential floor plans with room dimensions and information about contract options, services and general fee guidelines.



Branding strategies that work with seniors (continued from page 1)

and the “why.” Essentially, your branding is the creative expression that gives your organization, product or service its personality and flavor.

A coordinated theme A memorable creative concept or theme, when applied to all of your advertising and marketing media, can help build strong awareness of your company’s brand with seniors. Think back to “Please don’t squeeze the Charmin!” This theme was repeated hundreds of times on television and in print, each time reinforcing the primary marketing strength: the product’s softness.

Developing a workable theme can be challenging because it must be flexible enough to work in a variety of media and for each aspect of your positioning. By unifying your message under one umbrella theme, each layer of your marketing plan reinforces and builds upon your branding.

A single point While your positioning may have established several points of distinction for your business, most advertising vehicles are more effective when they focus *on one point at a time*. Rather than shoe-horning all of your strengths into one ad, we often recommend creating a series of ads, each focusing on one core marketing strength and explaining it fully. This technique works well with seniors, who expect a higher level of detail than younger consumers.

Creating a series of ads not only enables you to focus your message, it also works well to keep your advertising fresh—allowing your senior prospects to absorb your whole message over time.

A consistent visual identity Most advertisers understand the value of a recognizable logo, but few realize that a consistent visual identity involves much more. To maximize the impact of your logo, tagline and other visual elements, we recommend creating a style manual that can be referenced in-house and given to any outside vendors who reproduce your visual identity materials.

A style manual should identify acceptable and unacceptable use of your logo and other visual elements. Topics could include:

- guidelines on resizing the logo
- identifying logo color specifications
- allowable division or departmental modifications
- identifying fonts and placement for tagline treatment

A long-term strategy It takes time for a branding message to seep into the conscious minds of your audience. Sometimes it takes years. This is not to say that you can’t freshen up your look or message over time. Newsworthy changes to your product or service make great attention getters for all age groups and may be worked into your communications as they occur. Style-wise, small design changes can make a big difference.

You can also build your brand by making and following a long-term strategy that encompasses marketing, advertising and public relations. Depending upon your market, you may need to rotate your paid advertising through several media to generate the awareness of senior consumers. And don’t forget that seniors read more than other consumers—in print and online—so be sure to update your Web site and to contact local publications with news and events updates.

By employing these simple strategies, you can assure that your branding message will be delivered consistently. Applying your unified brand identity as you rotate through various media not only increases the number of senior consumers reached, but also increases the likelihood that individuals will receive your message multiple times. And the more times your message is reinforced, the higher the probability that people will remember you.

Love & Company’s senior marketing team includes:

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