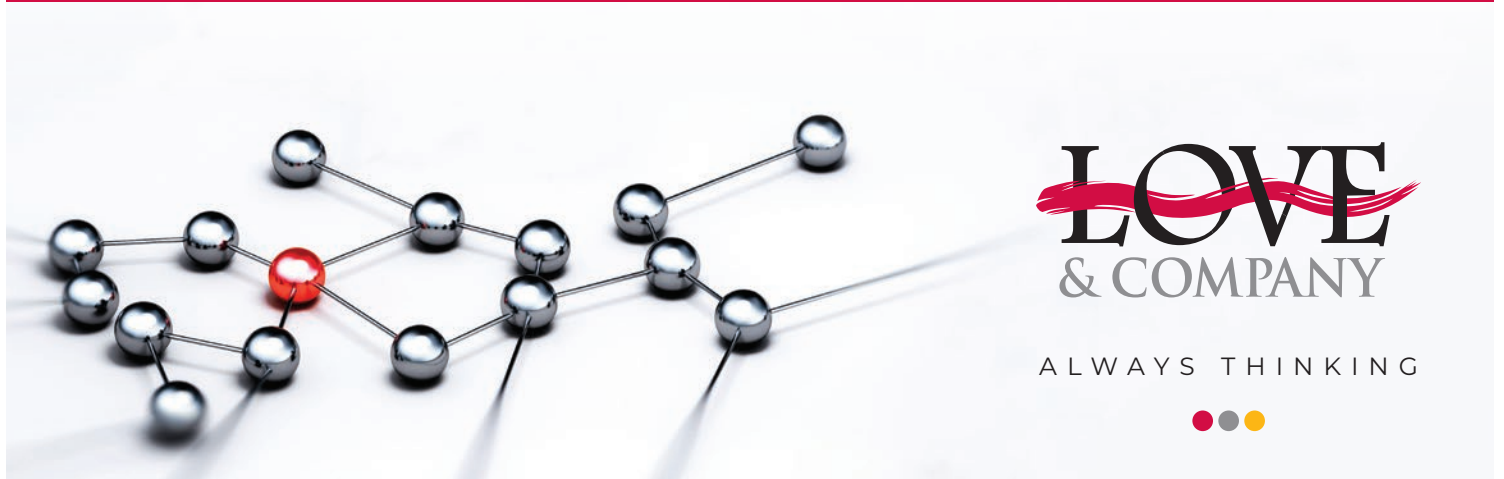




DIGITAL MARKETING FOR SENIOR LIVING

Preparing for 2021



WHAT DOES A GOOD DIGITAL MARKETING PROGRAM LOOK LIKE?

The world has dramatically changed. Through the advent of COVID-19, along with an ever-increasing tech-savvy senior living prospect, the tried-and-true methods and strategies you know and have leaned on in the past are no longer working.

Now, more than ever, the power is in the hands of the consumers. They are doing their research ahead of time. They are involving their network of family, friends and trusted advisors. And they recognize that they do not need to engage with your sales team to evaluate your offering.

Because you are striving to attract the experienced consumer, an integrated strategy with an emphasis on digital marketing is of great importance as you move into 2021 and beyond—one that is grounded in consumer experiences, authenticity and tells the truth attractively.

In this white paper, we'll cover three elements of a strong digital marketing program:

- Evoke emotion, change beliefs, and inspire action
- Assist the sales team
- Use the right tools and methodologies

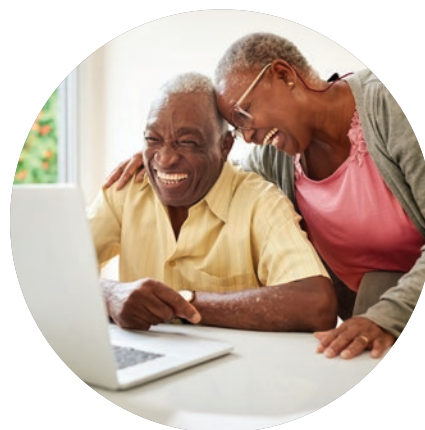
EVOKE EMOTION, CHANGE BELIEFS AND INSPIRE ACTION

FIND YOUR AUDIENCE

More and more of today's consumers entering the senior living market grew up with burgeoning technologies to which they have quickly adapted, and they are not afraid to use them. According to the Pew Research Center, a recent study found that 82% of those aged 65 to 69 and 75% of those aged 70 to 74 are online. The number of adult children online is even higher, and all these percentages continue to grow.

Furthermore, older Americans "...incorporate digital technology into their everyday lives," Pew Research Center reports. Perhaps most importantly, approximately "three-quarters of internet-using seniors say they go online daily—and nearly one-in-ten go online almost constantly."

So, if you are searching for your future prospects, you can find them on the internet, and a robust digital marketing program is vital to reach them.



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INFORM, INVOLVE AND INSPIRE

People are searching for answers. They're looking for ways to connect, to be engaged and entertained. And they want it in bite-size snippets that they can quickly and easily digest.

Today's internet environment is designed to distract. Users spend an average of just two to three seconds before deciding to click or scroll on past. It is fundamental to design quality content that is free of clutter, visually pleasing, single-minded and strikes an emotional chord while supporting the mission of your brand.

Be it a banner ad, social media, website, email or blog post, people long to be emotionally engaged and involved in an authentic way. They want to feel the experience, and they want to be inspired. The four walls and amenities of your community are not what makes it a community. It's the people who live there and the experiences they share. Your dining program may be exceptional, but so is the community's down the street.

Ask yourself the same thing your prospects are asking, "How is your community going to enhance my life beyond what I have now at home? Am I going to fit in?"

Remember, they have the power to decide whether or not to click or scroll. When content is experiential and framed more around them rather than focused on you and what you offer, and done so in a clean, easily digestible package, your potential prospects are more apt to click.

Evoking emotion that inspires action is a tall order that takes know-how, collaboration and an understanding of creating bi-directional confluency between your traditional and digital strategies. It is a long-held belief that even something as small as a \$20 purchase takes as many as 20 brand touchpoints before a consumer is ready to convert. With a major purchase such as a move to a senior living community, it can take more than 50.

To create and implement a solid digital marketing program in the coming year and beyond, it will take a smartly designed and well-executed digital marketing plan that integrates seamlessly with your traditional marketing. And it is not just what your prospects see on the front end every time they log on. It's the due diligence it takes on the back end to keep everything running like clockwork to create higher quality touchpoints throughout the buyer's journey, from nurturing to conversion, at a lower cost per lead.



A major purchase such as a move to a senior living community can take more than 50 touchpoints before a consumer is ready to convert.

ASSIST THE SALES TEAM

Just as the world has changed overnight, so has the role of the sales team. Sales counselors must have the tools required to effectively connect and communicate virtually with prospects, nurture and score leads, as well as to measure and evaluate efforts across both sales and marketing. Though the pendulum may shift back toward traditional sales methods again, no one knows when and how far back it will swing before it swings again to the digital side. But one thing is certain: practically no one was prepared for this change.

Compounding the situation, we know that most leads complete two-thirds of their research before contacting a community or talking with a sales counselor. Furthermore, a rapidly growing number of seniors now prefers emails, texts or chat as their primary means of communication.

With traditional Lunch and Learn events and community tours on the back burner, at least for the foreseeable future, sales and marketing teams need a well-stocked arsenal of digital tools and content that is easily shareable, covers a vast array of single-minded subject matter and is always on-brand. This includes automated emails, short videos, webinars, white papers and testimonials—a baseline of quality content that is readily accessible to the sales team to share with prospects with a click of a button.

Another digital tool that will help sales teams with blue sky and expansion projects is online payment systems. While faced with far fewer events and face-to-face opportunities with prospects and leads, automated payment systems such as PayPal will bring ease and convenience to you and your depositors by allowing deposits to be made directly through your website.

With the right digital tools backed by a holistic strategy, day-to-day performance becomes more efficient, budgets can be tracked and efficiently utilized, and leads can be moved through the sales funnel to increase short- and long-term sales in a sustainable and repeatable manner.

One such powerful tool that allows this to happen, when configured properly, is the CRM.

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OPTIMIZE YOUR CRM

A Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tool is the central nervous system for every sales and marketing department. CRMs can also be a source of major frustration because they can be difficult to use, no matter which CRM you are using.

There are two major themes we continually hear from time-crunched sales counselors, marketing directors, and CEOs and CFOs:

- “I can’t find the reports and data I need.”
- “There’s something wrong with the CRM. It must be broken.”

However, when we look into these frustrations, we typically find they arise from three issues:

- The CRM has not been fully optimized and properly configured to the specific needs of the users.
- An older CRM was not properly migrated to a new CRM.
- The sales team and marketing departments have not been properly trained on the system.

From our experience, we rarely see a CRM that is properly configured and used in the right manner lead to low occupancy. It just doesn’t happen. That’s why we work closely with sales and marketing departments to evaluate the CRM, ensure it is set up properly and train the sales team to use it correctly in a manner that meets their specific needs.

In doing so, leads no longer get lost in the system. Lead scoring becomes more accurate. Reports and metrics become reliable. You can become more strategic with your resources and can see where your marketing dollars are most effective. Time is saved. Productivity goes up. Occupancy increases.

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USE THE RIGHT TOOLS AND METHODOLOGIES

Just as a digital campaign needs to be confluent with traditional marketing efforts, your entire digital footprint needs to be intentionally holistic. A successful digital program cannot be effective and sustained through the implementation of just a few select pieces and parts. It is the culmination of a system of tools and methodologies on both the front and back ends that works collectively to underpin a larger digital strategy.

Look at it this way: If you were to build a deck, you wouldn't use only a few bolts to hold it in place. The deck would fail. You need all the right bolts in all the right places to keep it strong, stable and intact.

Below is a partial listing of tools and methodologies needed to build and sustain an effective digital marketing program.

WEBSITES

Every minute of every day, your website is out there live for your prospects to find. While you cannot control when or on what type of device they will view your site, you do have control over the user experience and increasing the odds that your site will be found.

Next to an in-person tour, your website is the best window into your community. Beyond being a source for relevant information about your amenities and services, your website can provide the opportunity to involve your audience in the lifestyle experience and other benefits that may otherwise go unseen in traditional media. Again, it's your chance to inform, involve and inspire prospects and create a sense of place.

Great user experience is much more than having a site that loads quickly, is well organized, scannable and easy to navigate. It's about crafting compelling content in a manner that engages the viewer, evokes emotion, and stimulates response. It is imperative to continually update content to both encourage return visits and increase your Google quality score.

Providing fresh content is a low-cost way to reengage users, nurture prospects and increase touchpoints. New photography or videos, upcoming event information, blogs and white papers all give users a reason to come back and learn more about your community. Fresh content also attracts new users through organic and paid SEO. Blogs are an effective means to increase visits. Blogs acquire and nurture leads through the buying journey by providing highly sought-after answers to burning questions seniors and adult children are searching for.

Your page rankings in part are also based on your quality score. Google continually scans websites and prioritizes them based on content that is fresh and relevant. Google also looks at factors such as functionality and responsiveness, whether your site is verified and claimed on the Google search console, whether it is tied to analytics, the strength of your brand and the quality of messaging. The quality of your content, in totality, affects where your website appears in search rankings. It can be the difference between appearing on page one or two or dropping down to the dreaded no man's land of pages five, six or lower.

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REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

Managing your online reputation is a must in this field where trust is so crucial. Online reviews are today's word-of-mouth and provide social proof. They are omnipresent across multiple platforms, including Google and Facebook, and heavily relied upon by the majority of consumers of all ages in their decision-making process.

With the need for constant monitoring, acquiring new reviews to meet the volume and freshness expectations, and responding to both negative and positive reviews, proper reputation management takes time and effort. If you have not considered the prioritization of this asset, consider the following statistics from an online reputation management study from BrightLocal:

- A positive reputation online helps customers trust businesses, converts searchers into leads and boosts local search rankings.
- Consumers read an average of 10 online reviews before feeling able to trust a local business.
- The average Google Reviews star rating is 4.42 stars. Senior living services, car dealerships and hotels have the lowest ratings.
- Just 53% of people would consider using a business with fewer than 4 stars.
- 45% of consumers say they are more likely to visit a business that responds to its negative reviews.
- 48% of consumers only pay attention to reviews written within the past two weeks.

The importance of local SEO is also a key reason to prioritize online reviews. The benchmark Moz Local Search Ranking Factors study cites that online reviews are considered by Google as one of the most important factors in local SEO rankings. Reviews fall not far behind Google My Business pages, where reviews are aggregated and often serve as a community's introduction to prospects in Google search.

Within that, review quantity (the rate at which new reviews are accumulated), review quality (written reviews versus just star ratings) and review diversity (the websites and platforms where your reviews appear such as Facebook) all need to be strong and relevant.

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SOCIAL MEDIA

Much like the rest of the world, the senior market has migrated to social media channels for news consumption, entertainment and personal engagement—particularly Facebook where seniors are the fastest-growing demographic. As far back as 2016, the Pew Research Center found that nearly 60% of seniors with an annual income of \$75,000+ are using social media. That percentage is surely higher today.

YouTube is also popular, and metrics show there are growing shifts of audience to platforms such as Instagram and Reddit. Instagram is becoming a place for light-hearted entertainment, and Reddit offers hundreds of informative subreddits geared to the older demographic. Although the number of seniors on Reddit today is low but growing, a large number of adult children are presently there.

Reaching people where they are today means reaching them through social platforms. However, posting for the sake of posting won't move the needle. The key is engagement and knowing how users are consuming content on each platform. Content needs to be easily shareable and strategically developed to align with your overall marketing goals and connect with your prospects in a memorable, experiential manner. To enhance your online reputation and fully engage users, social content management should be approached as a long-term campaign and not as single posts.



LEAD SCORING

Time: It is any sales team's scarcest resource. Lead scoring improves performance and productivity significantly by enabling salespeople to prioritize their work by focusing their communication efforts on advancing prospects who are more likely to join a community.

Robust lead scoring programs go far beyond the simple categorization schemes of cold, warm and hot that are still prevalent. These programs scan the CRM to identify leads with the highest propensity to buy. They take into account location, depth of engagement and behavioral data, along with demographic and financial data (often gathered through a data append), to rank leads.

From a sales management perspective, strong lead scoring programs work dynamically, updating frequently as information is added to the CRM. Salespeople are empowered to call up reports, e.g., a prioritized listing of the 25 leads who the data suggest are most likely to act.

Although human behavior is unpredictable, using lead scoring to determine where time and energy should be invested can decrease the number of outbound calls it takes to acquire an initial appointment and shorten the sales cycle. Lead scoring shifts the odds in the sales team's favor. Because each sale is so valuable, small shifts of the odds have a dramatic impact on results.

VIDEO CONTENT

According to Cisco's Visual Networking Index, video content will account for 82% of all internet traffic by 2022. Google/Ipsos' Human Stories Study already cites that this doesn't exclude seniors. Although websites and social media are the most popular platforms for video consumption, one in three seniors turn to YouTube to learn about a product and service.

Digital media makes it extremely easy to evaluate a senior living community's brand. Video content is the most effective way to bring the brand to life and endear your community to the viewer.

Through storytelling and highlighting positive experiences, short, quality video evokes excitement, builds trust and forms meaningful bonds in a way that allows prospects and their families to visualize what their own experience can be. They can virtually connect with your unique selling proposition, which can ultimately lead to more move-ins and higher satisfaction.

Contrary to what many believe, consistent, high-quality video content doesn't have to mean high-costs and time-consuming production. Many viewers today look for authenticity and originality. Brevity is also key. Videos that average no more than 90 seconds in length greatly increase the odds of a video being viewed from start to finish.

Online videos transcend well beyond boosting website viewership and retention. Their power resonates across all digital platforms. Consider the following statistics from industry experts:

- Social media posts that feature video content receive 48% more views than non-video content.
- Social video generates 1,200% more shares than text and images combined.
- Adding a video to marketing emails can boost click-through rates by 200%-300%.
- Embedding videos in squeeze or landing pages can increase conversion rates by 80%.

Updating your website with video content can also improve SEO rankings. Google quality scores consider video when evaluating a website's validity and page rank, along with how long a visitor stays on a page. Thus, utilizing video content can make a community's website more visible during a user's search.

Approximately
90% of
consumers
state they rely
on video to help
them make
buying decisions.



EMAIL MARKETING

If you think emails are a thing of the past due to the influx of mobile messengers, social media platforms and other forms of digital marketing, think again. In a report cited by Statista, roughly 281 billion emails were sent and received around the world each day in 2018. That number is expected exceed over 347 billion daily emails in 2022. As of 2017, in the U.S. alone, 85.5% of the age 65+ audience used email, and most check their inbox multiple times a day.

Today's sales funnel is non-linear with multiple touchpoints where leads might interconnect with your brand. One of the many strengths of email marketing is that it is an effective way to connect with your prospects no matter where they are in their buyer's journey.

At the same time, email marketing can be extremely effective when running in conjunction with other marketing components such as direct mail. Results from each are also quantifiable when an A/B test matrix is employed. A/B testing can track the response and conversion rates of alternative campaign approaches and measure which campaign was more successful. As technology continues to progress, lifetime tracking over the buying journey will become more accessible. This means that the sales team will not only be able to measure a prospects' response to a specific campaign in real-time but also their level of interest and engagement by tracking where they went next—did they attend an event or take a tour? Did they request a brochure? Did they visit the website? Did they interact on Facebook?

In short, this will allow you to better identify which leads are more highly qualified in the long run.

Remember that not all audiences are the same. This is true whether you are forging relationships with potential buyers through an email nurture campaign or implementing an automated email campaign to continue your engagement with those of whom you have already connected with.

A/B testing also lets you track and measure your content messaging strategy within the email campaign itself. This gives you the ability to create tailored, relevant content that aligns with your target audience. Do prospects prefer an information-driven campaign or a more emotional, storytelling approach, or something that is visually driven? Do they respond more to a 4-step automated drip campaign or is the response rate higher on a 15-step campaign? Implementing the best content and campaign approach could have a huge impact on your conversion rate and help inform decisions about other parts of your marketing program's messaging.



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MARKETING QUALIFIED LEADS VERSUS SALES QUALIFIED LEADS

As discussed earlier, the power is in the hands of the consumer. At the same time, many marketing and sales teams continue doing business as usual, working to move leads through a traditional sales pipeline in the hope they will act and respond in the manner in which the team prefers. In doing so, a great emphasis is placed upon Sales Qualified Leads (SQLs), which are those leads that have expressly reached out to connect or interact with the sales team in some way, such as attending an event or calling the sales office.

Sales teams often discount or ignore Marketing Qualified Leads (MQLs), which are prospects that have expressed an initial level of interest in learning more about a community, such as clicking on an online ad or completing a form on a website, but for which the sales team does not have a phone number. This is a big mistake!

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Do not automatically assume that MQLs are bad leads. Chances are that many MQLs are further along in the buyer's journey than imagined, more so than some leads you've engaged with over the phone. Again, people are doing their homework and do not have to speak with you to evaluate the value of your brand and determine whether it's the right fit.

Consider the following data:

- 50% of leads are qualified but not yet ready to buy. (Source: Gleanster Research)
- 79% of marketing leads never convert into sales. The common cause is the lack of lead nurturing. (Source: MarketingSherpa)
- Companies that excel at lead nurturing generate 50% more sales-ready leads at 33% lower cost. (Source: Forrester Research)

This is all the more reason why it is crucial for your marketing—both traditional and digital—to work confluently to engage and inspire leads that have not yet connected directly with the sales team.

Sharing appropriate content, delivered in the right cadence that lasts the length of the sales cycle, is not just about generating new leads. It's about enticing and creating brand believers of those who have an active interest but have yet to engage with a sales counselor.

Social media, paid search, retargeting ads, automated email campaigns, video content, blogs and white papers can all help ensure that the value of your brand is understood and well-received. Though communication at this MQL stage is purely one-way, all communications work together to build a strong relationship with MQLs and return some of the power back to you as they are nurtured along the buyer's journey toward conversion.

Just as not every SQL will become a buyer, not every MQL will be nurtured into a SQL. However, those who have taken a serious interest in senior living communities become hyper-aware of their messaging and touchpoints. It's called the Baader-Meinhof phenomenon and you likely have experienced it yourself. Think back to when you purchased your last new vehicle. Did you suddenly notice that you were paying extra attention to car advertising and seemingly saw the vehicle you were considering at every stoplight? That is Baader-Meinhof.

CONCLUSION

If you're not seizing the opportunity to stay in front of your leads and nurturing them through the evaluation and decision process, you run a good risk of losing them to the competitors who are doing so.

Prospects and leads do hold the power in their hands. As we move into 2021 and beyond, they will continue to expect and demand even more transparent authenticity and experiential connectivity. They will become more informed consumers and more reluctant to hand over their phone numbers until they are fully ready.

The good news is that a fully thought-out digital marketing program that nurtures and inspires can return some of the power back into the hands of your sales and marketing teams. By employing the right tools and methodologies that work confluenty with your traditional marketing strategy, your sales and marketing teams can identify and move higher quality leads through the sales funnel.



We invite you to contact Tim Bracken at **301-663-1239**, or **tbracken@loveandcompany.com**, if you would like to learn more about our breadth of senior marketing services.

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ALWAYS THINKING

