

Using Social Media to Build Consumer Relationships

THE LOVE REPORT

& COMPANY

Winter 2010

Through Their Fingertips— Incorporating Social Media Into Your Marketing Mix

While some may regard social media as a “young person’s arena,” its popularity and reach extend and fit well into the marketing of senior living communities. The question is, “How do you navigate the maze of social media sites, applications and tools to find the right mix for your marketing message?”

Past Love Reports have examined how seniors respond to various media, including direct mail, print advertising and Internet Website marketing, with the consistent goal of closing the gap between what marketers think seniors may respond to, and what actually moves them to take action. This year’s report is no exception.

Our Research Process

To complete Phase One of this year’s study, we created a comprehensive survey to help determine senior respondents’ knowledge and use of various social media venues, including e-mail, social networking sites, blogs and podcasts, online chats and webinars. Two versions of the survey were produced to target two different groups—those who already reside in a senior living community, and those who do not. The second group included individuals on lead base lists, wait list members and age- and income-qualified prospects.



You Tube™

skype™

facebook

A total of 38 senior living communities participated in the survey process.

Phase Two of the study involved Love & Company personnel training a group of residents of a senior community to blog, forming a resident blogging group to share insights about living in their community. The address of the resulting blog is: <http://kagresidentsblog.blogspot.com>.

In addition, we surveyed communities with *Facebook* pages to discover how they are using *Facebook* in their marketing efforts and what success and benefits have been derived from using the social media site.

What We Did

Participating communities were provided with a PDF of the cover letter and survey, which they printed and distributed to the various audiences. Respondents were given the option of responding electronically through a direct link, or completing and mailing the paper survey. We received a total of 2,603 responses to the surveys.

What We Learned

Optimize and Conquer

First and foremost, we discovered that over 86% of both survey audiences use Internet search engines, with over 28% taking notice of the sponsored results near the top of the page and on the right-hand side. Over 75% of respondents report starting at the top and viewing each result until they find a match. This includes viewing the sponsored links that appear at the top of the page before the organic results. These responses underscore the importance of optimizing sites to appear at or near the top of the most important search lists, as well as considering the use of search engine marketing (SEM) to have your sponsored link appear at the top of the page.

Embrace E-Mail

Over 98% of senior respondents reported that they use e-mail, with between 78% and 86% reporting daily use. Because the vast majority of those who received the non-resident survey are using e-mail to



stay in touch with friends and family, preparing an easily e-mailed brochure would allow these prospects to share information about your community. The same is true for invitations to marketing and on-campus events. Recipients should be encouraged to forward these messages. In the case of both brochures and e-mail invitations, include a strong call to action and an easy way to respond.

Of those who responded to the resident survey, over 93% use e-mail to keep in touch with friends and

family—also known as your target audience! Over 50% of these respondents indicated they would forward to their friends an invitation from their community to attend an upcoming event, and they felt that at least half of those friends would welcome the invitation. This can be a great—and low cost—way to increase attendance at marketing events.



Among both survey audiences, nearly 50% indicated they forward unsolicited jokes or humorous e-mail messages to friends and family, thus offering another avenue of communication. Creative use of viral marketing campaigns can move your message to reach an audience you may have considered outside your marketing scope.

Network Carefully

Our survey results indicate that Facebook and YouTube are the most popular social networking sites, and that many also use Skype to communicate with friends and family via the Internet. This offers a great opportunity to promote a community through posting of community event videos or testimonials on



YouTube or Facebook. Other ideas could include “video demonstrations,” such as sharing recipes, community tours, profiles of unusual resident hobbies and more. Brainstorm ideas and topics and have a ready library of videos and posts from which to draw.

Most communities are using Facebook to share news and images with prospects, or to target adult children. Content is often very lifestyle-oriented, with more factual information still reserved for the community’s Website. Consider a Facebook page when advertising an upcoming social event, or to recap resident activity or offer an overview of a community.

In our surveys, 74% of participating communities report spending only up to two hours each week updating their pages. They currently report promoting their Facebook page in printed marketing pieces and print advertising, or including the logo in an e-mail signature. In addition, don’t forget to add the Facebook link to the home page of your community’s Website.

Blogging is a Personal Process

While over 72% of non-resident survey respondents are familiar with blogs, just 19% report following one or more online blogs. Currently their three top blog subjects are current events, financial information and academics.

As mentioned earlier, Phase Two of this report involved training a group of senior community residents in Ohio to establish a

community blog. As of November 2010, the group had been blogging for nine weeks, the team members were enjoying the experience and the group was about to expand.

We learned several things during the formation of the blogging group. When encouraging community residents to initiate a blog, take care in selecting the team. Choose members who enjoy the Internet and like sharing social news and expressing their views. Give them the foundational information they need, teach them the process and have them try it out for themselves. Then leave them alone. Blogging is a personal thing, akin to keeping a diary, and you just can’t force it. The benefit of the hands-off approach is that candid, unsolicited insights are shared about the community in which the residents live.



What We Concluded

- Search engine optimization (SEO) and search engine marketing (SEM) are critical to being “found” on the Internet. Make sure you’re noticed on key searches.
- E-mail is a powerful tool when senior living residents are included and drawn into the “marketing circle.” Remember their willingness to forward messages to friends.
- Viral videos can be fun and effective ways to communicate the news and personality of a community. Create a library of them and release them during key marketing periods.
- Prioritize your involvement in social networking sites, and then commit to using them for a variety of marketing purposes. Always include a strong call to action and an easy way to respond.
- Blogging is something that seniors enjoy and will use to communicate their own life experiences to others. If you take care in selecting the blogging team, they can be your best ambassadors!

Remember to Track Your Results!

All marketing professionals want to increase ROI (return on investment). The goal is to increase results while spending the same amount or less.

This is where tracking the performance of marketing efforts becomes so important. The better your organization is at tracking the sources of leads, the more effective your advertising becomes. And effectiveness equals success.

Allow time and budget dollars to track the number of new customers visiting your blog, or the ones who are linking to your Website because of search engine marketing. You may find that the cost of other budgeted initiatives can be reduced while maintaining or growing your ROI.

Here are some simple steps to take:

- Specify landing pages on your Website for prospects to respond to marketing pieces and advertisements, such as direct mail, print advertising, web advertising and e-mail blasts
- Add Google Analytics to your Website – it’s free!
- Track visitors to your blog by using a built-in visitor counter

“Most importantly: Allow the time and money to track your results!”

- Use an electronic response form on your Website to help track how respondents learned about you
- Constantly fine-tune search engine keywords to get the best mix



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SENIOR MARKETING SPECIALISTS

The 2010 social media research project was led by Jessica Kraft, senior marketing account manager, and Emily Harman, media manager. Please contact them with questions about this project.

For copies of previous research studies, please contact us or visit our Website. Recent studies include:

2009: *Creating senior-focused direct mail that works (Part 2)*

2008: *What direct mail approaches resonate with seniors? (Part 1)*

2007: *How do seniors’ media preferences differ by demographic segment?*

2006: *What do today’s seniors really see when they view your wellness marketing messages?*