

*One of the region's leading senior marketing companies reveals the keys to successful communication with the nation's fastest growing consumer group.*

# THE LOVE REPORT & COMPANY

## *What do seniors really see when they view your marketing materials?*

Love & Company is a research, marketing, advertising and public relations firm specializing in the senior living and healthcare fields. Over the past 10 years, we have assisted several dozen senior communities and healthcare facilities—some have been start-ups, some wished to change their positioning, some wanted to promote expansions, some wanted to fill residences, and some just wanted to assess the competition.

We value our relationships with our clients and strive to *meet and exceed their marketing and sales goals* by developing materials that *produce results*. Since the field of senior marketing is an emerging science, we know that to produce the kinds of results our clients expect we have to continually improve and expand our knowledge base. We know that relying on the traditional approaches from the non-senior market is not likely to result in successful campaigns for our clients.

At Love & Company we make a commitment to go straight to the source. Our research department conducts ongoing inquiries into a wide range of issues that provide insight on the senior market—values clarification, consumer buying habits, favorite life activities, media pref-

erences and attitudes about retirement living. We conduct focus groups, telephone interviews, in-depth interviews and written surveys to provide a continuous flow of information into our creative development and strategic communications planning.

One of our earliest departures from the standard approach was questioning the common research method of asking **current residents** what features drew them to the community ... residents in their early to mid 80s. After all, the market we were trying to reach was the 65- to 75-year-olds who form the broad base of leads who eventually turn into depositors and move-ins. Our first significant discovery, years ago, was that *the decision-making process between initial interest and eventual move-in by the typical CCRC resident may be as long as 10 years*.

Since this early realization, we have used our own resources to conduct a number of research activities. Our goal is to find out what these tried-and-true messages that are typically used to promote senior living communities really mean to the very people we're trying to attract—and, more importantly, what messages might work best to attract their interest.

### In This Issue

## *Marketing to Seniors*

### THEMES

Page **2**

### HEADLINES

Page **3**

### IMAGES

Page **4**

### ADS

Page **6**

## *What themes and messages are most effective?*

Love & Company conducted two focus groups of age- and income-qualified seniors living in central Maryland. The average age of these homeowners was 70, and the average household income was \$54,000. The purpose of this activity was to assess the effectiveness of typical headlines, advertising themes and images used in collateral materials for senior communities.

We learned that the key motivating factors at the lead generation stage for seniors interested in CCRCs are:

- ✓ The promise of healthcare
- ✓ Freedom from most household chores
- ✓ Security

However, it's not that simple.

### **Healthcare ...**

is a double-edged message. Although the realization that the aging process reduces one's independence is understood by seniors and is seen as the major benefit of CCRCs, its overt expression in marketing materials may produce a negative effect. Seniors in our focus groups reacted negatively to images of frail seniors or those in wheelchairs.

### **Promoting a maintenance-free lifestyle ...**

has similar constraints. Many reasonably active seniors express pride in their skills at keeping a home, cooking and maintaining a yard. Messages that promise a life completely free of all home chores may be received negatively.

### **Security ...**

means something different to seniors at the lead generation stage. It has more to do with the satisfying feeling of knowing your children won't have to worry about you. Most seniors do not live in fear of their physical safety.

Other common themes used in CCRC collateral materials that produced unexpected reactions were:

### **Friendship vs. companionship**

Promises of "having more friends than you've ever had" are seen by most seniors as condescending at best. This theme may be interpreted as minimizing the life that they've already built. Companionship, however, is a vitally important value to seniors as they age. Married seniors respond very positively to images of "ordinary" couples in natural poses with happy expressions—enjoying the simple pleasure of being together. Single seniors fear being alone.

### **Urgency**

Messages that stress the urgency to "Buy now before prices rise" or "Act now before someone else gets your perfect home" usually fail at the lead generation stage. Successful seniors have learned to resist these "hard sell" approaches and typically react negatively. However, similar messages may have a positive appeal to individuals who are already on a depositor or lead base list.

### **Independence**

This emerges as the most fiercely protected value by seniors. No promotional materials for senior housing should ever imply that "you" (the community) know what's best for someone else. If you show respect for seniors' decision making, they will respond to you in positive ways. If you show unintended condescension, they are likely to dismiss your messages.

## *Which headlines work best ... and why?*

Headlines for direct mail letters, ads and other collateral materials are usually outgrowths from one or more of the themes identified in the previous section. We showed our focus groups a number of typical CCRC headlines and asked them to tell us which appealed to them the most and which would make them stop, take notice and read further into the copy. We chose headlines we had either written for our own material or had seen used in ads commonly displayed in periodicals and newspapers.

Two groups of three headlines were presented. Participants were asked to consider each and select the one headline in each group that was most appealing. Also, participants were asked to indicate if any of the headlines were particularly unappealing or offensive. Later, participants were asked to explain the reasons behind their selections.

Read the two groups of headlines below and try to predict how the groups responded. Compare your choices to the results provided on page 7.

*(Note: Cedar Glen is a fictitious community.)*

### **Group 1**

1. **Prices rise on March 20!  
Don't miss this opportunity to enjoy life  
at Cedar Glen at the lowest price ever!**
2. **Visit Cedar Glen—and enjoy lunch on us!**
3. **Cedar Glen—  
everything you've always wanted,  
close to home.**

### **Group 2**

1. **Wouldn't you love to live  
in a real neighborhood again—  
and have the time to enjoy it?**
2. **Only 24 beautiful,  
maintenance-free homes left!  
Reserve one before they're all claimed!**
3. **Now is the perfect time to find a house  
that doesn't come with yardwork,  
housework and snow shoveling.**

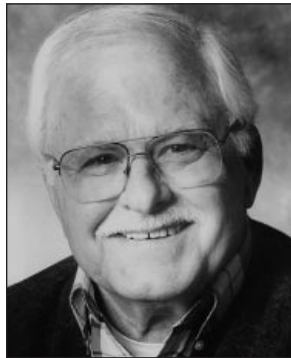
## *Which images are most appealing to seniors?*

We showed group participants four groups of photos of senior models used in collateral materials for senior housing communities. Test your knowledge of which images produce the most positive reactions in seniors

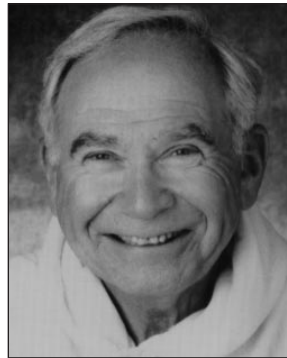
by selecting the one image in each group that you think the focus groups chose as the most appealing. Compare your answers to the results found on page 7.

### Group 1

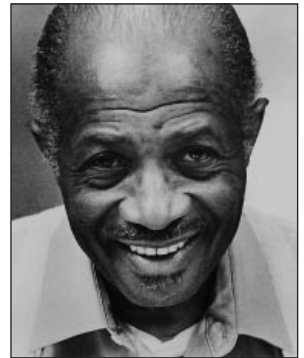
A



B



C



### Group 2

A



B



C

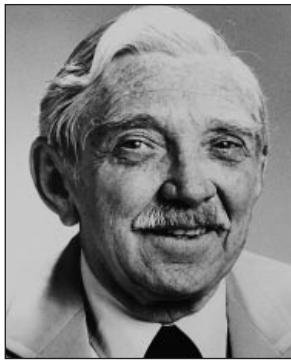


Group 3

A



B



C



Group 4

A



B




C



## Putting the pieces together

Finally, we showed our participants groups of ad series designed for a hypothetical CCRC, Cedar Glen. We have reproduced one of those sets of ads here. Applying the preferences of the participants outlined in the previous sections, try to predict which ad was determined to be the most effective by our groups. Compare your answers to the results on the next page.


1.



***“I’ve got more friends now than ever before.”***

Folks say it seems the residents at Cedar Glen were hand-picked for their warmth, their genuine concern for their neighbors and their zest for life. A not-for-profit retirement community, Cedar Glen offers an affordable way to enhance your life — with social, spiritual and educational programs; convenient services; a new Wellness Center; and on-campus healthcare. Call today!

**Cedar Glen**  
555-555-5555



2.



***“Now we can spend time as we choose.”***

Folks who retire to Cedar Glen are free to spend more time on family and hobbies and to travel without worry. Because we take care of all home and yard maintenance — even the cooking, if you wish! A not-for-profit community, Cedar Glen offers comfortable residences (some brand new in 2002!); social, spiritual and educational programs; a new Wellness Center; and on-campus healthcare. Call today!

**Cedar Glen**  
555-555-5555



3.



***“Now we can face the future with confidence.”***

Neighbors at Cedar Glen agree it just makes sense to make decisions *now* so they aren’t made for you *later*. A not-for-profit retirement community, Cedar Glen offers an affordable way to enhance your life and secure your future — with convenient services, a brand-new, comprehensive Wellness Center and on-campus healthcare. Call today!

**Cedar Glen**  
555-555-5555



## Headline results

### Group 1

Seventy percent of participants found headline #2 the most appealing. The idea of being invited to lunch was seen as a non-threatening way to learn about a community and the people who live there. As one participant put it, “You can learn a lot about a person when you share a meal.”

Conversely, 58% did **not** like headline #1. In fact **no** participant found this approach appealing. Most believed it sounded like other high-pressure sales tactics they have been subjected to (and rejected!).

### Group 2

Seventy-one percent preferred headline #3. Finding a retirement home that came free of tiresome chores was appealing to both men and women. Most believed that next to availability of healthcare, maintenance-free living was the most important benefit of a retirement community.

Not surprisingly, 42% did **not** like headline #2. Appeals such as those represented by these headlines appear to repel individuals who are not in a state of readiness to move.

## Image results

Percentage of participants selecting image as most appealing:

Group 1: **a – 90%** b – 5% c – 5%

Group 2: **a – 43%** **b – 43%** c – 14%

Group 3: **a – 89%** b – 5.5% c – 5.5%

Group 4: **a – 45%** b – 40% c – 5%

Focus group members expressed the most satisfaction with images of seniors who appeared “open,” “approachable,” “friendly” and “pleasant.” They rejected images that appeared to be “harsh,” “severe,” too “posed” or too much like “models.” In general, participants preferred to see images of seniors roughly the same age or slightly younger than themselves. Photographs of senior models that appeared to be too young or too wrinkled, frail or infirm were viewed negatively.

## Ad results

More than one-half (52%) of the participants preferred the ad #2, “*Now we can spend time as we choose.*” Among the reasons given for favoring this ad was that it addressed independence. Most participants felt that **independence** was the strongest and most important message to be communicated in marketing materials from retirement communities.

Forty-four percent (44%) preferred ad #3, “*Now we can face the future with confidence.*” Those that preferred this ad thought that it conveyed the idea of a secure future—for themselves and for their children.

Virtually none of the participants (4%) liked ad #1, “*I’ve got more friends now than ever before.*” Nearly 20% found this message offensive or disagreeable. Most who expressed an opinion felt that this message presumed that they had no friends or needed others to establish a friendship network for them.

## Conclusion

We urge all who are engaged in marketing CCRCs to seniors to consider the following five key principles when designing ads and promotional materials. Our research shows that:

- ✓ Although healthcare, maintenance-free living and security are seen as the three prime benefits of a CCRC, their expression in your materials should be inferred and subtle, not overt.
- ✓ When selecting images for your ads or materials, exercise care to ensure the faces you use are neither too young nor too perfect. Conversely, avoid images that show too much age, frailty or infirmity.
- ✓ Seniors at the lead generation stage will resist messages that urge prospects to act quickly before prices rise or that selection is limited.
- ✓ The most important value to seniors is independence. Never marginalize any aspect of their lives by striking a paternalistic or condescending tone in your copy.
- ✓ In the final analysis, we believe the most important component of the transaction between prospect and community is the state of mind of the prospect—not the features, services or amenities of the individual community.

We continue to conduct research and question common assumptions—and we encourage our clients to do the same. We all must discern and address the market's needs and perspectives rather than assuming that awareness of a community's features will capture the initial attention of the audience.

**Seniors want to see themselves when they view your marketing materials—living life as they'd like.**



Dr. Jim Holton  
Research Director

*Jim brings more than 30 years of experience in education and research to direct Love & Company's research efforts. Jim has led market research analyses and positioning projects for diverse clientele including universities, biotechnology firms, national insurance companies and financial institutions, as well as senior living communities and healthcare facilities.*

**LOVE**  
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