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**SENIOR LIVING MARKETING:
REACH AND TARGET THE
RIGHT AUDIENCE**

HELP YOUR COMMUNITIES FLOURISH

Between nearly two years of [elevated public concern](#), the [ever-changing digital landscape](#) and the continuing shift toward consumer choice, marketing is far from a walk in the park for senior living operators. To the third point, these organizations must choose the right demographic areas on which to focus their marketing dollars and efforts. Logic might suggest casting as wide a net as possible and seeing how many people you catch, but in today's marketing landscape this approach simply isn't feasible, especially in senior living. There are just too many people, platforms and varying needs. Those who take a "throw marketing at the wall to see what sticks" approach usually watch their budget circle the drain. To [quote](#) Dan Shewan of WordStream: "'Everyone' is not a demographic. A vague idea is not enough to compete in today's ruthless business environment." He continues, "Without detailed knowledge of your target market, you could be losing business to your competitors or missing out on opportunities to increase [occupancies]."

Read on to learn about crafting, targeting and reaching the audience that will help your communities flourish.



DEFINE YOUR AUDIENCE

Choosing an audience can seem daunting with so many factors in play, but don't get overwhelmed. Start simple. Here are three characteristics around which to define your target audience.



GEOGRAPHY

Where are the people you wish to attract most likely to reside? Zip codes are a good way to differentiate geographical segments. Consider those nearby to your community or communities and which have provided the greatest number of occupancies historically.



DEMOGRAPHICS

What are the traits and qualities that make up your ideal audience? Consider their age. Are you targeting residents themselves or their adult children? What is their income? Can they afford to live in one of your communities? What is their level of education? Are they employed or retired?



BEHAVIOR

What are the needs and wants of the potential resident or family member? What are their online habits? Are they proficient with technology, or are they more likely to see a print ad? Do they tend to seek advice from friends and family?

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

When investigating these areas, it can be helpful to consider your existing resident population and what you know about any family members that helped facilitate the move-in. Who would you like to replicate and who do you not want to replicate? Look for through-lines and consistent characteristics. One way to learn more about the perceptions and behaviors of adult children and current residents is to create a survey. You can use sites like [SurveyMonkey](https://www.surveymonkey.com) to design surveys easily with their simple and intuitive interfaces. Then, you can email a survey link to existing residents or resident family members. If results are slow, offer small incentives like gift cards or even discounts on rent – this information is worth the investment.

CREATE A TARGET PERSONA

Constructing a target audience is an important first step to reaching the right audience, but there is a crucial second component that many senior living organizations and marketers overlook: creating a target persona. A target persona is a fictional individual who is defined by the qualities of your target audience. A persona differs from an audience in two key ways: 1) it is represented by an individual rather than a segment of people, and 2) it fills in the audience's demographics with specifics.

Target personas both help you envision the perfect prospect you wish to target and inform you of what marketing strategies will best reach and engage them. What's more, they help your marketing team to craft copy and content with the language and voice that will truly resonate with those you wish to target. (It is much easier to write to a person than a set of data.) Using the right language and telling a story are both critical components of marketing in senior living, much more so than if you were marketing a car or a new medical campus. A transition to senior living is a major life event and, commonly, a permanent decision. This means that people are much more discerning when it comes to how a senior living community is presented and whether the marketing speaks to them.



BUILDING YOUR PERSONA

First, give your persona a name, and then fill in the blanks about their history, characteristics and lifestyle with specifics. For example, is it the adult child or resident themselves who are most likely to reach out? Are they male or female? If your target audience has a Bachelor's degree, where did your persona go to school? If your audience makes \$60,000 - \$80,000 a year, what is your persona's occupation? Once you've determined these descriptors, go a step further by rounding out their personality. What are their interests and hobbies? What do they do for fun? More importantly, what fears, concerns and problems do they have relating to senior living? Think about this through the lens of your organization. What do your communities offer that can help assuage these fears or solve these problems? What does your organization offer that cannot be found elsewhere? This can help you design marketing materials like ads, content and social media posts to cater precisely to the people you wish to serve, while also providing value by addressing their most common fears and challenges.

Target Persona Profile

Target: Adult child, daughter

Name: Angela

Age: 58

Education: Undergraduate

Alma Mater: University of Idaho

Employment: Employed

Occupation: Chief Business Officer

Family: 2-3, single or divorced

Spare time: exploring the PacNW, hiking, enjoying the outdoors, cycling, reading the daily news, crossword puzzles, values family time/family is very important



REACHING YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

Now that you've established the parameters that compose your target audience and persona, you can leverage this information to determine the best methods to reach them. As previously mentioned, throwing marketing against the wall to see what sticks is an unwise approach. There are countless ways to reach potential residents and family members, from print ads to mailers to social media to online ads and so on. Unfortunately, you can't be everywhere at once – and you would not want to be. Even if you had at your disposal the immense time it would require to create marketing assets for every available channel, the cost of implementing them all would be insurmountable. The smarter option is to decide where your target audience spends time and go to them with a handful of concerted marketing tactics.

But how do you determine where that is? It's simple: programmatic surveys.

Not to be confused with the straightforward surveys we recommended sending to current residents or families, these surveys use [programmatic targeting](#) to engage only the individuals most suited to your purposes. This method utilizes the vast troves of user data available online to hyper-target survey distribution towards those meeting criteria handpicked by you. Essentially, you will plug in the qualities of your target audience (age, income level, geographic location, etc.) to determine who will receive the survey. Then you will create questions designed to shed light on how they perceive and consume marketing. For instance, you can ask how frequently they use social media vs. email, or how likely they are to read printed material they receive in the mail. You can also ask questions about how these individuals would go about finding information about senior living communities. Do they use search engines and review sites or a more classic approach like newspaper ads?

Here is a sample of the questions Big Buzz used in a client survey to determine which potential marketing avenues were most relevant to their target audience and where they spent their time online. This makes the decision of which tactics to use an easy one.

Q9 Which resources would you use to learn about independent living?

- 01 Website blog
- 02 How-to guide
- 03 Online videos
- 04 Live chat
- 05 Social media
- 06 Cost calculator
- 07 Quiz/assessment
- 08 Downloadable brochure
- 09 Family/friends
- 10 Community groups/church
- 11 Flyers/print materials
- 12 Medical providers

Q13 Which of the following online platforms do you use?

- 01 Facebook
- 02 Instagram
- 03 Snapchat
- 04 TikTok
- 05 Facebook Messenger
- 06 Twitter
- 07 YouTube
- 08 Vimeo
- 09 Pinterest
- 10 Nextdoor
- 11 Online forums

The beauty of programmatic surveys is that they not only target ideal potential residents or families, but they can also use previous search behaviors to incentivize users to take the surveys in the first place.

DESIGNING YOUR MARKETING STRATEGY

Now that you know who you're targeting and what channels they use, it's time to design your marketing strategy. Check the results of your programmatic survey and choose three to five of your audience's most preferred marketing tactics. Are they big Facebook users? Implement a Facebook ad campaign and use the same targeting criteria you identified for your target audience. Be sure to keep your target persona in mind when you are creating the ad copy. Put yourself in their shoes and imagine what language and imagery would speak to them the most. If you can, use photos from your communities (with appropriate consent) to better convey the kind of lifestyle your organization offers and improve engagement over stock photography. For more ideas on Facebook marketing, download our convenient [quickstart guide](#).

Content marketing is another example of a popular tactic. If the majority of your target audience preferred blogs as a source of information, make sure your website's blog page (or that on the sites of your communities) is updated regularly with valuable content. Think about the fears and concerns of your target persona and use them to create content titles that provide solutions (e.g., 5 Ways to Pay for Senior Living). By creating content that offers real value to your ideal prospects, you stand a better chance of engaging them should they visit your website or find your blog post on a search engine.

Creating your marketing materials is often the hardest step in the process, especially if you have little experience in marketing or don't have much time to spare. Luckily, an experienced senior living marketing agency can help lift this burden from your shoulders. It can implement proven marketing tactics and have valuable insights as to which strategies will be most effective.

Yes, I want a complimentary strategy session with a Big Buzz nurture marketing expert today so I can get:

- ✓ Clarity on the root causes of current lead issues we face
- ✓ Research and industry intel that will help eradicate lead issues for good
- ✓ A clearer vision for reaching the organization's desired future state this year, 3 years from now and 5 years from now
- ✓ A free initial nurture marketing plan to invite warm leads to move in now

SCHEDULE MY FREE STRATEGY SESSION

Big Buzz is a marketing agency delivering a steady stream of move-in-ready leads to teams serving the senior living industry. For more than 15 years, Big Buzz has helped senior living marketing and sales teams nurture leads to increase occupancy, grow and scale. CEO Wendy O'Donovan Phillips is the author of the book [Flourish!: The Method Used by Aging Services Organizations for the Ultimate Marketing Results](#), has been published in McKnight's, has been a regular contributor to Forbes, and has been quoted in The Washington Post, ABC News and Chicago Tribune. The Big Buzz leadership team regularly lectures in front of audiences ranging from 25 to 3,000 attendees, including at Argentum and various LeadingAge chapters. Agency awards and accolades include recognition for excellence by the American Marketing Association, Gold Key Award Winner by the Business Marketing Association, HubSpot Academy Inbound Marketing Certification, and Top Advertising and Marketing Agency by Clutch. www.bigbuzzinc.com