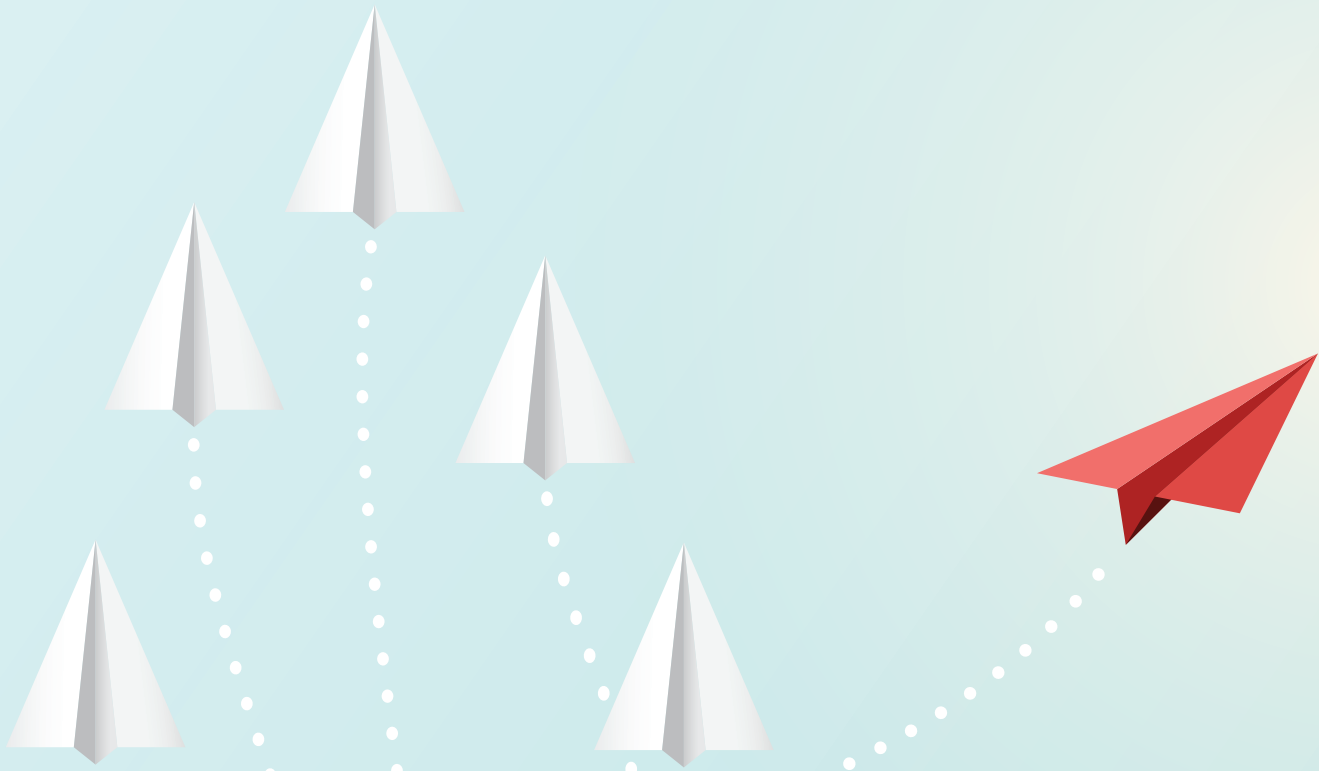


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The Complete Data-Driven eBook:

# The Dubious Data on Differentiation in the Senior Living Industry

Your marketing team rampantly launches efforts to make your senior living organization visible. Your web traffic is strong, and your click-through rates are above industry average. But the sales team keeps saying the leads aren't qualified, and occupancy is still not at 100%. They are running ragged sifting through hundreds of leads and feeling defeated after not meeting occupancy goals month after month. **Could insufficient brand differentiation be the root cause?**

If you are anything like your peers who we recently surveyed, you might respond, "Of course not. Our brand is great." The study shows:

98%

of your peers believe in their organization's brand

96%

trust their team's process for branding

94%

perceive their brand as above average or significantly above average when compared to competing brands

94%

say their organization has clear, documented brand guidelines that are followed by everyone

90%

say their organization amplifies their brand in ways that make them stand out from their competition

79%

say their brand is different than competitors'

### *The research shows they have on blinders.*

The same study reveals five deeper issues that are at the core of low occupancy:

1. **Incorrect definition** of brand differentiation, which results in weakened differentiation in the first place.
2. **Lack of data** backing positioning in the marketplace, which results in perceived differentiation rather than actual differentiation.
3. **Wrong decision makers** driving positioning in the marketplace, which results in perceived longevity rather than actual longevity of differentiation.
4. **Weak process** for building, maintaining and amplifying differentiation, which results in perceived consistency rather than actual consistency of differentiation.
5. **Weak value proposition**, which results in weak differentiation.

You may love your brand. Still, our data shows the people who need you may not readily see how your offering is different and better than your competitors'. Your organization may be getting lost in a sea of sameness without your team even realizing it.

Let's unpack the data to explore how senior living organizations can resolve these five deeper issues, authentically differentiate themselves and attract the warm leads needed to meet census, grow and scale. Namely, we will explore:



Correct Definition



Accurate Data



Correct Decision Makers



Strong Process



Strong Value Proposition



# CORRECT DEFINITION

Brand is the singular value proposition that uniquely positions your organization in the marketplace, as shown by trends in differentiation from the perspective of your residents and families. Brand building blocks include:

Positioning statement • Differentiators • Brand Essence • Mood board • Graphic standards

We asked 159 senior living executives and marketing team members, "How would you define brand in 1-2 sentences?" Only 24% of your peers correctly defined brand. In the words of a few of our survey respondents that got it right:



## ***Brand comes from the voice of the customer***

- "How others perceive your company, how others esteem your company based on reputation, based on performance"
- "How your company is perceived by the people it serves"
- "Exists in the mind of the customer"
- "Based on feedback on the offering"



## ***Brand may serve a particular sector of the older adult population***

- "We help veterans and their families"
- "We care for seniors with disabilities"



## ***Brand is timeless***

- "A legacy to be remembered"
- "What people will always remember"



## ***Brand is unforgettable***

- "A statement that sums up how your company is different and unique from other competitors"
- "A reflection of your work"
- "Gives an explanation of your brand that would make people want to instantly use your brand"
- "Totally recognizable as you" [unmistakable]



## ***Brand packs a Unique Value Proposition (UVP)***

- "Gives people a feeling [of belonging, for example]"
- "Shows how you brighten up the life of the elderly, what you give them to live for"
- "[Demonstrates] how you make the lives of people you care for better"
- "Encourages, empowers and uplifts your loved one"

What about the other 76% of responses to the question, “How would you define brand in 1-2 sentences?” Here’s what brand is not, in the words of our remaining survey respondents:

### ***Brand is not solely the features of the organization***

- “A type of product”
- “A company’s identity”
- “We take care of the elderly: we do their laundry, provide three hot meals a day and daily cleaning help with baths”
- “We are a long-term and short-term care [community], specializing in rehabilitation, we care for the elderly and offer a variety of activities of daily living”

### ***Brand is not comprised of intangible concepts that don’t differentiate***

- “Innovation”
- “Going above and beyond”
- “The best in home healthcare”
- “One of a kind”
- “Quality work always”
- “Best caregivers possible”
- “Unique”

### ***Brand is not solely a tagline or catchphrase***

- “Exceptional care without any exceptions”
- “With specialized care and unique care, we strive to be the best!”

### ***Brand is not solely the company attributes***

- “The business name and concept”
- “The name of a product”
- “What a company sells”
- “Your brand name and the services you put out”
- “The name or logo that defines your company name”

### ***Brand is not defined by any group that does not include residents and families***

- “Our company views”
- “Your definition of you and your company values”
- “Our brand is [defined] by the ranking of stars by the state and the level of care provided.”

Our study reveals that only half of senior living executives and marketers base brand differentiation on the perceptions of the residents and families served. Backing differentiation with voice-of-the-customer (VOC) data will set your organization apart from the pack.



# ACCURATE DATA

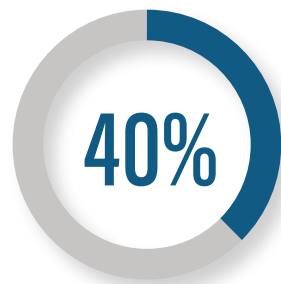
**Voice-of-the-customer (VOC) research is a methodology used to proactively uncover trends in residents' and families' perceptions, preferences and motivators in seeking support from your organization. This data defines the singular, value-based position in the marketplace that only your organization can own. *This is brand differentiation.***

Our study reveals that 75% of your peers base brand differentiation on the company mission, vision and values and 29% base it on company history. While these assets can inform brand differentiation, your team would be taking moderate risk banking its uniqueness on past team insights alone and not including insights from VOC data.

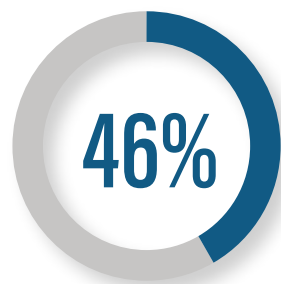
A high-risk approach to developing and maintaining brand differentiation would be basing it upon the perceptions of the marketing team alone (26% of your peers do this) or the executive team alone (which 21% of your peers do). This inevitably leads to two-dimensional group think. When someone on the team changes their mind about the direction of brand differentiation, there is no data to support nor refute a particular path forward.

Our data also indicates that 14% of your peers take the highest-risk approach to developing and maintaining brand differentiation, which is to base it on external marketing partners' insights. Without VOC data in hand, no agency can truly differentiate your brand for the long term.

## Half of your competitors use VOC data to define brand differentiation:



**40%** of survey respondents are currently using services to understand brand perceptions



**46%** of survey respondents have used services in the past to understand brand perceptions

## What other data are they using?

- 58% analyze customer satisfaction surveys, which are reactive research tools to uncover what current residents and families like and dislike about the organization and its offerings. While customer satisfaction survey data reveals what to improve, it does not show how the organization is different from competitors like VOC data does.
- 25% conduct competitor research to ensure differentiation. While competitor research is a key component of the brand differentiation process, it should come only after analysis of VOC data and development of messaging. This is when your brand analyst compares the positioning, differentiators and brand essence revealed in the data with the value propositions on competitors' websites to ensure your messaging is truly unique in the marketplace.
- 33% conduct meetings or focus groups with the internal marketing team to brainstorm ways to differentiate the organization and 28% conduct meetings or focus groups with external marketing partners to brainstorm ways to differentiate the organization. It's unlikely that true brand differentiation will emerge from data generated in these group sessions alone. When coupled with the gathering and analysis of VOC data, they can be more effective.

Simply adding VOC data to your suite of marketing diagnostics will go a long way in defining true differentiation from your competition.



## CORRECT DECISION MAKERS

### The most effective brand differentiation decision makers on your team are likely one to two key marketing executives along with your CEO and/or COO.

Our data indicates that 39% of your peers involve the whole marketing team in the brand differentiation process. In fact, we see when the pool of decision makers is bigger than three people, VOC data is less often accurately applied and more group think takes hold, watering down the outcome.

When including only a couple of key marketing executives and your CEO and/or COO, which only 21% of your peers do, you are more likely to align on and accurately follow the brand differentiation process, thereby achieving a stronger outcome.

20% of respondents include just the CEO and/or COO and 8% include marketing executives only. In our experience, including the appropriate people from both groups early and often expedites the process and leads to a more lasting outcome on which everyone can agree.



# STRONG PROCESS

The outcome of a strong brand differentiation process takes the form of five assets:

## 01

### POSITIONING STATEMENT

Articulates what the organization does at what value to whom in the words of those served. Our study shows only 52% of your competitors have this asset.

## 02

### DIFFERENTIATORS

The three main supporting points to the positioning statement. The key is to ensure that the differentiators offer real value to the target audience. Our study shows only 38% of your peers have this asset.

## 03

### BRAND ESSENCE

The succinct idea that most often comes to mind when people think of your organization. The brand essence serves as the foundation for every interaction with your organization's marketing messaging. Examples include Volvo's brand essence of "safety," Coca-Cola's "refreshing" and Geico's "savings." Our study reveals only 40% of your competitors have this asset.

## 04

### MOOD BOARD

A visual presentation of images in the form of a collage that best represents the organization's positioning, differentiators and brand essence. The mood board is used to convey the general idea or feeling about the positioning. It acts as an internal tool for the marketing team and external partners to provide inspiration and continuity in the design direction of all marketing. Our study shows only 28% of your peers have this asset.

## 05

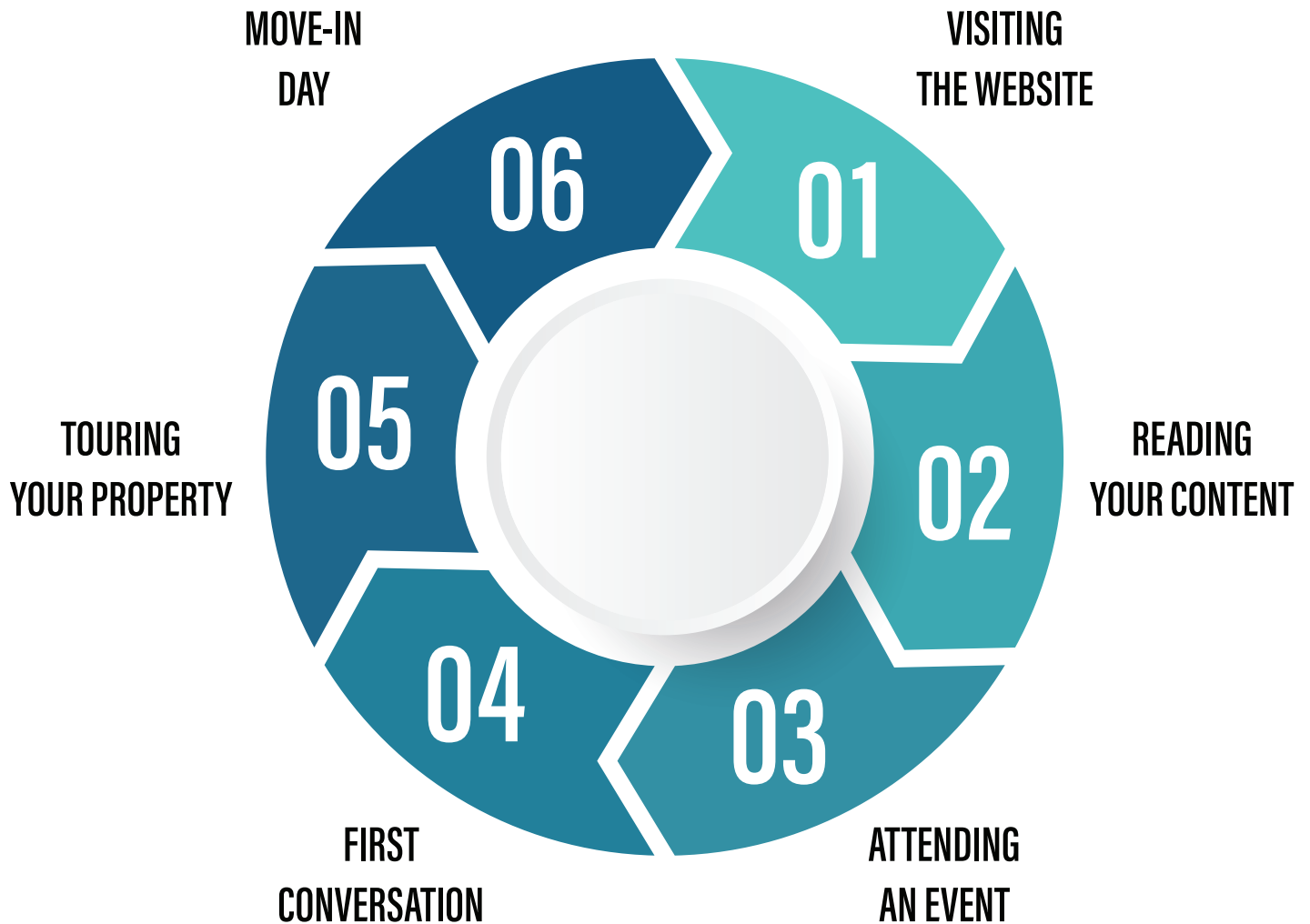
### GRAPHIC STANDARDS

Guidelines for correct use of the positioning, differentiators, brand essence, mood board, logo and corporate colors. Our study reveals only 23% of your competitors have this asset.

What's a strong process for collecting, analyzing and utilizing VOC data to develop lasting assets that differentiate your senior living organization?

In my book [Flourish!: The Method Used by Aging Services Organizations for the Ultimate Marketing Results](#), I give step-by-step instructions. Here is an overview.

The entire experience delivers on the promise made to them - from visiting your website to reading your content to attending an event to having that first conversation with your team to touring your property and all the way through move-in day.



That cycle adds up to higher occupancies, higher revenues, higher profits and more fulfilled residents and families.





# STRONG VALUE PROPOSITION

The value proposition is the clearest statement of benefit residents and families receive from your organization, as based on VOC data.

When your peers responded to our open-ended question, “How would you describe your organization’s brand?”, only 5% shared a strong value proposition.

This is the most important part of the brand; without it, the brand is just a description of features and services. The value proposition compels the person considering your brand to believe in it, to feel as though they belong with your brand and to become loyal to it. It is the one attribute of the brand that absolutely must be different than any of your direct competitors’.

Here are a few examples of value propositions as shared by your competitors who participated in our study, ranging from strong to weak:

Value Proposition	Clear Statement of Benefit	Based on VOC Data	Not Just a Description of Features or Services	Different Than Direct Competitors'
“Keeping dignity and independence”	✓	Likely	✓	✓
“Conscious nurturing”	✓	Likely	✓	✓
“Loyal and lifelong”	✓	Likely	✓	✓
“Heart centered”	✓	Likely	✓	✓
“Reliably kind”	✓	Likely	✓	✓
“Care” or “caring”	✗	Unlikely	✗	✗ The data shows that 24% of your competitors are using this as a value proposition
“Trust” or “trustworthy”	✗	Unlikely	✗	✗ The data shows that 12% of your competitors are using this as a value proposition
“Unique”	✗	Unlikely	✗	✗ The data shows that 8% of your competitors are using this as a value proposition
“Quality”	✗	Unlikely	✗	✗ The data shows that 6% of your competitors are using this as a value proposition

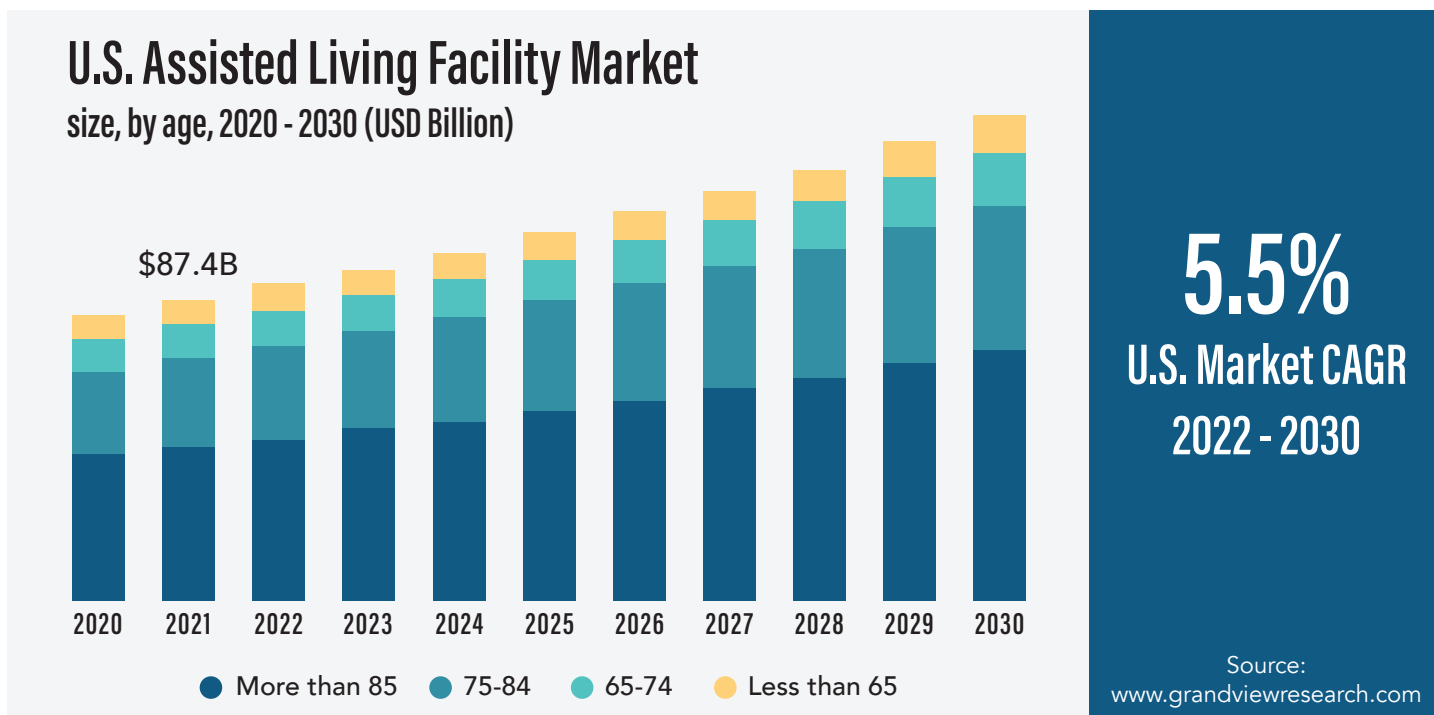
Key questions to ask yourself when drafting your value proposition:

- What three words or phrases does your VOC data show best describe the benefit residents and families experience from your organization?
- If I were an older adult or a family member of an older adult, would I simply expect these as part of the service from any senior living organization, or are they clear statements of benefit?
- Do these words or phrases deliver a strong value proposition that we undoubtedly know is true and unique about our organization?

Conduct competitor research to ensure no one else is saying it, and you have succeeded in creating a differentiating value proposition.

## CONCLUSION

[According to Grand View Research](#), "The U.S. assisted living facility market size was valued at USD 87.4 billion in 2021 and is expected to expand at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 5.48% from 2022 to 2030. [A] major factor driving the market growth is the growing geriatric population seeking companionship, security, and assistance with daily activities, are residing in ALFs. According to National Institute on Aging (NIA), globally, around 8.5% of the population is aged 65 and above. As per data published by Population Reference Bureau, the number of Americans aged 65 years & above is projected to reach 95 million by 2060, from 52 million in 2018."



Now more than ever, differentiation from the competition is critical to your organization's stability, growth and plans for scaling.

As W. Chan Kim wrote in [Blue Ocean Strategy](#), "Instead of focusing on beating the competition, focus on making the competition irrelevant by creating a leap in value, thereby opening up new and uncontested market space."

## 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](http://www.bigbuzzinc.com)