

Exceptional event planning creates something extraordinary out of the ordinary and generates excitement about your community like no other promotional component can.



# Special Events— Programs That Pique Market Interest

A special event is a tool that enables you to attract the market's attention, maintain prospect relationships, and encourage prospects to purchase. By creating something extraordinary out of the ordinary, well-planned programs—from cooking classes to book signings to fashion shows and fun runs—generate excitement about your community like no other promotional component can. This chapter explains all the steps for turning out memorable events and the kind of events that gain patronage.

The planning and execution of this critical marketing component requires creative thinking balanced with practicality. Often referred to as “event marketing,” the program goal is to increase traffic, leads, and eventually sales, using a bit of cachet and a splash of showmanship.

The practical aspect of event planning is in selecting the type of program that you will use to inform audiences about your community. You have two choices: educational events and social events. The creative aspect is in the promotional theme you use to pique the market's interest.

Let's look at how to put a good event together, from concept to completion.

## Educational Events: A Multi-Faceted Forum

Educational opportunities, such as seminars and workshops, appeal to multiple audiences and serve a variety of purposes. Seminars for your wait-list and lead base are a way to maintain relationships and to bolster interest in your community. They are also a highly effective and credible method to generate new leads. The goal for educational event marketing is the same as that of networking—to portray your organization as an involved community partner and a resource on the subject of senior living alternatives.

Many senior adults are curious about what retirement communities have to offer, but are reluctant to call or come in, thinking they'll get a "hard sell." Workshops and seminars offer a less threatening atmosphere for the market to learn more about your community, without the real or perceived pressure of listening to a sales presentation. Moreover, in the mind of the prospect, the

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notion of attending an educational program is more psychologically acceptable than the idea of looking at a retirement community as a potential future residence.

Seminars are also a great way to overcome the commonly encountered sales barrier of "I'm not ready yet." If you think about it, your real competition isn't the community down the road, it's the

consumer's own home; you must be more appealing than their cozy living room if you want to secure a sale. Featured speakers, which can include your residents, can offer information to senior consumers about the wisdom of planning for retirement living and show retirement housing as a superior alternative to remaining in their current home.

Or how about a seminar titled "Unlock the Equity Preserved in Your Home?" A panel of real estate and financial management presenters could provide strategies for converting senior adults' largest, most non-productive assets—their homes—into a more rewarding lifestyle, ranging from enjoying greater disposable income to the financial benefits of moving into a retirement community.

Not all of your seminars need to be on hard, head-spinning subjects. Why not host workshops or a series of do-it-yourself programs on topics such as gardening, painting, or cooking? For example, your foodservice staff can teach attendees how to whip up gourmet meals, to spotlight their expertise and your fine cuisine. And don't forget that residents are a sage source for sharing the how-to's of their varied hobbies and interests.

Through seminar marketing you can also reach and educate those who influence the prospect's decision. These decision influencers (as identified in your Strategic Networking Planner) have information needs different from the