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Creative Design And Copywriting—What To Say And Portray

Creative design and copywriting are terms that refer to the images and words used in your marketing communication materials. You may be familiar with the advertising agency lingo of “graphic design” and “copy.” The visuals and text of your advertising materials must be carefully crafted to help the market see exactly what you want them to see—a concept that our industry has not found easy to execute.

Despite the fact that our marketing machines have been hard at work informing and educating the consumer for more than three decades, our communities are still perceived as a “last resort” or as “old folks’ homes” by the majority of the market. Prospects often remind us that they are too young or “not ready” to move to our kind of place. Unfortunately, our marketing communication materials, with their use of age-biased phrases such as “retirement community,” photographs of “old people,” and institutional-sounding copy, perpetuate the very image our market seeks to avoid. It’s hard to imagine anyone getting too excited over the notion of moving into a “facility” or being thrilled at the idea of living in a “studio unit.”

This chapter explores alternative creative design and copywriting concepts that have maximum market appeal. The fundamentals are covered here; the mechanical execution of these concepts is detailed in the upcoming chapters.

Crafting the Right Message

Look at your marketing communication materials as well as those of other communities. Traditionally, most place a heavy emphasis on services, such as meals, housekeeping, maintenance, activities, and transportation. If you think about it, this emphasis throws up several sales barriers. Some senior consumers are repelled by a service-rich environment—not because they don't find the concept appealing at some level, but because they still consider themselves independent and are resistant to the notion of living in a retirement community. Most often these services are communicated using a sterile copy format, such as bulleted line listings. Prospects then whip through your selling points and conclude they don't need, and don't want to pay for, all the services you offer. It's no wonder so many prospects tell us, "I'm shopping for the future...for when I need your services."

Compelling Copy

You're probably asking, what do you write about if you're not to get into the details of your meals, housekeeping, transportation, and activities? The better question is, what should you discuss first?

Your advertising copy needs to respond to the interests and concerns of the senior consumer, and your target market in particular, which are most likely similar. Surveys tell us that a common attribute of many senior adults is that they own their homes free and clear, and that their homes are their primary financial asset. However, they also report having difficulty with home maintenance—from a number of perspectives. Household upkeep and taxes pose a financial burden, utility costs are too high and continue to rise, and finding reliable and reputable household labor is difficult. Because of soaring property taxes, insurance, maintenance, and utility costs, many senior adults find themselves today in the predicament of being "house rich and cash poor." Your target market may have substantial home equity, but monthly expenses can consume as much as one-half their income.

The selling point of "two daily meals and weekly housekeeping" is dull and falls on deaf ears.

While this information is hardly news, what is remarkable is that we don't capitalize on this consumer profile in our advertising messages. Instead, we base