

# 100 BEST

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GLYNNDEVINS **GD**

SENIOR LIVING MARKETING SOLUTIONS

# SENIOR LIVING MARKETING TIPS.

**Here it is, the Third Edition of The 100 Best Senior Living Marketing Tips.**

Marketing continues to evolve at a rapid pace, and that's reflected in this list ... with more than 20 new tips and significant changes in the ranking of our tips. As you'd expect, digital technology, social media and the critical importance of the customer experience have influenced the list, correlating to the effect they're having on consumer behavior and marketing strategies.

With the addition of so many new tips, it was a real challenge deciding again on the best 100. As in the past, we sought to include those that are distinctive, relevant to today's marketing environment, and can offer the greatest impact if implemented.

This is by no means a definitive list, nor are the tips listed in the only order that makes sense. It's simply a list we've put together based on three decades of senior living experience, and working with hundreds of communities of every type.

**We leave it to you to judge the value of these tips.**

## 100.

Read the GlynnDevins blog, [Insights](#).

## 99.

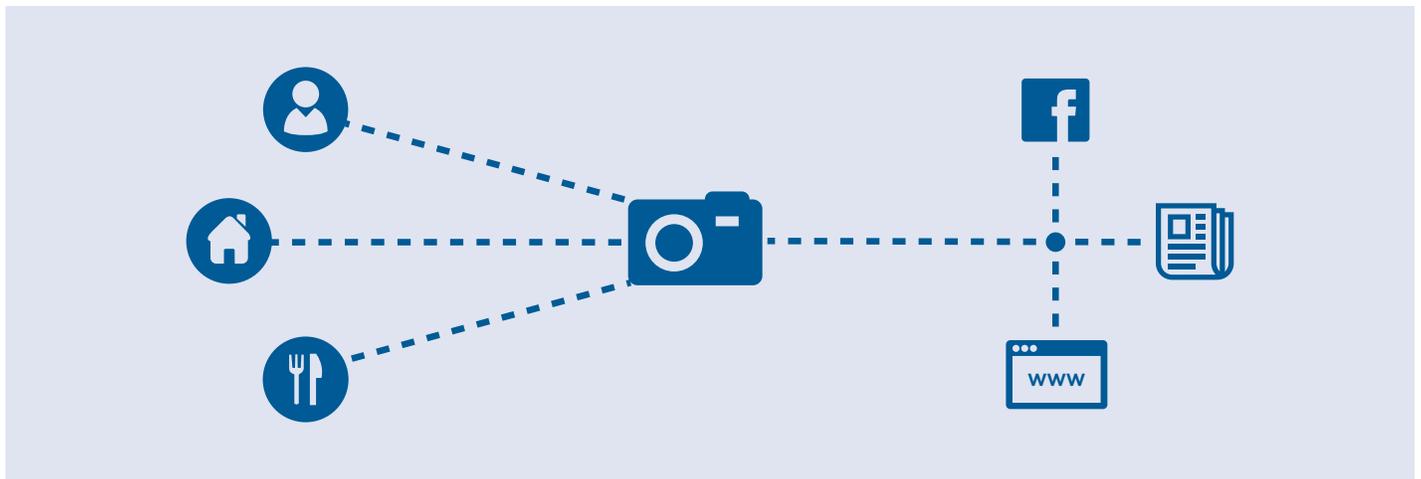
**Avoid common words with negative connotations** — facility, nursing home, institution, etc. Not only in your marketing materials, but in the language that you use inside and outside of your community. Your choice of words directly influences the perception held by your various audiences.

## 98.

**Plan for event follow-up.** Event marketing begins with the event, but it doesn't end there. Make sure staff has time to contact all attendees after the event in a timely manner. Their goal is to qualify leads and move them to a one-on-one appointment.

## 97.

Take photos of everything.



Document marketing events, social events, speakers and special visitors. Then post them on your website. Use them for social media, e-newsletters, internal communications and media outreach. And don't forget to get permission for use.

## 96.

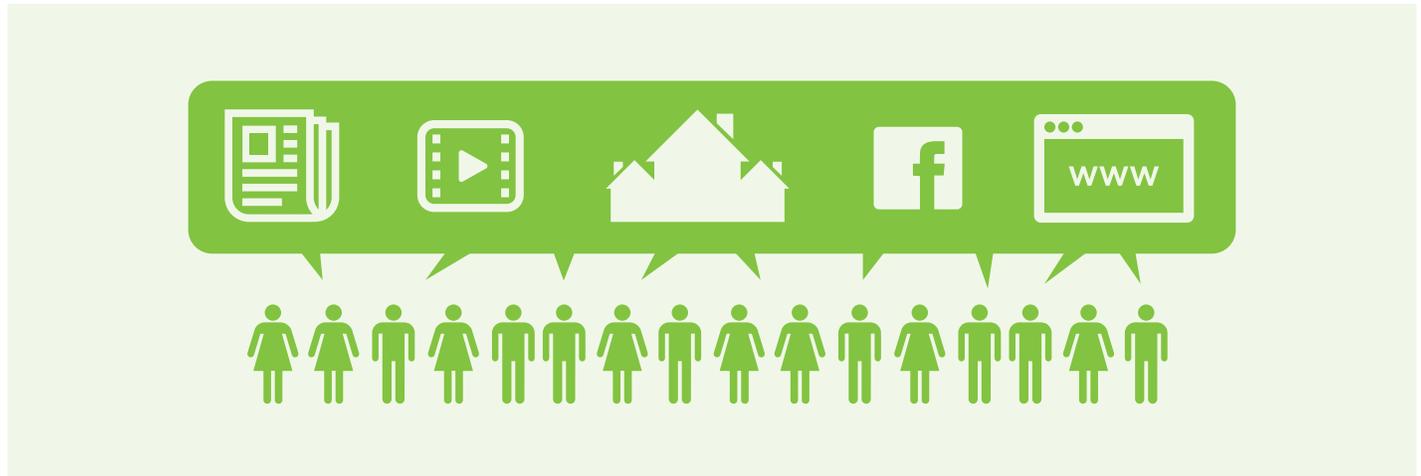
**Make it easy to RSVP.** Phone calls are great, but people often like the convenience of completing a form while they're on your website or Facebook page. Use both an automated message to acknowledge receipt of the RSVP and request their phone number on the form to confirm their reservation or change of plans.

## 95.

**Evaluate the quality of leads (both good and bad) generated from online directories.** Online directories should be evaluated by how often the leads they provide convert to move-ins, and it's important to keep track of this information. There are many options out there for senior living directories, and any additional information on their performance allows you to concentrate your budget and your efforts on the services that provide you with the highest-quality leads.

# 94.

Extend your community's culture and personality out into the public.



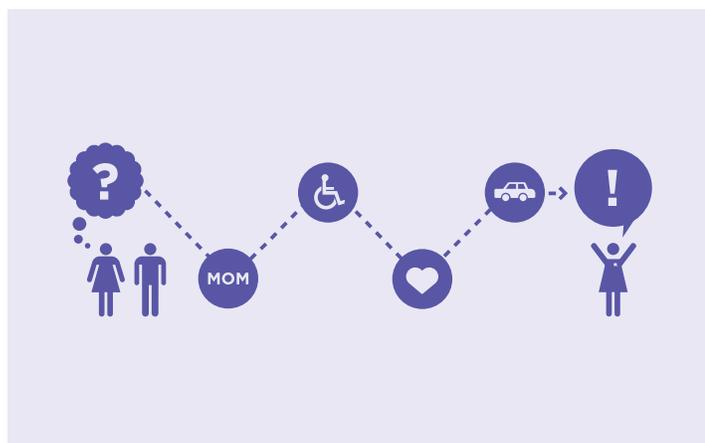
You can do this through your brand, the types of events you hold, your staff, outreach to community, news releases, social media, etc. Give people a reason to think you're unique, interesting and worth checking out.

# 93.

**Host a dinner with the executive team for hot/warm leads.** For many leads, who's in charge is a very important factor in making a decision. Let them get to know the faces of the community on a more personal level: the executive director, director of hospitality, or perhaps the chaplain. Your team can be a great closing tool, so use them to your advantage.

# 92.

**Know the stories of your residents and share them.** Keep your eyes and ears open. Telling resident (and staff) stories is a great way to connect with your prospects, create content for social media channels, and garner positive media coverage for your community. Stories are real and powerful, and build upon one another to tell your organization's overall story.



# 91.

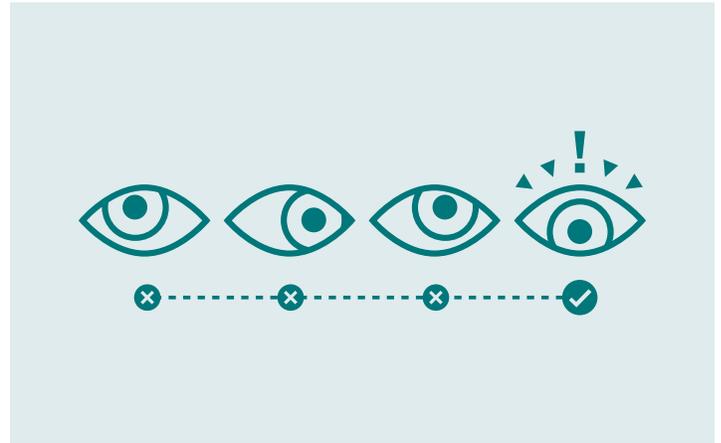
Be sensitive when working with adult children.

They're in the midst of one of the hardest decisions they'll ever have to make, and they're balancing it with the struggles of their daily work and family life. Be a resource for them by being available to help them when they need their questions answered.

# 90.

## Consider a remarketing campaign.

Not everyone who visits your website will fill out an inquiry form the first time, but it doesn't mean they're not interested. Remarketing is an online tactic that puts your ad in front of the prospects who came to your website, but didn't convert the first time; it keeps your brand name top of mind.



# 89.

**Consider everyone a qualified lead.** Just because a prospect pulls up in an old car, or their ZIP code isn't in a neighborhood with high home values, doesn't mean they can't afford to move in. Begin by establishing interest in making a move, and then pursue their ability to afford it.

# 88.

**Accept that sometimes "The way we've always done it" just doesn't work anymore.** Regularly evaluate your marketing/sales and operational strategy. Get in the habit of asking "Why?"

# 87.

**Be sure every content asset has an offer.** "Call today, Get More Information or Like Us" aren't offers. Seminars, luncheons, open houses, even free gifts and other incentives are offers. And make sure your offer is relevant and appropriate. A \$25 gift card may not mean much to wealthier prospects. Know your community audience.

# 86.

**Be aware that your conduct during a prospect's community visit speaks volumes.** Many prospects are anxious about fitting in and making social connections at a community. When touring a prospect, acknowledge or speak to every employee or resident you meet to demonstrate your welcoming culture. Here, actions speak louder than words.

# 85.

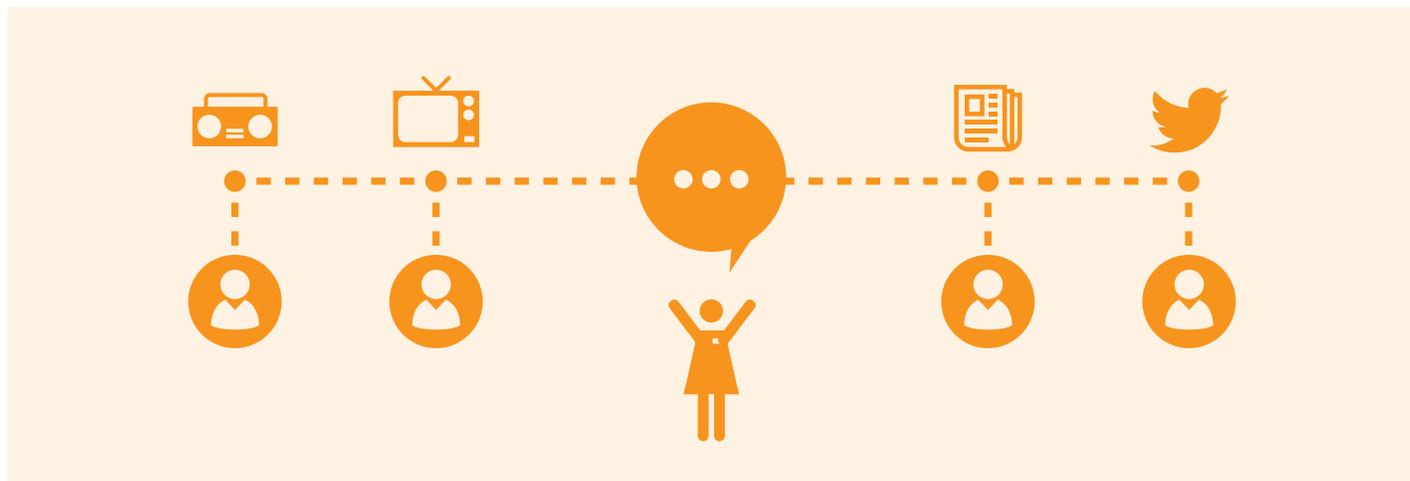
**Follow up an appointment with thank-you communication in a timely manner.** They may never be more interested in moving ahead than right after an appointment. Don't assume they need time to consider their situation. Follow up, either with a note or email, and let them tell you how they would like to proceed.

# 84.

**Understand social analytics and insights.** Keep track of what's going on behind the scenes of your social media accounts. What content is resonating the most with your audience? Do you have better engagement on a certain day of the week or during a certain time of day? Use this insight to drive your content strategy in an effort to increase engagement.

# 83.

## Get to know your local media.



Build a relationship with key editors and reporters: Be a resource and understand what types of stories they cover, and what information is really relevant to their audience. Solid relationships get your stories told, and having strong relationships could be helpful in a crisis situation.

# 82.

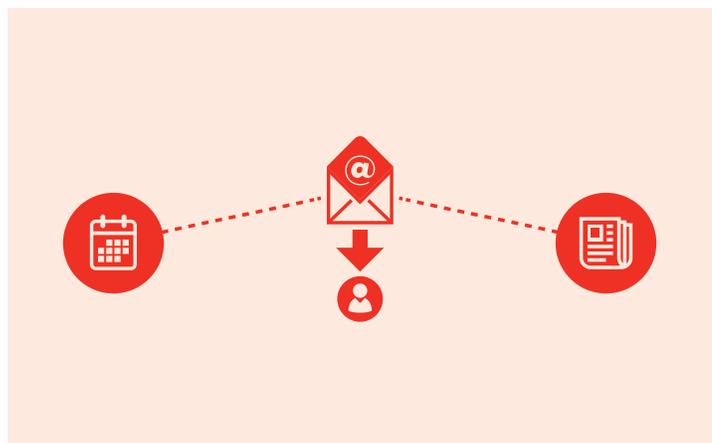
**Be sure social media is part of your marketing mix.** Having a social media presence can help convert leads to sales, and is an excellent way to foster relationships with prospects and influencers. Plan your social media so it works seamlessly with your overall marketing program, having content that matches your target audience, marketing calendar and core messages.

# 81.

**When asking your media partner for added value, consider having them add on something you haven't tried before, instead of just getting a lower rate.** It's a low-risk way to see if you could test something that might be a strong performer for you.

# 80.

**Use one-to-one tactics to support events.** Try calling or emailing leads in addition to mailing invitations for events. It costs less per attendee and is another reason to make contact.



# 79.

## Use email marketing to help develop relationships with leads.

Provide an opportunity on your website to opt-in to receive email communications. Regularly send e-newsletters, event invitations, announcements, incentives, etc. Send personal email with links to topics of interest or other relevant information.

## 78.

**Develop a content generation team.** A steady stream of fresh, relevant content takes effort. Share that responsibility across a team of your associates who are best suited to support this effort. Or engage an agency for help. Most importantly, identify a content champion to head up that team.

## 77.

**Leverage your social media content.** Use paid media strategies to amplify your social content. This can put your content in front of a highly targeted audience with minimal investment.

## 76.

**Have some sales-focused fun.** Hold contests for sales team members to generate appointments: Every 6 weeks, designate a 2-hour window at the end of a work day to make phone-outs or emails. Give away prizes for most connected calls, most appointments set, etc.

## 75.

**Target individuals 75 years of age or older for independent living.** There are a few exceptions to this advice, but for most communities and most types of residences, very few individuals move in before they're 75 years old. Reach out to those with the greatest likelihood to be interested.

## 74.

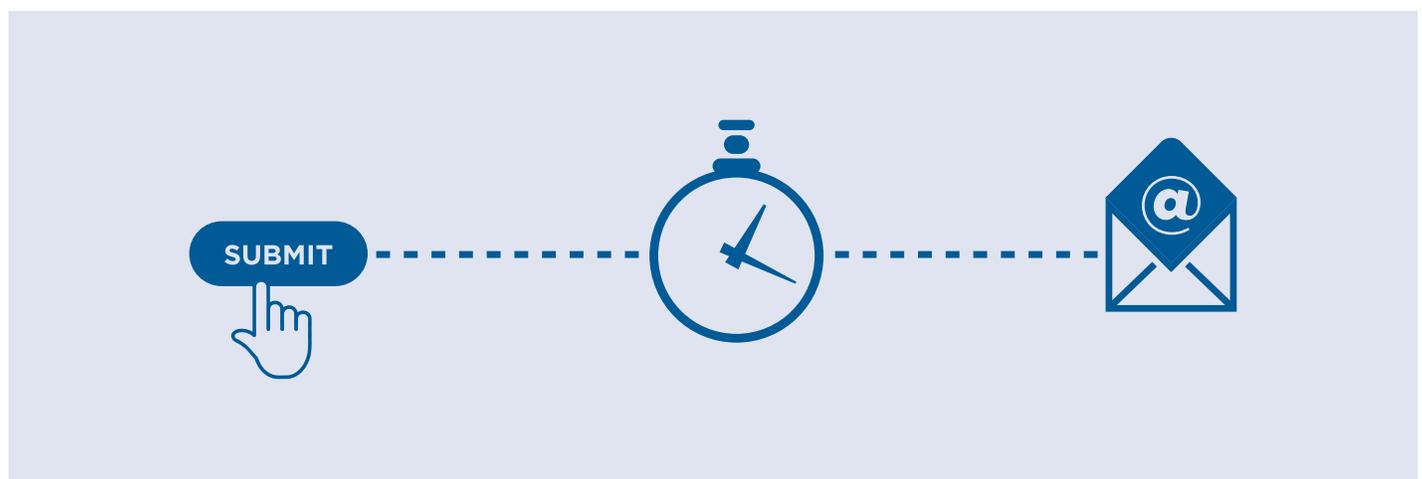
**Give leads a cost comparison analysis of their financial situation.** Then invite them to a personal appointment to help them take the next step.

## 73.

**Use events that occur every year as a backdrop to marketing messages.** Winter, tax season and New Year's are examples of regular events that can be used. You know what your audience is thinking at these times, so make yourself relevant.

# 72.

## Respond to all online leads in a timely fashion.



Set a goal to respond within 5 minutes. And have a back-up procedure for email/online inquiries, as you would for phone calls. A missed Web opportunity is a missed sales opportunity.

## 71.

**Respond to reviews about your community, even if they're negative.** Steer the conversation offline, if necessary, but don't shy away from responding. Responsiveness and service are admirable brand qualities.

## 70.

Create an “Ambassador” program for your best salespeople — residents.



Formalizing resident involvement with prospective residents can help control interaction and ensure someone is always available. Form a volunteer group of resident Ambassadors who are identified as good spokespeople for your community. Include a mix of single men, single women and couples.

## 69.

**Vary your sales approach based on discovery.** Different people make decisions in different ways. Some are motivated by the numbers (cost of health care, tax benefits of Life Care, estate protection), while others will base their choice to move on less tangible things (style of apartment, social activities, maintenance-free living, dining services, etc.). It's important to remember that there are wide-ranging personalities out there, so make sure you reach them all by having a varied approach.

## 68.

**Don't forget reminder calls, emails or even texts for events to reduce “no-shows.”** This is important for Monday and Friday events, morning events, early RSVPs and difficult directions.

## 67.

**Conduct regular sales meetings to keep the team focused.** Share ideas. Reinforce selling skills. Ensure accountability. And keep the energy up.

## 66.

**Know that digital is first for health services.** Adult children are the audience for assisted living, memory support and skilled nursing services, and they're first looking online. An information-rich website with easy navigation, supported by a comprehensive SEO/SEM program, is the first priority when marketing health services.

## 65.

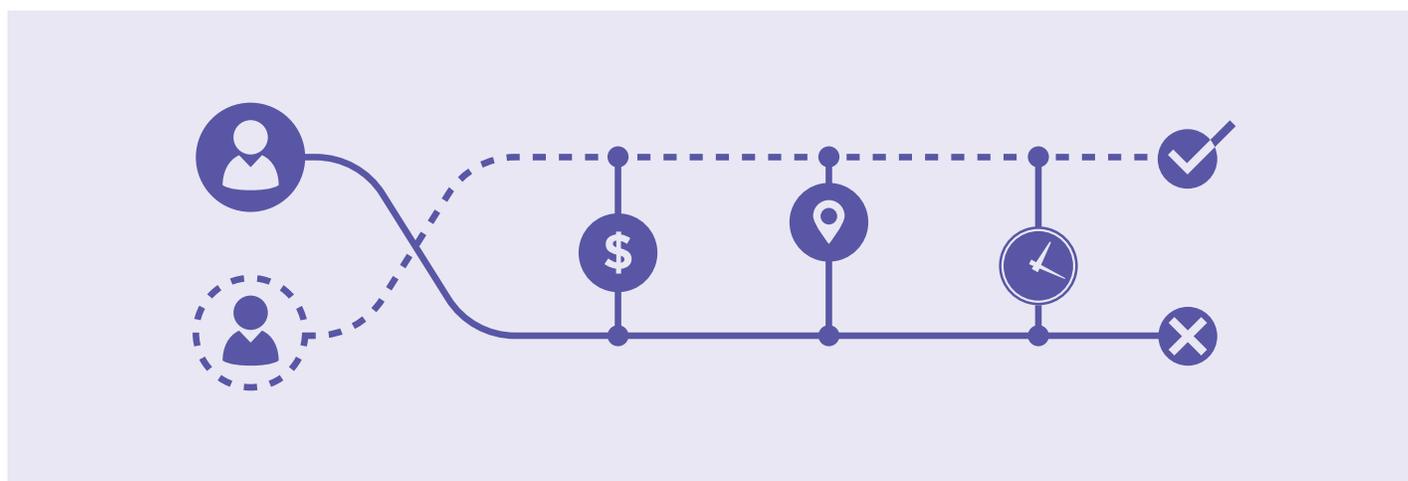
**Create a culture of team selling.** While individual goals are important to build productivity and reward success, don't overlook the power of team success and the energy created when salespeople are working with each other, rather than against each other.

## 64.

**Help prospective residents feel like they'll fit in.** Unfortunately, this is a concern with many people throughout our lives — we don't leave it behind in high school. Match up prospects with residents who have similar backgrounds or personalities. Or make sure prospects meet lots of residents to give you the best chance at a positive connection. Be sure your website and Facebook pages have lots of variety as well.

## 63.

Be willing to test new strategies.



New channels, new strategies, new market areas all offer opportunities to connect with the right customers at the right time. Testing lets you determine value without making a major commitment. Think about allocating a percentage of your budget to new strategies, or better yet, fund a small test budget above and beyond your regular marketing budget.

## 62.

**Don't always follow the competition.** Your situation and service offering are unique even if you share much in common with other communities. Let your marketing reflect your uniqueness, and let your data and marketing analytics drive your channel choices.

## 61.

**Conduct sales training.** It's an investment, not a cost.

## 60.

**Have a paid search program.** Even the best-optimized site can't anticipate every search term. And it's only becoming more complicated. A well-defined paid search campaign helps put you in front of the greatest number of prospects. Paid search is particularly important in large or heavily competitive markets.

## 59.

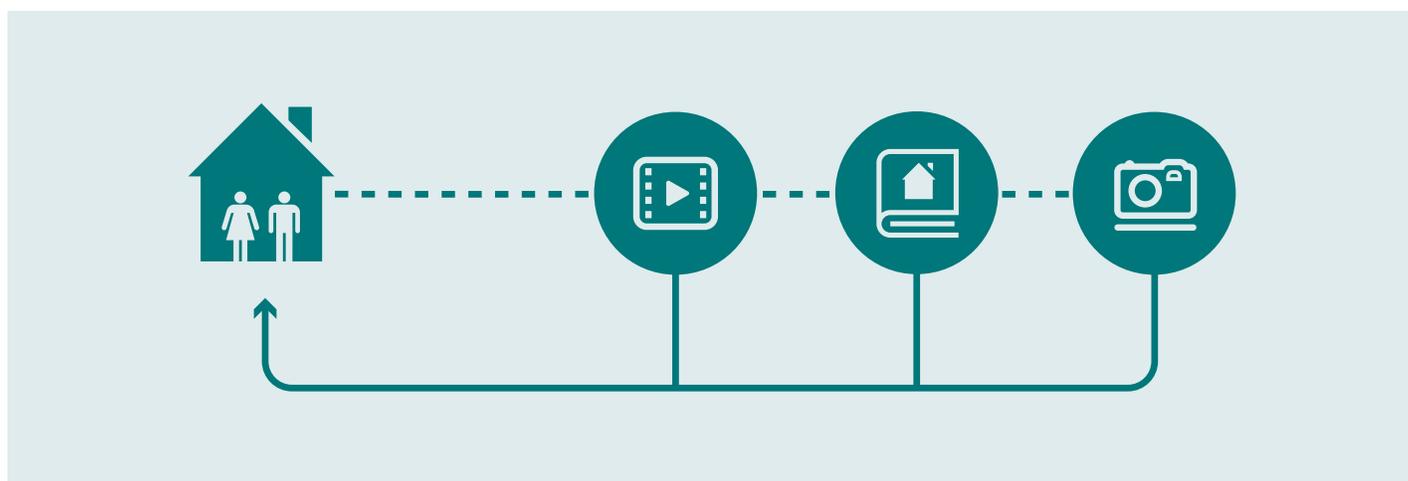
**Count an email contact as a solid contact for sales goals.** With email communication so prevalent, be sure to credit email contact with leads the same as a phone contact when tracking weekly call-outs.

## 58.

**Don't assume residents don't want to be paid for referrals.** Give them the option of a charitable donation in their name, just in case, but make sure you have a formal referral program in place and promote it often. Don't miss out on the window for the best and most referrals — soon after a resident moves to your community.

# 57.

## Create brand from the inside out.



Your brand isn't your marketing look and feel. It's the takeaway your customers have from experiencing your community and service. Your culture defines your brand. Your marketing communicates it. Your brand starts with a keen understanding of who you are as an organization.

## 56.

**Be a student.** The more you know, the better service you can provide, and being of service is a big part of relationship selling. Of course, know your community and product, but also seek opportunities to learn more about the senior audience, the issues individuals face as they age, and other options they have, such as other communities or in-home help.

## 55.

**Optimize your website for organic search results.** Search engines are becoming more sophisticated in evaluating relevance of website information. What you say and how you say it is critical to getting top listings for the prospects and keywords you want to target.

## 54.

**Engage on social media.** Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube ... social media is a huge part of everyone's lives — including seniors. Showcase your community's lifestyle and interact with prospects and adult children on Facebook. Dedicate a sales or marketing team member to engage with those connecting with you on social.

# 53.

Create opportunities on your website to convert visitors to leads.



Drive inquiries or email registrations with offers such as “How Tos,” FAQs, tips, newsletters, videos, articles, etc. Consider using “quick-forms” with minimal fields to make registering easy. Interactive content, infographics and strong CTAs can all help drive conversions.

# 52.

**Be aware that online reviews are the new word of mouth.** Don't discount the impact of online reviews. People use them to help make decisions, and they're key to building a strong brand. In fact, consumers trust online reviews as much as word of mouth.

# 51.

**Strive for consistency in marketing materials online and offline.** Everything you do is a reflection of your community and your brand. The look, feel and message of all your marketing should be similar. Even the look and attitude of your staff and the presentations you give should have a similar feel. It may get stale to you (because you're looking at it all the time), but to a prospect, changing logos, colors, typefaces and tones is confusing and decreases the brand's impact overall.

# 50.

**Always market as a community.** As the marketing staff, remind everyone that you're always marketing. Something as simple as the freshness of the cookies served to the women's group you're hosting at the community may lead to a positive or negative comment to your next best prospect. Your reputation is built through the collective experience of everyone who comes in contact with your community.

# 49.

## Maintain a clean database.



While you're on the phone or interacting with leads, update your database by getting new addresses, phone numbers and emails. Make this a priority. A clean database saves marketing dollars.

# 48.

## **Offer training for various staff members who may come in direct contact with prospective residents.**

Educate your entire staff on your core benefits through orientation, staff meetings, marketing updates and new service announcements.

# 47.

## **Include video in your marketing budget.** We process visuals 60,000 times faster than text.

Create a YouTube channel, post videos on Facebook and Instagram, share videos on your website and in e-newsletters. Include video in your media outreach. It's essential in telling your community's story.

# 46.

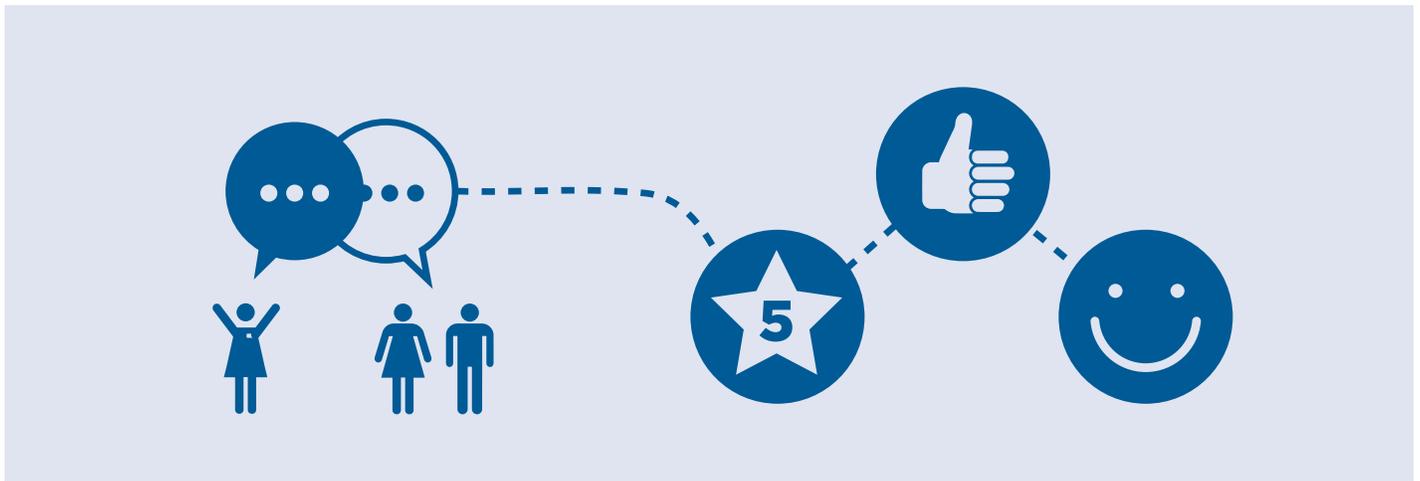
**Create a photo library for your community's marketing.** Images of your community and residents are powerful communicators and are required in every marketing format. Invest in a library of high-quality images that show off the best of what you have to offer.

# 45.

**Have a crisis communications plan.** Dealing with the practical issues of a crisis are difficult enough without having to also determine how, when and if to communicate with important audiences such as residents, families, associates and the media. And be sure the plan addresses the use of social media in communicating with these audiences. Having a plan can reduce negative issues and possibly create a positive result out of a crisis.

# 44.

## Encourage and promote online reviews.



Take a proactive approach to online reviews. Just as you'd ask a very satisfied resident or family for a referral, ask them if they'd post a review on your behalf. And make it easy by giving them "how to" instructions.

# 43.

**Coordinate marketing and resident lifestyle activities.** When planning events, don't forget to look at what events are already happening at your community for residents. Perhaps open up an event to the public, or schedule a repeat event/speaker for another day that's open to the public.

# 42.

**Don't overthink it.** Sometimes the best solutions are the tried-and-true methods, such as informational luncheons or direct mail.

# 41.

**Claim and optimize local business pages.** Local business pages are much more prominent on organic search result pages, as search has become more local. Having a well-optimized page helps your rankings and also provides a platform for consumer reviews — another Web element that's growing in importance as it relates to search and consumer behavior.

# 40.

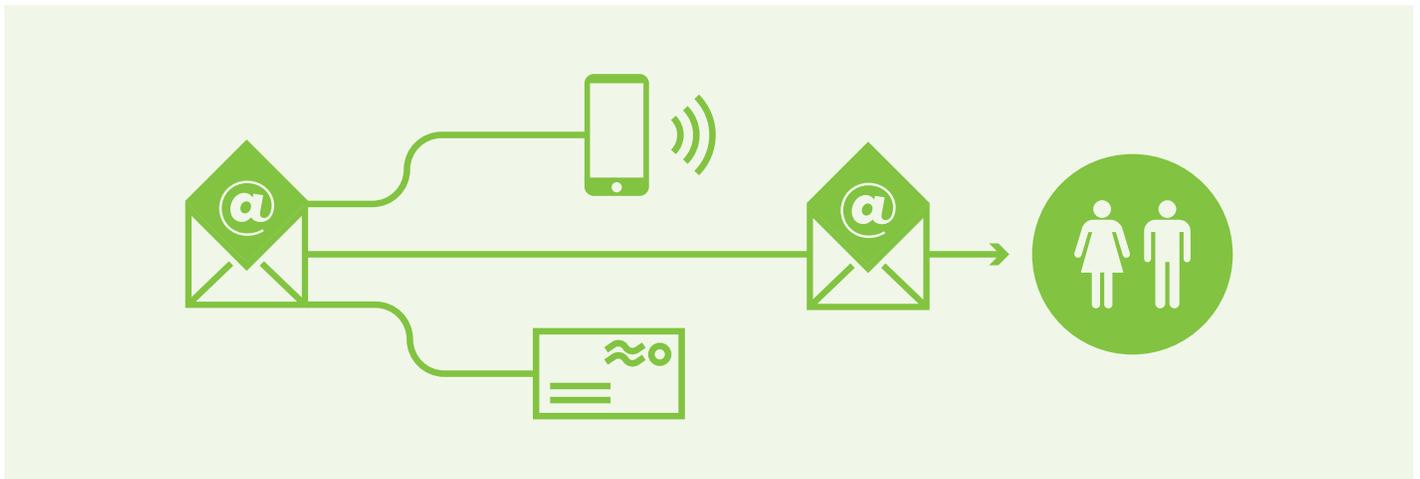
**Know where your leads are coming from and allocate budget resources accordingly.** Keep the best and then put some budget toward trying new things, still keeping careful track of response metrics, so you know what to repeat and what to change to keep the leads coming in.

# 39.

**Create a tour preparedness checklist.** Start the day with a 15-minute "show-ready" check. Scuffed or chipped paint makes an impression, and not a good one.

# 38.

If they emailed you, email them back.



Try to make the first attempt with a new website lead via email as opposed to picking up the phone. They chose this means of communication for a reason. Respect that until you have permission to call.

# 37.

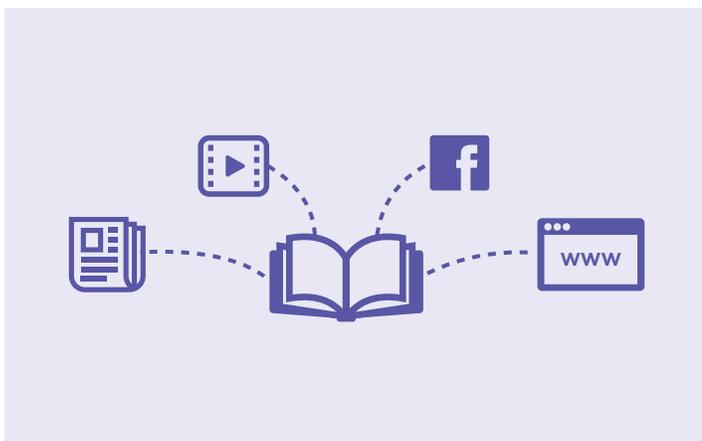
**Monitor and track website and social activity.** The tools are available and many are free. You should be tracking your website activity monthly – inquiries, conversion rate, time on site, monthly traffic, demographics and behavior – to evaluate performance and identify areas for improvement.

# 36.

**Be prepared for tours.** Establish a tour committee, including marketing, administrative and operations. Tour at least once a month as a committee, so everyone is seeing the community through the same eyes.

# 35.

**Walk the walk.** Nothing kills a sales appointment faster than good marketing and a bad product. Make sure your operations meet the expectation set in your marketing materials. Do everything you can to excel, and then make sure that you promote all the positive activity at your community.



# 34.

Be a storyteller.

In your videos, on your website, on social media, use stories to connect with consumers in ways that match where they are in their decision-making process. Whether the objective is creating awareness, meeting them at a life-changing moment, or nudging them to take the next step ... align stories with stages during your content planning process.

## 33.

**Be the first to respond.** We know from research that the first to respond to a consumer's inquiry has the inside track to making a sale. You can't guarantee you'll be first, but you can be sure you'll be last by not having a rapid response expectation in place for your sales team.

## 32.

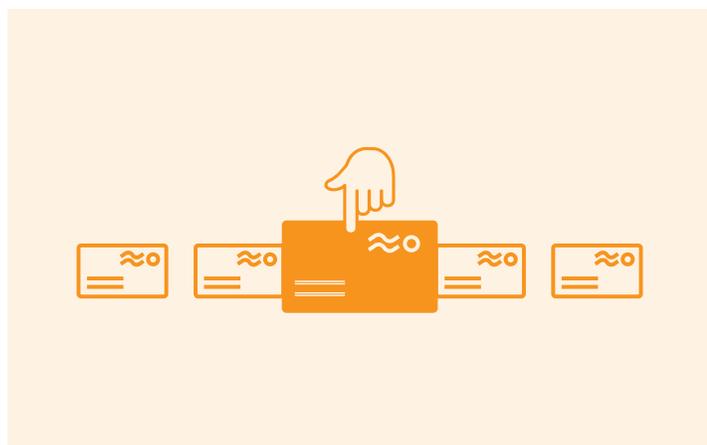
**Aggressively capture email addresses.** Email is a preferred way to communicate with leads (e-newsletters, event reminders, incentives, etc.), especially when you're engaging with adult children. Ask everyone for their email address ... and keep asking.



## 31.

### Keep your website fresh.

Update photo galleries, testimonials, calendar of events, etc., so people see there is life at the community. This also tells search engines you're relevant and improves search results.



## 30.

### Don't be afraid to push the creative envelope.

Remember your marketing messages aren't just competing for attention with other senior living communities. You're also competing with the thousands of messages that your prospects get bombarded with every day. It's important your message rises above the noise and compares favorably to all consumer marketing.

## 29.

**Capture information on the first call.** Train everyone who answers the phone to always ask for the basic contact information and the reason for the call. Don't risk losing a lead. Use call sheets, have event overflow dates identified, and never say, "We're already full."

## 28.

**Never underestimate the power of a resident's perspective.** When giving a tour, get your residents involved. Invite them to lunch with your lead, or stop on tours to meet them and let them show off their home. Host events where residents answer the questions.

## 27.

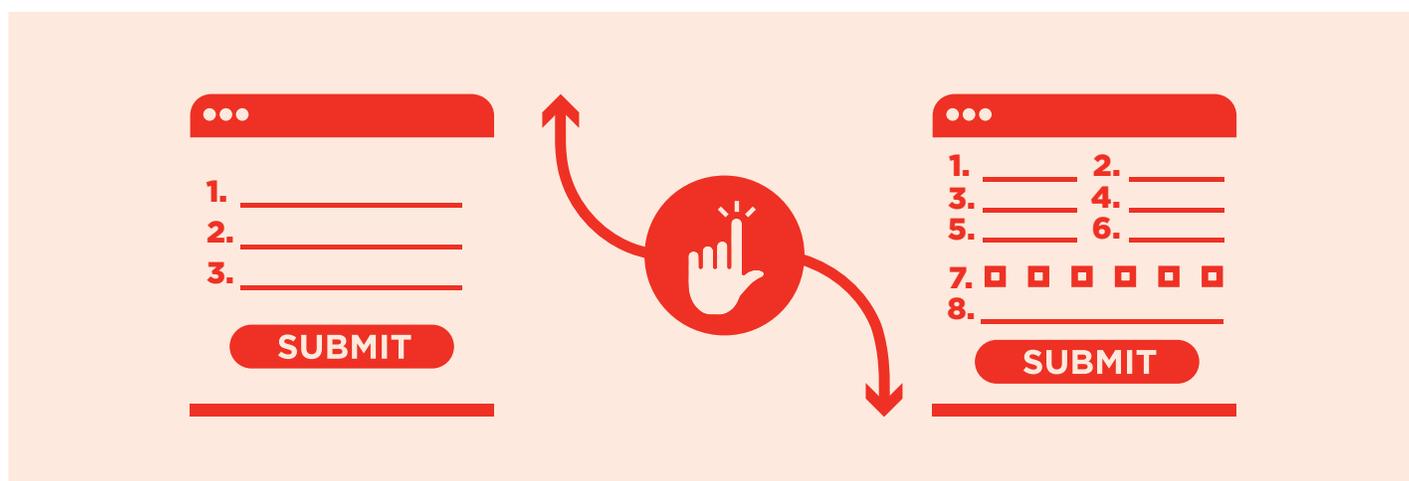
**Nurture leads.** Your sales team can't be in touch with every lead all the time. Yet we know most individuals need support to move forward and make decisions. Best when automated, but even if it's a manual process, have a program of regular communication to new leads that systematically delivers key messages and keeps their interest high.

## 26.

**Know that first impressions matter.** The marketing team is the voice and face of the entire community. Always remember to pay attention to how people are greeted — in person or by phone — and put your best foot forward.

# 25.

## Make inquiring on your website simple.



A name and an email address is all it takes to start a conversation. Long forms only inhibit inquiry. Start simple and gain the rest of the information you need as you build the relationship.

## 24.

**Answer the phone.** A missed phone call is a missed sales opportunity.

## 23.

**Create content with the intent to use in multiple marketing channels.** Before creating content, think through how you can maximize each piece to tell your organization's story.

## 22.

**Be open to new ideas.** Sometimes new tactics can stir up the marketplace in a positive way. Don't be afraid to think outside the box and create some buzz!

## 21.

**Evaluate your marketing results.** Take time to evaluate the cost per lead for your entire program, and for each specific event and tactic, so you can better plan for future marketing efforts. Know what works, and review and re-evaluate at least every 6 months.

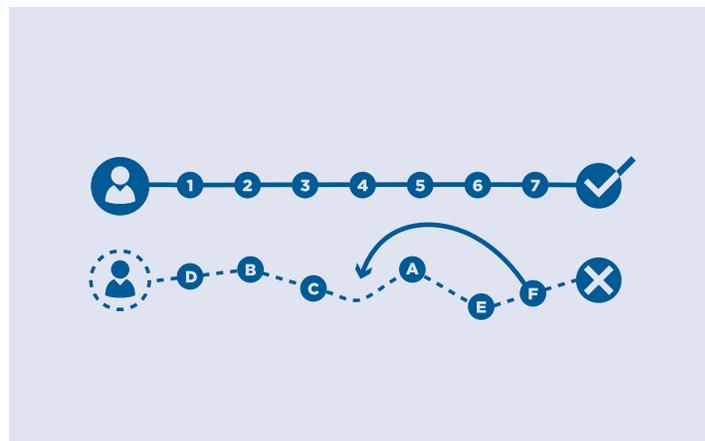
## 20.

**Accept that it's not about you.** Consumers want to know why they should care, and they don't give you much time to make your case. Make sure your messages are focused on the benefits of your community, rather than on a list of the features you offer. Put yourself in the shoes of prospective residents when creating content.

## 19.

### Have a strategy behind your content.

Irrelevant or unfocused content can frustrate consumers and might even damage your overall reputation. Who's your audience? What reaction do you desire once the consumer has viewed the content? What content will help motivate an action? Align your content with what influences prospective residents to take a next step.



## 18.

**Be sure your website is responsive to mobile platforms.** Smartphones and tablets have changed the way websites are accessed. More and more visits to senior living sites are coming from these devices. Be sure your website displays in a mobile environment, or create a dedicated mobile site to meet this need.

## 17.

**Communicate your uniqueness.** The core benefits of a senior living community are similar, but individual communities aren't. Identify what differentiates you, and clearly communicate those defining points. For example, if you have organic food items on your menu or have an association with a local college — don't forget to mention it. That's what makes your community unique!

## 16.

**Have and implement a solid plan for inquiry generation.** Hope isn't a plan. Know what you plan to do to get new leads and work your current lead base. Efficiently using your available budget comes from planning all your marketing activity together. Knowing if you're on track comes from having a plan to measure against. Making it up as you go along is always more work, more expensive and rarely produces better results.

## 15.

**Set sales goals.** How do you know if you're successful if you don't set goals? How much investment is needed? As a community, "we want to be full" isn't a realistic goal. Most of us work better when we know what we're trying to achieve. Be specific and realistic in setting goals, and track your progress.

# 14.

## Establish personal relationships with your leads.



Get to know as much as you can about them — birthdays, anniversaries, pets' names, favorite foods, etc., and then use that information to reconnect. We all buy from people we like.

# 13.

**Vary your method of contact with leads.** Call them, write them, send little notes, email or text them to let them know you're thinking of them. They should hear from you at least every 3 months.

# 12.

**Work your lead base.** Especially the cold ones. We have a tendency to think about new leads, but there are some great leads in your database you haven't connected with in a while. Those people who were "too young" 4 years ago may be ready to move today.

# 11.

**Have a mini marketing plan for each warm/hot lead.** Personalize your approach based on what is relevant for each one, with the goal being to make/strengthen your connection to them, and their connection to you and the community, with each contact.

# 10.

**Consistently market your community, no matter what your occupancy level.** Seems simple, but it's surprising how some communities let lead generation fall to the wayside when they're relatively full and stable. It's easier to maintain awareness than re-establish it, and often actually less expensive in the long run.

# 9.

**Referrals are usually the least expensive leads to generate, so actively pursue them.** Don't wait for your residents to come to you. Create ways for them to make referrals, such as having a formal referral program, hosting a "bring a friend" lunch, or simply asking to meet the friend who comes every week to visit.

## 8.

**Recruit and retain great staff.** Not just in marketing, but throughout the community. A great staff is one of your best selling tools, and the means to create positive customer experiences and strong referrals.

## 7.

**Treat your website as an extension of your community.** Second to referrals, community websites are by far the most cost-effective lead generator out there. What impression does it make? Does it provide a high level of customer service? Does it elicit the same feeling one would get if they walked into your community? Your website should be a hub for all marketing activity and a gateway to your community.

## 6.

**Leads have monetary value; treat them as such.** Communicate this to all staff, not just marketing staff. Your community invested significant resources — both dollars and time — to create each and every inquiry. Know what your cost per lead is, and treat each lead in a manner commensurate with an item of that value.

## 5.

Recognize that your number one competitor is the prospect's decision not to leave their current home.



You lose more sales to no decision than to someone deciding to move to a competitive community. Do you know how to sell as well against the prospect's residence as you do against the competitor across town?

## 4.

**Be benefit-driven.** Individuals need to know what's in it for them. It's not enough to say "Life Plan Community," "Life Care" or even "maintenance-free." Focus on how the features of a senior living community translate to tangible quality-of-life factors for a person — the benefits will make the sale.

### 3.

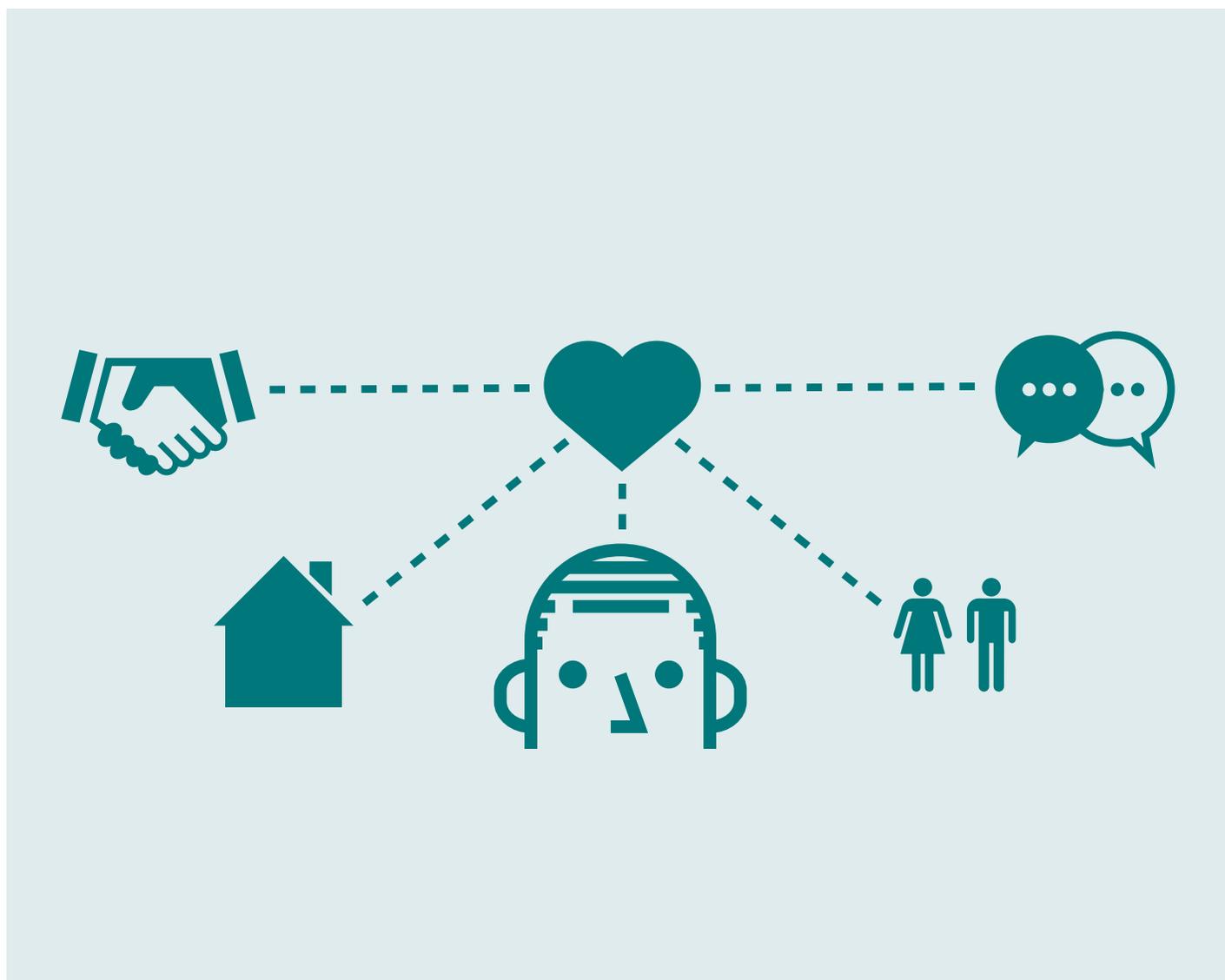
**Be an advocate, not a salesperson.** The best salespeople don't sell, they serve their clients. A senior living community isn't the right choice for everyone who shows interest. Put the prospect's needs first and give them the best information you can about your community, as well as other options they may have.

### 2.

**Become a master of discovery.** The more you know, the easier it is to position your community as the right solution. Have different questions for different types of individuals, and create an environment, such as a model apartment, that helps put people at ease. Find your own style rather than "learn" a process. If you aren't effective at discovery, you won't be effective at closing the sale.

# 1.

## Be passionate about your product.



Selling is about relationships, and relationships are about trust. If you believe in what you have to offer, prospects and their families will believe in you.