



STATE OF SENIOR CARE SALES AND MARKETING

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INTRODUCTION

The world of senior care and senior living marketing & sales is changing at a rapid pace—a trend that will continue the next several years as baby boomers age into senior care and senior living.

Today's seniors and their family members have greater access to information across a wider variety of channels than ever before. Online platforms and social channels once primarily used by younger audiences have since been adopted by both seniors and their adult-child caregivers. Direct mail and traditional advertising are becoming less effective, and spending on these forms of advertising is decreasing.

Where should senior care and senior living sales and marketing professionals spend their time and budgets? How do your marketing and sales activities compare to other communities and organizations?

To give some context to these pressing questions, we surveyed senior care sales and marketing professionals as well as executives in strategic sales and marketing functions from across the Senior Care continuum.

We asked for anonymous answers to a variety of questions about their communities and their marketing and sales activities. In this study, we'll share the results of the survey as well as insights to develop marketing and sales plans for 2019 that can help you and your organization surpass the competition and close more sales.

A special thank you to the SMASH (Senior Care Sales and Marketing Summit) leaders. Their thoughts and insight were invaluable in the development of this study.



Rick Whittington President, Senior Care Growth

Email: rick@seniorcaregrowth.com Connect on LinkedIn



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AUDIENCE

AUDIENCE

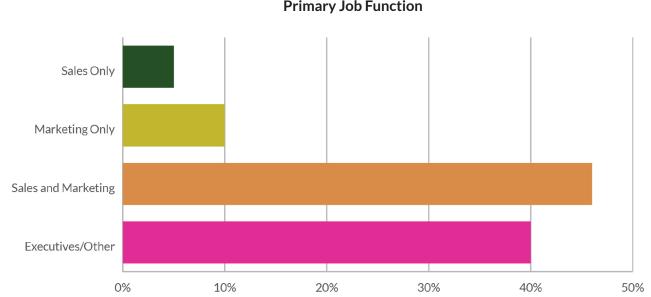
WHO WE SURVEYED

We surveyed senior care and senior living marketing and sales professionals and executives from across the United States who span all segments of the senior care continuum—from senior housing to post-acute care providers. They represent a variety of different size communities and organizations.

Staff Trends

PRIMARY JOB FUNCTION

When given the choice of sales, marketing, or both as a primary job role, 46% of respondents said they spend their time in both sales and marketing. Of those surveyed, thirty-six percent (36%) of our respondents this year were executives at their respective organizations.



Primary Job Function

Senior living organizations and communities tend to have smaller teams that handle both sales and marketing, and a single role may be handling many responsibilities.

Often, the Marketing Director is not only responsible for developing strategy, budgeting and marketing activities; but also for generating leads. They are tasked with keeping their sales team motivated and on track to hit revenue goals; even pinch-hitting to help individual team members or communities with tours and follow-ups when necessary.

In larger organizations, the sales and marketing functions are separate. But, given today's need for more and better data to evaluate care, KPI's and ROI, we find that sales and marketing teams are working in tandem to meet goals.

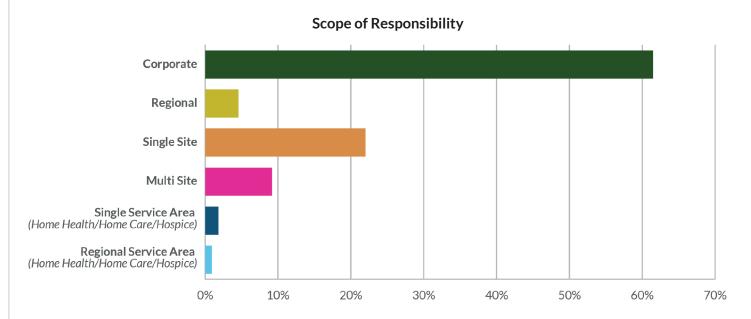
In organizations where the marketing and sales functions are separate, marketers are working with sales to generate leads, understand the sales funnel and to share individual buyer behavior data collected across digital platforms. They are also working in partnership with sales managers and sales team members to understand what content is needed to support the sales process. Marketing can then create those assets to help the sales team achieve their goals.



Likewise, sales should be sharing with marketing the messages that resonate with prospects in the sales process. Those insights can help shape marketing campaigns so they closely align with what buyers are actually looking for, depending on where they are in their buying process. Aligning sales and marketing functions can significantly increase revenue and cut the cost of acquiring leads and closing sales.

JOB RESPONSIBILITY

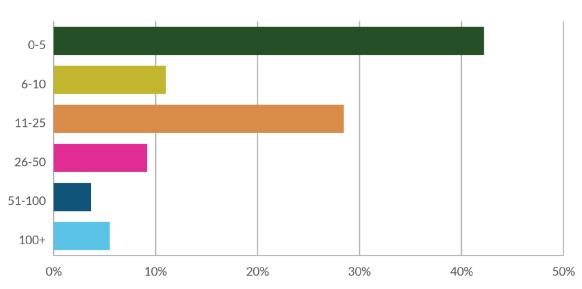
61% of the senior care marketing and sales professionals surveyed identified as having corporate responsibility, and 22% of respondents were single site operators.



Locations and Lines of Business

NUMBER OF LOCATIONS

When asked how many sites/buildings respondents' organizations have, a majority (58%) represent multilocation organizations, with the largest segment being 0-5 locations.

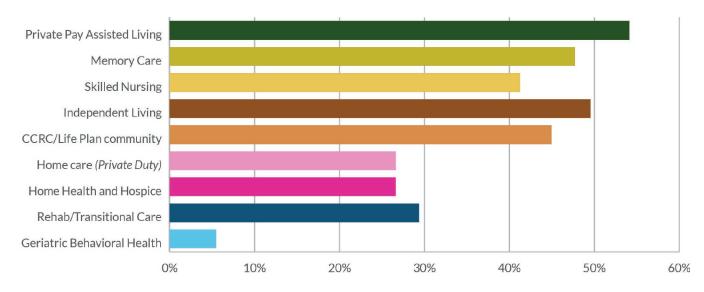


Sites/Buildings in Organization



PRIMARY LINE OF BUSINESS

The majority of those surveyed were in the senior housing industry, which includes: assisted living, memory care, independent living and CCRC/Life Plan communities. Most providers surveyed had a mix of senior housing and post acute; however, this study also covers responses from marketers in only post-acute and home care. The industries represented within post-acute and home care include: skilled nursing, rehab/transitional care, geriatric behavioral, home care and home health.

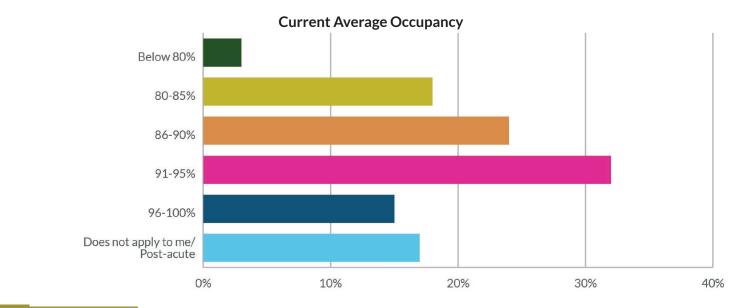


Primary Line of Business

Community Trends

SENIOR HOUSING OCCUPANCY RATES

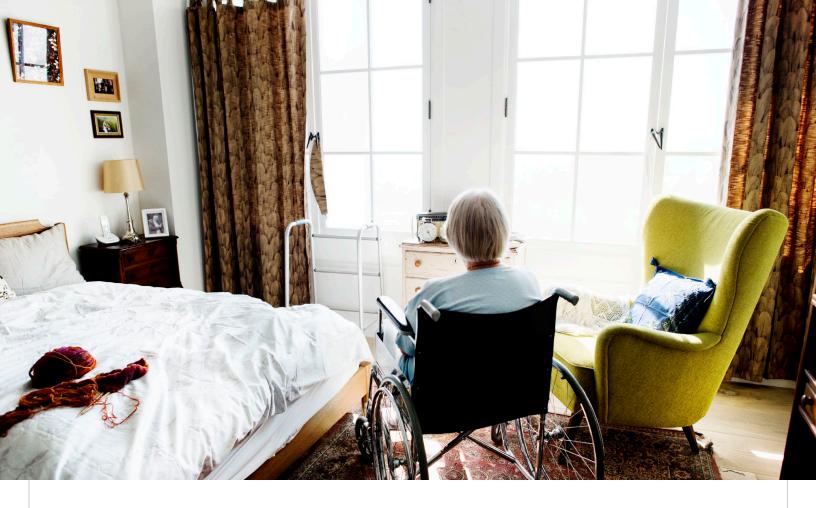
Based on National Investment Center (NIC) Data from July 12, 2018, "The occupancy rate for senior housing across the United States continued to decline in the second quarter of 2018. Occupancy in U.S. senior housing properties averaged 87.9% in the second quarter of 2018, down 0.4 percentage point from the prior quarter and down 0.8 percentage point from a year ago. The decline places occupancy at its lowest level since the first quarter of 2010 (86.9%)." Forty-three percent (43%) of our survey respondents sustain occupancy rates above 90%, while 41% see occupancy rates of less than 90%.







MARKETING



MARKETING

Challenges

Like our survey last year, lead generation is the top marketing challenge for nearly 50% of survey respondents. With customer/resident referrals being a top lead source for communities, it's no wonder lead generation is a challenge. While referrals result in high-quality leads, referral volume can't possibly keep pace with the occupancy needs.

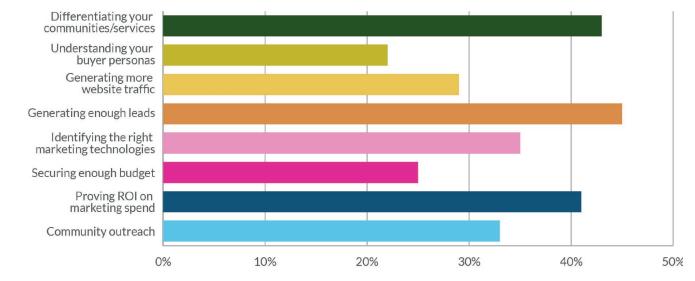
As baby boomers age into your communities, marketing to them becomes a challenge. This generation is more independent and view senior housing as a place to go when they are too frail to manage rather than a great lifestyle choice. They are determined to remain at home as long as possible. Many have savings to allow them to stay at home in their later years. Many senior care and senior living communities will need to reinvent and rebrand in order to meet the desires of their future residents.

In this year's survey, respondents report differentiation of senior care communities and services as their second top concern. As we've evaluated senior care and senior living websites, there is a sea of "sameness" in the industry. Websites and collateral show generic photos of smiling seniors. Senior communities have to do a better job telling a story that resonates with your future prospective customer. Activities that your current residents enjoy will not be the same ones the baby boomer generation enjoys. Communities need to do more to establish themselves in the minds of boomers as a great place that caters to people's desires.



If your organization is interested in better defining your unique story, you might want to pick up Donald Miller's book, **Building a StoryBrand: Clarify Your Message So Customers Will Listen**. Published in late 2017, this book outlines a formula for companies and organizations (for profit and nonprofit alike) to define their unique story.

Rounding out the top three challenges is proving ROI on marketing spend. ROI on some lead sources is easier to measure than others. Traditional media like direct mail, TV, radio or newspapers can be difficult to quantify, while events and digital advertising are easier to quantify. Adoption and usage of sales technology, like a CRM, will also help operators determine return on investment as long as sales and marketing leaders use the tools properly throughout the sales process.



Top Marketing Challenges

Lead Generation

Lead generation is a focal point among senior care/senior living marketing and sales leaders, and for good reason. With occupancy levels at their lowest point since the Great Recession, sales and marketing professionals are scrambling to find residents.

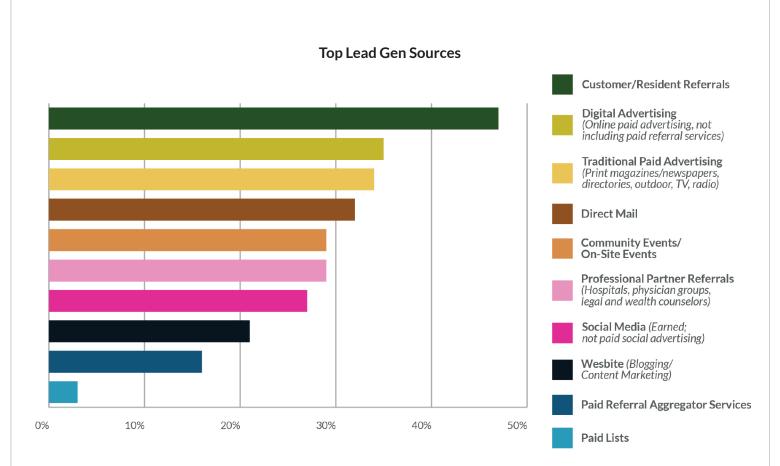
TOP LEAD SOURCES

In our 2018 report, community events and PR led the pack as the top lead source. In this year's report, though, customer/resident referrals led the way by a wide margin. Over 50% of survey respondents cited resident referrals as a top source, followed by digital advertising.

Also of note is that senior living websites are not among the top sources for lead generation. Senior care and senior living organizations—especially midsize and small organizations—have websites that are simply brochures, providing information but not giving them clear opportunities to move forward. Today's prospective resident is researching options online, and websites are an opportunity to differentiate communities and generate leads.

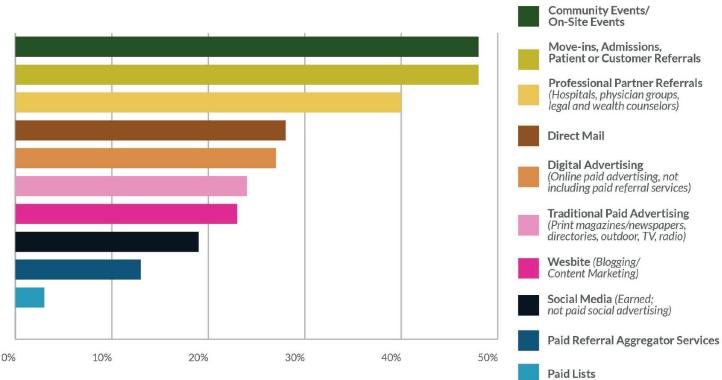
Traditional paid advertising as a lead generation source is steadily shrinking in other industries, but remains strong in the senior housing industry. Traditional advertising isn't as trackable as some other lead generation sources, so measuring return on investment can be difficult.





MOST EFFECTIVE LEAD GENERATION SOURCES

Survey respondents cite paid referral aggregator services, referrals from patients/customers and professional partner referrals (such as those from hospitals, physicians, attorneys or wealth counselors) as the most effective lead sources that ultimately produced the most new customers/residents.



Most Effective Lead Gen Sources



The top categories for referral sources came from move-ins, admissions, and patients; with internet search in close second. However, all four category groupings were very close with referrals.

Top Referral Sources



Move-in, Admission, Patient Referrals



Internet Search

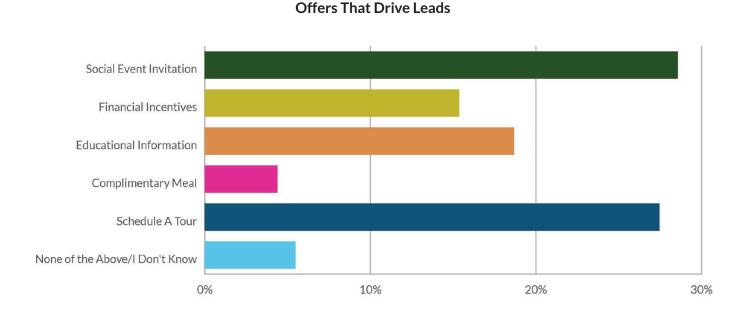
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Professional Partner Referrals (Hospitals, physician groups, legal and wealth counselors)



Paid Referral Aggregator Source

When asked which offers are most effective at driving leads, respondents cited social event invitations and tours.

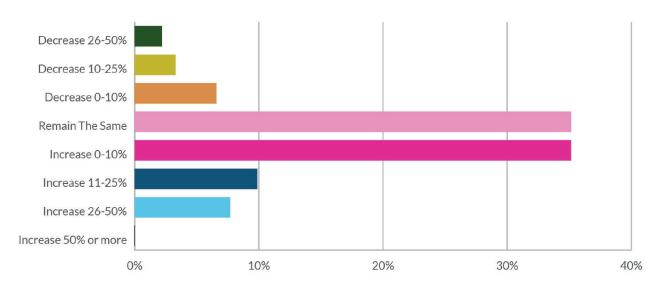


Marketing Budgets

While the range for monthly marketing budgets for senior care marketers vary greatly based on company size, marketing budgets as a whole are staying the same or seeing a slight escalation. Only 12% of survey respondents report that their marketing budgets will be decreasing in 2019. Most senior care and senior living communities plan to either keep their marketing budgets flat or increase them modestly in 2019.



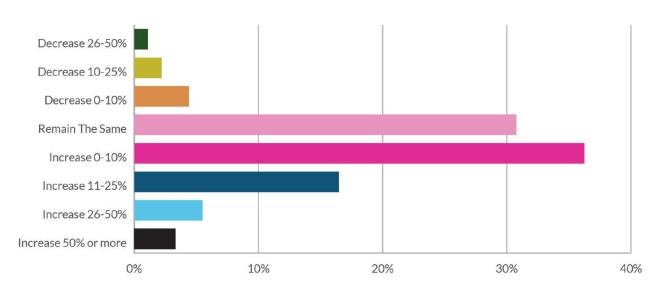
2019 Budget Variance



DIGITAL MARKETING BUDGET

67% of survey respondents say that their digital marketing budgets are either the same as last year or will see a modest increase of 0 to 10%.

Compared to last year, the number of digital marketing budgets increasing is expected to slow slightly in 2019. In our 2018 report, only 12% said their budgets would stay the same, while in 2019, nearly 31% of survey respondents said that digital marketing budgets would stay the same.



Digital Budget Variance

Digital marketing is a rising trend in the industry due to its cost effectiveness and the growth/popularity of the medium in general. If increasing occupancy is a top focus for your senior living or senior care center, digital marketing is a good choice because of the ability to measure effectiveness and report on return on investment.





In our experience, many marketers find setting an annual marketing budgeting to be a real challenge. Marketers, therefore, have a tendency to oversimplify their budget. They apply a blanket increase across all channels. We recommend taking a more targeted approach. Ideally, your organization's analytics and CRM are in sync and can tie revenue back to marketing activities. By evaluating the ROI of each marketing campaign and channel, marketers can allocate funds to what's working and scale back on what's not.

If your organization does not have a system to connect tours and move-ins back to marketing activities, now is the time to do so. As marketing becomes more digital, it's also easier to track your results. We recommend assigning a lead source to new leads as they're added to your CRM—such as "website," "Facebook Ad," or "Personal Referral." Then, once those leads become tours or move-ins, you will start to see which lead sources are successful.

To take it one step further, we recommend a review of each lead's timeline once they become a resident/customer. What marketing activities did they respond to and what sales initiatives moved the customer forward? Understanding this data and how you can repeat those activities going forward should serve as the building blocks of any strategic marketing plan.

If you need help setting up a system and understand what's successful, you can **schedule a strategy session with a Senior Care Growth expert** to discuss best practices and where to begin.

It's also worth noting that digital marketing and technology changes at a very fast pace. There are marketing tactics that are available to you now that were not commonly available a few years ago.



For example, chatbots are live chat programs that can be placed on your website(s) and provide answers to common questions in real time or route a website visitor to a marketing/sales agent. Some CRM and marketing automation platforms allow you to automate messages back to interested prospects, decreasing your speed to lead and improving their experience.

DIGITAL ADVERTISING

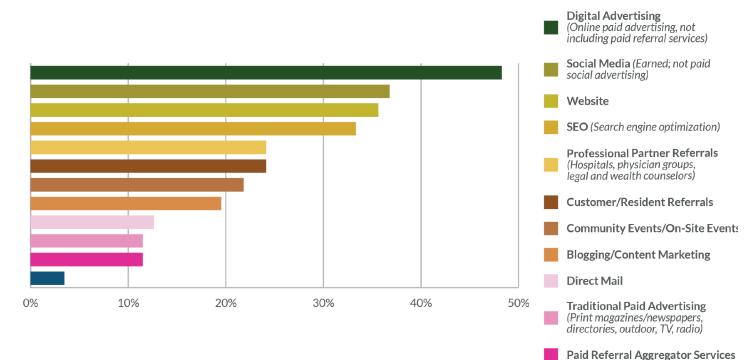
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With many communities facing lower occupancy numbers, expanding your lead generation efforts should be a priority. We recommend allocating a portion of your budget to digital advertising. Specific channels that can be highly targeted include Facebook and Google Ads. Advertising to seniors in a specific geography is very easy with these types of digital ads, and can help reduce your cost per lead.

As part of your advertising budget, consider testing remarketing ads. These ads allow you to advertise to past website visitors who didn't take an action or your website. These retargeting ads appear on other websites as they navigate to other sites, like Facebook or news sites. We've found them to be highly effective at a relatively low cost. You can start with a very small budget, and ad campaigns can be scaled as demand dictates.

INCREASES AND DECREASES IN MARKETING BUDGET

The "digital wave" continues for senior care and senior living in 2019. The top four marketing tactics that will see an increase in marketing budget are all digital in nature.

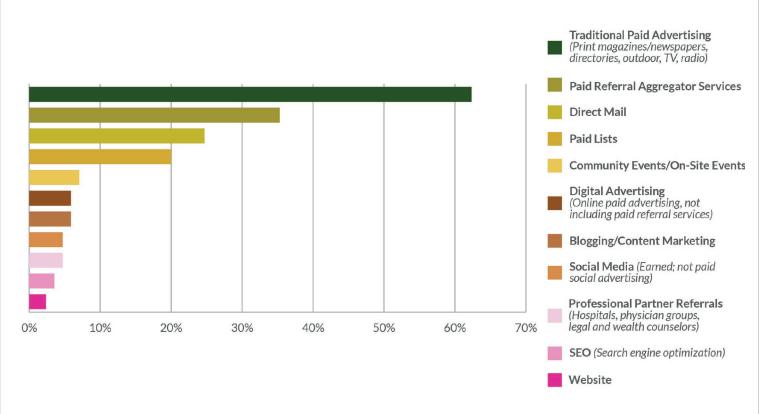


Areas to Increase Marketing Spend

Paid Lists

In many industries, traditional media as a percentage of marketing budget is on the decline. The same is true for senior living and senior care. Sixty-two percent of survey respondents say that investments in traditional marketing—such as print magazines/newspapers, directories, outdoor, TV, radio—will decrease in 2019.

Spending on paid referral aggregator services and paid lists will also decrease as senior living organizations become more savvy at generating their own leads.



Areas to Decrease Marketing Spend

However, even though the survey indicates a drop in spend for paid lists and direct mail, they certainly have their place in the marketing mix, especially if your organization is opening a new location and need to quickly increase occupancy.





SALES

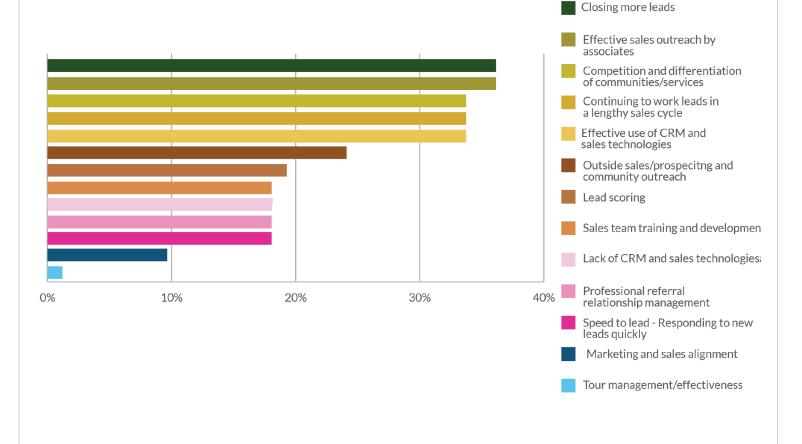
SALES Challenges

This year's results show there are five key sales challenges that senior care and senior living organizations face. They are:

- Effective sales outreach
- Closing more leads
- Competition and differentiation of communities/services
- Effective use of CRM and sales technologies
- Continuing to work leads in a lengthy sales cycle

Interestly, four of these five challenges are internal challenges, meaning that organizations can have some influence over them. For example, effective sales outreach and closing more leads can be influenced with sales training or effective use of CRM technology.

Competition and differentiation, as we mentioned earlier in the report, are top external concerns. Many communities "look" the same to prospects, considering marketing collateral—including websites—all look the same.

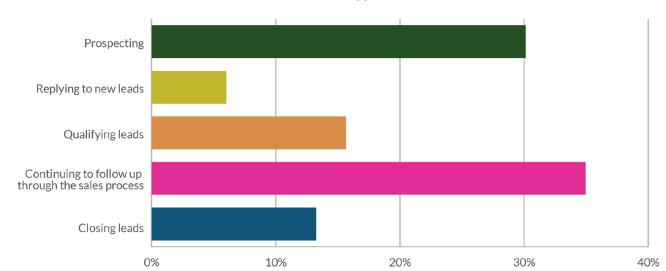


Top Sales Challenges





When asked what part of the sales process organizations struggle with the most, continuing to follow up through the sales process bubbled to the top of the list.



Sales Process Struggles

While some CRMs have automated email and outreach functionality, many senior care and senior living organizations haven't implemented marketing automation platforms. These platforms can automate the sending of helpful information at each stage in the process, increasing your touchpoints and reducing the time commitment to staying in touch with interested contacts.

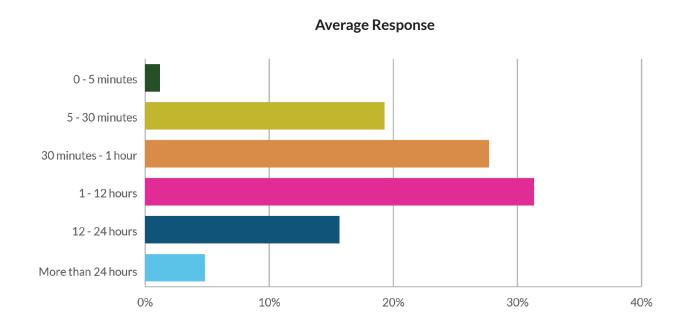
Prospecting is a sales process struggle for 30% of respondents. Many senior living and senior care organizations combine the marketing and sales function, and think of them synonymously. Prospecting requires a different sales skill set, though, which is why many organizations struggle with it. Many sales representatives find it easier to follow up with those that indicate interest first.



Sales Cycle Insights

AVERAGE FOLLOW UP TIME

Average response time to an initial inquiry varies, but only 20% of communities are following up in under 30 minutes. Another 20% are only able to follow up in 12+ hours.



When it comes to following up on inquiries, speed matters. A survey by InsideSales.com found that companies that respond to inquiries within 5 minutes qualify 21 times the number of leads compared to sales reps who respond within 30 minutes. Additionally, you are 10 times less likely to get in touch with a lead if you follow up after the first hour of their request.

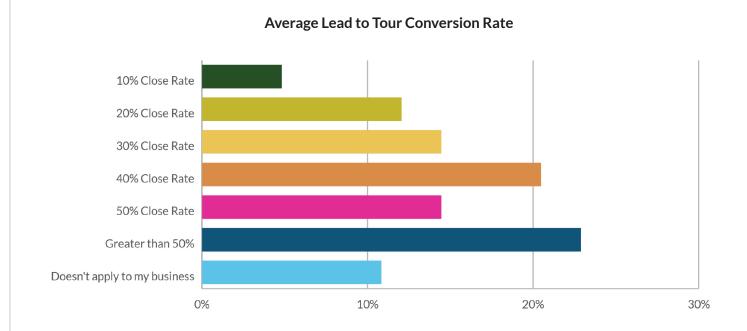
To ensure leads for your community are responded to as quickly as possible, representatives must have the proper tools in place to be notified when a lead comes through the website, and then follow up with a direct, relevant message. Any company with ten or more communities should consider centralizing lead follow-up for digital leads, as it can be difficult for a field salesperson to reliably respond quickly enough.

If someone in your organization is in charge of lead intake, we recommend setting up your website to notify that individual immediately via email and/or text message. To shorten follow up time, have email templates at the ready to speed up your response. You might also consider setting up automated email workflows to reply to website form submissions on your behalf. Just make the emails appear to come from a real person with personal email address and signature. Additionally, many CRMs allow sales teams to share email templates that give reps the ability to send a well-written email response in just a few seconds.

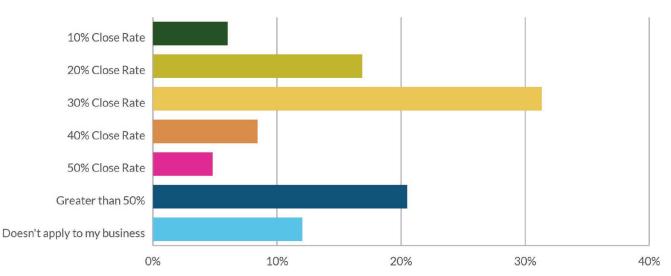
LEAD TO TOUR CONVERSION RATE

The majority of the senior care marketers we surveyed had a lead-to-tour conversion rate of over 40%. One requirement for accurate reporting of lead-to-tour conversion rate is that all salespeople input all of their leads into the CRM—not just the ones they feel are qualified. This number could also be artificially high because salespeople are not capturing interest early in the decision making process.





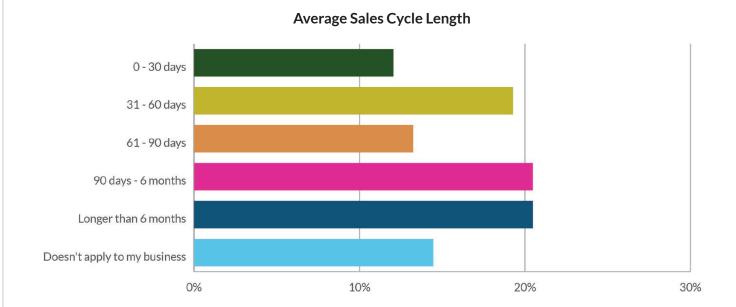
TOUR TO CLOSE/ADMISSION CONVERSION RATE



Average Tour to Close Rate



LENGTH OF SALES CYCLE



The length of sales cycle for senior living services varied widely for the respondents in our survey.

Only about 31% of leads are converting within the first 60 days. This speaks to the need to nurture and stay in touch with leads for a longer period of time, since over 40% of leads will take 3-6 months to make a decision.

Ultimately, it's your responsibility to build rapport and provide enough information in a timely manner for the prospect to make a decision. Automating some sales follow-up can make sure your communication is consistent, and personal touches like phone calls can help ensure that the proper rapport is built with prospects.

If you are hoping to shorten your sales cycle, make sure your inbound channels are set up properly and your sales reps are well-equipped to handle inbound inquiries effectively through training and effective communication about marketing and lead generation efforts.



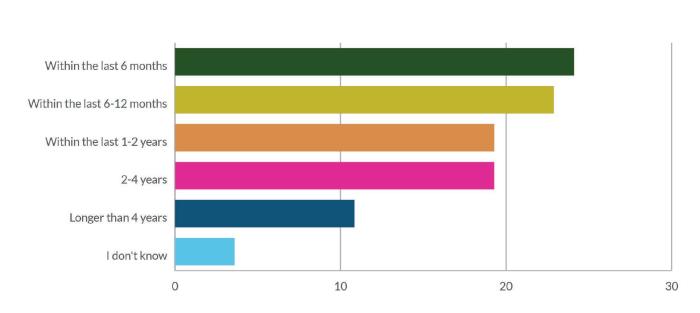


WEBSITE & TECHNOLOGY

WEBSITE & TECHNOLOGY

Website Design

Clearly, senior living and senior care organizations are paying more attention to their websites. Nearly half (47%) of survey respondents had their websites redesigned in the last 12 months. Even with this trend, 31% of survey respondents' websites were redesigned over two years ago.



Time Since Last Website Redesign

In our experience, there's not a standard "lifespan" of a website. If your organization continually updates your website with new articles and helpful information, the website's lifespan will be longer than one that sits untouched for months or even years.

The main drivers of senior living and senior care website redesigns are:

- 1. Website technology has changed since the last redesign (i.e. your website isn't mobile friendly, it's difficult for internal staff members to update the website without a developer, there's no integration with marketing automation or CRM, etc.)
- 2. The website doesn't generate leads (i.e. a high "bounce rate," it doesn't use forms effectively so prospects can indicate interest in your community, the website is not aligned with your company's most recent goals or marketing strategy, etc.)
- **3.** The website truly does look old and outdated (i.e. websites, like buildings, need to be remodeled occasionally to maintain a clean, modern appearance)

One trend we've heard more about this year is the idea of a "website refresh," which is where you might update parts of the website but not the whole. A "website redesign" usually means you are completely changing the look and feel, as well as website text and messaging.

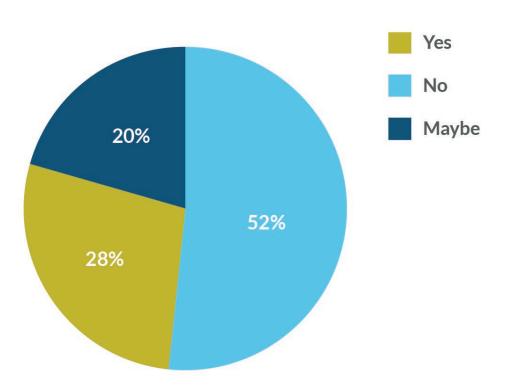


By contrast, a website refresh may replace some photos and overhaul messaging to align with a new strategic plan (or simply to clarify your messaging and make it more customer friendly). Re-coding and re-building the website isn't always necessary.

A website refresh might also focus on your search engine optimization to increase search visibility and increase referrals from Google.

Costs to at least refresh some portions of your website should be considered in your marketing budget each year. Having an up-to-date website is just as important and keeping the grounds and building properly maintained. If a prospect tours and is turned off by the upkeep of your grounds, they might turn to your competitor; and in the same way, if your website doesn't provide helpful, up-to-date information your competitor may be gaining potential residents who were not satisfied by your website.

When asked if organizations were planning a website redesign in 2019, approximately half of survey respondents indicated they were not. This makes sense because as we saw in the previous chart, most organizations saw the need to redesign their website, and did so within the last six months to a year.

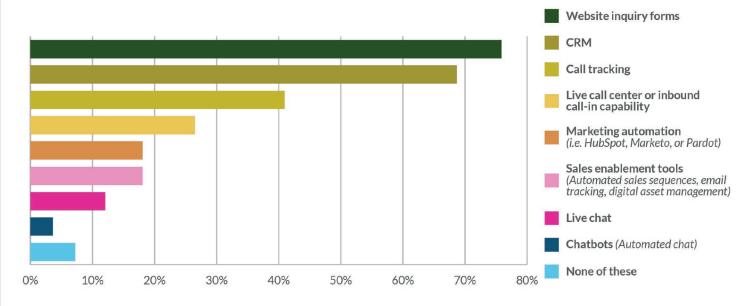


Planning Website Redesign for 2019



Marketing and Sales Technology

Which marketing and sales technologies are senior care and senior living organizations using today? The only two technologies that over half of all survey respondents are using are website inquiry forms and a CRM.



Marketing and Sales Technology

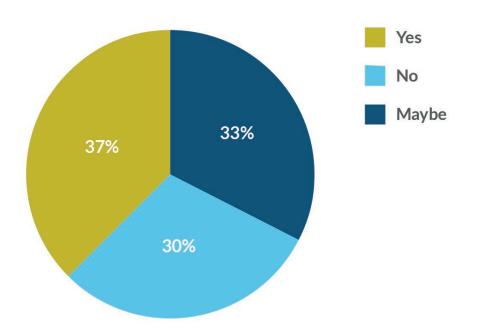
As mentioned earlier in the report, live chat and chatbots are an emerging trend, and we think these technologies could be pivotal for senior care and senior living organizations because of their relative ease of implementation. A chatbot is defined as, "A computer program designed to simulate conversation with human users." These logic-based programs can help you respond in real time to prospects visiting your website. While they can't answer complex questions, they improve the customer experience by answering routine questions, routing prospects to a real sales representative, or even scheduling a phone conversation or tour.



Marketing Automation

Marketing automation is still a relatively new technology in the senior care and senior living industry. Many larger organizations use marketing automation, but struggle with setting it up properly to get the desired results. Smaller organizations have been slower to adopt the technology, but could benefit their lead capture and sales processes.

37% of our survey respondents plan to invest more heavily in marketing automation in 2019, while 30% do not. 33% say that are considering it.



Investing in Marketing Automation

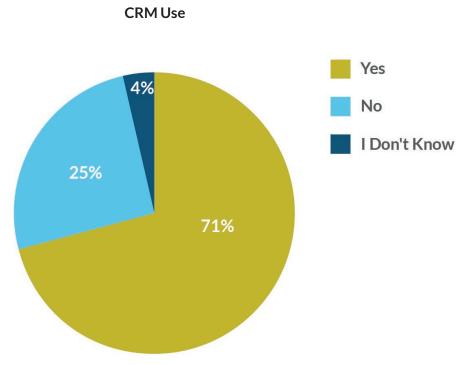
For providers who use marketing automation, more are using non-industry specific products, although there are providers who've begun to adopt the use industry specific marketing automation tools as well. A list of examples are noted below:

+ Constant Contact + OccupancyAdvantage + G5 + Oracle Eloqua + HubSpot + Salesforce/Pardot + Infusionsoft + SilverPop/IBM + Mailchimp + SoftVu/SeniorVu + Marketo

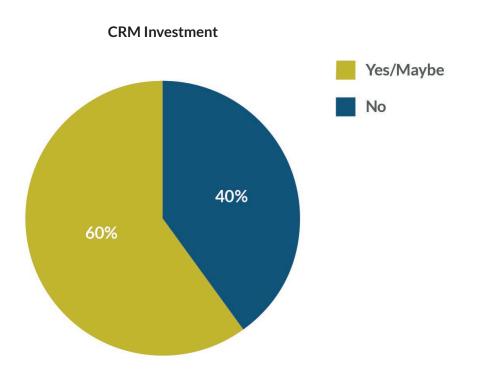


CRM

In our experience, a CRM is integral to running a consistent sales process, having the proper context for leads, and assisting sales and marketing professionals to respond in a timely way. The majority of respondents have invested in this technology to leverage these functions.



Although many senior living professionals are already utilizing a CRM, they are continuing to invest in it's growth and expansion. 60% of respondents are planning or considering to increase investing in their platfrom this year, so understanding CRM best practices is essential.





Some best practices of CRM usage include:

- Customizing your CRM so you can run your own sales process using the technology, not having to adapt your sales process to a rigid technology platform
- Regular training for sales, marketing and management personnel so the CRM can be used to the fullest extent
- Integrating the CRM with your website so leads are populated in the CRM (reducing data entry) when contacts fill in forms to indicate interest
- Using automation for initial contact with prospects (such as immediate email follow-up when someone fills out a form on your website to indicate interest) and to schedule tours (i.e. a prospect can click a link and see a sales or marketing rep's calendar, then select a time that works best for them).
- CRM integration with a marketing automation platform for high-volume communities with limited sales and marketing staff, which helps those staff members score and prioritize leads, then follow up quickly.
- Using data/dashboards generated by a CRM to report on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) about pipeline and lead generation—all leading to better lead identification and higher velocity closing.

There are several industry-specific CRMs, as well as non-industry specific ones. A list of examples of both are noted below:

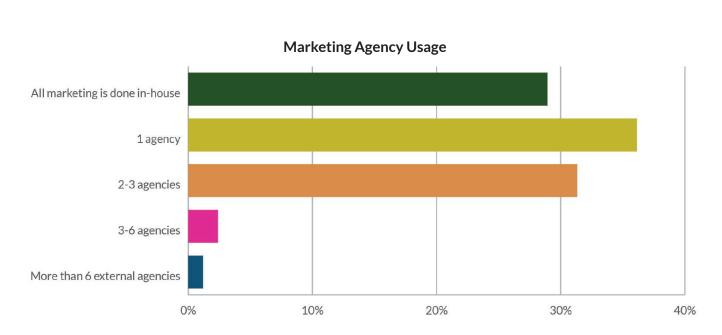


Marketing Agency Usage

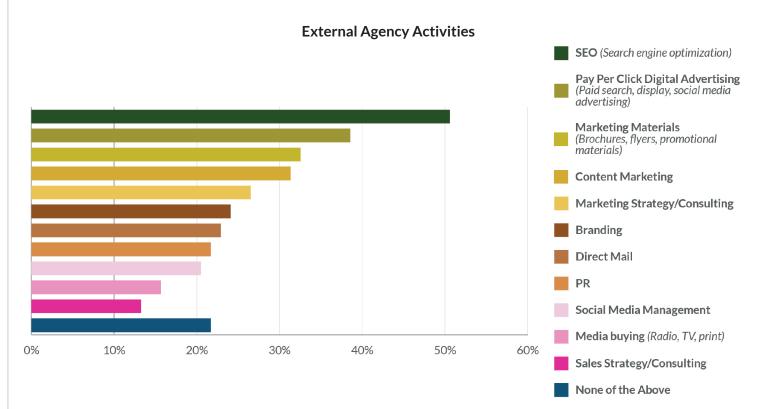
As you are likely aware, marketing and sales professionals at senior care and senior living organizations are very busy. As a solution, rather than hiring permanent staff members, some organizations seek the help of an external marketing agency. Senior care and senior living organizations rely on agencies for staff augmentation, an outside perspective and expertise that can't often be found in the organization.

Roughly 29% of survey respondents say all of their marketing will be done in-house in 2019, while the remainder will work with at least one agency. Most survey respondents (36%) are planning to work with one agency, while 31% will work with 2-3 agencies.





When it comes to working with an agency, the most popular activity will be search engine optimization (SEO), followed by pay per click digital marketing (such as Google Ads).



Of the activities that we surveyed, senior care and senior living organizations are more likely to get help from a marketing agency for digital marketing tactics. While we didn't explore why, we suspect that many organizations don't have the same level of digital expertise in-house. At the same time, digital marketing usage is on the rise at senior care and senior living organizations.

The value an agency brings to the table is either vertical/industry expertise (for example, they've provided search engine optimization for several senior living organizations), or horizontal/methodology-based expertise (for example, pay per click advertising or lead generation specialty).



CONCLUSION

Senior care and senior living organizations have some intriguing opportunities ahead for 2019. With occupancy at its lowest level since the first quarter of 2010, marketing and sales will be confronted with the need to find additional lead sources, generate more leads, follow up with these leads quickly, and nurture them through the sales process. However, the opportunity here will be to find new ways to generate additional demand, as well as ways to enhance and improve follow-up.

We would encourage you to find ways to track the effectiveness of all of your marketing and sales activities in 2019. This can be done most effectively with marketing automation and CRM working in concert to collect data and tie marketing and sales activities to move-ins. Sales and marketing staff can then make adjustments based on what's working and cut budget in areas that have higher cost per lead and cost per move-in.

One theme that stood out this year is the need for communities to differentiate themselves. This is typically a branding function. We concur that there is a sea of sameness among many senior care and senior living organizations, and clear messaging is needed to help your community stand out. What points of differentiation help your organization stand out among those in your area? How can you promote that message more effectively?

Digital marketing is continuing to gain momentum in the industry, fueled by higher internet usage to research housing/care options and the ability to measure effectiveness. For example, it's easier to measure how many move-ins result from a pay per click campaign than from a newspaper ad or postcard. Consider using pay per click on Google and/or on Facebook, both of which can be highly effective lead referral sources at a relatively low cost per lead.

Continual follow-up (lead nurturing) is a sales challenge for many organizations to address in 2019. The cost of generating a lead is too high to only have one or two communications. Offering those contacts valuable information and content that will move them closer to the sale should be the focus in the year ahead. Following a documented sales process is a first step—where you can define content and FAQs that can be answered as you stay in touch. Having both marketing automation and a CRM can help with this, too.

Marketing budgets will trend slightly higher overall in 2019, which will give sales and marketing leaders the resources they need to make improvements in 2019. Whatever your challenges are and no matter how you plan to address them, we hope this study has been insightful, and we wish you all the best in 2019.

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- Create a cohesive brand message for consumers, professional referrals, locally and nationally

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