

# SOLUTIONS ADVISORS

Values driven. Results focused. Senior living experts.



## The Evolution of an Event

### Part 1: Strategic Planning

Events are a fundamental marketing strategy for senior living. As the more traditional methods of lead generation fade, events remain key to generating new leads and converting existing prospects.

At Solutions Advisors we've been successful in planning events for independent living communities that are meaningful for participants. Over the next several newsletters we'd like to share with you some of our secrets for success. Using a case study from a real event, we'll show what's behind the strategy and share tips on how you can improve the chances of holding a strategic and successful event.

#### STEP ONE

### Establish the Goal



Events are not always about getting as many prospects as possible into a room. Instead, think about a specific goal. Is the goal to generate new leads? To convert your best prospects into sales? Provide new information to advance decision-making? Different types of communities may have different types of events. For independent living communities, we break events into three categories: lead generation, advancement and conversion. Each event has a goal and a plan.

At The Clare, a high-end Life Care Community located in Chicago's famed Gold Coast, we understood that many prospects had numerous 'touches' from the sales team and had toured on several occasions, but remained undecided. We determined that prospects needed to hear from residents themselves about how they arrived at their own decision to move, and decided to hold a resident panel event with the goal of advancing existing leads in their decision-making process.

## STEP TWO

# Determine the Strategy



Knowing that The Clare's prospects are a highly educated and sophisticated demographic, yet not easily convinced, we realized we could not 'sanitize' the stories or simply choose residents for whom the decision was easy. Instead, residents were strategically chosen whose journey had some bumps and potholes along the way and who were considered 'tough sells.' We also wanted a diverse group of residents representing both singles and couples, whose decisions were based on a variety of reasons that would resonate with prospects. Five residents were selected, some of whom had moved from out of state or simply from across town, and who lived at the community from six months to six years. We interviewed the residents in advance to make sure they were comfortable with telling their story and found that each had a different experience on their path to making the decision to move - some positive and some negative. This preparation was important to ensure that the audience would hear five different reasons for making the decision and five different points of view.

## STEP THREE

# The Invitation



The decision of who to invite to your event is perhaps the most important. Who you invite depends on the goal. Do you invite your entire lead base or perhaps only those who have visited at least once? Or should the invitation be mailed to a purchased list? In this case, we invited prospects considered to be in the 'thinking stage' and developed a compelling direct mail piece inviting them to "join in a conversation." We wanted to convey the idea that this was not a sales presentation, but an opportunity to ask questions and hear real-life situations and honest answers.

## STEP FOUR

# The Results



The event was highly successful and resulted in two sales, both from prospects who had been in the database for over five years. Three other prospects were advanced in their stage of readiness and one opted for a 'staycation' at the community. Not only did it promote candid dialog among panelists and prospects but prospects were able to ask questions they normally would not ask a sales counselor. According to The Clare's sales team, "There's no better way to get through to prospects other than listening to people like themselves who have already made the decision."

**Next Up:** Part 2 of our *The Evolution of an Event* series - learn how to create an event 'check list' and understand the strategy behind following up both *before and after* an event.

## Mark your calendar!

Solutions Advisors will be exhibiting at the upcoming **Argentum Senior Living Executive Conference** May 9 - 12 at the Colorado Convention Center in Denver, Colorado. Please stop by and visit us at **booth #521**.

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