

7 Steps to Generating More Leads: Best Practices for Senior Living Websites

by Barry Harrison, CEO Resolve Digital

“The Internet will soon pass word-of-mouth as our most valuable tool for generating leads.”

Ginny Echevarria, Highland Cove

As the economy continues to impact occupancy rates the competition for new residents has never been greater. With the right strategy in place, the Web can become your most effective source of new leads. What does a successful web strategy look like? We've reviewed dozens of assisted living sites and spoken with industry leaders from coast-to-coast to uncover the best online practices for the market today.

There's one characteristic common to every successful assisted living facility: They continually look for more effective ways to connect with prospective customers. As web-savvy boomers approach this stage in their lives, the importance of the Internet as a marketing tool will continue to grow. Providers that are positioned to take advantage of this trend will benefit by engaging and building connections with prospective customers online.

Our recommendations for effective senior living websites in seven steps.

1. Set clear and measurable goals that have a direct impact on your ROI
2. Focus on usability and simplify site navigation
3. Address different audiences based on their needs and motivations
4. Communicate an immersive, authentic experience to differentiate your offering
5. Guide prospects to take the next step in the process
6. Offer visitors good reasons to provide their contact information
7. Make improvements based on feedback and results

1. Set clear and measurable website goals

“Every year our website becomes more and more important.”

Jessica Szczepanek, East Village Place

The ultimate goal of your site is to generate leads. It does this by guiding visitors through a long and confusing process as they make a major life decision for themselves or a loved one. Your site should assist them from the moment they begin their research to the “conversion” that happens when they make a decision. There are many small steps along the way.

To measure how well it functions or “converts,” your site should be equipped with Google Analytics. You’ll receive valuable insight about how people really use it. Armed with this information, you are better prepared to engage visitors as they move through their decision-making process to conversion. This might mean downloading a brochure, signing-up for a newsletter, or scheduling a visit. However you define conversion for your site, analytics can help improve your conversion rates.

Some of the most important questions Google Analytics reports can answer:

- How many visitors are coming to your site?
- How long does the average visitor stay?
- How many pages do they visit? Which ones?
- What keywords did they use to find your site in the Search Engines?
- How many visitors take an action you want them to take (a “conversion”)?

2. Focus on Usability

“Even when the website is not the initial source of referral, it’s often mentioned by the top three referral sources that they had reviewed our website before contacting us.”

-- Peter R. King, Paragon Village

Here’s your mantra: Keep it simple and think big. Usability is vitally important, especially for sites aimed at a boomer or senior audience. If your website is difficult to use, it undermines their confidence, causes confusion and makes them feel less capable. Chances are your visitors are already feeling stressed. Your site should provide reassurance and make visitors feel good about themselves.

Here are some of the elements to consider:

- Big photos, not thumbnails
- Big buttons that look like buttons
- Links that look like links
- Alternate text sizes so visitors can select larger fonts
- High contrast text
- Lots of “white space”
- Simple navigation
- Not too many choices
- Short text blocks and short sentences

3. Address different audiences based on their needs

“We take a picture of the resident having fun doing something and then e-mail it to the family. Those little things are important.”

-- Loren Shook, Silverado Senior Living

By engaging your prospects you win the right to start educating them. By telling them what they need to know you gain their trust and build a foundation to grow your relationship. Your site must provide information that addresses the needs of your different visitors through each stage of their decision-making process. Ask yourself how well your website addresses the needs of these common audiences:

- **Family members looking for a loved one**
A typical visitor is the adult child caring for aging parent(s). Technologically savvy, they want an efficient way to get the information they need.
- **People looking for themselves**
A smaller number, but sure to be increasing as web-savvy boomers find themselves in need.
- **Healthcare providers and hospital discharge planners**
Planners looking for a place to refer need to know: What level of care does the facility offer? Do they take Medicaid?
- **Prospects who made an inquiry but haven't made a decision**
They may use the site to validate their visit to the community or share information with loved ones.
- **Family and friends of current residents**
Loved ones want to see monthly activity calendars and photos and get a sense of what life is like there. Of course these may be likely future prospects.

4. Communicate an immersive, authentic experience

“Our website helps visitors visualize what their loved ones will experience, to picture their loved one living here.”

Jessica Szczepanek, East Village Place

Your site isn't about you. It's about your visitors.

The Front Porch community web site gives visitors an inside look at life at each community through personal stories told by residents. Professional photos, virtual tours, amenities and social opportunities enhance the sense of community. Each website invites visitors to an upcoming event.

Mather Residences promote their “Simplify Your Life” approach which tells stories in a friendly and conversational tone. Their site features “resident satisfaction scores” a price comparison table to help people understand what they are currently spending per month.

Adding a “Frequently Asked Questions” page helps establish trust and can build a connection with your visitors if it directly addressing their most pressing concerns.

To create an immersive experience, establish a connection, and emphasize quality of life include:

- Photos from recent events
- Activities calendars
- Bios of key staff members
- Feature a resident and staff person of the month
- Resident-generated content

5. Guide prospects to take the next step in the process

“We want them to contact us so we can better understand their needs and to make price a secondary reason for making Paragon Village the new home for their loved one or themselves.”

-- Peter R. King, Paragon Village

People often come to your site at the beginning of their decision-making process in a state of confusion. They may feel overwhelmed and pressured. Help them ask the right questions. Suggest how they might compare facilities in an honest and objective way. Your site can inspire and make it easy for visitors to take appropriate action as they move through the decision making process.

It is very important to guide your visitors with clear and obvious “calls-to-action.” Here are some of the steps your website can guide prospects to take:

- Watch a virtual tour
- Download a brochure
- Tell a friend about your site
- Sign-up for a newsletter
- Attend an upcoming event
- Make an appointment to visit the facility
- Ask questions or provide feedback

6. Offer visitors good reasons to provide their contact information

“30% of calls to Chicago building came from website. I was shocked. I didn’t think it would be that high.”

-- Arnie Kanter, Barton Healthcare

Prospects may visit your site long before they’re ready to make a decision. How can you ensure that they’ll think of you when the time comes? It’s very important to maintain a connection until the decision must be made. What reasons can you give them to come back to your site?

Frequently updating your site with photos of new residents, activities, new staff members, and a calendar of events offer examples of vital social interactions. Resident-generated content will make it unique. How can your site become a resource for the community?

The primary goal is to get permission from your visitors to stay in contact.

If you don’t have an HTML newsletter you should start one. If you have one, make sure that a current edition is available as a sample so people can see what they’ll get when they signup. And make the signup form easy and obvious.

7. Make improvements based on feedback, results and new opportunities

According to [MediaPost](#), women over the age of 55 are the fastest-growing user group on Facebook

Don't ever assume that your website is "done." Every successful website is a work in progress.

Continually ask for feedback and modify your site accordingly. Think about conducting user tests to make sure that you see your site from your visitors' perspectives. Consider how social media and online communities can encourage interaction between residents, caregivers, family members and friends.

We were told "there is a big difference in residents who come in today as compared to those 10 years ago." We can be sure the same will be true in the next decade. With the right strategy in place your website is uniquely positioned to respond to changing needs and conditions.

Resources and Reference Sites

[Highland Cove](#)

[Paragon Village](#)

[Silverado Senior Living](#)

[East Village Place](#)

[Engage As You Age](#)

[Front Porch](#)

[Mather Residences](#)

[Barton Healthcare](#)

[Care Networks](#)

[Mature Market Experts](#)

For a complimentary evaluation of your senior living website please call Barry Harrison 888. 832. 0781 or email barry@resolvedigital.com.