

# Leading with lifestyle

for marketing and  
sales success



**Using examples from an award-winning organization, these specialists in senior living marketing describe how communities can harness the benefits of lifestyle messaging**

by Kimberly Hulett, BA, and Erin Read, BA

"The Boomers are coming! The Boomers are coming!" For a decade, this has been a common theme of conference presentations, media headlines and board meetings. Many of those offering housing and services to actively aging adults have felt stumped by this "new" consumer—the 50- or 60-something Baby Boomer. The reality is that with

the rising age of entry for residents in continuing care retirement communities and other senior living settings, the "new" consumer is just as likely to be a 70-something member of the Silent Generation. There is one marketing technique that works with active adults of both cohorts. Lifestyle.

Lifestyle messaging can have a positive impact on prospective residents—and on an organization's bottom line.

At Traditions of America, a developer of 55+ lifestyle communities, lifestyle is woven into everything the company does—into residence and community design, programming, site selection

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*Situated near Pittsburgh, Traditions of America at Sewickley Ridge boasts a 7,700-sq.-ft. clubhouse with a lounge and other spaces to socialize*



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Snow tubing offers a fun winter activity for a group from Traditions of America at Silver Spring, located in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania

and, of course, marketing. In January 2016, the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) named Traditions of America its “55+ Builder of the Year.” The Radnor, Pennsylvania-based company also took home three Gold Awards and five Silver Awards for excellence in NAHB’s Best of 55+ Housing Awards competition. What was the common thread to these honors? Lifestyle.

Let’s explore some concrete examples of how Traditions of America’s commitment to lifestyle messaging has propelled it to year-after-year sales success and how you, too, can apply these insights to your community.

## **Site selection and community design**

For real estate, “location, location, location” has long been seen as the key to success. This is no less true for 55+ housing or more traditional senior-living developments.

Traditions of America has built communities in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware for more than 20 years. Site selection is driven by the company’s philosophy that each location must support a vibrant lifestyle. Whether the new community is in Pittsburgh, State College or Pennsylvania’s Lehigh Valley, each location must feature opportunities for arts, culture, higher education and employment within a short drive.

The Gold Award-winning property Traditions of America at Sewickley Ridge (Pennsylvania) illustrates how a commitment to lifestyle can and should impact community design. The clubhouse sits at the top of the campus, with a deck cantilevered over the ridge, looking out on the rolling hills of Pittsburgh—views that can create quite an impact on prospects. The floor plan was based upon feedback from homeowners at other Traditions communities and discussions with prospects in the Pittsburgh market.

It features larger fitness spaces and more planned informal spaces, such as a sports bar and billiards. Outdoor gathering spaces dot each neighborhood.

Traditions of America partner Nathan Jameson says these spaces “support a community coming together organically. Our job,” he adds, “is to design resort-style amenities that adapt to and reflect how our active-adult homeowners define a better lifestyle for themselves, as a neighborhood.”

Research with senior living prospects backs up the importance of leading with lifestyle for community design. Findings from interviews and video field studies have shown that prospects view the sales counselor as an important, necessary part of the process. Yet, at the end of the day, prospects say they base their decisions on the experience and “feel” when they walk in the door.

## *Apply these insights to your community*

- Is your organization choosing locations based on how inexpensive the acreage is? This may cost you in the long run, as today’s active adults prefer to have area attractions, entertainment and job opportunities within striking distance.
- Is your community-center floor plan too rigid? “Life is what happens to you while you’re busy making other plans,” wrote John Lennon. It’s as true for the life residents want to make for themselves.

## **Home design**

Traditions of America at Lititz doesn’t feature hills or an abutting nature preserve. Instead, the community is located in “America’s Coolest Small Town”—Lititz, in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Here you’ll find historic houses, hometown chocolate-makers and mill buildings being given a second life. The home design at this Traditions of America property, however, is consistent with its sister communities: Each floor plan emphasizes lifestyle.

Homes are low-maintenance, with each plan featuring first-floor bedrooms and bathrooms, including a master suite, to appeal to older adults who are planning ahead. Each home also has an optional loft to provide a separate guest, entertainment or work space. And buyers can customize their new homes—walls can be moved, sunrooms added. Residents define their “retirement lifestyle” for themselves.

Model homes lead with the lifestyle message, too. Features that facilitate an active, healthier life and easier daily living are highlighted. Vignettes illustrate “typical” homeowner experiences such as visits from grandkids or rooms dedicated to creative passions. Some homes feature designer-screened porches and others showcase sunrooms, demonstrating how homeowners can each customize their relationship to the great outdoors.

#### *Apply these insights to your community*

- Is your organization’s sales pitch more focused on quantity of bathrooms than quality of life? Work with your team to identify and clearly communicate the lifestyle benefits of each home plan.
- Don’t be overly specific. Let prospects define their desired lifestyle for themselves. Then help them make selections that support their aspirations. Bundling popular features can speed a sale, as long as your team can flexibly meet “out of the box” requests.

#### **Sales and marketing**

Developers of housing for older adults can learn a number of tips from the Gold Award-winning Welcome Center at Traditions of America at Lititz. Like many in the industry, Traditions of America had welcome centers that were stuck in the past. Visitors entered to a standard reception desk and the focus—everywhere—was on “the product.” A clubhouse floor plan and several lifestyle photos were the extent of lifestyle mes-

saging. There was little of the emotion that inspires sales.

When selling housing and healthcare to older adults, it’s really less about “selling” and more about consulting. In order to consult with prospects, the team must start with discovery. Discovery is a two-way street: Prospective residents learn about your community, while your team learns about potential buyers.

That standard reception desk actually makes discovery harder. The prospect and the sales counselor are physically and mentally in different spots. In contrast, the Lititz welcome center features round tables, loveseats and chairs, which put prospect and counselor sitting shoulder to shoulder, having a conversation.

Visuals foster a free-flowing, dynamic environment that conveys the best aspects of the community lifestyle. Some of these images also feature homes, amenities and other product features, but they are secondary to lifestyle.

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*The National Association of Home Builders named Traditions of America at Lititz, Pennsylvania, its Gold Award winner for ‘Best Sales Center’ (201–1000 units) in its Best of Housing 55+ Awards in January 2016*

#### **Research aims to illuminate changing attitudes**

Mature marketing agency Creating Results recently launched the third edition of its national research project, *Social, Silver Surfers*. First released in 2010 with a second edition in 2013, *Social, Silver Surfers* chronicles the changing attitudes of Baby Boomers and older adults towards websites and social media, according to the agency. The research includes specific questions for recent movers, reflecting the interests of those marketing senior living, 55+ housing and all-ages communities. As of press time, data for the third edition will be collected in-person and online through June 2016. Creating Results expects to start sharing findings with the public in July. For information, visit [www.socialsilversurfers.com](http://www.socialsilversurfers.com).



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As noted above, location is an important part of the lifestyle message. The Lititz welcome center not only has an area map showing how the campus is central to arts, recreation and more, but also tangible representations of area attractions. An iPad kiosk introduces another experience, as visitors watch videos of residents describing the lifestyle they enjoy. Each of these elements is designed to invite discovery, build on stated interests, and spark conversation.

## *Apply these insights to your community*

- Typical sales centers are dominated by design samples for finishing options, which can sabotage the discovery effort and slow the sales process. Consider how you can separate design materials from the welcome center space. If your space must serve multiple purposes, think through the ideal flow for a discovery meeting versus sales versus procedural appointments. Knowing your needs ahead of time means you can create a functional space that supports all of your organization's goals.

Traditions of America also received a Gold Award for its website. This resource offers a personalized experience that reflects the offline experiences prospects enjoy. It emphasizes lifestyle in several ways.

Authentic images of residents in action are featured throughout the site. Homeowner stories are told in website copy and in video. Star ratings for selected communities speak to the “Better Living” lifestyle from several angles (and increase the perceived value of that location). Homeowner reviews are relatable and motivating—and it is nearly impossible to find one that focuses on product over lifestyle.

Localized community content on the website carries the message further, as it gives future buyers the flavor of the surrounding area. Finally, the site includes an interactive feature that allows prospects to begin customizing their floor plan online.

## *Apply these insights to your community*

- Does your website reflect the priorities of your buyers? Prospects want to know that they'll be welcomed by a group of older adults whose values match their own. Your website should spend time demonstrating fit.

## **(Un)Programming**

At Traditions of America at Silver Spring in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, homeowner Hope Shaffer rates her neighborhood highly as a place to live. Chief among her reasons is Lifestyle Director Karen Karkuff, whom NAHB named among the best 55+ lifestyle directors in the United States this year.

Karkuff is not programming activities; she's creating an atmosphere that is friendly for residents. While the homeowners might all be experiencing the same stage of life, they don't all define retirement living in the same way.

*Residents get together to barbecue at Traditions of America at Silver Spring, Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania*



This (un)programming aligns with the (un)retirement realities of the “new” consumer.

Boomers and younger Silent Generation prospects often want less rigid programming. They appreciate the informal spaces that smart builders are building into clubhouses and community centers, as noted above. They also want greater input into the activities that will fill those spaces with laughter and memories. Traditions of America lifestyle directors support the camaraderie that naturally develops and follow the lead of their residents. It's about collaboration.

For example, Karkuff attended the International Council on Active Aging's conference in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 2015 and returned with dozens of ideas. Some ideas were refined with homeowner input and took flight; others were put on a back burner in favor of “home grown” inspirations.

From a marketing perspective, this collaboration fosters an active lifestyle that motivates future buyers to join the fun. Prospects who sample the lifestyle at formal events, informal happy hours or guest stays move more quickly towards purchase.

#### *Apply these insights to your community*

- “User-generated content” is an Internet buzzword used to describe social media posts, videos, ads and other items that are created not by the brand, but by the brand’s customers. When marketing senior living, consider how you can leverage this content to communicate your lifestyle message. Showcase authentic photos taken by residents on your website and social media. Solicit reviews; the positive ones can be used in marketing and the negative ones give your team critical feedback for improvement. Consider what “resident-driven passions” you can talk about during information sessions versus “resident-centered programs.”

## **A catalyst for success**

The benefits of a commitment to lifestyle aren't limited to active-adult housing. Past experience with senior living communities suggests that even though a community might be a lifecare type A product, when they stop leading with lifecare and start leading with lifestyle in marketing efforts, they enjoy increased response rates, engagement and sales. (To be clear, you'll still address and emphasize lifecare in the sales cycle, but you shouldn't use it to create initial response and engagement. That's like leading with a prenuptial agreement rather than a date for lunch and a hike.)

Whether it's investing in new, more flexible clubhouse floor-plans or designing more engaging discovery spaces (rather than static sales centers), making it easy for buyers to find and customize a home plan to the way they want to live, or taking a step back to collaborate on programming, you can create an award-winning lifestyle at your community by applying these insights.

Leading with lifestyle can be your catalyst for greater success. ☺

*Kimberly Hulett, BA, is executive vice president at Creating Results, a full-service marketing, public relations and advertising agency nationally recognized for expertise and success in marketing to mature consumers. Hulett has been a spark for transformation in the senior living industry. She positioned the organizations she led for strategic growth while driving over USD\$200 million of annual revenue and record profitability. Hulett has applied her strategic insights into branding, culture transformation and sales/marketing alignment to a variety of senior housing organizations. Most recently, she was vice president of marketing and sales at Lifespace Communities. The strategic programs she oversaw led to record high occupancy and 12 uniquely positioned communities operating under a single recognized corporate brand across*

## **Resources**

### **Creating Results, LLC**

[www.creatingresults.com](http://www.creatingresults.com)  
[www.twitter.com/creatingresults](http://www.twitter.com/creatingresults)  
[www.maturemarketingmatters.com](http://www.maturemarketingmatters.com)  
(blog)

### **National Association of Home Builders (NAHB): Best of 55+ Housing Awards**

[www.nahbclassic.org/showpage\\_details.aspx?showPageID=10681](http://www.nahbclassic.org/showpage_details.aspx?showPageID=10681)

### **Traditions of America**

[www.traditionsofamerica.com](http://www.traditionsofamerica.com)  
[www.facebook.com/traditionsofamerica](http://www.facebook.com/traditionsofamerica)

seven states. Hulett can be reached at [kimberly@creatingresults.com](mailto:kimberly@creatingresults.com).

*Erin Read, BA, is director of strategic planning at Creating Results. Read generates and applies insights into Baby Boomers and beyond to client marketing programs for greater results. She writes, researches and speaks to regional, national and international audiences about generational marketing. Read also coauthored a Lasell College/E.L.D.E.R. graduate certificate course on strategic marketing management, as well as three national studies and eBooks. Her insights have been featured on MarketPlace Radio and in BrandWeek and other publications. At Creating Results, Read contributes to the planning and implementation of integrated online/offline marketing programs, and spearheads digital marketing for clients in senior living and other industries. To reach Read, email [erin@creatingresults.com](mailto:erin@creatingresults.com).*

### **Images courtesy of Traditions of America**