



## CASE STUDY:

# North Hill Integrated Marketing

At only 75% occupancy, North Hill was burning through its reserves. Collaborating with the leadership team, we made immediate improvements while strategically repositioning the community for long-term viability. Four years later, the community had 185 total sales and was at 93% occupancy.

LOOK INSIDE FOR THE COMPLETE STORY

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Strategic Marketing



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### THE SITUATION:

Being the first Lifecare CCRC in Massachusetts, North Hill had a heritage of innovation. However, after 25 years, it was offering an outdated product and experience. Occupancy declined and average age upon move-in climbed to the upper 80s. New competition was pulling away prospects who would once have considered North Hill. Fortunately, the board and the leadership team recognized that they needed to reposition the entire physical plant and operations, along with sales and marketing, to appeal to a new generation of prospects. This is the story of how Creating Results applied integrated marketing strategies to help North Hill successfully reposition, rebrand and become the first choice of more than 250 seniors seeking their ideal retirement lifestyle.



### THE STRATEGY:

#### Celebrate What You Have

The situation was dire. In the year before we came onboard, closings fell from an annual average in the mid-30s to just 9 in 2010. North Hill not only lost some of its sales and marketing team, but many who stayed didn't see a way forward.

Creating Results started our engagement with North Hill by uncovering their challenges and identifying the inherent strengths of the community. As Amanda Combs, our Director of Marketing Strategies, puts it, "Having assisted more than 100 communities, we not only bring a great deal of experience, but we always start by understanding the unique strengths, challenges and opportunities of each community."



#### Listen, Learn and Enlighten

We started our discovery process by building on research done by Stonetrust Partners, North Hill's development consultant, which explored what stakeholders thought about North Hill and the competition. Focusing on different subsegments — including lost leads — through surveys, focus groups and calls, we quickly identified disconnects between what people within the organization believed and the perceptions and desires of their target market. It is common for people who are most vested in an organization to have some myopic perceptions; however, leadership must openly address reality in order to offer a product that is relevant to the target market.

We shared our research findings with all stakeholders and worked to build consensus around the challenges and opportunities. This was a critical first step, as the required changes would impact every stakeholder and cause short- to mid-term inconveniences and frustrations for many. As is often the case, it is a delicate balancing act to be respectful to the people who live in a community while taking the bold steps necessary to remain viable in a competitive market. Creating Results helped North Hill navigate this inherent challenge by providing data that supported the need for change, developing communication tools to help build support among all stakeholders, and facilitating internal presentations and Q&A sessions to build consensus and buy in.

Without the relationships and support we developed throughout the organization during this critical phase, North Hill would not have succeeded in its transformation.

### Be Creative About What Could Be

Our research identified some competitive challenges — and opportunities. While the community could not currently compete on product or price, it had a highly desirable location. A primary competitive advantage was its ability to offer the best everyday experiences and a refreshingly empowering outlook on living life.

We used the importance of location in developing the print and digital media strategy and as the inspiration for an initial creative campaign that could run while we worked on the repositioning.

To maximize the ROI of the marketing program, we focused North Hill's investment on interacting with people who would be most likely to be attracted to North Hill's new offering. We researched mailing and digital prospect databases, incorporating criteria beyond location, age, income and net worth. We also started researching and developing numerous affinity programs, drawing on the existing relationships of stakeholders, including residents. Not only would this increase North Hill's prospect pool, but it would also make people's first experience with North Hill more favorable.

Since the community's visual appearance was institutional, dated and off-putting to visitors, we worked with North Hill to develop a road show and identified affinity groups to host events at their locations. This would provide prospects with a familiar and comfortable location, increase exposure to people who would not visit the community on their own and reduce marketing expenses.

### Branding Is Much More Than a Logo

While the discovery and research was underway, we assessed the brand. The North Hill logo and brand colors needed to be refreshed, but that would be the easy part. Building on the brand pillars the team and Stonetrust Partners had identified from the initial research, Creating Results developed a philosophy that would drive the experiences and opportunities that people living at North Hill would enjoy. We branded this philosophy "PurposeFULL Living®."

North Hill was not a place to retire to a "carefree" life. We wanted people to care. It was not a place to go to because you didn't want to maintain your house. North Hill was a place you wanted to move to because you desired a vibrant life full of opportunities that you could not have if you stayed at home. We were not talking about bingo, going to

**PurposeFULL Living™**

PurposeFULL Living® is the heart of the True North Spirit. It is both a philosophy and approach to life designed to enrich the well-being of all members of the North Hill community. PurposeFULL Living® is founded in a view that true wellness is derived from meaningful engagement in all dimensions of the human experience.

- Physical WELLNESS**: Honoring our physical well-being through good lifestyle choices.
- Social WELLNESS**: Building and maintaining meaningful relationships.
- Cultural WELLNESS**: Celebrating the rich diversity of our interconnected world.
- Occupational WELLNESS**: Contributing our valuable expertise, passions and talents with the world.
- Emotional WELLNESS**: Cultivating self-awareness and inner peace.
- Spiritual WELLNESS**: Aligning with inner spirit and sense of purpose.
- Intellectual WELLNESS**: Expanding our understanding of life and the human experience.
- Environmental WELLNESS**: Celebrating, protecting and engaging with our personal surroundings and our natural world.

the symphony and ice cream socials. No, we were talking about world-class experiences, opportunities and everyday interactions that would delight people. Our research showed that people were embarrassed to share that they had moved to North Hill. Obviously, embarrassment doesn't drive referrals. Our goal was to create experiences that were so positive and engaging that people wanted to tell their friends.

To make this happen, Creating Results collaborated with the leadership team and Stonetrust Partners to align the mission, vision and brand. To accomplish this alignment, North Hill needed to address internal processes, behaviors and beliefs. The community designated "Brand Champions" in each department, and Creating Results worked with them and the leadership team to communicate the brand pillars and look for ways to align operations with the brand. For instance, the dining team looked at the overall experience, including not only what was on the menu, but also how they presented the menus. How did the lighting, layout, ambiance and team member interactions empower and enrich each person's day? The activities and exercise area was renamed "The Center for PurposeFULL Living." The Brand Champions moved away from traditional programs and developed language and enticing opportunities that inspired both North Hill residents and prospects. The key question to every group was, "What are the everyday experiences that are supporting our brand and what are the everyday experiences that are detracting from the brand?"

Creating Results' has long focused on "Everything Mature Consumer Experience." In a weak brand, there is little continuity among the various marketing elements and operations. Kim Nobbs, with whom we collaborated at North Hill, talks about the "Big Shrimp Syndrome." She has observed prospects being served large shrimp at marketing events and then much smaller ones once they move into the community. North Hill strove to eliminate such disjointed experiences. Working with the Brand Champions, we created everyday experiences that were the best in the market and then aligned our marketing to promote these experiences.

We also worked with the entire organization to change the language and behaviors. Instead of the focus being on "caring for people," we emphasized "empowering people." By treating people with respect and having confidence in their abilities rather than focusing on, or assuming, limitations, North Hill began to deliver on its "vibrant living" promise. Changing a tagline without changing the experience would not have helped, and probably would have made matters worse. When people experience the disconnect between marketing promises and everyday reality, they understandably lose trust in an organization and won't refer their friends. North Hill worked hard to align their brand and culture.

Most organizations in crisis look for simple, quick fixes. The problem is, simple, quick fixes generally result in initiatives that are more likely to slow the rate of decline than solve the core problems. We commend North Hill on having the courage, perseverance and patience it takes to collaboratively develop compelling experiences and secure the commitment of the entire organization to consistently deliver them.



# True North

Vibrant Living at North Hill



**THE SOLUTION:  
An Integrated Approach Enhances ROI**

Once we had established a desirable and deliverable value proposition and identified the target market and resources, Creating Results developed an integrated marketing plan. The goal was to dramatically increase leads from an average 34 to 96 per month. We established the goal for lead generation after analyzing the existing lead database, projecting future turnover and determining a realistic sales goal for the next 4 years.

We projected where and how many leads would come from different sources. Initially, Creating Results invested a large percentage of the budget in more expensive media, such as newspaper print, direct mail, broadcast and some targeted sponsorships, along with aggressive digital initiatives to rapidly build awareness and promote the rebranding. Based on the results of lead tracking through unique phone numbers, landing pages, cookies and email analytics, we continued to modify the plan to maximize the ROI.

Initially, the integrated plan focused on promoting a series of experiential marketing events at the enticing venues of affiliated partners. As the renovations progressed, we began holding more events at the community. We strategically separated these into experiential marketing events that had no sales component and informational/sales events. Some events were designed for more than 400 people and others were very intimate opportunities for 6 people. We made it clear on the invitations and promotion what the event was about and invited different people based on where we thought they were in their personal purchase journeys. We continue this strategy today and see experiential events as the most beneficial and cost-effective way to engage people to want to know more about North Hill. These events continue to be the key feeder for the prospect database.

To enhance the experience of visitors to the community, we used an empty apartment as a dedicated reception area. North Hill built a temporary entrance so that prospects could walk directly into this inviting space. This also kept prospects out of the areas that were dated and would undergo renovations, thus making a much stronger first impression. We also designed a separate Welcome Center and Design Studio in two adjoining apartments. The combined effect was that visitors could see, touch, taste, hear





**True North**  
Vibrant Living at North Hill

Project True North is a commitment to transform North Hill from the inside out with new, distinctive residences, engaging shared spaces and an expanded, reimagined model of health care services for those who need them. The True North initiative will expand the services, amenities and experiences available to all North Hill residents.

Lifelong learning is a vital part of life at North Hill. As we expand our engagement with neighboring communities we invite you, your family and our colleagues and associates to take part in our series of courses and events.

#### MUSIC SERIES

From the classics of the 18th century to the standards of the 20th, the True North Music Series will investigate how music influences and nourishes our lives and our culture through lecture, discussion and performance.

**THIS TERM:**  
Tuesday MAY 15th | 7pm – 9pm  
**Chamber Evolution**

With Chamber Players from A Far Cry Orchestra  
The Rivers School Conservatory – Weston, MA

#### CHAMBER EVOLUTION

A group of chamber players from A Far Cry Chamber Orchestra will explore the rich world of string chamber music for quintet and sextet. From Boccherini's first experiments with the form to Mozart's game-changing 2 viola quintets, via Schubert to Brahms and Tchaikovsky who pull out all the stops with the sextet. Journey through this evolution and a discussion of chamber music, its expansion beyond the string quartet, and a taste of this deliciously full-bodied repertoire.

A Far Cry Chamber Orchestra stands at the forefront of a new generation in classical music. According to the *New York Times*, the self-conducted orchestra "brims with personality or better personalities, many and varied." A Far Cry was founded in 2007 by a tightly-knit collective of 18 young professional musicians and since the beginning has fostered those personalities, developing an innovative structure of rotating leadership both on stage and behind the scenes. By expanding the boundaries of orchestral repertoire and experimenting with the ways music is prepared, performed, and experienced, A Far Cry has been embraced throughout the world. To their credit are 200+ performances and three albums. A Far Cry is proud to call Boston home, and maintain strong roots in the city rehearsing at their storefront music center in Jamaica Plain and fulfilling the role of Chamber Orchestra in Residence at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Collaborating with local students through an educational partnership with the New England Conservatory, A Far Cry aims to pass on the spirit of collaboratively empowered music to the next generation.

The Rivers School Conservatory is one of the nation's leading community music conservatories, home to more than 750 students.



**True North**  
Vibrant Living at North Hill

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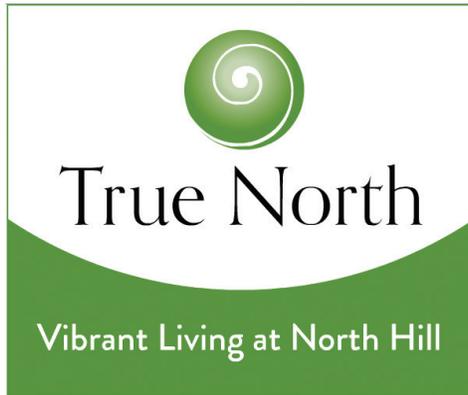
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and feel what North Hill was going to be and not be distracted or deterred by what it was at that time. The confidence and desire that these vibrant spaces instilled significantly shortened the sales cycle and increased referrals.

As North Hill grew their database and we secured more leads through referrals from residents and the affinity initiatives, we eliminated broadcast and more sponsorships, and scaled back on print and direct mail. Instead, we relied more on narrowly targeted digital and online and offline direct marketing campaigns.

Throughout the engagement, we documented significantly enhanced performance of integrated campaigns over single initiatives. As a result, we strategically supplemented our online initiatives with complementary offline efforts. Based on the results, we reduced the marketing spend by reducing our reach, but we maintained overlapping frequency. To help minimize prospect fatigue, we tracked prospects' preferences where possible, and provided them with the content that they desired in the format that was most appealing to them. This resulted in response rates and open rates that consistently exceed industry averages. For example, since its inception in 2011, North Hill's email marketing campaign has experienced open rates in the range of 30-50% (industry average is 17.9%) and click-through rates of 8-10% (industry average is 2.2%).

While this extra level of effort created some complexity, from a prospect experience it was far preferable. By providing prospects with valuable content in the format they preferred, North Hill created desirability and instilled confidence. Prospects said, "We belong at North Hill" and that "North Hill was right for us." North Hill was only able to achieve this continuity of relevant content delivered to prospects in a coordinated and personalized manner because of the strategic, integrated marketing plan. (If you are interested in specific components of the plan, we have separate case studies on many of the individual initiatives.)



## THE RESULTS:

	BEFORE CREATING RESULTS	WITH CREATING RESULTS
<b>Leads Per Year</b>	<b>444</b>	<b>1,094</b>
<b>Sales Per Year</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Lead Database</b>	<b>1,420</b>	<b>3,430</b>
<b>Website Visitors Per Year</b>	<b>714</b>	<b>44,645</b>
<b>Email Subscribers</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3,367</b>
<b>Social Media Followers</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>537</b>
<b>YouTube Views</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>25,450</b>
<b>Average Age of I/L Residents</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>78</b>

### TAKE-AWAYS:

The significant challenges that North Hill faced did not happen overnight, nor could they be resolved with some simple sales and marketing tactics. By working closely with the leadership team and all stakeholders, Creating Results collaboratively developed a strategic and integrated marketing plan that:

- set realistic goals
- stanch the financial bleeding
- measured and improved ROI
- positioned the community for ongoing success

The main take-away for Creating Results is that to increase sales, lower the average age of new residents and increase the length of stay, a community will need six components:

1. a willingness and necessary resources to undertake fundamental change
2. a strategic, creative and collaborative sales and marketing partner
3. a well-conceived and well-measured integrated marketing plan
4. the commitment to develop a value proposition that resonates with a sufficiently sized target market
5. the discipline to align the culture and the brand
6. the tenacity and creativity to anticipate and work through the inevitable challenges of any large undertaking

# CASE STUDY:

## North Hill Integrated Marketing

### TESTIMONIALS:

“Creating Results’ strategic and integrated marketing efforts were critical to North Hill’s successful transformation. They were an exceptional partner who always acted in our best interest.”

— Kevin Burke, *CEO, North Hill Communities*

“Creating Results is a tremendously collaborative, effective and trusted partner. From helping North Hill discover and give voice to our brand, to developing an integrated marketing plan that tripled leads, to improving ROI, their team has listened to us, challenged us and helped us to reposition, expand and increase occupancy.”

— Rebecca Donato, *COO, North Hill Communities*

“Project True North absolutely could not have been the success that it was without Creating Results on the Team. Everyone at Creating Results is unfailingly professional, creative, intuitive, attentive, responsive and good-humored. Their guidance, knowledge and expertise were indispensable components of North Hill’s winning marketing and sales strategy during the 6-year repositioning. I am forever indebted for everything that Creating Results taught me more in those 6 incredible and rewarding years.”

— Paul Duffy, *Principal, Compass Eight*  
*Vice President, Marketing, North Hill Communities (2011-2017)*

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with Creating Results to improve your  
integrated sales and marketing efforts.**

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