

Selling to Seniors

The Monthly Report on the Mature Market

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Is Your Web Site Primed for the 50+ Market?

The constantly-evolving Internet means marketers of senior and active-adult housing have to stay on top of their game if they want to harness the Web to its fullest potential among prospects.

"What worked last year won't work, and might even be hurting you, this year" says [Todd Harff](#), president of [Creating Results](#), a marketing agency focused on 40+ consumers.

The move toward Web 2.0—sites that build community and encourage interactivity among users—means sites for senior housing and active-adult communities must be so much more than just online brochures, he contends.

"As marketers, we no longer control the message," Harff tells STS. "Today, there is a good deal of credibility given to other consumers' comments. Now we have to make sure that everyone's actual experience is so good that they will post positive comments about us."

Web surfers are looking for user-generated content and put stock in honest stories from real people like them. "People want an unblemished, real perspective," Harff says. "If they don't see some negatives, they won't believe it."

Successful sites are working to create a dialogue and relationship with their visitors. A simple brochure format doesn't keep people for long and gives them no reason to come back.

"Online advertising is moving away from sales and toward conversations," Harff says. "Credibility and quality of response are becoming increasingly important. Consumers are becoming the advertisers."

One of the easiest ways to build interactivity into your site is to have regular surveys that ask a simple question of all visitors, he notes. You collect information on everyone who answers the question and visitors can see what other people like them are thinking. Online research groups also can help marketers hone their messages.

Personalization also is becoming the norm online. Customized content based on what people are most interested in can help build a connection with prospects. For instance, visitors who indicate that they like cars would receive specific information or invitations to an upcoming car show.

"I'm amazed at the number of marketers who still don't see the Internet as that important for the mature market," Harff says. While statistics from the [Pew Internet and American Life project](#) show that only 29% of people aged 71+ are online, more educated and affluent seniors are significantly more likely to use the Internet regularly, he notes.

"Among our clients, 97% of the people who are considering an active-adult community went online first," Harff says. Among prospects of continuing care retirement communities, 70% visit the Web sites, he adds.

The Internet is the first stop for most people looking to narrow down their real estate choices. "If someone comes to your community to visit, they've already chosen you, they know the floor plans and now they want to see the community first-hand," Harff tells *STS*. "You have to make sure that their impression is terrific."

It's also important to integrate Web efforts with public relations initiatives, Harff adds. More than 90% of people in one recent survey said they have read about a Web site in a print article and then visited it online, he says. Nearly 90% have seen a print ad and later visited the Web site, and 83% have seen a site advertised on TV and later visited it.

"If you can place really interesting stories in publications that link back to your Web site, it can increase your overall page rank," he tells *STS*.

To provide marketers with a basic introduction to site design for 50+ users, Harff has posted [a free online checklist](#) on Web site usability. The checklist offers tips on issues such as fonts, format, and navigation. For instance, don't use blue text or black on red or red on black, make sure copy reads at least 40 letters across in all instances, and design all navigation buttons with a text label in addition to a universally recognizable icon.

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