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Marketing Before And After The Sale Helps Builders To Reach Buyers



Janis Ehlers

Las Vegas—In the increasingly competitive senior housing market, the edge may go to builders who have marketing strategies for both before and after a community opens, say speakers at the International Homebuilders' Show here.

Senior housing consultant Janis Ehlers of The Ehlers Group, Fort

Lauderdale, FL, says it's critical to treat your buyers well after the sale. This includes keeping appointments on time, helping with what could be their first move in years and offering a designer's help with decorating.

To encourage referrals, your buyers must feel they're important and their buying decision was correct. One way to do this, she suggests, is putting a sign with the buyer's name on the lot, before building even begins, and e-mailing them a photo so they'll show others and spread the word about your community.

Another way to make buyers feel important is to introduce them to staff—and encourage employees to use their names.

Don't overlook the importance of making buyers feel welcome right away through such gestures as temporary clubhouse membership and participation in social events. Posting a packed calendar of future events is invaluable in helping buyers anticipate the lifestyle they're buying into, and can help them feel the aggravation and emotions of leaving a home filled with memories will be well worthwhile, she adds.

Buyers need to feel connected to your community, as well. Ehlers suggests posting photos in your newsletter or onsite of other home buyers who may come from their same hometown.

Ehlers suggests you remind employees actual or potential

buyers may stop by any time. This means keep an eye on appearances, regardless of ongoing construction, so someone's first and perhaps last impression won't be of construction debris or other eyesores, instead of a well-maintained area.

Make sure you and your staff realize seniors contemplating the active-adult lifestyle rarely look once and buy. Instead, they'll come back many times. Thus, it's important to hold "be back" parties. Don't write them off as lookers—keep inviting them to events to keep your community in their minds in a positive way. Ehlers suggests a "try it, you'll like it" approach of inviting a prospect to experience your community at no risk or expense, with a free night's stay.

Don't overlook real estate agent relationships either, when it comes to spreading the word. A good one can easily determine how successful your community will be, and Ehlers recommends making them feel appreciated, perhaps with small gifts for every sale.

Be sure to employ a variety of referral and relationship-building techniques. For example:

- Tell buyers you'll invite interested friends or neighbors to future events.
- Promote nonresident referral.
- Stress to employees everyone in your company is a "salesperson."
- Be sure you're never too busy to thank customers with a quick note.
- Offer a resident referral program.
- Make sure your customer service is top-notch at all times, but especially at peak times, such as contract signing.

But perhaps most important, suggests Ehlers: Make sure every employee understands community word of mouth is just about the most powerful, cost-effective marketing tool there is.

—Mike Gerech