

industry | **BABY BOOMER**

“those people,” identifying with your target market

I recently got the chance to tour a large (over 300 home site) 55+ development that could become a fabulous community with a little help. by Sue Marshall



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What I knew ahead of time was gathered from advertising that I had seen in magazines, heard on the radio and seen on their website. Their advertising made it clear that they were focused on the younger, more active baby boomer.

Marketed as a resort lifestyle community, the neighborhood features a large club house. The club house features a fully equipped fitness room (including a separate yoga room) and pool area. There is also a large gathering room, business center and card room. The “Lifestyle” director is a full time employee and is responsible for planning events. All good decisions. The problem began with the current hours: 10am to 6pm —most boomers are active before 10 and after 6, aren't they?

To top off that bad decision, I noticed the most recent planned event was bingo night. Is bingo something that baby boomers are interested in? Curiosity got to me so I called my Mother and asked her if she plays bingo. She responded with a quick “no” and added that she really wants a Nintendo Wii game. Neither she nor I are interested in bingo. Maybe bingo is making a comeback with the younger generation but it is not a baby boomer pastime.

The next problem became obvious after I got a chance to ask questions of the sales team after touring the property. I asked questions geared to understanding the needs of the potential homeowners that had visited. What is the average age? Do they still work? Do they have grandchildren that spend time with them? What kind of services are they asking the community to provide? What floor plans are they most interested in? What is the average price they are willing to invest? What was surprising was that the answers were not clear to the sales staff. What's worse, several times questions were answered by addressing potential homeowners as “those people.” A properly researched and positioned community should have discovered the answers to these ques-

tions well before the sales team is in place. And, proper training should have ensured that the sales staff is always respectful and inclusive in their communications.

The majority of the sales team were not baby boomers themselves. This shouldn't be a problem. In my opinion, well trained sales staff can work very well with people of another demographic as long as they know how to identify with that market. As a salesperson, the key to identifying with your target market is to remember that 70 percent of your sales time in front of interested parties should consist of meeting and conducting discovery (asking questions and listening) versus presenting product and closing the sale. This is often difficult because it is the reverse from what has happened in the sales process in the past (especially in an aggressive sales market). If a sales person is spending the majority of their time presenting product versus getting to know their prospects they are missing out on the process of identifying with them.

The end result? The potential homeowner and current residents will continue to be “those people” and there will continue to be a gap in understanding. If the sales team at this community had focused more on discovery, they would realize that their target market is more interested in iPods, Internet and Wii games than they are in bingo. My advice to them would be to get to know the target market and focus on giving an unbelievable experience. Homeowners will tell their friends about the joys of living in the community with passion, enthusiasm, and conviction that advertisement can never match. So forget about how great the model home is and focus on giving them the experience of a lifetime.

