



Building an Effective Web Presence for Senior Living Communities **By Ann Marie Ladis**

As marketing professionals, we know it is important for our senior living communities to have well-designed, search engine-friendly websites. With tech-savvy adult children participating in the decision-making process more often than not, it is critical that we pay as much attention to a site's back-of-the-house functionality as we do to the artistic look of each page. Access to the Internet allows consumers a fast way to research products, so the community website is often your first interaction with a potential resident – and it can either engage that person or turn the prospect away. Of course, your website also must be found easily in the first place.

When Retirement DYNAMICS® (RD) performs a comprehensive website assessment upon commencing work with a community, it is not unusual for us to encounter the following issues:

- Text on pages that is not visually broken up by photos;
- Too little text on each page to permit effective search engine optimization (SEO);
- Lack of contrast between text and background;
- Broken links;
- Not mobile-friendly;
- Pretty pages, but they load too slowly for today's devices and impatient consumers;
- Not organized well for the reader with an ineffective or confusing hierarchy of topics; and
- Text and terminology that do not improve SEO; for example, using euphemisms rather than commonly used search terms.

When performing a website analysis, we assess a number of things, including:

- Content needs – Is your site regularly updated, is there a person in charge of freshening content, and what content management system is your site using?
- Usability – Ease of navigation, back-of-the-house concerns such as compressing image sizes for fast loading and removing auto plays, and
- Goals – How is your website performing based on analytics and what are prospects doing once they are on the site? (If you just thought, “What analytics? then you know you need help!)



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Below are some tips we share with all senior living providers:

Organization and SEO

Perform keyword research for your community to determine what areas of your website should stand out visually, as well as in meta tags and text for SEO. For example, if people are searching for “Senior Apartments,” “Alzheimer’s Care,” and “Rehabilitation,” these may be incorporated into the navigation on your home page, with additional secondary and tertiary navigation beneath them.

Optimized conversion funnels help people find the information they need and then encourage them to take action. The funnel helps people move from awareness to interest to desire to action, which can be as simple as signing up for an e-mail newsletter or making a request for additional information.

Design

A well-designed website should have plenty of white space and the right amount of copy on the pages (300-500 words is recommended). If the page is too crowded with text, people get tired reading it, and it is very difficult to read on a mobile device.

Buttons should also be designed so they are not too small to touch on a cell phone. Contact information should be easy to find on all of the site pages, and color should be used judiciously. For example, white text on some color backgrounds can be difficult for older eyes to read. Bear in mind what role color-blindness of some prospects might play in your design choices.

Photography and Videos

We recommend the use of professional photography that actually highlights what the text is trying to say. For example, a picture of the back of a bunch of residents’ heads at a large gathering is not eye-catching and does not necessarily convey the idea that residents are active participants in community programs. A well-composed photo of one resident interacting with a teacher in a colorful art class conveys that message much better.

Videos are an excellent addition to a site, but they need to be short. Consider 20-second videos highlighting different aspects of your community.



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Many times, we are our own worst enemies regarding websites. We use terms such as “Memory Care” on the website to the exclusion of “Alzheimer’s Care,” which is the phrase most people actually use in web searches. Or, we have an agency create a beautiful website, but we have not funded outsourced updates or have identified no one within the organization who can be trained to make changes and update it regularly.

Most importantly, remember that a website is never complete. SEO rules are amended, prospect preferences change and technologies advance. Think of your community website as an ever-changing virtual brochure requiring constant attention as new trends emerge and others evolve or fade away.



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