

BUYING INFLUENCES

Whenever someone decides to pay money for a product or a service we call it a "buying decision". Understanding your true customers means recognizing that in every buying decision there are at least four influencers (this is true for all businesses). Those influencers include:

<u>BUYING INFLUENCE</u>	<u>DEFINITION</u>	<u>IDENTIFICATION</u>
User	The person actually using and benefiting from your service	Resident
Economic	Financial decision maker. Gives final approval to laying out the money.	Resident Care giver State Conservator Guardian
Expert	Makes judgments and recommendations	Physicians Discharge Planners Conservators Attorneys Churches Home Health Agencies Senior Centers Retirement Homes Senior Apartments Senior Mobile Home Parks Referral Agencies Ombudsmen Family Members Referral Agencies Social Service Agencies Etceteras
Coach	Has the ear of the potential customer (resident)	Could be any of the above as well as friends

RESIDENTIAL CARE MARKETING

Each of the above influencers has a different role in the decision-making process and must be taken into consideration when developing your marketing message:

User - How can you develop marketing messages that reflect a place where this person would feel at home?

Economic - Who will foot the bill? What kinds of things are they interested in? How can you help them understand their options for paying for the care? How can you let them know that their loved ones are in the right hands? What do you do to make their life easier? How does your marketing message integrate the interests of the Economic Influencer and the User?

Expert - Who recommends that this step be taken? Is it possible to get endorsements from this person? Is your marketing message one that this person will feel comfortable sharing with the other influencers? Will this person refer you to other potential residents or their care givers.

Coach(es) - Who is likely to have the ear of your potential customer/resident? What kind of advice are they most likely to give? Years ago automobile manufacturers recognized this element and ushered in a whole new era in marketing. It came to be known as "keeping up with the Jones". People are influenced by how their decisions will look to family, friends, and others that have their ear.

When developing any facet of your marketing campaign make sure to take into account all of these buying factors. A message intended to appeal to one may inadvertently discourage another.

A good example of the need to pay attention to all of these influencing factors is what happened to one of our clients. They devoted all of their resources to making the internal environment as pleasant as possible for their residents. "Many of the residents don't even get out much - and none have ever

complained about the outer appearance of the facility." they reasoned. What they didn't adequately consider, however, was that they were located in a very upscale, image oriented area. The care givers were concerned as to how it looked to their friends when they would drive by and say, "this is where we have our mother". Consequently, they lost business to a newer facility down the street that looked better, but provided demonstrably less service. All because they neglected one of the needs of a powerful buying influence.

However, the competitor also neglected to consider how influencers interrelate. Once admitted into the facility, the residents found their monthly rates continue to rise as they needed more services (the same services that were provided as part of the package by our client). No doubt, they reasoned that it would be much easier for the care giver to pay each incremental price increase than to go to the trouble of moving their parents or grandparents again. What they didn't count on was the conscientiousness of the residents. Our client would receive many unsolicited visits from these people, complaining of their loved ones being "nickel and dimed to death".

So, what was our client's response to all of this? They came up with a three phase plan:

1. Upgrade the exterior look of the facility.
2. Create plans and marketing communications that emphasize the "package value" -- everything included, and no up charges after move-in.
3. Offer a special plan where our client would hire, pay and supervise professional movers to move in the new residents.

The results were exceptional. They knew what to do once they became aware of the various "buying influences" and their differing needs.