



## Finding the Right Marketer

As the retirement housing industry has matured and become more sophisticated over the past 25 years, so has the industry's approach to marketing and sales. Today, most residences have a staff member dedicated to the marketing and sales function. It costs money to bring in sales leads and, once you have them in hand, you want to ensure you're managing each lead to its fullest. For this reason, ads and direct mail campaigns that drive in traffic are not good enough; you need a professional salesperson to greet each prospect and take him/her through the sales cycle. Otherwise you'll be spending a lot on marketing and not seeing the results you anticipate.

At Greenhouse, we are often asked about what qualifications make for a good marketer in this industry. That's a tough question as many of the best marketers don't have university degrees or previous experience. What they do have, however, are certain personality traits that serve the role well.

Let's think about what the job entails. In most residences, the marketer should be responsible for community outreach and sales – both of which require superior relationship-building skills. Community outreach is about connecting with referral sources and building traffic. Sales is about increasing occupancy. In some organizations, the marketer is also responsible for designing and placing ads, organizing signage, and producing marketing materials.

We suggest you remove these responsibilities from your marketer. These are not core competencies of a good marketer and they take away valuable time from community outreach and sales. Have head office do them or hire an agency.

If you are able to de-clutter your marketer's role so she is clear on her priorities – outreach and sales – the traits you are looking for in that position become crystal clear. You want to find someone who:

- Is empathetic
- Has great presentation skills
- Is mature in attitude, professional in appearance and eloquent in speech
- Has tremendous curiosity – she wants to know every detail of each prospect's life (that's translates to great sales discovery)
- Excels at customer service (common courtesy and exceptional social manners included)
- Is detail oriented
- Is motivated by reaching a goal (she likes to win!)

One note of caution – don't expect superior computer skills from your marketer. Most successful salespeople are "people" people and avoid documentation and computers as much as possible. They love talking and relationship-

building; they abhor sitting behind a desk. This is not to say that they should be excused from computer work – computerized lead management is vital to the role – but it’s a reality. It’s like homework for your teenager – they don’t want to do it but they have to, so set realistic expectations, support wherever possible and continue to train and coach, coach, coach in this area.

While your first choice would likely be to find someone who is already successfully doing the role for another residence, this is becoming increasingly difficult. As more residences come on the market, we only have so many seasoned marketers to go around. You may have to resolve yourself to the fact that you will find an amazing candidate from outside the industry but significant orientation will be involved. Short-term pain for long-term gain.

When you’re writing an ad to recruit for this position, think of what would appeal to the type of person you’re looking for – someone who is caring but goal-oriented. Consider a headline like:

“Did you get a hug at work today?” “Did the sale you made today improve someone’s life tomorrow?”

These headlines emphasize the *value* of the work the marketer does – not in terms of revenue but *purpose*. Most of the successful marketers we recruit at Greenhouse are women coming from other industries who are at a point in their lives – usually middle-age – where they feel they want a career that is serving others in some capacity – “work that is good for my soul” is what one candidate told me. Pair this desire

to help others with the innate desire to achieve goals and you’ve got yourself a winner.

What should your position be called? We’ve heard it all: Retirement Counselor, Lifestyle Consultant, Leasing Manager, Customer Relations Manager, Marketing or Sales Manager and on and on. Don’t cloak the name in too many euphemisms trying to sugarcoat it. If you do, the role of that individual is not clear to others on-site and she becomes a dumping ground for miscellaneous tasks. In a focus group, a gentleman once told me “just call her marketing manager. We’re calling to get information and we know what that means.” So I generally stick to that. The one caveat is in the ad. In the ad I always call it a “Sales Manager” or “Sales Representative”, even if the actual title will be “marketing”. Why? Because if you call it “Marketing Manager” in your ad, you’ll get lots of inappropriate candidates who have worked in ad agencies or marketing departments. Don’t be distracted – that’s not what you need. You need a salesperson.

When you’re writing your ad for the marketing position, it’s tough to know what to say in terms of qualifications. If you require a university degree or previous industry experience, you may be inadvertently weeding out your best candidates. If you don’t outline any qualifications, you’ll get truckers and fast fry cooks applying. Rather than a long list of qualifications, include a few lines about what the role. Something like:

*If you’re someone who enjoys representing a product you really believe in, this opportunity may be for you. We’re looking for a motivated individual with great relationship-building skills*

*and, preferably, experience in consumer sales. You'll develop a comprehensive outreach program to build community awareness and referrals, and you'll assist prospects through the sales process. Strong community contacts, excellent follow-up and sales skills, and computer literacy are all assets.*

You'll notice we mentioned "consumer sales". Finding someone who has sales experience would be preferable. The type of sales is important however. A business-to-business salesperson is dealing with another business person. This client has a budget and a goal; he or she is not driven by strong emotions in regards to this decision. Whether he/she buys the widget from you or another supplier has little impact upon his/her life. However, someone dealing in consumer sales means they are selling a product that an individual is buying – often for their own use or consumption and always with their own money. Making the gargantuan decision to move into a retirement residence is a vastly emotional sale and it's best to recruit someone who has sold things to *individuals* rather than to *businesses*.

When you review resumes, look for:

- Cover letters and resumes that are well-worded, error-free and nicely formatted. While your ideal candidate may not be a whiz with computers, he/she should be able to write well and be smart enough to get assistance with the set up so the documents present professionally.
- Experience with seniors, either personally or professionally.

- Consumer sales experience, particularly of large ticket items like homes, vacations, etc. or to a market that deals with seniors (such as home health aids)
- Valuable previous work connections such as at a hospital, doctors' offices, community agencies
- Volunteer experiences; this is extremely telling when you consider the community outreach facet of the role. If he/she has served on the Mayor's Gala committee, the library board, the Relay for Life committee, the United Way campaign, etc. you know he/she is a natural born networker.

I find it is better to interview more people than less but this can be time-consuming. Consequently, you may find that, if you have too many resumes in your "possible" pile, it may be wise to do a pre-interview over the phone. Call the individual and schedule a 15-minutes screening interview; offer to send them the questions via email ahead of time. During the interview, ask three or four significant questions such as:

- Tell me about any experience you've had, personally or professionally, dealing with seniors
- What attracted you to this role?
- What attributes does a good salesperson have?
- Suggest one good community outreach idea for our residence.
- What is your salary expectation? (or share your wage range)

Discussing salary expectations (or sharing your salary range) at this point can save you a lot of time. If you're offering in the \$40,000 - \$50,000 range that is standard in the retirement residence industry, you may find that a number of your candidates are not interested. Good salespeople can easily make \$70,000+ in other industries so it's better to know this ahead of time.

Based upon what you learn, you can then begin scheduling interviews. When doing so, you may want to save time by asking candidates to bring along a list of references and also make them aware that, if offered the position, they must produce a clear criminal reference check and vulnerable sector screening.

Check out the next issue of Dialogue+ online when we'll cover questions to ask during the interview, who should be involved in the second interview and how to do the reference check.