



Maximizing Your Model Suite

Model suites are one of the many costs of doing business in the retirement residence industry. It may be tempting to show only empty suites or to show the suites of current residents but, at Greenhouse Marketing, we advise that the return on a good model suite is many times the initial cost. Empty houses don't sell as well as empty suites. Even the nicest of current resident suites can have clutter and odors or be unavailable at times. While this may be a necessary option when your building is full, generally it's better to have a dedicated model suite when you're leasing up.

In terms of cost, we generally budget \$7,500 for a studio model suite and \$10,000-\$12,000 for a one-bedroom. This is without any designer fees. For that kind of money, you want to ensure you're getting it right.

Some tips:

- Don't have too many model suites. It will appear that you have lots of inventory available and won't infuse a sense of urgency.
- At most, chose only one model suite per type - studio, one-bedroom and two-bedroom. If one or more of those suite types is in great demand, don't

bother setting up a model suite of that type - those suites will sell themselves.

- Don't choose your "best" layouts as model suites. Again, these sell themselves. Do a great job with a less popular layout to create interest.
- Think about your tour path when deciding on the location for the model suite:
- Ideally, you'd like to show it part way through the tour and encourage the prospects to sit for a minute in the suite. Maybe offer bottled water (that can be kept in the kitchenette fridge). This break allows for more rapport building and discovery and allows the person to begin picturing him or herself living in that space.
- Many clients have limited mobility, so keep model suites near to an elevator. If you have more than one model suite, keep them in close proximity to one another so you're not dragging the client around several floors.
- When setting up the suite, ensure all the basics are there before you start adding ancillary pieces. Each suite needs a bed, dresser, TV and seating. If space permits, you can start adding in

nightstands, coffee tables, TV stand, additional seating and even a cafe table and chairs.

- Do you need a designer? That depends on your market positioning, budget and talents. A high-end residence may require a designer's involvement. However, if budget does not permit and/or you have access to someone with a flair for decor, you might forego the designer. Just remember four important items:

- You are furnishing for a senior so lighting should be good, seating high and firm, chairs should have arms and safety and convenience are paramount
- All colours should match throughout the suite. It's a small space so don't use a startlingly different colour scheme in each room. You want a sense of space and flow.
- Not only should colours match, but theme as well. This is where most people go wrong. Don't start mixing different decorating themes. Whatever you choose - classic, modern, Victorian, etc. everything should work together.
- Don't forget the small touches - candles, framed photos, magazines, throw pillows, lap

blankets, floor plants, lamps - all of these things add to the welcoming ambiance of the suite. And include items in the closet - good quality matching wooden hangers and attractive hat boxes or baskets.

- Operators often worry about whether to stick with the colours and finishes standard in each suite or to "jazz" up their model suite. If you have two model suites, you could do one of each - one with the standard colour palette and draperies, one with different paint colour, a window valance, etc. If you allow residents to decorate their suites with different paint schemes and draperies, it makes good sense to show this. It helps dispel the myth that a retirement residence is like a nursing home. It looks more like a condo.
- Put your model suites on a housekeeping schedule so they get cleaned regularly.
- Do a quick walkthrough of the model suites each day. Smell good? If not, open a window. Turn on the taps and flush the toilet occasionally. Plump the pillows. Turn on the radio if there's one in the. Make sure there are no dead flies on the windowsill.
- Any maintenance man will tell you that it seems the moment we finish a model suite, it rents and we have to move it to

another suite. This is a good thing - even if it does create work. Don't be talked into not hanging pictures and draperies because of the work involved in patching and painting the walls when the model suite rents. That's the point of having a model suite - so make those nail holes!

Each model suite should have that "Wow!" factor that means a prospect is struck by how nicely decorated it is. This isn't achieved with a hodge-podge approach and cast-offs from a previous resident. An investment in a good model suite is an investment in occupancy.