

THE POWER OF TRUST

Building brand trust is straightforward: Do what you say you're going to do. But it's not simple.



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No matter what measurements you use to determine quality, the numbers won't make a difference unless people trust what you're saying. Trust makes it possible to get through daily life's ups and downs—a spilled tray in the dining room or an associate without their usual bright smile—and the more rare big challenges, such as crisis situations or health problems. Trust is the assurance that the leadership has the skills to know what to do and how to get everyone working together to provide the best quality of life.

Trust in senior living has to be earned, from the first encounter with a provider's name or sign to the regular communication with an adult child. Yet some regular practices in the industry and how we communicate can serve to erode trust.

With his experience working in senior living on the corporate level as well as in consulting and digital marketing, Jamison Gosselin, vice president, senior living at marketing firm G5, has seen the benefits of brand trust from several perspectives. He offers a holistic look at how trust in marketing and business is earned and what can erode it.

IT STARTS WITH THE PEOPLE

When I think about brand trust from the marketing perspective, it really is a long continuum. Because you want to start building brand trust from the very early stages, from when someone finds you as a brand all the way through to fulfillment of that trust.

We're caring for moms and dads, and we're a very human-oriented business. Brand trust starts getting built in the senior living space with the people. For an adult child or the senior themselves,

your community is fulfilling some very basic things: providing meals, transportation care, and personal care. But beyond that, it's about being able to fulfill the emotional and mental needs, the ones that equate ultimately to providing a good quality of life. I think if you look at any mission statement in senior living, that concept is there one way or another, paraphrased in different words.

The bottom line for me with brand trust is: **We do what we say we're going to do.**

AN AUTHENTIC PICTURE

I am a firm believer in authentic photography. You look at the websites, you look at the marketing brochures, you have these happy seniors—a lot of it's this very aspirational stock photography. Then when the senior or the family member walks into the building, they see a beautiful building, but with people who are 20 or 30 years older than the people that appear in their marketing collateral.

I've always leaned toward being a little bit more authentic and showcasing the lifestyle that our community's offering. **We want to show that when our communities perform well, this is what you can expect.** That sets the stage for building brand trust with the consumer.

Typically, the disconnect will start when you go from the online or the marketing advertising to when the adult child and the senior walk into a community. Ideally, what you communicated in your marketing is authentic enough yet polished enough that it connects. I think our industry senior living has gotten better at ensuring that there are fewer disconnects, that marketing aligns with the on-site experience.

You can erode trust right off the bat by not providing the answers that customers need before they come visit your community.

A DAY IN THE (REAL) LIFE

When I talk about authenticity, I talk about what a day in the life of a resident in a community might be. I'm sure you've had the experience when you walk into a well-run senior living community: You walk into a place where there's activity, there are smiles, you might smell fresh bread baking or lunch being prepared, the community is clean, people are engaged, the executive director and staff are greeting residents by name. You feel that positive vibe.

The challenge for marketers is: How do you take that authentic nature of the residents living in the community and project that within marketing communications? Through photography, yes, but through content, testimonials, stories—especially through video—we can give **a good, solid, authentic portrayal of what's going on in a senior living community every day.** I think the industry has gotten better at that.

DIVERSITY MATTERS

We need to make sure that we do include a walker or wheelchair and **people with disabilities in our materials**, because that is an authentic portrayal.

Frankly, we have an obligation in marketing to promote the diversity in our world. I think we need to portray the fact that people have disabilities, and senior living has people with a variety of religious beliefs and races and ethnicities.

BRAND STAKES ARE HIGH IN SENIOR LIVING

People buy senior living once, for the most part. It's not like you're getting on a plane or buying a can of soda. When you make that decision, you have put a lot of time and effort and have built up trust with the local community.

As a result, **when there is an erosion of brand trust and it's well publicized, it could take six months to a year to rebuild that trust again.** You could have had a strong community, but when you start getting bad publicity, it's a hard recovery. You have to put a focused, dedicated program in place to establish brand trust again.

You erode right off the bat by not providing answers consumers want before they come visit your community. **Mismanaged expectations is another way.** If we are not managing expectations as to the number of activities or the type of food—if we talk about five-star dining and it's not quite even chain restaurant dining, that's not managing expectations very well.

MEASURING TRUST

We're all trying to measure our brand trust in many ways. We've been trying to figure it out for years, because it is such an intangible; it's such a soft area of the business. We're always trying to put numbers and key performance indicators (KPIs) on things.

One of the biggest ways to measure brand trust is through **net promoter score.** If you would refer your family and loved ones to the community, that means you have brand trust, and that's fantastic.

Another way to measure trust is through **referrals.** Resident referrals don't get a lot of volume, but they get great conversion rates.

You can measure it through **word of mouth.** If you're seeing good-quality **lead volume** to the community, there's a good local market brand trust there. It means people want to check it out; they haven't heard bad things. Another is **length of stay**, [apart from people moving out because they need a greater range of care]. Obviously, **online reviews** are another way to better understand brand trust. It is critically important for an operator to have a program in place to generate authentic reviews from their communities.

But there's no perfect measurement for brand trust—you have to take a number of those different KPIs and build your own branded KPI dashboard related to brand trust

AUTHENTICITY MATTERS

Stackla, a visual content engine that uses AI to discover user-generated content, did a study of about 1,700 consumers in the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia about authenticity. It revealed a disconnect and an opportunity: Marketers think they're being authentic, but consumers may not share that opinion. **90 percent of consumers say authenticity is important** when deciding which brands they like. **92 percent of marketers** believe most or all of the content they create resonates as authentic with consumers—but 51 percent of consumers say less than half of brands create that kind of content.