

Lucas

Welcome to Bridge the Gap podcast, the senior living podcast with Josh and Lucas. Great guest on today, Talking about a very special and particular topic relating to sales and marketing in senior living, we want to welcome Heather Fremont. She's the vice president of marketing at Maplewood Senior Living. Welcome to show.

Heather Freemont

Good morning, everyone. And thanks for having me love seeing you all.

Lucas

It's great to see you too. You know, there is this long battle between sales and marketing in almost every vertical and every organization, and the ones that are able to integrate that correctly under the same umbrella are the ones that find that kind of magic formula where sales and marketing are working and going in the same path. And the impacts of that are huge on sales. Occupancy is a big topic in senior housing, especially coming out of the last two years. And Heather, we've had a great pre-discussion around how you and Maplewood have been able to integrate sales, marketing communications, and leveraged content to drive leads and get everybody going in the same direction. Can you talk to us a little bit more about how your strategy and philosophy of bringing marketing and sales together to meet the goals of the organization?

Heather 02:08

Sure, Lucas. One of my favorite subjects as I already shared with you you know, I've been privileged to be able to do that, I think it's my fourth time of being able to really look at marketing, sales and communication, and pull them under the same umbrella. And it's all working towards the goal of operations and working in conjunction with the goals of the organization and the ops team. And I do, definitely see the momentum of that. It's definitely going to be something that many have heard before that there's marketing out there kind of on their own island, doing their thing, making their great brochures. They have a wonderful brand, keeping that in check all the time, and creating, brochures and different content that they feel would be great for the organization and for the sales team to use.

Heather Freemont 03:00

I think with having marketing and sales sort of separated on their own islands, there's definitely challenges to that. Oftentimes, what you hear are your sales team saying to you, "well, marketing creates these brochures, but they're not what we need." I want to talk about this program, and I want to give somebody this, and need to explain this, or help them over the hump of their objections. And marketing's off doing, creating these things that really aren't that helpful. I mean, they're beautiful, but they're really not helpful to our prospective families." I think there's so many reasons to look at marketing sales, and I don't leave out communications in that, under that umbrella, when you really start to exist from a marketing and communication standpoint to meet the goals of the organization and the sales team, you then begin to start to drive occupancy.

Heather Freemont

Those things totally need to be aligned. Can you do it separately? Lots of companies do it every day. Lots of senior livings are operating just that. But you will find silo and I truly believe you won't get the momentum that you can get when you're really operating under, the goals of the organization and seeing yourself from a marketing standpoint is really serving your sales team. And that means listening and understanding what their needs are. Getting from them needs of the customers are and what the prospects and prospective families are asking for. And then how do we answer that question as a team, and really help them help their customers further?

Josh 04:31

Heather, I love this topic and it is very true that there's often an unhealthy friction between marketing sales, ops, and all of that. And everybody can point fingers at the other and, and kind of blame for problems and things that might not be where we want them to be. But now you've had not only your this experience, but this is something that you've done kind know through your career is really bringing teams together on this front to communicate, to set goals together, to implement strategies. Can you talk to our audience because I think everybody right now that's listening is literally thinking, "oh yeah, amen to that. Amen to that." No matter whether you're in sales or in marketing, everybody's fee that, but it's a big difference to like say that, but then to do something about it. So can you give some practical strategies that you've seen work for you through the years on how you establish that team, where the communication begins and how you go about that kind of on a daily basis? Like what's the framework for that?

Heather Freemont 05:45

You know, I mean, part of it is just starting off with that as a mission in the departments. It's obviously working with the team and talking about, what is our purpose in marketing and communications? What are we trying to accomplish here? Ultimately, we're trying to support the goals of the organization. In senior living right now. It's all about occupancy and recruitment, right? It starts with just having that as you know, this is our goal, what are our goals? What are our objectives? How are we going to get there? And you basically, you're writing a plan based off of that. You're always coming back to, does this support sales, and I think part of your question about how do you do this on the daily, it's having those conversations and understanding.

Heather Freemont 06:28

While I'm in the sales training and the regular sales trainings that we're doing with our teams, we're asking them questions, we're saying, "let's talk about your objections right now. How are people feeling about COVID? What's holding them back?" And so what all of that is doing is then sending me back to, how am I going to respond to that with our marketing team, how are we going to create maybe a handout that addresses their concerns about covid? Or how do they move forward in this new climate, right? What are the right questions to ask about moving in a community that are different than they were maybe two or three years ago? And so, as you're hearing what their conversations are, you're basically taking that and developing that into immediate tools and content that they can use and roll out and help them, help their customers through the pipeline and pull them into the pipeline, quite frankly. And I know we're gonna get more into content, but those are the types of things that we do on the daily.

Heather Freemon 07:29

It's really listening, going back and forth. We make it our mission that if somebody on the sales team says to us, "I'm struggling at this and how to communicate this," usually within a day or two, we're turning

around something for them to help them. Whether it's talking points or something they can use with the customer. We work for them to be successful. You have to go in with that attitude. You have to live by that every day and really just come to the table with solutions for them and you build that rapport and then they're going to tell you more of what their challenges are. And then you start to really see that momentum.

Josh 08:07

I love that. So Heather, I'm going to give you a little bit of kind of a case study without being too specific and get your thoughts on this because I see this in a lot of organizations, but oftentimes you'll have, whether it's internal marketing department or an agency, and you get these monthly, weekly, quarterly reports, right? And it's like these traffic reports, website, social media and all these things and marketing agencies really touting that or marketing teams really touting that. And then the sales team is sitting there thinking, "oh, well, I'm wasting a bunch of time because these people aren't even qualified, right?" And you're driving a bunch of traffic. Yes. But I'm wasting time. So there's always to this kind of friction. And that's when sometimes the finger pointing begins both ways. And sometimes the marketing team saying, "oh, well you just can't close, you just can't close." Talk to... what have you done to really help the, the marketing efforts really be tailored to driving qualified leads so that maybe that finger pointing is less or it feels more collaborative that you're working together to drive the actual appropriate traffic.

Heather Freemont 09:25

Okay. So a couple parts of that question. One, when there's success and people are being successful, there's not a lot of finger pointing, right? You're driving this success, number one. That means when you're on the same page, we don't see as much finger pointing. One it's like, look, we're on the same team. You're not always going to get... your traffic is just traffic until you qualify it. Going back to the topic of content, by using content to help drive traffic, you are going to obviously bring people to the table that are qualified or perhaps are not qualified or maybe they're ready or not ready. They could be anywhere on the journey. They could also not be qualified for your communities. It's really kind of working with the team to understand the differences.

Heather Freemont 10:12

A lot of the conversation I have with the sales team is we're going to attract people. And it's actually, one of our goals is to attract people at all different places on their journey. And we're going to put them in different places in the funnel. Some of them are going to come to the table for us and we're trying to get them when they have been on this journey. They're at the bottom end. They need to make a move immediately and it's need driven. And look, they're going right down to the bottom of the funnel, right? There are going to be other people, and we're trying to intentionally get them, that may be a couple years off and we're going to touch them. We're going to put them at the top of the funnel once we've qualified and we're going to work on them in helping educate them and take them all the way through that journey, through content, and help and education, and really helping, throughout their journey as they're trying to get to the place where they might be able to move their spouse in to say a memory care program, because they're not there yet.

Heather Freemont 11:05

You have to earn that trust over time. And so, you know, we talk a lot about we are not only trying to attract prospective customers that are right coming in at the bottom of the funnel. People say low hanging fruit, right? We're trying to work them, we would prefer to help them on their journey

throughout time so that we can build a longstanding trusting relationship with them. And just really encouraging them to look at it that way, as opposed to, I want it and I want it right now. Because you can still continue to close people, regardless if you've got them in your CRM and you're helping them on that journey. The ones that weren't ready six months ago are ready today. And if you have that relationship and you've helped them along, they're gonna choose you.

Heather Freemont 11:50

And so it's really educating them on what are these leads coming in? We also always know that we have to qualify them. However, you are going to get leads at different places and it's your job to help them. Sometimes they tell us they're two years out, you start helping them. You build the trust, they're coming to some educational stuff, suddenly they love the community and say, I've realized it's time to do this. And it's now only been 30 days. I try to encourage them to look at it as you're on their journey, you're going to be centric to what they need and help them. And I try from a marketing standpoint as we want to give them as many tools as we can to help those customers so that they can trust us early and often. And once they do that, they suddenly are on a path and it becomes a lot quicker to make those decisions. Does that help?

Josh 12:42

Oh yeah. So great, great stuff. So let's transition the conversation, because you did mention you may have even said the phrase content is king. But that's what comes to mind. Yeah. So that's a lot easier said than done. Take us on the journey of like thought process or how you guys arrive at quality content. What does that structure look like?

Heather Freemont 13:06

Yeah. I mean you are so right in saying like when I bring up this topic and when I brought it up to my own team, when we wrote our initial playing in together, they said, "you want to do a blog every week on both of our brands? Okay. How are we going to do that? You want to produce content every month that's new and fresh." "Yeah, we're going to do that." And so, they were sort of like, "oh gosh, she's crazy. This is gonna be fun."

And suddenly I look back at hundreds and hundreds of content pieces later, they see the impact and you know, they're proud of their accomplishment. How do you do it? I guess I start with, what am I talking about with content? Content can be a lot of different things.

Heather Freemont 13:49

One, I mentioned blog. So obviously you're talking about post articles, things that are topical to the industry, and things that people have top of mind when they're looking at senior living. It can be a tip sheet, a resource type sheet. It can also be a guide if you're taking a deeper dive, right? Each of those are to some extent harder than the other. If you're writing something that's 10 pages, you're obviously doing a deeper dive, it's a little bit harder to do, so you can start small. What you do is you, you put a plan together that you can accomplish. You take a look at who's on my team? What are the skill sets that everyone has, who can be doing? What, and how can I make a plan?

Heather Freemont 14:31

Even just have a goal of producing one or two pieces of content a month. I want to get to the sales team and find what would be the most helpful. What's are their highest number of objections? What are the topics that come up? What are people struggling with? In the past couple of years, a lot of it might have been COVID, what are their concerns? How can we answer them in writing? How can we do something to give them so that it can make them feel more secure in their decisions. Diving a little bit deeper into what does that content look like? I mean, there's a lot of different ways to look at it. I mentioned where they are in their journey. You can write content to somebody that's a couple years out on their journey.

Heather Freemont 15:10

Especially when you're talking about independent living people that may be looking a little bit further out. You can also write content for people that are in an emergency situation, that are literally need driven and need to make a quick decision. You're looking at the different places on the journey and thinking about, "how do I answer these questions?" In marketing, you don't have to make that up. You go back right back to the sales team as soon as you start. I said this before, but bridging the gap, you know, to play off of you all. But between marketing and sales, your sales team quickly responds to that and they say, gosh, thank you for doing this. And suddenly you're now really, having a relationship that they're going to be sharing more with you, and that gives you more concepts for what we could be doing to help them, you know, so you can target people on different places in their path.

Heather Freemont 15:56

You can look at objections. I always say, look at their pain points. What are the things that stop people? You suddenly are going along this journey, and they go, "eh, I changed my mind." Or they put a deposit down and they pull it. What is it that stopped them? Are they overwhelmed? Do they not understand the financial? Do they know if mom's going to fit in? And so we want to answer what stops them. And so all of those different things are ways to really look at the content and say, "these are the things we should be writing about." You said how do we do it? So I'll skip the why. Because I think the "how" is oftentimes where people definitely get stuck. One, you want to like I said, you want to look at your team, see what your skillset is.

Heather Freemont 16:42

Two, if you have people on your team that you think can start to do this, and you have a topic, you set a small goal, you make an outline, you pass it back to somebody that you trust and you just start doing it. And before you know it, you're designing it. And you're putting a first piece out there. If you can't do it internally, because you don't have that strength on your team, is there some, someone you can outsource it to? Can you pay somebody that's an expert in one of those areas, design, writing, whatever to help you, once you have an outline. Do you work with any agencies, is that something that you want to pay an outsource? So there's a lot of different ways to accomplish it. Obviously it depends on your budget and I've done it all different ways. And I think depending on what you're trying to do you know, you can use different methods for it. Some you may do internally, some may need to look outside of your organization, but it's well worth it.

Josh 17:31

Well, Heather, that is really, really good stuff. And, I appreciate you sharing some of the practical how-to. One of the themes that was occurring to me while you were talking through all of the different content that you're producing and you recommend our listeners producing is this idea of content with purpose. Because every example you gave, you were giving very intentional purpose for that content. Not content

just for the sake of something that looks cool or is a cool soundbite. It actually was driving towards a purpose, very intentional. Lucas, I'd love your thoughts on this. I've often called you the LinkedIn ninja. You produce content on LinkedIn that obviously that's how me and you met was kind of following each other. And we met at an event years ago. What, what are your thoughts on this?

Lucas 18:23

Well, I think it's a, it's an incredible conversation because obviously my perspective is way more or B2B, but this conversation I think is highly driven in more of the consumer marketplace, and which is where operators, that's where they're spending their time on sales and marketing. And I think it's so similar where obviously the B2B marketplace has its own nuances in the consumer marketplace has its own nuances too. And I think the key to any type of content on this strategy that we're talking about is just consistency. People can't expect to put out a blog one month and then next quarter, do it again, and think that that's going to actually drive good leads. You want to become the source of great information where you create followers and people are connecting to you.

Lucas 19:16

And so I think it's an incredible conversation. And I can tell that the senior living marketplace coming out of the past two years of this kind of desperate situation that we've all been in. I think the good byproduct of that has been basically a forcing of the hand to leverage social media, add in technology and start to develop a bigger content strategy. If you don't, you're just not going to make it. And so I think it's a really good conversation, especially Heather, you there at Maplewood have been able to have success in this arena. And I think it's great to share these thoughts and ideas with the whole industry.

Josh 19:56

Well, Heather, thanks for joining us today and bridging the gap between sales and marketing something that's so important. I love the intentionality behind the content that you guys are producing. Congratulations. I can't wait for audience to connect with you that maybe aren't already. We know you're a very busy person. Thank you for joining us today.

Heather Freemont 20:28

Oh, thank you all. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you and good luck to everyone on their growth and their occupancy.

Lucas 20:29

That's great. A great thing to end on here on the bridge of gap network, go to a BTG voice.com for more information about this show and many others. Xconnect with us on social. We'll make sure we put all of Heather's contact information in the show notes. So you can ping her on LinkedIn and check out their website and see what they're doing as far as content. And thanks to everybody for listening to another great episode of Bridge the Gap.