

Introduction

The Aging Network is gaining remarkable attention. As the number of older adults increases, conversations are taking place in every corner of the nation. While policymakers and frontline program leadership are exploring ways to reach more seniors and adapt to a shifting demographic, the “market” is exploding with new competitors who offer innovative services tailored to the growing needs. At the same time, the media world has become complex, offering new marketing channels, creative methods, and a 24-7 cycle of personalized messages for every category of personal taste and interest.

At the intersection of these changes is a tremendous opportunity to pivot our practices to harness the future. Never before have we seen the level of competition that today’s landscape presents. We can no longer assume that we are the only option available to provide meals (and other services) to seniors. Therefore, how do we communicate value, illustrate impact, and preserve relevance in a crowded market? Revisiting your thinking and your strategy surrounding “marketing” may shed light on the way forward.

What is marketing?

When marketing is narrowly referred to as simply: “outreach” or “communications” it reflects one-directional thinking. Today, marketing is a sophisticated machine demanding multi-faceted, multi-directional, and multi-channel operations. Consequently, having a 21st Century view on marketing limits gaps and diminishes opportunities for competitors to develop improved products and services targeted towards community-dwelling older adults promoted through a robust marketing platform.

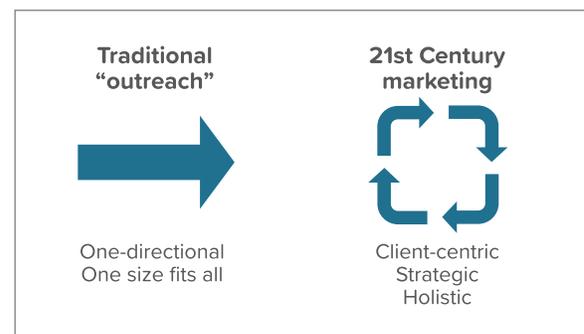
Client-centric

At the core, marketing is client-centric. It’s not safe to assume all audiences are the same, primarily because it simply isn’t true. We know consumer expectations are changing, particularly those of the older adult population, largely driven by a mix of culture change, technological advances, and corporate America’s “have it your way” promise to give consumers targeted and engaging experiences on their terms.



How can this be used in the Aging Network?

Get to truly know the seniors that you serve. With the changing medical needs and lifestyle choices in American communities, now is a great opportunity to re-examine who you are serving—so you can serve them well. Beyond a list of demographics (age, race/ethnicity, income, zip code), opt to dive deeper to learn about your client’s behaviors, motivations, interests, and desires.



Consider the above models regarding marketing theory. Which approach are you using?

One easy way to tackle this exercise is to create “personas” or fictitious models of types of people you serve. For example, you might give them individual names like: Maureen, and then create a narrative around her situation. For example: Maureen is a 65 year old widow who lives in her home, but is beginning to have trouble with daily tasks. Her children live many states away

and her social network is not as tight as it used to be. She's looking for ways to stay active and healthy but transportation is challenging since she has some chronic mobility issues. Continue this exercise until your team feels confident they have solid profiles of the personas within your client population. Remember: using a one size fits all strategy, likely becomes, one size fits none. We can do better!

Strategic

Marketing's ultimate goal is to influence consumer decision-making which is why over the past two decades, "marketing" has been increasingly moving away from a simple "nice to have" business function to the responsibility of high-level executive teams.

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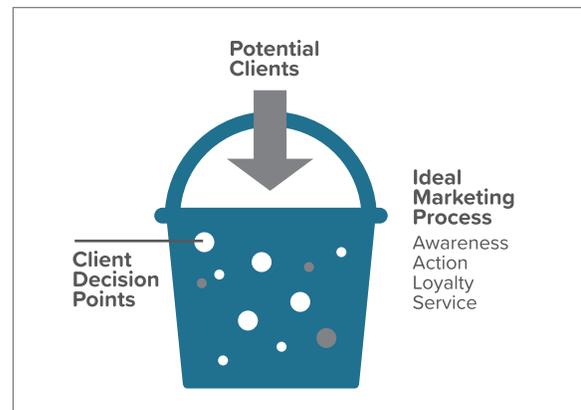
Think of your marketing efforts as a bucket. You are trying to fill the bucket with as many clients as possible in order to fulfill your mission of being the best senior nutrition services provider possible. Your challenges:

1. You have to find the source for the water to fill the bucket (this represents your clients)
2. Your bucket—like everyone else's!—has some holes in it (this represents client decision-making).

For some organizations, success measurement starts and ends at merely counting people served. Let's dial up your sophistication by using this metaphor to more strategically manage and measure your marketing efforts.

- To address challenge #1, look at the census data for your community—you might have this from a needs assessment. This represents the entire universe of your potential clients or "the water source."
- Next, to address challenge #2, you need to define and strengthen all the decision points that move your potential clients into actual clients. Where do people show interest in your services (perhaps a visit to your website or a call to your organization), but don't take the action (perhaps signing up for meal delivery or joining a congregate nutrition program)?

You will need to understand how many show interest in your services compared to those who actually take action. Informed by this information, you can develop a marketing plan that uses compelling messages to better engage with potential and actual clients. Using this approach will help you move consumers from awareness ("We know you exist") to action ("We are buying what you are selling").



Consider this metaphor when managing your marketing program. As you fill your bucket with potential clients, there are areas of churn where clients are losing program awareness, the desire to act, loyalty to your brand, and satisfaction with your client service. So, where along the way can you improve?

Holistic

Professional roles and responsibilities are also shifting with the times. More and more, organizations need interdisciplinary staff that can offer additional value to power your mission. By leveraging these talents, the function of your marketing program can help influence how your clients make decisions. Luckily, there are many ways your organization can communicate with your clients to engage them, educate them about the value of your services, and retain them as clients.

How can this be used in the Aging Network?

In order to remain competitive, you must identify your swiss-army knives (multi-talented staff) and align your teams. Where once in a far wing of your office was a separate Marketing department or lone Graphic Designer, and upstairs sat the program staff, now we have the opportunity to get together and share the responsibility.

What does this mean for senior nutrition programs – in practical terms? To get started, host a workshop and invite a cross-section of your organization. Use the bucket metaphor as a conversation point to engage your staff and colleagues in understanding where your current client-centered marketing efforts are focused. Are most of your best efforts concentrated at awareness building, i.e. brochures, websites, hand-outs that took many months and dollars to produce? Managing marketing/communications in a competitive market is an important responsibility. Remember the old adage: it costs more to find a new client than it does to keep the ones you have.

So, what are you waiting for? Use your new tactics from this issue brief to redesign the complete customer journey experience and refresh your marketing so it's a well-oiled machine—that everyone has a hand in!

What is involved in marketing?

Now that we have reviewed the landscape shifts and a few of the tools you need to be successful, it's important to understand the operations needed to manage a modern marketing platform.

Strategy - This is the intangible who, what, and how.

At the intersection of your organization's purpose, your audience's needs, and the services you provide lies your strategy— that is, the dynamic approach your organization is taking to provide best-in-class products/services. Pay critical attention to this opportunity to refine and sharpen your approach based on a thorough

understanding of what is sometimes taken for granted. Leadership and frontline staff alike should weigh in to shape your strategy with leadership responsible to ensure alignment with mission, goals, and audience expectations.

Tools - These are the tangible tools produced to communicate value externally.

Your tools consist of a variety of assets built with the verbal messages and visual design aesthetics (color and imagery) that are customized to meet the client where they are. Here is where marketing material design lives—from print to web to social media and physical experiences. Leadership should identify a specialized team or individuals (the more interdisciplinary the better, and give them creative latitude!) to plan and execute the marketing tools based on the strategy defined.

Management - This is the daily operations, scalable insights, and opportunities for innovation.

Using a deep level of empathy and installing a consumer feedback loop into operations means management will be multi-faceted and ongoing. It's here where strategy and tactics connect within the Awareness - Action - Loyalty - Service model. Leadership teams should constantly align teams, offerings, and refresh your strategy across the entire organization.

Read our complementary Innovation Brief <https://nutritionandaging.org/briefs/> to learn how to advance your mission and preserve relevance.

RESOURCES

Seven Things You Need to Know About Marketing in the 21st Century, Bain & Co.: <https://www.bain.com/insights/seven-things-you-need-to-know-about-marketing-in-21st-century/>

No Market for Marketing, Stanford Social Innovation Review: https://ssir.org/articles/entry/no_market_for_marketing

The Ultimate Guide to Nonprofit Marketing in 2019, HubSpot: <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/how-to-run-a-lean-mean-nonprofit-marketing-machine>