A Special Report from Extended Care Products, Inc.

The Five Census Building Mistakes to Avoid in 2013:
How to Master the New World of Attracting More Residents©

By Chip Kessler
ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Chip Kessler is a nationally known creator and producer of staff training and development educational programs for those working in our nation’s nursing facilities and assisted living communities. His area of expertise is marketing/census building and customer service. He’s the author of three books, the latest, The No B.S. Guide to Marketing to Leading-Edge Baby Boomers and Seniors (Entrepreneur Press) co-written with marketing legend Dan S. Kennedy, and is available at Barnes and Noble, Books-a-Million, Amazon.com and major booksellers nationwide. Chip’s also a personal census building/marketing and customer service consultant to nursing and assisted living facilities with clients in five states.

A NOTE ABOUT THIS SPECIAL REPORT FROM CHIP KESSLER:

Hello! Thanks for accessing this special report which I’ve titled “The Five Census Building Mistakes to Avoid in 2013: How to Master the New World of Attracting New Residents.” It is specifically designed to address the unique challenges nursing homes and assisted living communities face in getting more new residents in the Year 2013. Let’s face it, the playing field has changed! No longer can you exclusively rely on past tried and true marketing/advertising strategies. If you notice, this special report has two extremely important key words in its title. Let me give you a moment to see if you can spot them … ready: these words are master and attract.

You see, if the census building landscape had remained the same, I could call this report simply “How to Get More New Residents” and leave it at that. For your benefit, however, so you can receive the maximum impact from this report, it’s important you understand that it’s no longer feasible for your facility’s long-term success to just expect residents and families to show up simply because you are there. In the past, providing your building had a good reputation and you put in some time (and effort) in your marketing, this was the case. No more. Today, what with The Affordable Care Act (and our federal and state governments) promoting at-home healthcare services, plus increased competition from your fellow assisted living and nursing facilities, etc., you must be extremely pro-active to get and keep all of your beds filled.

With this said, I’ve done an extensive study of the present marketing/advertising scene, what works and doesn’t work. In addition, I’ve spoken to several facility administrators, executive directors, marketing personnel, directors of nursing, social service directors and other key figures in the healthcare environment. In gathering this data, I’ve also put into play my 30+ years in marketing, advertising and communications (the last 10 of which were specifically working with our nation’s nursing homes and assisted living facilities) to formulate this detailed study which I now submit for your review and action.

I wish you the best of luck in your future marketing/census building efforts, with the understanding that your “luck” will mostly come from the action you and your fellow staff members take in building and keeping a consistently strong census.

Sincerely,
Chip Kessler
PRESENTING …

THE FIVE CENSUS BUILDING MISTAKES TO AVOID IN 2013:
HOW TO MASTER THE NEW WORLD OF ATTRACTING MORE RESIDENTS

MISTAKE NUMBER 1: COMPLACENCY

Why wait? Let’s get right to the heart of the matter and not just slowly get to a major factor in a facility’s sing-song or declining census (and if your numbers are basically just staying at a consistently middling rate, it’s the same as declining because you’re not moving forward).

There are a number of reasons a person (and a facility) becomes complacent. But rather than do some psychological probe of these factors, which won’t specifically address your census, we’ll leave the analysis for others.

Instead, we’ll tackle the subject from the standpoint of how it robs your facility of attracting as many new residents as you possibly can. It’s honesty time. See how many of the areas below you and your facility can identify with:

• We’ve always had a decent to a good to a great census
• I get out from the building every once and awhile and go into the community to meet and talk with people
• We don’t really have to do any “marketing” because all the people in our region know about us and where we’re located
• We really don’t participate in very many community events
• We don’t really need to do anything because new families have always just come through our doors

I think you get the point. Sure it’s easy to sit back and congratulate yourself and your fellow staff members for a solid census. Or likewise it’s easy to sit back and say we’ve tried some things in the past to increase our numbers but we seem to just stay at a certain level no matter what … so why bother?

There are other words one might use instead of “complacent” to describe this latter attitude, but my purpose here is to not call anyone names. Rather, it’s to help you see that no matter if your census is at 100%, 80%, or 50%, there’s never a good time to mentally and physically check out from working your census. And yet my investigation shows that struggling facilities have repeatedly fallen short of a consistent effort. The question you must ask yourself today and in the future is, “Am I and our Facility Doing Everything We Can to Build our Census?”

A POINT TO REMEMBER: In my research I’ve discovered that quite often, a facility that has a census problem also has a morale problem. Poor morale often results when employees believe everyone’s not working for the same common goal. Here the goal is a consistently strong census. Battle complacency by having staff focus on this goal!
MISTAKE #2: FAILING TO MAKE SURE EVERYONE ON YOUR STAFF IS IN THE MARKETING MODE

Question: After the care and services your facility provides to your residents and families what’s the next most important job of everyone who works inside your doors? Answer: the marketing of the very same care and services your facility provides. My studies show that facilities that are struggling with census don’t properly grasp this fact!

You see, it’s not good enough to say “marketing … well, we have a person who does that.” Or “our marketing person along with our administrator or executive director handles this.” Nope, everyone who’s an employee in your building needs to be made aware of and understand that he and she is a representative of who you are and what you have to offer in your region and community. Certainly your key staff (marketing, administrator, executive director, director of nursing, social services director) is front and center in these efforts. However, your activities director and your facility’s religious leaders such as a pastor or rabbi (if you have one) can be a major asset here as well in your direct dealings with key referral sources like your local hospital discharge planners and physicians, seniors center, etc. Plus, you must drive home the point that everyone who cashes a paycheck (or in this day and age has their paycheck directly deposited into the bank) is a walking, talking representative of your facility in the region and community.

Example: if people know that Mildred is a charge nurse at your nursing home or that John is your assisted living community’s director of maintenance and said person’s acting irresponsibly in public, this will reflect badly on your facility, and potentially cause you to lose new residents. Why? Because Mary or John’s neighbor Teresa who witnesses this poor behavior is likely to look elsewhere for caregiving help for her aging mother (perhaps even keeping Mom at-home) because Teresa now believes your building is full of Mary’s or John’s. Case closed.

While some may not want to hear this, your marketing/census building efforts need to become a major priority for the entire staff because without filled beds, a facility’s focus changes. Jobs can and will be affected. It becomes a vicious cycle that leads to a bad destination. No, you don’t expect your housekeeping supervisor to suddenly go out and visit your local doctors, however this person needs to act as a sterling representative of your building when out in public, and be friendly and courteous to everyone she sees inside your doors.

POINT TO REMEMBER: Nursing facilities and assisted living communities that have every single staff member aware of the fact that census matters, can’t help but be on the right track. Conversely, it’s important the facility’s leadership makes every effort to involve all staff, plus include them on your census success stories. Give staff reasons to take “ownership” of your census and those who care about your facility will respond in-kind. Those who don’t, reveal themselves to be folks who can’t be counted on!
MISTAKE #3: NOT GIVING ENOUGH RESPECT TO THE POWER OF WORD-OF-MOUTH ADVERTISING

This is such an important subject that I produced a DVD program on it a short while ago. Certainly this is not a new concept, however, in this day and age I’ve found that far too many facilities are not giving this phenomenon the proper attention it deserves. Quite simply “Word-of-Mouth Advertising has the power to do any and all of the following for (and to) your building:

• Create the impression that your facility is a terrible place to live
• Cause people to believe your facility has problems with staff
• Prevent important referral sources from recommending your facility
• Make folks automatically rule out your building as a caregiving option
• Eventually drive you out of business

or …

• Position your facility as “the facility” in your region and community to live
• Enhance your reputation because you have loving and caring employees
• Motivate local hospital discharge planners & physicians to refer new residents
• Cause people in your region to make your facility their hands-down #1 choice
• Make your facility’s entire operation more profitable with a rewarding future

It’s pretty easy to choose which path you want to follow. However you can’t just say, “I really like the second group of results” and then sit back and wait for all of these good things to happen. You’ve got to make them happen! How? By the proper use of your local media (in your marketing and advertising that position your building’s image just the right way) and by cultivating outstanding personal relationships with happy and satisfied families and residents. This includes any of your former residents and/or families who have a good taste in their mouths regarding your case and services. Make sure to make proper use of these “champions” as they will work wonders for your census … if they are out in your region and community spreading positive information about what your building has to offer.

A POINT TO REMEMBER: People are going to talk … about the weather, the television program they watched last night, and your nursing home or assisted living facility- if you give them a reason (good or bad) to talk about you! Plus, its human nature that folks (in many cases) like to gossip and spread bad news more often than good news, so it’s vitally important that you give people plenty of reasons why they need to spread the “good word” about your facility. Make the effort to first discover who amongst your present family members (and residents as well if possible) that have a favorable impression of your fellow staff members and your building. Arm these folks with enough reasons why so that they can’t help spread the good word and what you’re doing on behalf of their loved ones. In the long-run, this kind of positive word-of-mouth advertising carries more credibility and has a greater impact on the general public than all the fancy advertising and marketing campaigns you can muster.
MISTAKE #4: FALLING SHORT IN THE ‘EXPERT’ GAME

You are new in the community and need an electrician, pronto! Not knowing anyone to ask, your first step is to go to the telephone directory or Google “electrician’s” in your town and see who’s got an advertisement. You see the following designations at the bottom of two big notices for potential candidates to repair your faulty kitchen outlets:

John Jones, Electrician
Sam Smith, Master Electrician

Quickly … which of the two grabs your attention? Might it be Mr. Smith? More than likely it’s so, and it’s not because you like the sound of his name more than Mr. Jones, or like the looks of his advertisement over the other gentleman’s. No, it’s probably because the following two words had an impact on you:

Master Electrician

You see, we all instinctively want the very best and to get it from the very best person possible. This is true whether we have an expert mechanic to repair our car, a plumber that demonstrates he knows what he’s doing when it comes to dealing with that leaky faucet, a doctor who’s earned our trust to tackle any medical issues … and just the right healthcare venue to tend to our loved one’s (our own) needs!

Accordingly, you want and need to position your nursing facility and/or assisted living community as The Home of the Healthcare Experts. This is of paramount importance in today’s new world of census building where trust and competence earns you respect … and more new residents. Best of all, gaining this kind of “authority status” is easier than you think, much easier in fact as we do business in the year 2013. How so? Because of one word I used in the very first sentence of this paragraph: position. Quite simply “expert status” in your local region and community is achieved when you look for and take advantage of those opportunities that put you and other key staff members in positions of authority.

Accomplish this and watch your census explode! Authority/Expert status can be developed via any number of speaking, writing, and other communicative means where the person-in-question (you, for example) and placed in the right venue at the right time. Quite frankly, this is an extremely powerful marketing and census building strategy that once accomplished will separate your facility from all the rest. It’s a subject that I can personally attest to its effectiveness and one that I never get tired about talking about and working with my nursing and assisted living facility clients to gain.

A POINT TO REMEMBER: Human beings naturally gravitate to someone or some thing that has achieved authority status. Nowhere is this more evident than in the healthcare field, and for our purposes here, a caregiving option such as a nursing home or assisted living for a loved one or oneself. We need to trust and respect those who are caring for someone who can no longer completely care for him or herself. Are you this person and this facility in your region and community?
MISTAKE #5: GOING IT ALONE

The task of building and maintaining a consistently strong census should not fall on the shoulder of just one person. If nothing else, I sincerely hope you’ve received this message as it’s been an overriding theme in this special report. Without a doubt, the facilities I’ve studied which struggle in getting and keeping their beds filled have generally left this responsibility to the marketing person (who usually doubles as the admissions person) with some assistance from the facility’s administrator or executive director. Indeed it’s the role of the facility’s marketing director to be the focal point for all census building, advertising and marketing initiatives. However, putting all of your “eggs in this one basket” in this new age of census building is a recipe for disaster. Why? Because it’s very difficult for just one or two key people to devote the enormous amount of time necessary to entirely grasp what’s best needed for the situation-at-hand.

Your facility’s census is too important to be left to chance or guesswork, or fall victim to less than your full attention. What may have worked in the past cannot be relied on into the future. Today’s forward thinking assisted living and nursing facility understands that there needs to be a solid foundation of marketing/advertising principles which are followed. Some of these principles have been covered in this special report:

- The role “Expert Status” successfully plays in your census building efforts
- Getting the entire staff to buy in and take part in the marketing of your facility
- How to best use the power of word-of-mouth advertising
- The morale busting problem of complacency

However there are several additional marketing/advertising principles for census building success to adhere to such as:

- Getting key local referral sources to take “ownership” of your facility
- The importance of making your facility a real destination spot
- The ability to have people visit your facility well before there’s a caregiving need
- How best to deal with any negative publicity your building receives
- How to cultivate free local positive publicity in your region and community (this is an extension on my chapter dealing with receiving great word-of-mouth advertising)

As you can see, there’s much more to your census building/marketing/advertising efforts than time and space permits in this special report. Attracting more new residents, today more than ever before, is truly a science and a work-of-art that needs to be studied and mapped out in a systematic fashion to give you continuous success day after day. It’s something I take a great deal of personal pride in as I work with my nursing facility and assisted living consulting clients. If you’ve liked what you’ve read in these pages, and think that my services may be “the missing piece” of your census building efforts, I invite you to visit www.extendedcareproducts.com to learn more about my consulting program, or if you wish please feel free to give me a call at 1-888-206-2244 to further discuss your facility’s particular needs. Thanks for reading … I wish you much future census success!