



Thriving in the Face of COVID-19



Hello,

Thank you for downloading the first eBook from Sabal Group: Thriving in the Face of COVID-19. As I write this in mid-June, I'm looking forward to celebrating Father's Day in a few days. But for hundreds of thousands, that holiday means something new this year: their dads, paw-paws, gramps, uncles, brothers, husbands and all-around-nice guys won't be with them. COVID-19 has forever altered how families will think about this day. And Mother's Day. And Christmas. And every other significant day in the lives of their family.

More than two million Americans have contracted the coronavirus, and as you know, seniors are those at highest risk of dying from it. While the full impact is yet to be tallied, I don't doubt the deadly virus has affected someone you know or a resident in your senior living community. And each loss diminishes each one of us.

When Kirkland, WA became the first hotspot, I realized the virus was going to directly impact the entire senior living industry. As I grieved for the anonymous Life Care Center patient, I knew I had to share my thoughts with the larger senior living community. Just as the virus spanned the globe, from a wet market in Wuhan to a meatpacking plant in a tiny Iowa town, I hope sharing these articles and strategic ideas can add value to your work in the face of its daily challenges.

One indelible lesson I've learned is that we're all in this together. In the face of a disjointed response from politicians, individual responses to social distancing, and personal decisions about the new abnormal, each one of us must chart a path forward. This year marks the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century. It's a year we'll leave to historians to sort out for a host of reasons. It's a year we'll all remember. But we still have to live it, one day at a time. As you figure out your next step, and the one after that, and the one after that, I hope these essays help you find your way. Together, we can not only survive, we can thrive. That's important to remember. Because our current and future residents are relying on us.

***Best,
Maribeth***

Table of Contents

Quiet Within a Maelstrom

Positive Action Defeats Fear

Marketing during a Crisis

Messaging in the Time of the Pandemic

Connecting with Your Audience

#AloneTogether: Putting Facebook to Work

Lessons for Senior Living Communities from Teens and Celebs

A Pivotal Moment

The Elephant in the Room

Reputation Management: Restoring Faith in Senior Living

Finding Our Footing in a New Landscape

What's Next?



*Society is being disrupted
in ways and at a rate
we've never seen.*

Quiet Within a Maelstrom

Travel bans. School closings. Sports canceled.

From Disney to your local preschool, from the NBA to grade school soccer, nothing is exempt from the uncertainty surrounding the current response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We're deluged with hourly updates, breaking news, social media disinformation, and opinions from people who shouldn't be sharing them. And it's all moving faster than we can adapt. One minute I was hearing a news anchor talk about the PGA canceling The Players Championship, scheduled for March 12-15. The next minute, ABC was running a TV commercial hyping that very golf event. What we think we know and what experts are telling us can be old news within minutes.

The week of March 9th has been a hard but clear lesson in how interconnected we are in a digital world. When one person panics on social media, the panic spreads to untold thousands, and ultimately, Amazon sells out of toilet paper, cleaning wipes, and bulk soup. In the midst of it all, many senior living communities feel like they are one case away from becoming the next [life care center crisis](#).

Hurricanes? Coastal residents, including senior living communities, have a plan for those. Tornadoes and floods? Most people have a plan of action in mind. Blizzards, fires, or earthquakes? We've all lived through them to some degree or another. We keep moving forward, with grace and confidence.

But a novel virus that has become a global pandemic in less than two months? That's something few have considered or prepared for. Consider the case of the U.S. federal global health team. It was led by a top White House official and in charge of the nation's response to pandemics, but that official left the administration in 2018 and the entire team was subsequently dismantled. Their work was absorbed by other agencies. And, as we're seeing with testing issues, even the CDC wasn't ready with a plan to address this pandemic. If federal government agencies are not prepared, is it reasonable to expect senior living communities to be?

Society is being disrupted in ways and at a rate we've never seen. Caught in the middle are marketing teams facing uncharted territory. No doubt you're reconsidering public events. Your team may need to prepare press releases as well as internal

and external-facing updates for employees, residents, and their families. Social media still needs attention, and it's important to avoid ["tone-deaf" posts](#). In a fluid situation, what you write today you'll more than likely be revising tomorrow.

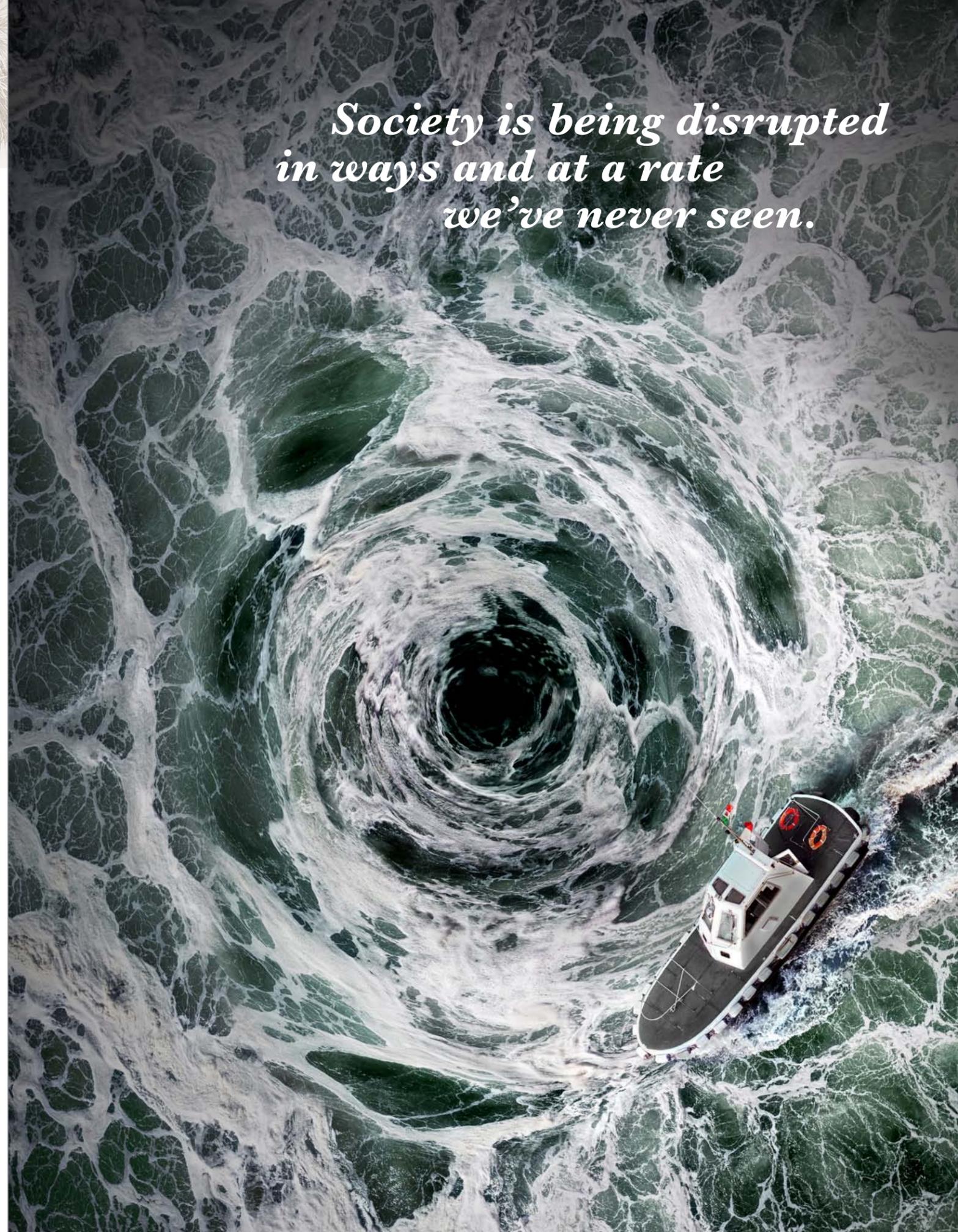
Your current marketing strategy may be languishing at the bottom of an overloaded to-do list, lost in the face of daily challenges to keep communicating and maintaining transparency. Whether or not your senior living community is directly impacted by COVID-19, this crisis will pass. But what will be forfeited due to abandoned campaigns, reallocated budgets, and lost momentum? No one can accurately predict when this situation will be in our rear view mirror. But now is the time to develop a strategy for the duration and a messaging plan for the post-Coronavirus days.

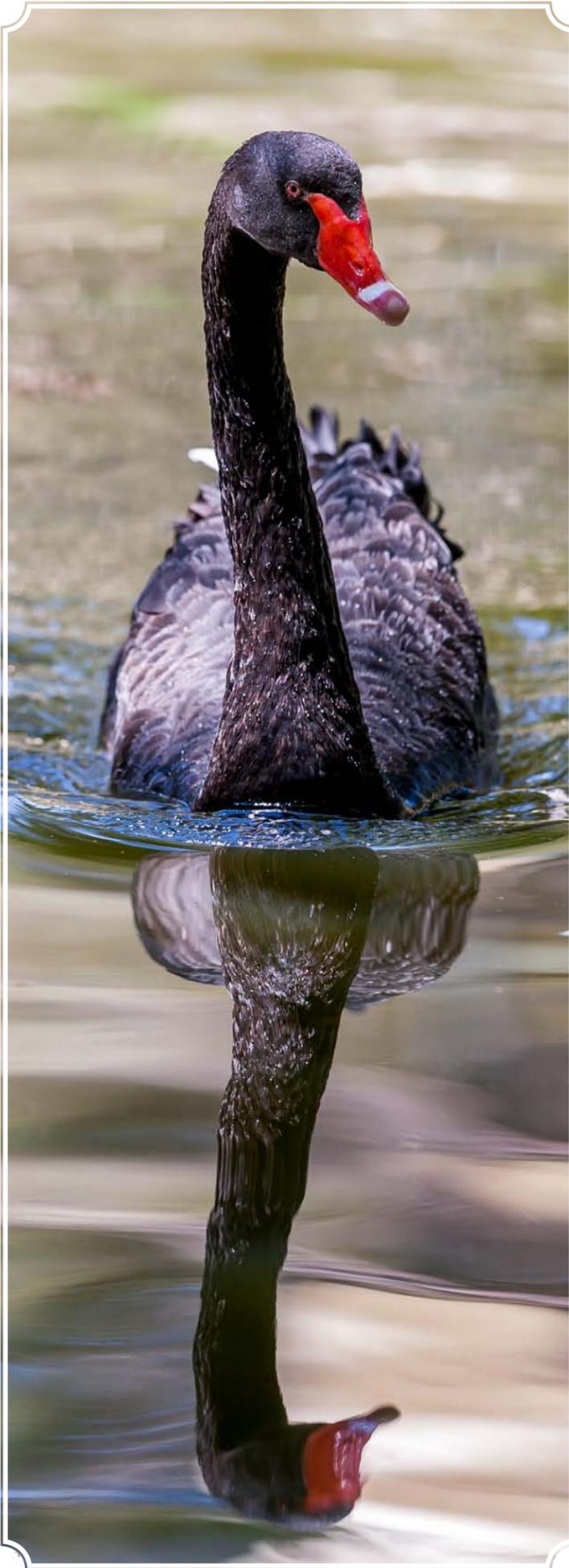
Take a moment to breathe. Assess where you are in your marketing campaign and acknowledge you might not have all the answers. It's fair to put some efforts on hold and make the best of a fluid situation by trying new ideas. It's also wise to ask for help, whether for the short or long term.

Successfully moving past these next few months is going to take creative and innovative thinking. When you're faced with the challenge of maintaining a pipeline of prospects, an external agency can provide fresh ideas, on-demand assistance, and new forms of content so that reaching your marketing goals doesn't lag while you work on delivering trustworthy information to your residents, families, and employees.

Let's face it, the usual way of doing business is on hold until further notice. This is the right time to think outside the box and explore the advantages of omnichannel marketing with a trusted expert.

In the meantime, wash your hands and stay three feet away from one another. Remain calm, avoid panic, and, together, we can forge a new path to success.





Positive Action Defeats Fear

COVID-19 is a black swan event, and business as usual isn't possible. In our current situation, we have the opportunity and obligation to create a place of emotional safety for our audiences, our colleagues, and our loved ones. How we see the current situation, choices we make, and how we act directly reflect our point of view. Actions, after all, speak louder than words and promises.

Our interconnectedness in the digital world makes it easy to find examples of companies creating safe places for their audiences out of compassion, grace, and empathy. Here are three examples that might inspire you.

Home Safaris

[Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden](#) understands that a pandemic means no zoo visitors. Closing the facility directly impacts their bottom line. They also saw a need to help others as schools across the nation are closing. They put their mission to create adventure, convey knowledge, conserve nature, and serve their community into action by creating the Home Safari Facebook Live event. Each afternoon at 3pm EDT, they livestream original content followed by an activity kids can do at home to reinforce the lesson. Youngsters get high-quality content, parents get a break, and the zoo lives up to its mission.

Senior living communities can follow suit, albeit without the charms of Fiona the hippo or Moe the sloth. If you've canceled an informational event, why not livestream it? But don't stop there. With groups of 10+ being frowned upon, why not stream a performance by a guest musician or a lecture? What can be done in person can be a live event streamed through social media.

Serving Others

Few people look to law enforcement for inspiration, but that changes if you follow [Oconee County Georgia Sheriff's Office](#) on Facebook. On an ordinary day, you can count on

them to post wry and humorous comments about the foolish questions they get and local situations they encounter. When facing a crisis, the direct, no-nonsense, yet compassionate posts will lift your spirits. The way they speak to their huge audience (142,000+) is a masterclass.

Change is something we resist, but we can turn this black swan event into an opportunity to connect in different ways and learn new skills.

Tone-deaf social media posts are popping up everywhere. Southwest Airlines is one example, promoting their \$49 sale when hardly anyone is flying. It's time to take a second look at your social content and check that you're on message without bringing the doom and gloom. Brush up on your videos skills and put your CEO front and center the way [Collington, A Kendall Affiliate](#) did with their update on Facebook. They're also balancing COVID-19 informational posts with content that isn't about the virus. Finding the right mix might require some trial and error, but business as usual isn't the appropriate approach.

Share in New Ways

Numerous brands are sharing excellent content for home-bound audiences. Open Culture.com offers [free coloring books from 113 museum collections](#) for download. Google has a website with 3-D [tours of five national parks](#) from Alaska to the Dry Tortugas. The [Google Arts & Culture](#) website features 2,500 museums around the globe you can visit digitally. If you just want to get away from everything, head to the [Access Mars website](#) for a 3-D tour of the Martian surface from NASA.

It's difficult to compete with world-class art and Mars, but looking at the way this information is presented can generate ideas about how to share what makes your senior living

Don't let fear win.

community special. Tap a colleague who loves creating videos and ask them to brainstorm new ideas about showcasing your facility. Consider recording community member responses to direct questions or facilitating video calls between members and their families. If personal tours are limited, why not update your floor plans? Or better yet, replace floor plans with 3-D renderings that can be downloaded with to-scale furniture so potential members can see how their belongings will fit.

Connect and Care in the Face of Change and Fear

Change is something we resist, but we can turn this black swan event into an opportunity to connect in different ways and learn new skills. Test-drive new communication programs by setting up digital meetings between colleagues working from home. Tap into your coworkers' abilities to troubleshoot under pressure and give them the chance to share new ideas and technology.

In his 2002 Marquette University commencement address, Fred Rogers said,

“...because deep down we know that what matters in this life is much more than winning for ourselves. What really matters is helping others win, too, even if it means slowing down and changing our course now and then.”

COVID-19 is imposing a course change. But it isn't the only outside pressure doing that. We can embrace it with grace to provide safe spaces for your audiences, both real and digital. Or you can let your fear overwhelm you. Don't let fear win.

Marketing during a Crisis

COVID-19. Coronavirus. Pandemic. Shelter in place. Social distancing. Self-isolation. We're adding new words to our vocabulary. But no matter which words are creeping into our conversations, we need to carefully consider how we're speaking to one another.

Shared Vocabulary

Have you noticed the way social media and the news talk about senior living? Since the early reports about Lakeland, WA, I am noticing "nursing homes" is the default descriptor for all of senior living. While we have a very specific definition of what constitutes a skilled nursing facility, the rest of the country uses the generic phrase. Why? Because it's a form of shorthand to distance those older people at higher risk from ourselves.

This type of "older than me" thinking is becoming increasingly evident among Baby Boomers. The New Yorker recently published an online article about the difficulty of [convincing Boomers to take the virus seriously](#). Why? Boomers don't think of themselves as being old. In their minds, the people at risk are at least 10 years older than they are. Rolling Stone's contribution was a [first-person piece](#) that compares Boomers to teens, both groups don't want to be told to do anything!



Marketing Vocabulary

For those tasked with marketing during the COVID-19 crisis, finding the right words in addition to the best tone and voice to communicate can be a challenge. Uncertainty is now the norm. As we consider how to move forward, we need to answer critical questions about how to speak to our audience and what the conversation should be about.

My best advice is to take a moment and breathe. It's okay not to have all the answers right this minute. Let's face it, the situation is fluid, and there's no national consensus. Once we accept that, we can move forward. Punit Renjen, Deloitte Global CEO recently published an important article about [the heart of a resilient leader](#) during this crisis. In case you missed it, I've adapted his five key points to provide a framework as you evolve your message during the crisis.

1. Recognize and acknowledge the situation.

We can't control everything, but we can control how we respond to both the big challenges and the small annoyances. Set aside time to speak with your colleagues about what's happening. Schedule a phone call or better yet a video call, so you can listen to the pauses and the emotion in what is said and what is left unsaid. Be an empathetic and compassionate listener. Accept that there are apt to be child-size interruptions, and take the opportunity to see how they are juggling parenting, homeschooling, and working from home or outside the home. By making employees your first priority, you'll identify needs within the larger audience.

2. Remember your mission and put it first.

It's time to reread your mission statement and evaluate what you need to do to fulfill it. The mission statement for one of my clients states their primary goal is to "...uplift the lives of older adults and those who care for them." Putting the needs of your residents and caregivers first makes it easy to identify the things everyone must do and the things that could be done later. Use the mission statement as a binary litmus test to make your decisions and allocate resources.

3. Perfection is the enemy.

No matter what you're doing during this crisis, focus on delivering timely

information, quality content, and clear communication to the best of your ability. Let go of any need to get it "right" or perfect. No one can afford to wait while you find the perfect word or phrase. Focus on immediate needs, and get on with it.

4. Trust matters.

Trust is built on a foundation of transparency, relationships, and experience. Be honest and upfront with your internal and external audiences. Own your story. Don't let the fear of being wrong paralyze you. Be prepared to revise and change as you need to, with newer and better information. Stay in touch with your audience. They'll remember what you did, not what you said you would do.

5. Now is not all there is.

This crisis will pass. When it does, experts are predicting it will speed up future changes. More people working from home, an increase in online learning, and greater reliance on delivery and shopping services will become the norm. Look at the "temporary measures" you've implemented. How can you leverage them to improve the lives of your community members and employees? Did a stop-gap measure, like putting your [head of security in charge of your Twitter account](#), turn out to be a genius move? The National Cowboy Museum & Western Heritage Museum did just that, and Tim is now a Twitter star.

No matter what challenges you're facing right now and in the immediate future, all I can promise is that you'll be asked to change, adapt, improvise, and make it work. Pause a minute. Consider your options, and then try something. You might discover a better way to deliver your message. Remember, you're not alone. We're all in this together.

Messaging in the Time of the Pandemic

COVID-19 has upended marketing for everyone. As the weeks pass while we stay home, you might find yourself humming the haunting lyric from 1776, “Is anybody there? Does anybody care? Does anybody see what I see?” If you know the musical, you know this is John Adams’ moment. His lament becomes determination to press forward with a vision of what the future can be. And you know how that ends!

Right now, in the quiet moments, you can be forgiven for wondering if anyone is listening to you. I get that because I have those same moments, doubts, and questions. But I believe the right messages, on the right platform, are vital during these difficult weeks. It is possible to turn adversity into an advantage that differentiates you



Right now, in the quiet moments, you can be forgiven for wondering if anyone is listening to you.

Isolate Together

If you find yourself consuming more media as you spend more time indoors, you’re probably seeing an uptick in messaging from brands big and small about our shared journey. Why? Because smart brands know they have a captive audience craving quality content. They’ve taken this opportunity to speak out in new and different ways that connect with their audience. One such message that caught my eye was a Facebook TV ad.

For the first time in 2020, Facebook created a Superbowl ad promoting its groups feature. The central message was that there’s a group for everyone, whether you’re a kazoo player or parent of a teenager. On April 1st, Facebook launched a new ad with the message that [“We’re never lost if we can find each other.”](#) The ad directs viewers to its [COVID-19 support page](#), where anyone can request or offer help.

Like Facebook, you should have a YouTube channel. Not sure why? It’s the second-largest search engine in the world. It has more adult American users than Facebook.

Find What Matters

What’s your mission? No matter what challenges you’re facing right now, your mission remains the same. But it’s time to pivot to new ways of sharing it. For those in senior living, your marketing up until now may have focused on promoting the advantages of your community, enriching experiences, upscale amenities, and a caring staff. But those attributes are less relevant right now. Why not follow the advice in Dear Evan Hansen? The anthem [You Will Be Found](#) asks if you’ve ever felt forgotten, lost, or lonely. But the song’s message is that there are people around you, you will be found, you will not be forgotten, and you are not alone. And isn’t that what your audience wants to hear?

Analyze your data about where your audience looks for information about senior living. Identify the best-performing platforms where your messages are read, shared, and liked. Then translate your mission into a message that your audience will find a home, a community, a shared sense of purpose when they join your senior living community. If you don’t have a best-performing platform, the data will encourage you to re-think your current social strategy. And if you don’t have any data, it’s time for a crash course in analytics.

Person-to-Person

From CEO to delivery workers, the daily impact of COVID-19 is felt by everyone. While the experts weigh in on how best to flatten the curve, average Americans aren’t content to stay home. Why? Because we crave human interaction.

Video is the best way to provide that person-to-person experience instead of just another upbeat social media post or blog article about 10 ways to stay entertained during a pandemic. Whether you produce it on your iPhone or rely on a professional, video lets you put a human face on your brand. Create one to reassure families, offer virtual tours, or give residents a platform to perform. But don’t just shoot it, post it, and forget it. With a modest budget, you can promote it on social platforms to get it in front of a wider audience. Invest in an innovative ad campaign on Google to drive traffic that otherwise might never visit your website. Then create the next one.

No matter what you’re doing in terms of marketing right now, please know you’re not alone. We’re all facing the same challenges.

One New Thing

From photos of [hotels with room lights creating a heart](#) to home videos of citizens applauding healthcare workers, we’re all craving positive visual messages. Now is not the time to rely on traditional messaging on the usual channels. For the next two months as a short-term experiment, try creating innovative messages on the channels you know and at least one new one. Whether you’re a fan of email blasts or direct mail, change it up by offering information on virtual tours of museums near you, your best homemade recipes, or ways to alleviate loneliness. If you’ve never considered Pinterest, set up an account, and then reach out to your residents and ask them to share their favorite pins and boards.

No matter what you’re doing in terms of marketing right now, please know you’re not alone. We’re all facing the same challenges. And when you need someone to talk to, Sabal Group is here for you. Ask us anything. Together, we can find the best solution for you.



Connecting with Your Audience

Throughout history, hermits have been the exception.

Humans are hardwired for social interaction, for person-to-person connections. We seek to build a community with one another. And that's one reason we're struggling with sheltering in place, staying at home, and self-isolation. We crave contact. The first week, it was a bit of a lark. Something to challenge us. Can I do this? What will it be like to work from home, homeschool the kids, and share space with my spouse 24/7? The second week was less fun. By the fourth week, well, let's just agree not to talk about Fight Club.

No matter how you're coping with our new reality, you still have to reach your audience. Marketing still matters. And that's why a focus on your direct mail campaign, as part of an omnichannel process, is the best strategy for both short- and long-term success.

The Power of Touch

Research shows that touching and being touched are elemental human needs. However, during this pandemic, touch is the last thing we should do. When you think about senior living events and in-person tours, what are the most common things we see? A handshake. Facial expressions. Body language. Human-to-human connection. Each one of these helps a potential resident assess your community and their fit within it.

For an industry that has a long and slow sales process, the power of personal touch, meeting people, and making a connection is priceless. When in-person connections are curtailed, you can reach out and connect through a smart direct mail campaign.

Solutions Instead of Sales

You might not call your prospective audience the Cursive Generation, but it's an apt descriptor. For Boomers and their parents, penmanship is a point of pride. They use it in daily life by mailing checks to pay bills and writing letters or postcards to friends and family. Sending them mail taps into this form of communication.

If you've paused your sales campaign, now is an excellent time to experiment with fresh ideas for a direct mail campaign. Research shows your audience is a fan of direct mail. And in a time when days blur together and everyone is staying home, high-quality mail can help you stand out in a sea of competitors, providing connection and useful information. Now is not the time to fall back on the tried-and-true pieces you've used in the past. Your calls-to-action, primary content, and visual collateral should be retooled to reflect a new purpose and our new reality.

Consider sharing your community's favorite recipes to help home cooks vary the menu. You can offer tips for downsizing as bored seniors tackle spring cleaning. If you're scheduling live events on Facebook to help build a feeling of community, send postcard invitations to make prospects feel like they're a valued member of the group. To acknowledge our need for physical touch and feeling connected, you could create a mailer with instructions on how to fold an origami bear to share a virtual hug. It's interactive, it's unusual, and it can brighten someone's day.

Looking for something a little more personal? The seniors in your community have had their daily lives curtailed, so why not involve them in a direct mail campaign? Ask for handwriting samples and choose the best to pen legible, handwritten notes to your high-value prospective audience. Or ask everyone to write down the one thing they love most about your senior living community. You'll have new content for an entire series of campaigns, current testimonials for your website and social media, and graphics for a direct mailer. And you'll validate your residents' experiences and contributions to your community.

#EmotionalConnection

As the song says, you don't know what you've got till it's gone. You will return to in-person events, hugs, and handshakes. You will host onsite tours and information luncheons again. You will continue to leverage digital media to stay connected. In the meantime, why not reach out to touch people via direct mail too? It can make all the difference to your marketing campaign, and, more importantly, to your audience.

Humans are hardwired for social interaction, for person-to-person connections.





#AloneTogether: Putting Facebook to Work

If pressed, I'm the first to admit my family has been spending more time on social media since mid-March. Since we are confined to home, it's not surprising our innate craving for human connection has us reaching out to friends and family. We're following the news on Twitter, catching up with friends on Facebook and Instagram, connecting with Zoom parties, and lifting our spirits with silly Tik-Tok videos.

Brands are also relying on social platforms for new ways to reach their audiences. For instance, About Face Bootcamp, my workout "home" for the past seven years, has had to convert its entire business model due to COVID-19 restrictions. Instead of shutting their doors, they've shifted to Facebook and now provide 3-4 live workouts daily. The videos are on a members-only private page called Aboutletes. But they didn't stop there.

They recognize the importance of the personal trainer relationship, so members also have the option for personal training sessions via a Facebook messenger video. While no one knows if this model will thrive once we return to the gym, it is clear the current approach means owner Jena will have more options when things reopen. By thoughtfully embracing the new social approach, she's laying the groundwork for future success. Smart businesses across all industries need to do the same thing, taking a holistic and long-range view of their social media marketing initiatives.

Integrated Marketing Approach

Senior living communities are accustomed to using social media as part of their marketing strategy. But tough times call for fresh approaches. While Jena is fighting to keep her fitness business alive, senior living communities are fighting a different challenge in the face of COVID-19. For every feel-good story about a senior living community, the media publishes a story about long-term care and skilled nursing facilities being [ravaged by the virus](#).

In an industry working overtime to promote an image of healthy, active seniors, how do you overcome perception issues? How do you counter negative stories without appearing to be insensitive or out of step? In a time when we're six feet away from one another and wearing masks, how do you build the bonds of community? In a nutshell: social media powered by omnichannel support, using multiple channels to achieve one goal. For example, social media supported by expertly targeted email campaigns.

Eblasts and Microtargeted Ads

Brands that tap into the power of an engaged audience recognize they can't simply publish a post and expect an engaged audience to show up. Plenty of brands pump out social content that fails to resonate with anyone. Few likes, fewer comments, and zero shares are neon flags signaling a lack of interest by their followers.

Savvy brands recognize that social posts flourish only when they provide an active support strategy. Successful brands understand the value of multiple posts promoting their premier content. They leverage the expertise of full-time social media managers to run micro ad campaigns as signal boosters to reach the right audience. But if that's not in your budget, it's time to explore other options.

When you can't invite your audience to visit your community in person, a virtual event is almost like being there. Facebook is rife with ideas about ways to connect using video for virtual events. But successful events rely on behind-the-scenes prep. As with anything, you can't just put it out there and expect people to show up.

One major component of a successful digital event is omnichannel support. Once you decide on the nature of the event, the prep work turns to the actual production tasks and event promotion. Chances are good that you've got in-house talent handling the production. But do you have the right lists for your email or direct mail campaign to successfully promote the event? Sourcing the right data to boost awareness demands the right partner. And the right partner for data is Sabal Group.

Break Out Stars

The RiverWoods Group communities in New Hampshire have been super successful on Facebook with live events that go beyond the ordinary. Every Wednesday, they host a movement video to encourage their audience to stay active. But they're doing more than hosting dance parties. A recent [15-minute video on downsizing](#) garnered 14,000+ views.

If you're longing for an audience that numbers in the thousands, the right content deserves a signal boost. Sending creative eblasts to the right list of prospects is an economical solution. It helps build a short-term audience of people looking for information, ideas, and diversions while they're stuck at home. And it can build a long-term audience who will keep you in mind when their needs change in the future.

Facebook and Instagram are ideal platforms for visually-focused campaigns. Endearing photos of [seniors wearing colorful masks](#), especially with the addition of red clown noses, lifts everyone's spirits. But it doesn't do much to build your brand and reap the rewards of new community members. If you're ready to try something new to engage the right audience, it's going to take an integrated marketing approach using the best data and the right channels delivered on a mix of devices.



*...the younger generation
can show us the best ways
to connect in a digital world.*

Through video.



Lessons for Senior Living Communities from Teens and Celebs

From what I've observed these past six weeks, teens seem to have the right idea. Wait. What? Teens? Perhaps it's more accurate to say the younger generation can show us the best ways to connect in a digital world. Through video. And if your senior living community intends to thrive in 2020, you need to follow their example.

Digital Natives

Gen Z can rightfully be called digital natives. Born between 1995 and 2010, this cohort has been exposed to the digital world from their earliest days. They live their lives tied to a smartphone, nimbly navigating between apps to connect with brands, friends, and family.

Highly visual, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and YouTube are the social media platforms of choice for Gen Z. Older generations might watch a concert or performance once in a while as they shelter in place, but Gen Z is spending almost 3.5 hours watching videos on YouTube as part of their normal routine. It's their most-visited website. Why? According to ThinkwithGoogle, 7 in 10 say [watching videos](#) helps them feel more connected with others, and 80% say they learn something or acquire new skills.

Live from...Home

Hollywood is no stranger to the power of video. It's a celluloid connector between people. While everyone is sheltering in place, Hollywood continues to connect us. The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon can no longer broadcast from Rockefeller Center, but that hasn't stopped Fallon. Instead, he's using his home as a location for his At Home Edition. His wife and two daughters are his audience, camera operator, and production team. As a result, the show is no longer a polished comedic studio talk show. It has found a sweet spot as it veers from monologue and familiar bits (thank you notes are still present) to spontaneous and human moments when his wife misses a music cue or a daughter asks him for gummy worms. The result, according to Vulture.com, is a show that's a "[go-to source of coronavirus comfort content.](#)"

Some Good News

It comes as no surprise that people want to laugh or find great

content to relieve the sameness of life at home. John Krasinski's Some Good News YouTube show uses that recipe in his new series. Each week, the episode focuses on sharing only good news, ranging from comedic insider bits with Hollywood friends to guest appearances by major stars.

In the [second episode](#), which has gone viral, Krasinski and wife, Emily Blunt, chat with Aubrey, a disappointed 9-year-old whose trip to see Hamilton on Broadway was canceled due to the pandemic. Her backup plan? Rewatch Mary Poppins Returns to see Lin-Manuel Miranda. Krasinski surprises her with news he'll give her a trip to Broadway to see the musical when it reopens. But here's what made this one go viral.

*Through the magic of the conference call, the show's original cast do the opening number for her.
It's an electric moment. Diggs, Odom, Miranda,
and the rest of the cast sing their hearts out.
For a little more than four minutes, we're all part of
the shared experience of live theater via Zoom.
And that's why it went viral.
It was honest. It was genuine. It was authentic.*

Embrace Good Enough

[Our need for connection](#) is amplified during social distancing. Your marketing calendar has been upended and is in flux as you try to anticipate what's next. That's why you need to think outside your go-to strategies to connect with your audience. It's time to tackle video.

It's probably going to have an uphill learning curve. Accept it. Strive for good enough and let perfection go. Your audience is willing to connect with you through video. But don't leave them on their own to find you. Just as Some Good News and The Tonight Show rely on others to promote their work, your content needs similar omnichannel support.

Just remember to ask for help so the right audience can find your content.

A Pivotal Moment

Pivot. Merriam-Webster defines pivot as a “central point, pin, or shaft on which a mechanism turns or oscillates.” But the word also describes human action as we turn from one direction to another. Business pundits describe it as the moment when excuses become action or the shift to Plan B.

Pivot. It's a word, a concept. And it keeps running through my mind.

Pivot. It's an active choice. It's a conscious choice. It's an idea I have been stressing to my clients.

In marketing, campaigns need to be tracked, measured, and evaluated. Future steps depend on a solid return or developing a new strategy. This requires an investment in time, thought, and resources. But when your carefully considered plans are upended because of a global pandemic, the usual becomes unusual and a new normal begins. Like it or not, we've all been forced to pivot.



Pivot.

*It's an active choice.
It's a conscious choice.
It's an idea I have been
stressing to my clients.*

Change is Hard

Change is a challenge for humans. Even when we recognize the benefits of change, we're hesitant to take the necessary steps.

Why? Researchers tell us we resist change because:

- We focus on the negative aspects of the change
- We believe we must change everything all at once
- We recall previous attempts that ended badly or were poorly managed
- We believe we will lose something as a result of the change
- We don't believe the new way will benefit us

Let's face it, we all know we should exercise, eat a healthy diet, and get enough sleep. It's not a secret. And yet. The majority of us fail to do these three things as part of our daily lives, whether we're sheltering in place or free as a bird. We know we should, but we don't do it. Why? Because change is hard. It's easier to keep on doing what we're doing, even when we know better.

Adapt or Die

Evolution gifted humans with a valuable skill: adaptability. In a changing environment, the ability to adjust meant we could survive whatever Mother Nature threw at us. Winter blizzards? Check. Scorching summer temperatures? Check. Carnivorous prey faster than us? Check. We made our homes on top of mountains and along the shores of the ocean. We learned to thrive in the arctic and the deserts. Humans adapted. But now that we're civilized, adaptability has become a less common trait.

In the business world, adaptability can be the difference between success and becoming obsolete. Eastman Kodak was the giant in photography for decades. When was the last time you used film to take a photo? In 1928, IBM's punch cards were the industry standard. When did your computer last require one? DuPont was founded in 1802 as a gunpowder mill. Today, after a merger with Dow Chemical Company, it is the world's largest chemical

company. Each of these corporate giants pivoted at a crucial moment. They adapted to thrive, not just survive.

Global is Local

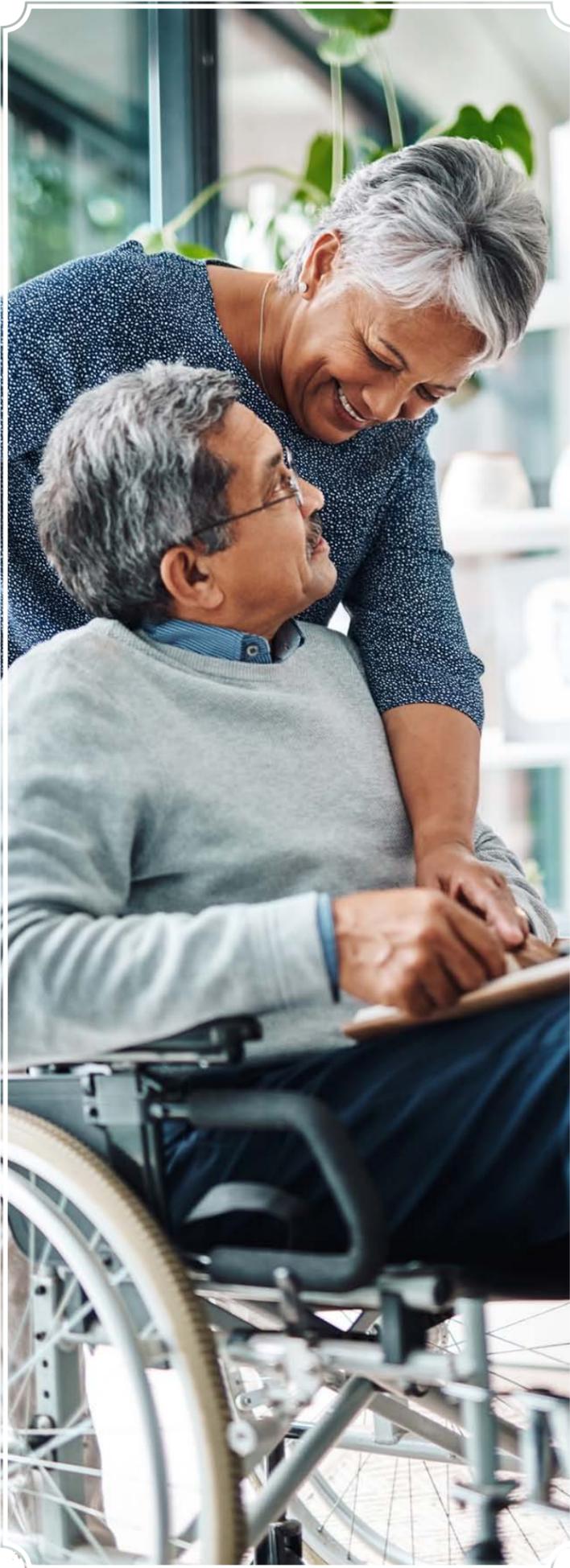
The pandemic has underscored how interconnected our world has become. Businesses from senior living to higher education are learning firsthand what mom-and-pop shops face in our digital world. Global is the new local. And without a strong and relevant digital connection, you will be as irrelevant as those unused rolls of film or punch cards.

My clients have responded to the current situation in one of two ways. Some choose to continue following their tried-and-true pre-pandemic strategy. Others pivot to find new ways to achieve their goals. The latter are the brands that accept reality and understand [the need to adapt their marketing strategies](#). They've turned to virtual meetings, webinars, and Facebook Live. But it's not just about new ways of sharing information.

Agile brands rely on targeted lead generation to reach the right audience with [fresh email and direct mail campaigns](#). They leverage accurate lists of prospects that most closely match current residents to provide useful information and direct their attention to online events or Zoom sessions. Their mission hasn't changed, but their message has pivoted to address our new realities. For example, [RiverWoods Group senior living communities effectively use video](#) to reach their audience on Facebook. Every Wednesday they host a movement video to encourage their audience to stay active. But they're doing more than hosting dance parties. A recent 15-minute video on downsizing garnered 14,000+ views.

The New Normal

Sooner or later, things will shift back into more familiar patterns. As the ads say, we'll be back to hugging one another, sitting next to one another, and marketing like we did before all this began. But although it might look like the old normal, it won't be. [We've learned new lessons](#) about the power of pivoting and being adaptable. It's time for a new direction. Your future residents are waiting for you to take that first step.



The Elephant in the Room

Days run together, small tasks get overlooked, simple projects seem more complicated, and everything, everything takes more time, energy, and resources than expected. It's a side effect of COVID-19 no one wants to talk about. We might joke about it, but we're not laughing.

The truth is, we're tired of having to adapt. We're running low on grace and mercy. And we're worried about what happens next. The weight of the unknown is taking a toll on everyone.

It's the elephant in the room right now. What's next?

A New Normal

For senior living professionals, your definition of normal has been completely upended. According to The New York Times, [long-term care facilities have been hit hard](#) by the virus, with more than 19,000 deaths among residents. If you're part of a life plan community, the ripple effects of this crisis have directly impacted you too. Day-to-day marketing activities have been suspended as team members are asked to shift their focus to more critical needs. While you're rolling up your sleeves to become front line workers, the bottom line isn't going to stay off your radar until things return to "normal."

Many marketing teams have pivoted successfully by embracing digital solutions to engage with prospective residents. Facebook videos, Zoom events, direct mail campaigns, and e-blasts are being used to maintain connections with target audiences. Others haven't had the time to pivot, learn new techniques, or invest in new technology. Kudos to those who have successfully shifted to new ways of marketing during a crisis. But if you're in the latter group, it's time to step outside of your comfort zone. As strong, independent thinkers (a hallmark of successful marketing teams), we're loath to ask for help. But in this new normal, asking for help should be your first step.

Clone Your Team

I remember seeing Multiplicity, [a silly science-fiction comedy](#) starring Michael Keaton. Keaton plays a husband who duplicates himself so he can handle his job and make time for his family. Then he makes a second clone and hilarity ensues. While cloning yourself isn't an option, you do have partners behind the scenes who can give you a hand with the challenges you're facing.

Your marketing partners bring a wealth of experience and expertise to the table beyond the specific roles outlined in a Statement of Work. It might feel awkward, but take a chance and ask them to help you brainstorm ways to do more with less. At a time when everyone needs help, you're not going to offend a vendor by asking them to help you find viable solutions.

The truth is, we're tired of having to adapt. We're running low on grace and mercy. And we're worried about what happens next. The weight of the unknown is taking a toll on everyone.

#InThisTogether

This hashtag isn't just another marketing ploy. We're all looking for fresh ideas and new ways to add value to what we offer, whether we're a sales or service professional. You might be handling tasks normally outside your job description like Tim, the head of security, who has become the darling of Twitter now that he's running the [Nat'l Cowboy Museum account](#). As a Twitter newbie, his fresh approach is boosting brand awareness for the museum and adding fun and value to our Twitter feeds.

No one could have predicted Tim would become a Twitter star. But taking the chance was smart because a new approach brought fresh ideas.

#InThisTogether

Sharing Strengthens Us

Like you, Sabal Group has been pivoting and adapting. We're known for our ability to deliver the cleanest lists as part of an [omnichannel solution](#). But after speaking with clients over the last few months, I realize our conversations have evolved. We're now discussing broader issues. My contributions are more strategic. I'm sharing insight into what the most successful email campaigns do and the types of stories that convert because I'm deep in the weeds of data. This pivot has energized our partnership.

COVID-19 helped me realize I love to brainstorm with clients about new ways to succeed. I thrive on delivering the right information for each client. I recognize each client's strengths and the ability of a particular channel to reach the right people. Sleuthing through reams of data to compile the right list means I know your audience, and details about them can guide the tactics of campaign development.

So now is the time to ask. Why? Because sharing ideas about new campaign strategies enables me to help you succeed.



Reputation Management: Restoring Faith in Senior Living

We know seniors living in skilled nursing facilities (aka “nursing homes” by most media) run a markedly high risk of contracting Covid-19. And, we understand why. The older population, particularly those with disabilities or chronic illnesses, is at a higher risk for viruses in general. When that vulnerability combines with shared dining and common spaces, the need for hands-on care, and staff shortages, the predicament is worsened.

Long-term Care Facilities in the News

The need for more hospital beds has resulted in several states long-term care facilities to admit Covid-positive patients, putting the larger community’s population at risk. This is big news. According to an [NPR piece on May 9](#),

“As of Wednesday, the Kaiser Family Foundation reported 5,215 people died from the virus in long-term care facilities in New York — 20% of the state’s total number of dead. New Jersey had the second-highest rate with 4,556 reported cases in their facilities, 53% of the state’s total death toll.”

This big news continues to gather steam. A recent [NBC News release](#) offers privately compiled data indicating nursing home deaths account for more than half of fatalities in 14 states. That number will grow, and as the government continues to crunch the numbers for public release and new cases are reported, a final count cannot be determined. The article also points out that the senior care industry recognizes the need for a substantial increase in testing capacity and protective equipment for staff.

We see what’s happening out there, the reaction from both media and public policymakers. A notable example is the [\\$611K fine of Life Care Center of Kirkland, WA](#). Most of us can understand this response, at least to some degree. Senior care communities have had a long and difficult history with infectious

disease prevention. And while we know skilled nursing facilities are not congruent with continuing care communities, that’s not common [public knowledge](#). If we want to get ahead of the perception in terms of messaging, we need to have the scaffolding in place to address staff and training shortages, ensuring we adhere to current best practices, and keeping an eye on future recommendations.

The Reputation Effect

With a disease that spreads in high rates in an elderly, vulnerable population, our industry is seeing a notable drop in inquiries, move-ins, occupancy, and, most devastatingly, trust. [LeadingAge](#), a highly respected non-profit organization in aging services, has been quick and thorough in responding to the crisis. In a recent statement, the organization explains most [media coverage is incomplete](#), and part of our response should be education.

In a reply to “fist shaking” against senior care organizations by some government and media outlets, [LeadingAge writes](#),

“We’re pitching for earned media placements of articles, interviews and op-eds on national TV, radio, and print outlets. We’ve shifted to a more aggressive and proactive stance, calling out the failures of federal response so far and calling for comprehensive support across the continuum of care.”

Brookdale’s President and CEO, [Cindy Baier, explains](#) another component missing from the larger public’s understanding is that skilled nursing facilities are not congruent with other senior living organizations, which typically include independent living, assisted living, and memory care. There’s a wide spectrum of care. While we know that, how can we ensure others understand?

Baier goes on to explain how she and her colleagues are addressing this global crisis: “We shared links with our peers, reporters and the public. It was important to share our knowledge and ideas with anyone interested, especially small senior housing operators that may not have the resources we have.” She adds that Brookdale’s COVID command center and clinical leaders were panelists on Argentum’s first webinar for best practices in battling COVID-19.

How Do We Respond?

It’s not an easy time to work in the senior care space. Amid widespread fear, an abundance of caution, and ever-changing guidelines from government sources, there’s a deluge of information released daily. How do we, advocates for and believers in the value of continuing care communities, help inform the conversation? How do we communicate with the public at large, our clients, and their families?

We can start by perpetuating truth, transparency, and care. It’s not much different from what we always do, but there’s a climb ahead as we move slowly forward. We know our senior living communities are doing everything they can to protect their residents, keep families safe and informed, and ensure the highest levels of care. And we, working in communications for these vital service providers, can keep the narrative honest and empathetic by using data to inform our messaging and by speaking clearly and concisely.

Let’s talk about the things we’re getting right. Let’s talk about how our communities are putting social distancing guidelines into place while recognizing the individuality and dignity of each person. Let’s talk about enhanced infection control measures, including taking temperatures regularly, increased staff training, the use of PPE (and the need for more), and testing capacity.

Let’s consider how we:

- Listen to our clients, their families, and others across social media. Are we monitoring sentiment effectively? Do we have a plan in place?
- Look to competitors and others in the space. We know that continuing care communities are different from skilled nursing facilities, but we need to keep a close eye on what’s happening throughout the senior care space.
- Differentiate our communities, standards of care, and disease protocols.
- Engage with potential residents and their families in the absence of events and on-site tours. Do we have virtual tours available? Have we considered how to do these live?
- Reach prospects with crucial information about Covid-19 and how we’re addressing the pandemic.
- Maintain or amplify brand awareness with thoughtful, well-timed correspondence.
- Provide digital or print CTAs that are not “tour” focused.
- Aid the public and our audience through content that is educational, timely, and useful. How can we provide a public service that also helps our brand?

As we receive world-wide data on this global crisis, we can see the sun starting to peek through the clouds. And while we’re a long way from normal, we have many tools at our fingertips to help our brands while helping our audience.

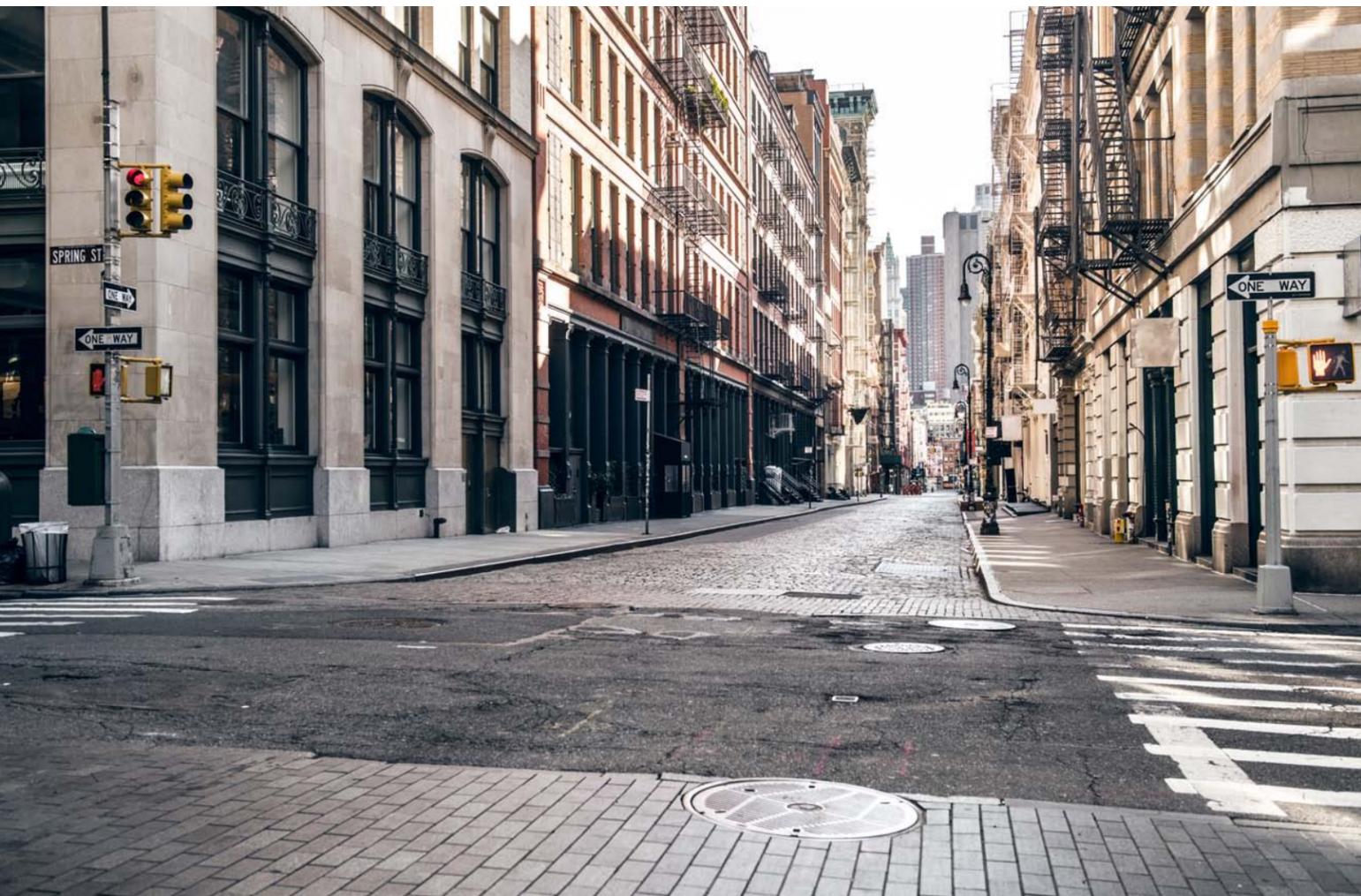
Finding Our Footing in a New Landscape

Traditionally, the Memorial Day holiday signals summer's start. It's a long, lazy weekend heralding warmer days, family vacations, and a slower pace for many. But now, it might become known as the start date for the new normal. As states begin to lift lockdown orders, everyone is wrestling with how to manage the transition from sheltering in place to resuming public life. It shouldn't surprise me that the response verges on chaos instead of consensus. But it does.

Flattening the Curve

After roughly three months of social isolation, it's easy to understand why we're ready to move forward. The United States has a population of about 358 million. As of May 20th, there have been approximately 1,559,300 people diagnosed with COVID-19 according to [the latest numbers](#) published by The New York Times. That's roughly 0.4% of the population. I believe most people want the best for their loved ones and for society as a whole. But it's difficult in the best of times to accept personal restrictions for the greater good. When we're stressed after months of staying home, and when we're talking about 95,000 people dying, the number becomes too abstract. Haven't we already done our part by flattening the curve?

This is why I'm not surprised to see people flocking to beaches and bars as restrictions are lifted. Getting a haircut or spending an hour in the gym may not be essential, but these actions are emblematic of what we've been denied: making personal choices without interference from an outside authority.



A Shifting Paradigm

Navigating this transition means walking a fine line between the needs of the individual and that of the greater society. Experts are weighing in on the 1,001 considerations and challenges facing institutions as they weigh the risks and benefits of restoring normal operations. For those in the senior living industry, the decisions that must be confronted are even more complex.

Before we ever heard the word "coronavirus," the senior living industry was adjusting to a host of challenges. Occupancy rates were falling and stay-in-your-own-home options were increasingly viable alternatives. Plus, Baby Boomers haven't quite reached the average age of most senior living residents. And let's face it, Boomers march to the beat of their own drum, which means they won't follow in the footsteps of their parents and grandparents when making housing choices. All this was already happening, and then a senior living center in Kirkland, Washington, became the epicenter of a COVID-19 outbreak in early March.

Three months later, nearly 80% of all COVID-19 deaths, with approximately 74,093 seniors aged 65 and older, have died.

The New Abnormal

Everyone in charge of institutions, from universities to senior living communities, is facing critical decisions regarding reopening. Even as the death toll climbs, images of our elders being isolated and dying alone resonate with the general public. While your community may not have been impacted directly by the virus, you're faced with adapting to the new abnormal. I have no doubt you're haunted by the question of how to move forward without appearing to be insensitive to the risks.

At the heart of our industry is the concept of community. We choose to gather together to serve the needs of our seniors who have chosen to be part of a larger group. But in the face of the pandemic, this gathering, this source of fellowship has been strained to its limits. Picking up the traces and re-establishing the group identity is just one of the tasks ahead. Connecting with and convincing outsiders that our communities are safe and secure options is the larger challenge. How to communicate our message without sounding callous or self-focused will not be easy or simple. But it is necessary.

Reinventing the Playbook

There are no easy answers to the questions facing our industry. There are best guesses and reasonable risks. We need to re-evaluate what has worked in the past in light of what we've learned this spring. If you're a bit dizzy from all of [the pivoting](#) you've been asked to do, it's okay to take time to work through the problems you're facing. You don't have to reinvent the wheel because others are facing the same challenges and sharing their ideas.

Universities and colleges have thousands of students choosing to engage in social activities outside of attending classes taught by hundreds of senior professors. Classrooms are used multiple times each day by transient groups. Dining halls cater to a fluid student body mixing in residence halls, libraries, and recreational spaces. How do you clean, maintain social distancing, and ensure everyone stays healthy? These are just a few of the big questions they're addressing.

Pastors and their churches are facing a different set of challenges. Church services are inherently about being part of a community. We expect to express fellowship by shaking hands, passing the collection plate, and singing together. How do you ensure distance between congregants during services and when entering and exiting? It gets more complicated when you consider sharing hymnals and bibles. Is there adequate time to clean between services on Sunday? Will the congregation wear masks?

A Delicate Balance

What we know to be true is that we're part of a service industry dedicated to providing a safe and secure environment for everyone, from our newest members to our part-time colleagues. As we move forward, we'll find simple and complex solutions requiring contributions from everyone. Innovative ideas and new ways of creating a shared experience will be necessary to survive and thrive in the post-pandemic world. I encourage you to re-envision the future for your community.

What's Next?

One. Hundred. Thousand.

On May 27, 2020, [The New York Times reported the number of deaths](#) due to COVID-19 has passed this milestone.

It's as if every person living in San Angelo, Texas or Kenosha, Wisconsin had died.

One. Hundred. Thousand.

If you asked 100,000 people to stand shoulder-to-shoulder, the line would stretch for 23.6 miles or roughly the distance from downtown Chicago to Elk Grove Village.

One. Hundred. Thousand.

It's the equivalent of 1 in 5 people in Wyoming dying in less than 80 days.

Senior Matters

If you had asked me three months ago what I would be thinking about at the beginning of June, I would have said upcoming conferences and new client calls. But that was before the new abnormal. Today, I'm focused on what the senior living industry faces after bearing the brunt of the pandemic.

A recent Forbes article notes [nursing home and assisted living community residents account for 43 percent of all deaths](#) attributed to COVID-19. But the team who crunched the numbers reveal this number is inaccurate because it does not include seniors who died in a hospital. The data is also incomplete because only 39 states provided data. Individual states report much higher death rates for seniors. In Minnesota, 81% of all deaths are

seniors in long-term care facilities, and in Ohio, it's 70%. With the [CMS now mandating reporting](#) from long-term care facilities (not assisted living), those numbers will undoubtedly increase.

Beyond the personal loss for each family, there's the impact on each senior community. The ripples from every death within a community touch each of us in the industry.

#AloneTogether

How do we recover? Together. I know each community is unique. But I also know that we must do this together to thrive and not merely survive. The coming days and weeks will see an increase in the easing of social restrictions. Schools will reopen. Sports will resume. At some point, contact tracing will become a fact of life. And sooner or later, there will be a vaccine. But senior living can't simply reopen the way other aspects of life can. Each community, and our industry as a whole, needs to forge a path forward that keeps residents safe and instills trust in the greater community about our ability to lead the way. We need to raise our voices and lead the conversation about what this pandemic has revealed: Our seniors are vulnerable and too easily ignored. Sadly underscored when the Texas lieutenant governor suggested [grandparents would be willing to die](#) for the sake of our economy.

Rebuilding trust needs to address overt and hidden issues, like ageism. And I believe the best way to rebuild trust in senior living is by leading the conversation, not merely responding. It will require a new level of transparency as we hold these conversations. Knowing the right platforms to connect with the right audience ready to hear your message is vital. But it all begins with having a sound plan in place to address the issues, the challenges, and the solutions. And that is what I imagine is keeping you awake at night.

Strategies & Tactics

We've weathered total lockdown, and now the next steps are before us. A careful return to communal dining, easing of visitor

One. Hundred. Thousand.

restrictions, revving up the on-site workforce, and instituting personal tours for prospective residents. These are basic tactics that are relatively easy to devise. Crafting a sound strategy to address long-term measures for the health and safety of staff and residents is more complex. Putting together a compelling message at the heart of that strategy is difficult.

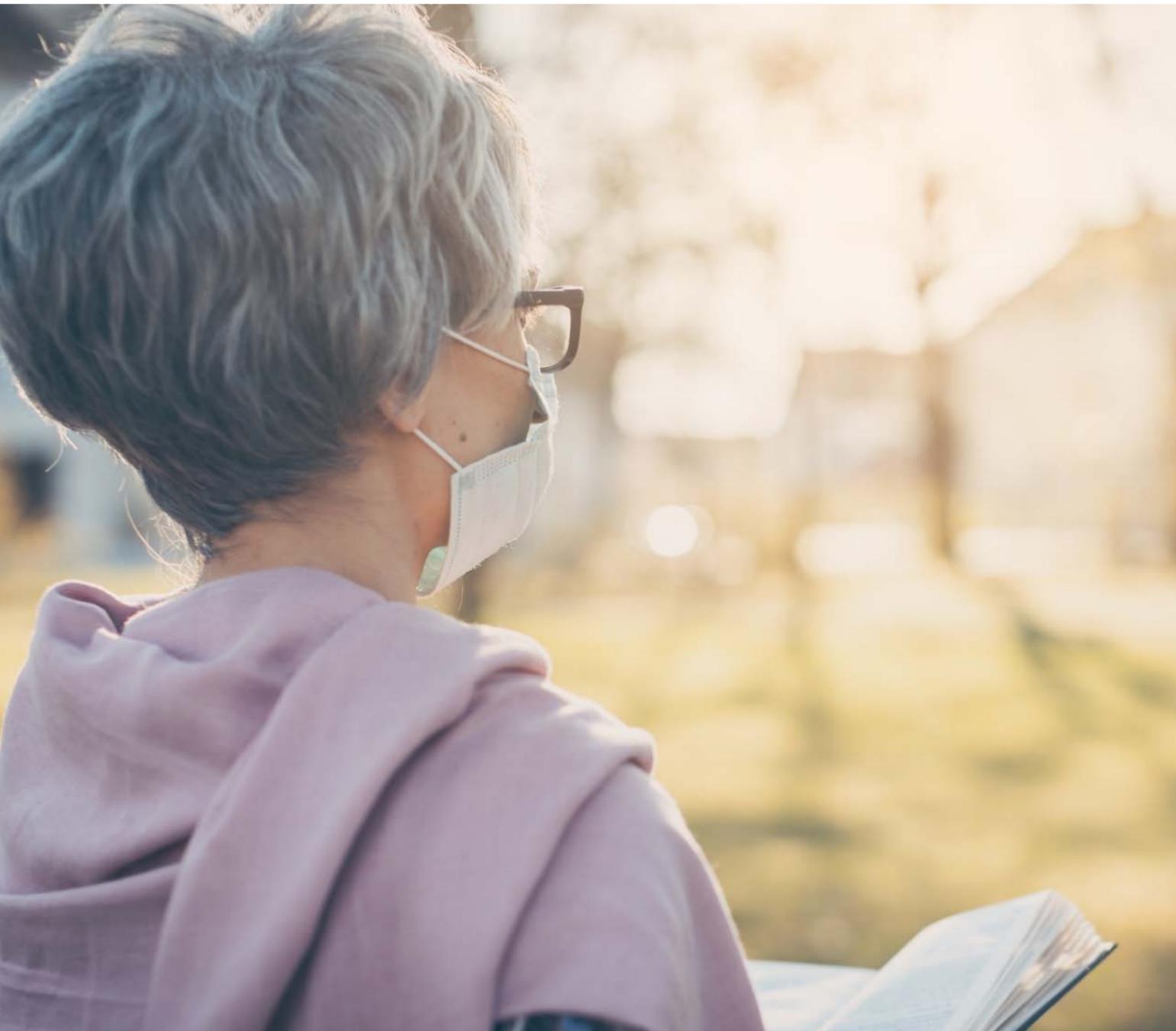
Establishing trust between your audience and your community will take a village.

Your audience has a million voices clamoring for their attention right NOW on every platform imaginable. Their time and attention is the most valuable asset you can cultivate. To do so, you must share a message worthy of their time and attention. And you need to share it when your audience is ready to hear it. You need to have your message on the platform of their choice. You know that. Just like you know you and your marketing team will need to implement new measures to achieve your goals. It's relatively simple to reconsider budgetary allocations. It's more difficult to add bandwidth and expertise. It will take a village.

Trust is Fragile

No one wants to make a bad choice or an errant decision. Having the digital world at our fingertips means we can research our choices in greater depth than ever before. We read reviews from strangers and consult friends for their observations before making purchases. We get news from online sources matching our perspective because all news is partisan. Your prospective residents and their families live within this digital milieu. To thrive in a world where the elderly are expendable requires a level of trust few are willing to give.

Although it will be challenging, I'd like to help you build trust with your audience. If you'd like to know more about how to craft a post-pandemic strategy, please contact me. Together, we can do it.





Maribeth Jenkins is passionate about building long-term relationships and developing solutions for inbound and outbound marketing. With more than 20 years experience in the marketing and data field specializing in the senior living industry, she offers deep industry knowledge and insight designed to deliver measurable results for her clients.



Learn more about Sabal Group and how we can help you and your organization by visiting our website at www.sabal-group.com or call 704.214.1737 to speak with Maribeth.