

RHarper Consulting Update

Repositioning: Make the Most of What You Already Have



Roger Harper, Principal of [RHarper Consulting Group](#), provides development consulting services to the senior housing industry.

The capital cost of repositioning can be overwhelming. The financial weight of adding new services and campus components, making major physical plant renovations, and increasing marketing budgets, not to mention the disruption of operations during the transition period, combine to stop many projects before they ever get started. Understandably, the focus is usually on the new additions and challenges, and we are often swept up into the mindset of "if we can't do all of it, we can't do any of it." Taking a longer range perspective on your repositioning and attacking the most easily accomplished tasks first will help you get through these vitally important changes in the most practical and efficient manner.

Repositioning is a process, rather than an event, and breaking the project down into smaller, more readily executable phases has a number of advantages. In addition to a more manageable capital plan, making smaller changes over a longer period of time allows you to evaluate the effectiveness of each action and make continuous adjustments. Improvements to parts of your community that residents touch every day, such as their living units and dining venues, yield the most benefit – at least as perceived by residents – and are often the most accessible and manageable projects.

Here are some thoughts as you consider improvements to your community:

Living units: Good architectural design is not enough – you should also involve interior design professionals to keep the design updated. At least 25% of the fixtures and finishes you select today will be discontinued or no longer available within twelve months. Allowing your construction group to make substitutions is hazardous to your marketing effort. Negotiate an annual review and re-selection with your designers. It will pay dividends in assisting your marketing efforts. Along those same lines, allow as much customization as you can for prospects. It not only provides a greater diversity – it particularly appeals to the daughter or daughter-in-law assisting the prospect in their decision.

Reception Area: This is where you make the first impression on a marketing prospect, and all too often I see that it has become a "central command" dispatch area, where the receptionist is shouting into a blaring two-way radio while trying to answer telephone calls, respond to questions from residents, organize transportation services, and cover all the other tasks which don't fall into anyone else's job description. Paying particular attention to providing a pleasant, welcoming arrival and greeting experience can really strengthen your marketing efforts.

Dining Venues: Providing more choices with diverse themes and menus has proven to be successful for the sale of additional meals, marketing effectiveness, and overall resident satisfaction. These renovations and additions can have more impact than any other.

Exterior Finishes and Campus: You don't want a prospect's first impression to be one of aging design, finishes and landscaping. Evaluate and examine ways you can update the finish materials on your building to provide a more contemporary look. Have a landscape architect take a fresh look at opportunities to improve curb and drive-up appeal.

Approaching the repositioning of a senior living community is a huge endeavor. Taking a more deliberate, small-phase approach provides a more continuous process that helps mitigate risk, provides more accessible financing, increases your control of the process, and reduces the disruption to continuing operations. Your current and future residents will appreciate the approach.

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RHarper Consulting Group provides development consulting, program management, and owner representation services focused on the senior living and mixed use sectors. In addition, Mr. Harper is also a listed mediator and arbitrator providing dispute resolution services for the construction and real estate industries.