



Your Food. Your Story.

Make your dining program your best marketing tool

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Why it matters

Increased dining satisfaction benefits your guests and your business

Meals make memories. That's why you put so much energy into culinary creativity. Don't let your innovation get overlooked. Dining is a key part of your overall community. It's time to market what's going on in your kitchen and at your tables.



GETTING STARTED

This guide will focus on three areas to build better connections and make your skilled nursing and senior living dining program shine:

1. Creating

Build a brand that stands out

2. Innovating

Try fresh formats and dining ideas

3. Marketing

Tell your story with digital, other channels

Who wins with a great dining experience?

YOUR GUESTS

Dining ranks as a favorite amenity

Food quality and choices are important to residents and families, who make placement decisions.

Everyone appreciates options

Improve resident satisfaction and fulfill nutrition, wellness, convenience and social needs with dining options like cafes, fine-dining and room service.

Meals satisfy a personal need

Flexible dining plans with menu options can meet individual tastes, preferences and needs.

YOUR ORGANIZATION

Improve quality of care

People who enjoy their food and dining experience eat better, reducing malnutrition and dehydration concerns.

Reassure family members

Delicious, well-balanced and flexible dining choices confirm you're caring properly for their loved one.

Stand out from the crowd

Finding ways to make your dining program unique gives your entire community an edge in a competitive market.



TOP CONCERN:
Preventing isolation
and loneliness

OUR SOLUTION:
Dining brings social
interaction opportunities

Source: Argentum, December 2020

Key Takeaways

- ▶ Innovative dining is what residents want *and* need—a perfect combination that fits into your value-based, person-centered goals.
- ▶ Improving dining options can be a beneficial strategy for business development, and it aligns with the overall aim of boosting resident satisfaction and quality of care.
- ▶ Your dining program—what you serve and how you serve it—differentiates your long-term care and senior community from the competition.





Creating Your Brand

Let your food program build your reputation and keep the promises you make.

What's so important about your brand?

Everything. Avoid drowning in a sea of sameness with your competitors. Remember that people are at the heart of all you do, from your administrators to your staff to the residents.

Address a target audience

- Who is your primary customer?
- What are their expectations for dining?
- What are your competitors doing?

Conduct surveys

- What do people know about your community?
- What do people love about your community?

Listen to the results

- How are people behaving toward your messaging?
- What are people's fears, challenges and obstacles?

Find threads you can address

- Who did they consider before choosing your community?
- What is your dining service doing to build brand loyalty?

FAVE FEATURES

Things seniors wish would be added to their communities:

- Swimming pools and hot tubs
- Exercise room or gym
- Movie room
- Bistro or pub
- Libraries
- Tech center

Source: craftandcommunicate.com





When branding meets marketing

Based on your survey feedback, decide what dining options you'll offer that are most important to your audience.

Define your brand promise

- What do you want to be known as best at?
 - Excellent food quality
 - Exceptional experience (hospitality, service, atmosphere, etc.)
 - Wellness (balanced meals, MIND diet, etc.)
 - Specialty nutrition (cardiac, diabetes, consistency modified, etc.)
 - Stewardship (environmental awareness, community service, etc.)
- Explore this with critical stakeholders

Assess your current dining program

- What are you already doing that works?
- What does your current program lack?

Build and implement offerings

- Align offerings with your brand promise
- Tackle quick wins that appeal to your target audience
- Make plans to tackle long-term successes

Give your dining program an identity

- Consider a name and logo



Key takeaways

- ▶ **Put people first.**
Shape your unique brand by recognizing the needs, concerns and successes of your staff and your customers.
- ▶ **Call on inclusion.**
It strengthens your dining program. When your people are engaged, they will sing the praises of your brand.





Bring *Excitement* to Dining

You've decided to make dining a bright spot. Try these ideas to make it happen.



Invest in your culinary staff

Hire an experienced chef and a registered dietitian nutritionist

Train your team on fundamental cooking skills, food safety and sanitation

Train your team on front-of-house hospitality

Support your team in industry networking to monitor food trends and ideas



Upgrade in-room dining

Make it feel like room service with digital ordering, delivery

Add special touches: garnishes, placemats, scented towelettes, personal notes

Train team members on the value of resident interaction at mealtime



Feature popular wellness menu options

The MIND Diet (a combo of the DASH and Mediterranean Diets)

Plant-forward foods (veg-centric or plant-based entrées)

Sustainable/local choices (feel-good, earth-friendly)

DINING DESIRES

Seniors say these three services make a community worth living in:

1. A deli or first-class restaurant with American, Chinese, Italian and Mexican selections
2. A specialty coffee house
3. High-quality foodservice

Source: craftandcommunicate.com





Photo Credit: SuzyQ carts



Offer menu choices that make it easy to follow prescribed diets

Meal plans for conditions such as diabetes, heart health

Consistency modified options that meet IDDSI best practices

Nutrition pre-hab before a scheduled surgery

Convenient meals delivered after hospital discharge



Raise excitement with a traveling cart. Focus on:

Specialty snacks (ice cream, popcorn, smoothies, fresh baked goods)

Appetizers (charcuterie, cheese and crackers)

Beverages (mocktails/cocktails, specialty drinks)

Full meal service carts (room service, outdoor dining, community areas)



Create food-based activities (virtual, or using safe social distancing)

Teaching kitchens (demonstrate and sample a recipe)

Happy hour (refreshments and beverages)

Cook up a memory (bring loved ones together to create food and reminisce)

24-HOURS IN A DAY

Snack carts and stocked kitchenettes meet person-centered dining needs.
Source: Verywellhealth.com





Increase your meal plan options

Use delivery and pickup options for regular meals

Menu do-it-yourself meal kits

Offer prepared entrées in single or double portions

Deliver groceries



Connect to residents without full meal plans

Open a micro-mart with grab-and-go meals, groceries

Host your own farmers market



Think about the broader community

Create a revenue stream with meal delivery or pickup services

Offer prospective residents a meal (curbside or delivery)

Key takeaways

- ▶ Mix it up. Options are limited only by your imagination, resources and capabilities.
- ▶ Hunger doesn't run by a three-meals-a-day clock. This is their home, so it's reasonable to plan ways to satisfy appetites anytime.





Tell Your Story with *Marketing*

Start spreading the news — it builds morale, improves care and can increase occupancy.

4 reasons why it works:

- 1. Build brand awareness.** Highlight what makes you different from your competition.
- 2. Intensify your culture.** When you show you care, it's contagious.
- 3. Solidify trust.** Show nutrition expertise as the foundation of wellness.
- 4. Create loyalty.** Consumers and employees will stick with you.

Market to all audiences

Here are the four main groups you should be reaching and ways to reach them.



Residents and families

You directly serve residents in your care. For them, dining should be a daily bright spot. You indirectly serve families. They judge how dining helps their loved ones thrive.

- Reach them onsite, with signage, newsletters, a loyalty program.
- Display beautiful photos in your communications.



Future residents and families

Put potential residents and their families at ease by showing choices, creativity and nutrition are simply how you operate, because you understand how important food is in people's lives.

- Don't overlook enticing food images in your advertising.
- Dedicate a page on your website to the dining program, highlighting the extras.
- Showcase your abilities by serving food at marketing events.



Local healthcare organizations

Doctors, hospitals and care providers make referrals or get asked by prospective residents to suggest long-term care and senior living options. A noteworthy dining program is a factor.

- Play up resident satisfaction scores to show the impact of food quality, variety.
- Show you understand the role food plays in nutrition and hydration.
- Highlight nutrition factors that play a role in reducing medical readmissions.



Current and prospective employees

Food is an enjoyable part of people's lives. It's no different for your team. When they embrace your dining program they enjoy their work and strive to perform even better.

- Have people on your team be spokespersons for your creative menu items and services (incent them with food).
- Find opportunities to feed your entire staff (not just the foodservice team). Give them a chance to be proud of your food and they will likely talk about it to others.



Market yourself deliciously

To assure your reach to all these audiences, make dining a part of every marketing platform you use.

CONVENTIONAL ADVERTISING

People eat with their eyes, so build their appetite with beautiful images of your food, your vibrant dining area, and the special amenities you offer. Places to consider:

- Brochures, flyers, newsletters
- Mailers (direct mail packets, postcards)
- Billboards and other signage
- Broadcast (TV, radio)
- Publications (magazines, newspapers)

EVENT ADVERTISING

Let your food win people over. Do more than serve snacks like chips and salsa or cheese and crackers. Showcase what's special about your program. Places to consider:

- **Community events.** Fundraisers, festivals, “Taste of ...” gatherings, etc.
- **Cooking competitions.** Culinary contests, cooking demonstrations, etc.
- **Prospective resident tours.** Provide a meal as part of every tour and invite questions.
- **Job fairs.** Creative dining adds appeal for those seeking employment.

SHARE THE LOVE

Get the local community, residents, staff and family members talking about how good your food is. Word of mouth speaks volumes.

Source: “Building a High Performing Sales Team” webinar





Digital marketing

Seniors have closed the digital literacy gap, and these channels are a top place to engage. The surge in digital use puts emphasis on your website and social media presence.

Your website presence

Your business legitimacy is based on having a website. You have about 8 seconds to capture someone's attention, so make your first impression a good one.

Make dining front and center on the community's homepage

- Provide a link to the dining homepage with deeper details
- Keep your content updated
- Start a blog or write about dining in an existing blog
- Make it easy for people to sign up for a newsletter or email, include dining and nutrition details
- Allow viewers to enter comments
- Ask for feedback with a survey

What matters on your dining page

Your team—the foodservice director, dietitians, chefs, dining room manager, etc.

- Show their education, credentials and certifications
- Make it personal by telling their foodservice philosophy

Your program—show images or videos of the dining experience in action

Testimonials—Let the people who enjoy your food share their experience

PLUGGED
IN



70%
adults 65 and
older who use
the internet

Source: Pew Research



Your *social media* presence

Social media marketing includes real-time, interactive and targeted solutions. Four options to consider:

“Social selling is about human-to-human connection and providing a solution to each other’s problem. This means being warm, friendly and genuine. Not pushy.”

—Debra Gawet, Sage Age Strategies

Facebook

- Share curated content, post videos, invite people to events.
- Followers can share your posts easily.
- Encourage “follows” and “likes.” This increases visibility and alerts that person’s friends.
- Videos and photos get preference on Facebook news feeds.
- Use Facebook Live to showcase culinary demos or events.

Instagram

- Use Instagram Stories to share real-time updates.
- Remember, the Story feature only lasts for 24 hours.
- Share high-resolution photos, short videos and promotions.
- If residents or families create posts, you can repost and share them.
- You get free insights when using Instagram for business.

Twitter

- Post new information about your dining program or community.
- Interact with other businesses, organizations or the media.
- Pin important content to the top of your profile.
- Post or reshare frequently, but do so with care: once it’s live, you can’t edit.
- Use hashtags to reach a wider audience (#foodie, #goodfood, #communityname).

LinkedIn

- Create a LinkedIn business page to share information and build your brand.
- Have employees create professional profiles and connect with others in the senior living or healthcare community to promote your dining.
- Invite connections to join your marketing email list.
- Join groups relevant to your demographic and actively discuss culinary and nutrition topics.





Social Media Strategies

There are methods to make your marketing work harder.

- Use Facebook and Instagram primarily for business to consumer communication.
- Use Twitter and LinkedIn primarily for business to business communication.
- Keep an eye out for emerging social media channels (like TikTok) to reach new audiences.
- Share the stories of your program. Is the chef creating a special holiday dish? Is your coffee kiosk brewing something seasonal?
- Ask the public what they want to see or learn from you.
- Get residents and families involved in sharing pictures and your posts to their friends.



MIND THE GAP

The pandemic accelerated the need for life plan communities to market digitally, creating a gap between sophisticated digital marketers and traditional marketers.

Source: Fitch Ratings

Key takeaways

- ▶ There are many avenues for marketing your dining program. Use the ones that work best for your capabilities.
- ▶ Strong marketing builds goodwill among your residents and their families, your team and the healthcare community.
- ▶ Demonstrating your strengths allows you to ask for — and expect — referrals.



Resources

Learn more about how to make your dining program shine through these online resources. Click below to open the links.

Show and Sell with Social Media Food Photos

Impress your guests with custom labels, stickers, packaging and more

More Insights from Gordon Food Service



Gordon FOOD SERVICE Marketing Your Healthcare Dining Program

Learn how to market your healthcare dining experience.

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