



PERFORMANCE CASE STUDY

SENIOR CARE MARKETING

*What We've Learned in 7 Years, Across 80+ Communities,
and \$2M+ in Ad Spend*

Prepared by Digital Wolf Agency

May 2026

Summary

Digital Wolf Agency has spent the past seven years inside the senior care industry. We've managed marketing for more than 80 communities across the country. From high-end luxury communities, value-tier independent living, dedicated memory care buildings, assisted living, skilled nursing, CCRCs, and everything in between. Our clients span every price point and every level of care. This case study is the culmination of that work.

It draws on the past **24 months** specifically, a period in which the way families research, evaluate, and choose senior care has fundamentally shifted. The pandemic accelerated digital-first decision making. AI-generated content flooded organic and paid channels. Privacy changes reshaped audience targeting. Programmatic placements expanded into channels that did not meaningfully exist for senior care five years ago. Through all of it, we have run hundreds of paid campaigns and published thousands of pieces of original content on behalf of our communities, backed by more than **two million dollars** in cumulative ad spend.

We set out to answer two questions:

What messaging works, and how do we capture the attention of families researching senior care?

The Headline Findings

- Families researching senior care respond to specificity, transparency, and trust signals, in both paid and organic channels.
- Care-level messaging outperforms generic language by **3–4x** in paid search.
- Programmatic display performance is driven by warm, lifestyle imagery, not stock photography or aspirational marketing visuals.
- Trust-building organic content (culture, awards, caregiver support) consistently earns the highest engagement rates of any category.
- Transparency about pricing, care levels, and what life inside the community actually looks like, accelerates every step of the family decision journey.

Part 1 - Paid Marketing

Across the portfolio we manage hundreds of active paid campaigns spanning Google Search, Google Performance Max (Programmatic Display), Meta (Facebook/Instagram), and a growing share of social display inventory. The strongest signals over the past 24 months break cleanly into two patterns: the messaging that wins in Paid Search, and the visual creative that wins in Programmatic and Social Display.

1A. Paid Search (PPC) - Messaging That Converts

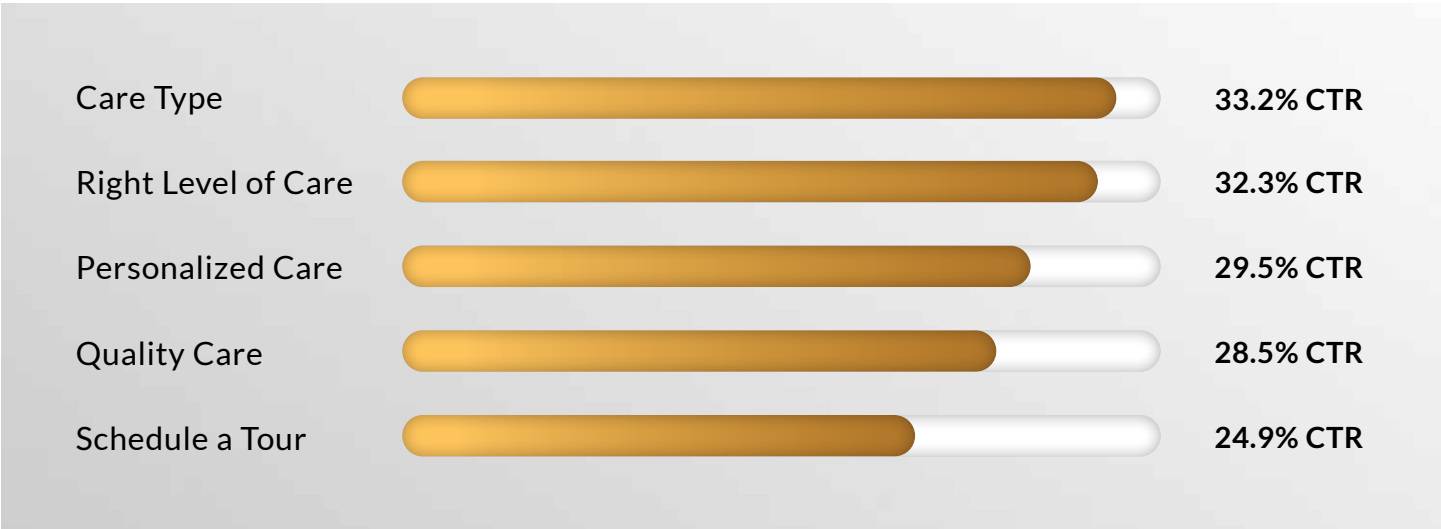
Headline Messaging

The single most important finding from headline testing across our portfolio: care-level specificity wins. Headlines that name a specific level of care, or that directly address the family’s core decision, outperform generic alternatives by 3–4x in click-through rate.

Our highest-performing headline “Right Level of Care & Support” has driven hundreds of thousands of clicks across our portfolio at a 32.3% CTR, a 72% conversion rate, and a sub-\$1 CPC. It works because it mirrors the exact question families are asking themselves in the moment of search: Is this the right level of care for my loved one? When the headline reflects their internal conversation, they click.

Other top performers - “Enhanced Personal Care / Assisted Living” (33.2% CTR), “Personalized Care” (29.5% CTR, 72.8% conversion), and “Schedule A Tour” (24.9% CTR, 77.9% conversion, the highest of any headline we’ve tested) share the same trait. Each names a specific care type or a specific next action.

On the other end, generic and AI-generated headlines fail badly. “Senior Care Community” plateaued at 8.2% CTR. Google’s auto-generated AI headlines such as “Relax and recharge” hit just 4.4% CTR despite massive impression share. The pattern is unambiguous: human-crafted, care-specific headlines outperform generic and AI-generated alternatives every single time.



Description Messaging

Description assets follow the same rule. The top-performing description across our portfolio highlighted a specific life-enrichment program with concrete activities and local outings, it achieved a 30.7% CTR and an 85.2% conversion rate. The second-best referenced “exceptional facility features” by name and converted at 84.0%. Both are feature-specific and tangible.

The worst-performing description “When You Live in Our Community, You Can Learn, Laugh, And Explore Life Anew” drove 56,700+ impressions but only a 0.95% CTR. Aspirational, feeling-based language does not drive action in ad copy. Families want concrete answers, not poetry.



1. Specific Program

Name the care level, program or feature.



2. Benefit

Highlight a concrete, meaningful benefit.



3. Call to Action

Tell them the next step to take.

The Winning PPC Formula

- Example: “Daily life-enrichment programs, chef-prepared meals, and weekly outings schedule a tour today.”
- Avoid: aspirational language (“explore life anew”), generic descriptors (“senior living community”), or AI-auto-generated copy.

Sitelinks & Callouts

“Floor Plans & Pricing” dominates sitelink performance across every community we manage, typically the #1 sitelink, with CTRs above 32%. This confirms a critical insight: families want pricing transparency early. They aren’t just browsing; they’re qualifying whether a community fits their budget before they engage further.

Visual sitelinks (“Photos” at 14.8% CTR, “Gallery” at 12.8%) consistently convert at 50%+, confirming that families need to see the environment before they will pick up the phone.

Among callout extensions, amenity-specific messaging revealed unexpected conversion patterns. “Covered & Garage Parking” converted at 95.2% and “Fitness Equipment” at 91.0% these are practical, tangible amenities that families can picture. “Pet Friendly” is the most consistent performer across the entire portfolio, with interaction rates of 14–16% regardless of price point or care level. “Family Communication App” achieved the highest callout CTR at 18.8%, showing that families increasingly value technology that keeps them connected to a loved one’s care.

The Headline Findings

- Care-level specificity: name the care type, never “senior care” alone.
- Action-oriented CTAs: “Schedule A Tour” converts at 77.9%.
- Program-specific descriptions: name the activity or feature, not the feeling.
- Pricing transparency: “Floor Plans & Pricing” is the #1 sitelink across our portfolio.
- Tangible amenities: pet-friendly, parking, fitness equipment, family communication tech.
- ***Human-written > AI-generated, every time, across every asset type.***

1B. Programmatic Display & Social Display - Creative That Converts

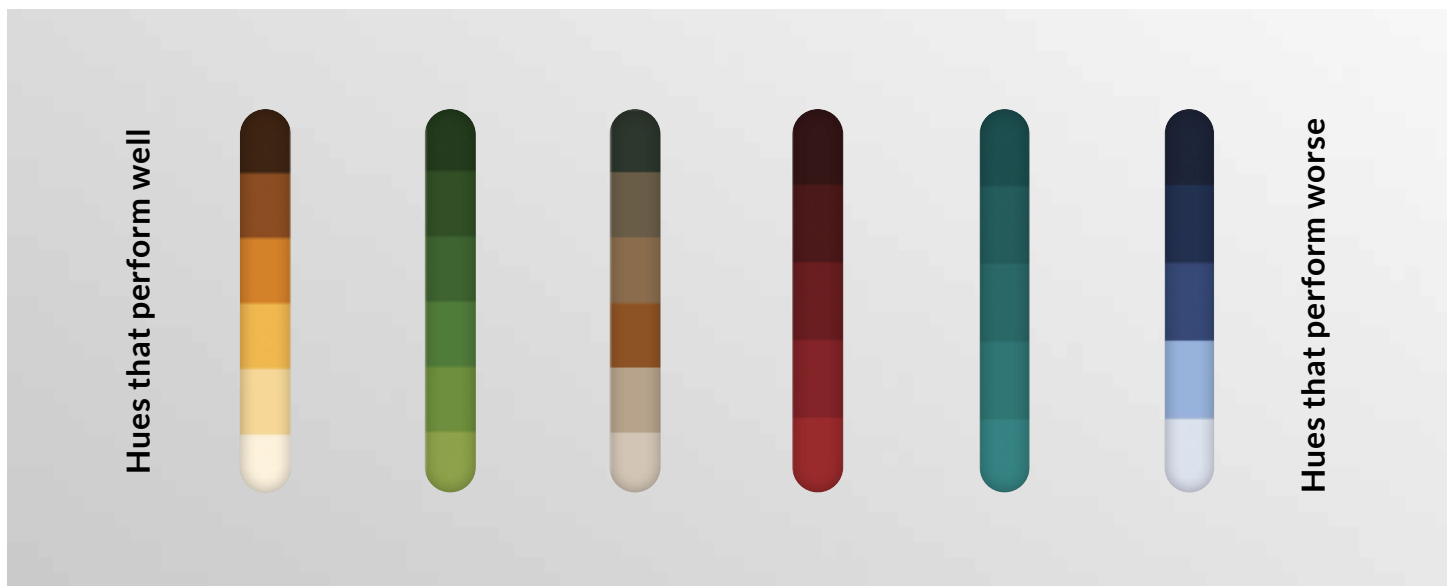
Performance Max and social display campaigns now make up a meaningful share of our overall paid spend. Unlike Search, where the text is the lever, display performance is driven almost entirely by creative. The Programmatic Display algorithm will optimize toward whatever asset combination converts; our job is to give it the right creative inputs.

Over the past 24 months we've tested thousands of image, color, and asset variations across Programmatic Display, Meta, and other social display channels. Four findings have held up consistently across every community type and price point in our portfolio.

Finding 1: Warm Palettes Outperform Cool Palettes

Color analysis across our Programmatic Display accounts reveals a consistent pattern: warm color palettes (golds, soft oranges, warm whites, terracotta accents, and natural wood tones), outperform cool palettes (blues, grays, clinical whites) in CTR, time-on-asset, and downstream conversion. This aligns with broader research showing that warm tones evoke comfort, safety, and home. The primary emotional drivers in senior care decisions.

Cool, clinical palettes signal "hospital" and "institution" to a family audience. Warm palettes signal "home." Even within the same community, the same room, and the same photographer, color-graded warm versions of the asset have consistently outperformed cool-graded versions in head-to-head tests.



Finding 2: Lifestyle and Activity Imagery Beats Everything

Lifestyle and activity photography consistently outperforms every other image category in Programmatic Display and social display. Images showing residents engaged in group activities; art classes, gardening, game nights, holiday celebrations, intergenerational events, generate the highest engagement and CTR across both ad creative and content. The key is depicting genuine moments of connection and participation, not staged poses.

Community environment photography is the second strongest performer. Interior shots of common areas, dining rooms, fitness centers, and outdoor spaces drive high engagement because they answer the family's unspoken question: "What will this place actually look like?" Well-lit, inviting common areas with visible amenities (comfortable furniture, natural light, clean dining setups) significantly outperform exterior-only building shots.

Staff interaction imagery, caregivers assisting residents, nurses engaging in conversation, team members participating in activities alongside residents, performs strongly in culture-driven and brand-tier campaigns. Imagery that humanizes the care experience directly supports the trust-building process families go through before they ever fill out a form.



Finding 3: Authenticity Beats Polish

Seasonal and practical imagery tied to a specific theme outperforms heavily art-directed studio work. Real moments, a holiday meal, a birthday celebration, a grandchild visit, a Wednesday afternoon bingo game convert better than polished compositions. Families are emotionally sensitive to anything that feels marketed-to-them. They are looking for proof of life inside the community, not a brochure.

Finding 4: What Doesn't Work in Display

Generic stock photography. Smiling seniors on benches with no context, activity, or environmental detail. These images are visually interchangeable with every other senior living provider and do nothing to differentiate.

Exterior-only building shots with no human element. A facade tells families almost nothing about the experience inside. When exterior shots are necessary, they perform better paired with people. Ex. Residents walking on a path, a family arriving for a tour, staff greeting someone at the door.

Clinical or medical-focused imagery. Even when promoting health services or skilled care, imagery that emphasizes medical equipment, scrubs, or institutional settings actively repels families. Clinical language and visuals signal “facility,” not “home.”

Overly polished aspirational imagery. Stock-feeling, agency-feeling, brochure-feeling, creative loses credibility with a family audience making one of the most important decisions of their lives. Authenticity consistently outperforms aspiration.

Programmatic & Social Display. What Works.

- Warm color palettes (golds, soft oranges, wood tones) over cool/clinical tones.
- Lifestyle and activity photography: real moments of resident engagement.
- Environment imagery: dining rooms, common spaces, outdoor areas, natural light.
- Staff interaction: caregivers and residents together, humanized and real.
- Authentic over polished: a real Wednesday afternoon beats a studio shoot.
- Avoid stock photography, exterior-only shots, clinical imagery, and over-art-directed brochure looks.

Part 2 - Organic Content

Paid marketing drives the immediate click. Organic content does the deeper work it builds trust, establishes authority, and captures families earlier in the research journey, often before they're ready to convert. Over the past 24 months we've published thousands of pieces of original content across community websites, blogs, Google Business Profile posts, and social channels. The patterns we see in organic engagement reinforce and in places extend, what we see in paid.

2A. SEO Performance - What Earns Visibility

Blog Traffic Has Grown 300%+ Over Six Quarters

Across our portfolio, blog traffic has grown more than 300% over the past six quarters. The growth is driven by a multi-site syndication model: original blog posts are deployed across community websites with localized adjustments, generating compounding search visibility while still serving each individual community's local SEO.

In the most recent year alone, organic blog content has generated more than one million search impressions across our managed community domains, with hundreds of unique blog URLs ranking in search results. Search visibility is not the bottleneck. Engagement and conversion off that visibility are where the leverage lies.

The AEO / GEO Shift – Why SEO Matters More, Not Less

The bigger story in organic content right now is the rapid emergence of Answer Engine Optimization (AEO) and Generative Engine Optimization (GEO). Across the past 18 months, AI-powered search experiences (ChatGPT, Perplexity, Google AI Overviews, Gemini, and Claude) have moved from novelty to mainstream. Current industry estimates place 10–20% of all search behavior on these AI answer engines rather than on traditional search results pages, and that share is climbing every quarter.

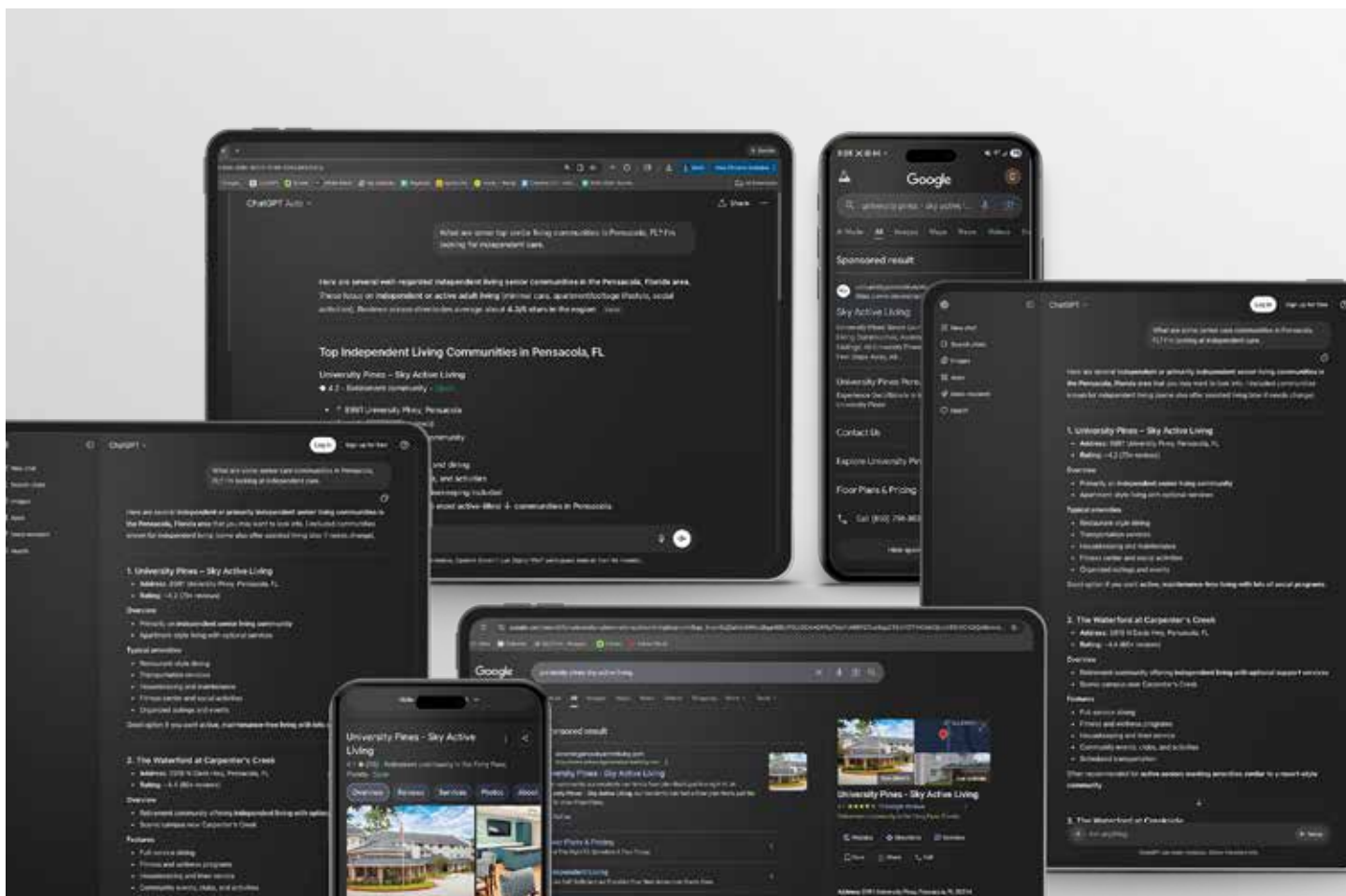
For senior care specifically, this shift matters more than it does for most industries. Family decision-makers are increasingly likely to start their research with a conversational query “What are the best assisted living options in [city]?” or “What’s the difference between memory care and assisted living?” or “How much does senior living typically cost in my area?” and receive a synthesized, AI-generated answer that cites a handful of sources. Families then click into those cited sources to verify and dig deeper. Whoever earns the citation earns the next visit.

The instinct across our industry has been to assume AI search reduces the value of SEO. The opposite is true. AEO and GEO are SEO, intensified. The signals these engines use to choose which sources to cite - clear, structured content with definitive answers; topical authority built across many pieces; current information; semantic clarity; credible source signals, are the same signals that drive strong traditional SEO. Communities that have invested in deep, well-structured, authoritative content libraries are the ones being cited inside AI answers. Communities that haven't are invisible.

The practical implication is significant: every recommendation in the Organic Content playbook below now does double duty. Content written to answer a specific decision-stage question doesn't just earn a click, it earns a citation. Trust and culture content doesn't just build engagement. It gives AI engines an authority signal to cite. Pricing-transparency content doesn't just remove a conversion barrier it gets surfaced inside AI answers when families ask about cost. The senior care operators who win the next 24 months will be the ones who treat AEO and GEO as the natural extension of their SEO strategy, not as a separate channel.

Search Impressions vs. Engagement = Two Different Games

Across hundreds of blog posts, search impressions and reader engagement are only loosely correlated. Generic health-tips content can rank well and earn impressions, but holds readers for 20 seconds and converts almost no one. Niche, decision-stage content earns fewer impressions but holds readers far longer and feeds the bottom of the funnel. SEO strategy must optimize for both visibility AND the right kind of visibility.



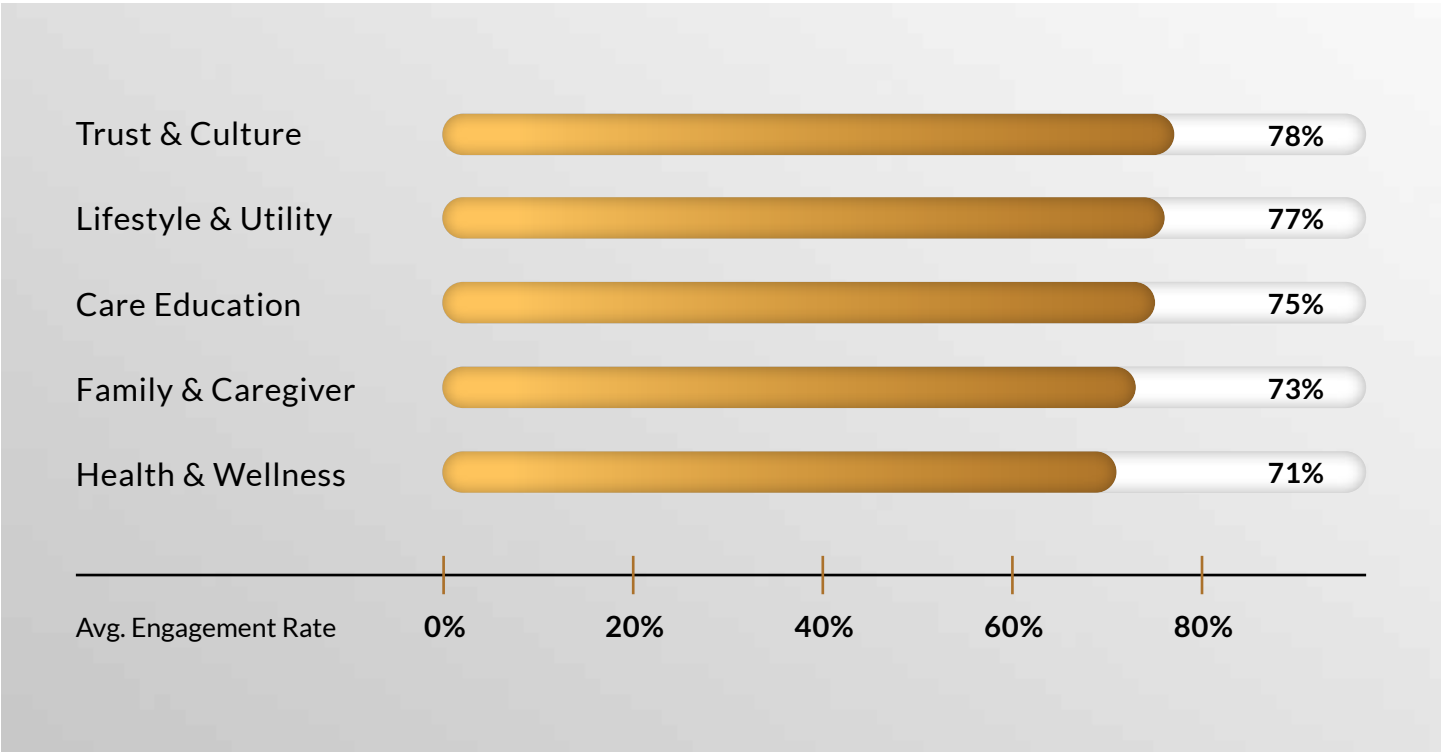
2B. Consumer Engagement - What Themes Actually Land

Looking at engagement rate, average session duration, return-visit rate, and downstream conversion across thousands of pieces of content, five themes consistently rise to the top. The chart below shows average engagement rate by theme across our portfolio.

Theme 1: Trust & Culture Content (Highest Engagement)

Company news and culture content is the highest-engaging category in our portfolio, averaging engagement rates above 78%. Families don't just research care options, they research the organization. Stories about workplace recognition, charitable partnerships, staff awards, and company values consistently outperform pure product content. Posts about "Best Workplaces" recognition routinely hit 80%+ engagement; partnership and giving-back stories regularly clear 84%.

The implication is significant. Trust content is not optional it's infrastructure. Families want to know who will be caring for their loved one, what the company values, and whether the staff is treated well. Content that demonstrates organizational quality directly supports the trust-building process that drives the move-in decision.



Theme 2: Family & Caregiver Support (Most Efficient)

Family and caregiver support content is the single most efficient category in our portfolio measured in page views per post. These pieces address decision-stage questions: “So you’ve planned your visit - what next?” “How do I talk to my parent about senior living?” “What should I expect in the first 30 days?”

This content works because it meets families where they are emotionally. They’re not just gathering information they’re navigating a difficult, often guilt-laden transition. Content that acknowledges the emotional weight of these decisions and provides practical, navigable guidance earns both engagement and trust. It is also significantly underserved across the industry. Most senior care content libraries are dominated by generic health posts, leaving an open lane for any community willing to publish decision-stage content.

Theme 3: Lifestyle & Practical Utility

Lifestyle content: gift guides, technology tips, activity highlights, seasonal pieces earns engagement rates approaching those of culture content. The top-performing single piece we have ever published was a holiday gift guide for seniors, which cleared 85% engagement across dozens of community syndications.

This category works because it addresses a universal family concern: “What will my loved one’s daily life look like?” Content that paints a picture of an active, engaging lifestyle, concretely, with named activities and real photographs. These directly support the emotional case for senior living.

Theme 4: Care Education (Deepest Engagement)

Care comparison content on respite care, assisted living vs. home care, memory care basics, hospice vs. palliative has lower volume but the deepest reader engagement of any category. Average session duration on care-education posts is more than twice that of generic health content. These posts target high-intent search queries aligned with active purchase decisions and form the foundation of bottom-of-funnel SEO.

Theme 5: Health Content Needs Depth, Not Breadth

Health and wellness is the largest content category in volume across senior care publishing and the lowest in engagement. Generic nutrition tips, hydration reminders, and exercise basics attract search volume but hold attention for 20 seconds or less. The issue isn't the topic; it's the depth and the specificity. "What a Typical Meal Looks Like at a Community Like Ours" outperforms "The Importance of Senior Nutrition" every time. Health content needs community-specific framing, depth, and practical takeaways to break through.

Financial & Transparency Content = A Quiet Winner

Financial content (pricing transparency, Medicaid waiver explainers, VA Aid & Attendance, financial planning for senior care) shows the highest return on visits across our entire portfolio. Families bookmark these pages, return to them multiple times during the decision process, and share them with siblings and adult children. A single localized Medicaid waiver page on one community site generated over 1,000 page views in its first months. Financial transparency removes the #1 barrier to continued engagement.

Organic Content - What Works

- Trust and culture content: awards, charitable partnerships, staff stories = the highest-engaging category of all.
- Decision-stage guidance: "what to expect," "how to prepare," "questions to ask" = the most underserved and most efficient.
- Lifestyle proof points: activity highlights, gift guides, daily-life pieces = second-highest engagement.
- Care education depth: longer, more detailed care-comparison posts = deepest engagement, foundational SEO.
- Health content with specificity: community-grounded, not generic.
- Financial transparency: Medicaid waiver, VA benefits, and pricing-transparency pages drive the highest return-visit behavior.
- Google Business Profile distribution: cross-posting blog content to GBP is one of the single highest-ROI moves available.

Part 3 - Five Lessons That Bridge Both

Across 24 months of data, hundreds of campaigns, and thousands of pieces of organic content paid and organic, search and display, five lessons cut across every channel. They describe how families actually research senior care, and what earns their attention at each stage.

3A. Five Lessons That Bridge Both

1. Answer the Question They're Actually Asking

The #1 paid headline (“Right Level of Care & Support”) and the #1 organic post (“So You’ve Planned Your Visit - What Next?”) share a single trait: each mirrors the specific question the family is asking in that exact moment. Headlines that name the care type outperform generic labels by 3–4x. Blog posts that answer a specific decision-stage question outperform broad health tips by 50%+ in per-post efficiency. Every piece of content should be written as a direct answer to one specific question a family member is asking during their research. The more specific the question, the higher the engagement.

2. Show, Don't Tell

Families need to see before they believe. “Floor Plans & Pricing” is the #1 sitelink, at a 32%+ CTR. Photo and gallery sitelinks convert at 50%+. Description assets that name specific programs outperform aspirational language by an order of magnitude. Programmatic display performance is driven by lifestyle and environment photography. Concrete beats abstract at every level, name the program, show the floor plan, list the amenities, give the price range. Families are making a practical decision with enormous emotional weight, and they need tangible proof points to feel confident.

3. Build Trust Before Asking for Action

Culture content earns the highest engagement of any category. Families research the organization behind the community before they tour. They want to know that the staff is valued, that the company wins awards, and that the organization gives back. Trust content is not optional, it is infrastructure. Every quarterly content plan should include at least one piece that demonstrates organizational quality, employee satisfaction, or community involvement.

4. Meet Families Where They Are Emotionally

Family and caregiver support content is the most efficient category in our portfolio. Visit-planning content is the single highest-traffic piece type. Care type education content holds readers longer than any other format. These pieces work because they acknowledge the emotional reality of the senior care journey. Content that acknowledges the weight of the decision and provides practical

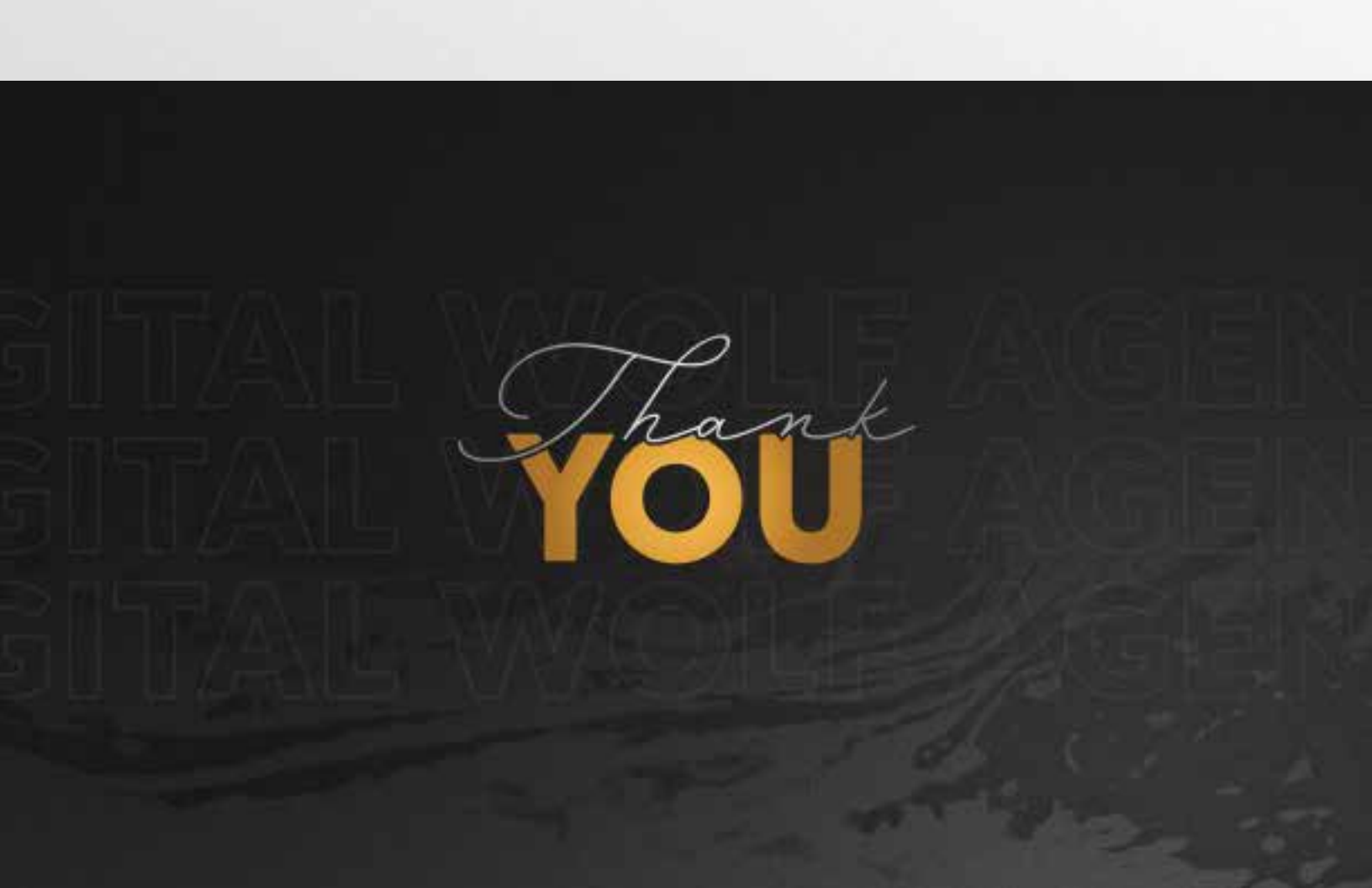
navigation tools vastly outperforms generic informational content. It is also the most underserved category across the industry and the highest-ROI place to publish today.

5. Transparency Accelerates Decisions

Pricing transparency is the thread running through every data point. “Floor Plans & Pricing” is the runaway #1 sitelink. Financial planning content shows the highest revisit behavior in the portfolio. A single Medicaid waiver page can generate thousands of page views. Families need to understand costs to move forward and communities that provide financial clarity earn attention, engagement, and trust faster. Do not make families hunt for pricing and financial information. Proactive financial content removes the #1 barrier to continued engagement.

Five Lessons

- Answer real family questions directly: specific, decision-stage messaging consistently outperforms generic marketing language.
- Show tangible proof points: pricing, floor plans, amenities, activities, and real community life drive higher engagement and conversion.
- Trust-building content: staff stories, awards, culture, and community involvement, earns the highest engagement across channels.
- Emotionally aware content that supports caregivers and families outperforms purely informational or aspirational messaging.
- Financial transparency accelerates decision-making and removes the largest barrier to continued engagement.



Thank
YOU

Contact Brandon@digitalwolfagency.com for a full look at our senior care marketing findings & strategy recommendations.

This case study reflects what Digital Wolf Agency has learned in seven years of senior care marketing, across 80+ communities spanning every price point and care level, with more than two million dollars in cumulative ad spend. The findings are aggregated at the portfolio level; performance for any individual community will vary based on local market dynamics, care type mix, pricing position, and competitive landscape.

For questions or to discuss how these findings apply to a specific community or portfolio, contact Digital Wolf Agency at brandon@digitalwolfagency.com