

# Selling to Seniors

*The Monthly Report on the Mature Market*

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## Words from Winners: Mather LifeWays Seeks Cutting-Edge

The name of the game in marketing and advertising 50+ housing is generating interest and getting people talking. Sara McVey, vice president of marketing for [Mather LifeWays](#), says going out on a limb remains the best way to do that, even if it means accidentally putting some people off along the way.

Mather LifeWays brought home three awards in the annual [Best of 50+ Housing Awards](#), presented by the [National Association of Homebuilders](#) in May. The company's efforts with The Mather, a CCRC in Illinois, nabbed it a gold award in the direct-mail marketing/advertising category (a shared award), as well as an innovation distinction. Meanwhile, its efforts for Splendido at Rancho Vistoso in Arizona earned a silver award in the special promotion category. It is the second consecutive year the marketing firm/development company drew three distinctions in the awards program.

McVey says that a centerpiece to any effort targeting the present 50+ marketplace needs to be rooted in straight-forward communication. Sure, there's plenty of room for top-notch visuals and irreverence, but some straight-shooting remains in style. Says McVey, you won't see generic advertisements of people "doing uninteresting things with smiles on their faces" out of this firm these days.

"I think there have been so many bad ads, and God knows we've probably created a few of them," she says. "When you show people sipping lemonade, they're bored by it ... They want to identify with something."

With Mather LifeWay's gold-winning direct-mail campaign that hyped the Mather, the company decided to meet perceptions of certain buyers – "I'm not ready yet," "I'm too healthy," etc. -- head-on.

McVey says the campaign relied on the strategy of telling potential buyers in the demographic that they're right about being healthy and young and how that is exactly why they want to move into a CCRC now. The photos featured older adults on a beach in standoff-ish poses with different objections to moving into a CCRC. Then, as the consumer flips open the mailing, the brochure mentions how all those realities apply to living at the Mather in a positive manner.

"You want to move in when you're still healthy, still young, because that's when you get the most out of it," McVey says of the campaign's overarching message.

And it doesn't hurt to put in edgy and sometimes comical imagery while conveying straight-talk, Mather LifeWays believes. After all, today's 50+ crowd generally sees itself as vivacious and cutting-edge.

"When you show a guy in a Speedo with a belly over the top, some people think it's great and funny ... It's a very delicate balance," McVey says of trying to have some fun with photos the firm has used. "If you're going to spend money and try to communicate with people, go for it. If you water it down so much, don't be surprised when the results are watered-down."

Once Mather LifeWays took an agreeable approach with the potential buyers, they offered information and education on the fun and opportunity within their communities. And it didn't hurt to hold special on-site events for "March Madness" (the NCAA basketball tournament) and a Chicago Comedy Trooper performance centered around lifecare skits. While interesting and fun events are a key hook, McVey says being totally upfront that there will be some type of information session helps prevent people from leaving the development with a bad taste.

"We tend to be overly transparent about it because we really only want people who are interested," she explains. "We don't really want to lure someone who's not interested under a false pretense. We don't want to anger anyone."