



HOW “INTERNALIZED AGEISM” IMPACTS SALES, MARKETING AND CENSUS

(And What You Can Do About It!)

OVERVIEW

Defining Internalized Ageism.

1. Internalized ageism is a bias, created as a sum of all the negative conditioning we receive throughout life about older people. (Dr. Tracey Gendron, Virginia Commonwealth University, Gerontologist)
2. Internalized ageism is “a prejudice against our feared future self.” (Psychologist Dr. Todd D. Nelson, California State University-Stanislaus)

For people over 40, the “subjective age,” or how they feel on the inside, is, on average, 20 years younger than their chronological age. When that subjectivity is compounded with the psychological construct known as “internalized ageism,” defined as “a prejudice against our feared future self,” this gap between a prospect’s inner and outer reality can have profound implications for how messages and images of older people are being seen and processed.

Why does it matter? As marketers and salespeople, we are judged by our results. Communities that ignore the impact of internalized ageism do so at the expense of their marketing effectiveness and sales closing rate. At 3rd3rd Marketing, we see internalized ageism as a strong, unconscious consumer preference. While we hope this attitude changes in time, at present, we must meet and respect where prospects are at mentally, emotionally and culturally.

Ageism in Advertising.

An AARP survey and analysis of thousands of advertisements targeted at older people confirmed ageism in advertising. While some 70 percent of seniors dye their hair, 90 percent of the photos showed seniors with gray hair. That’s a serious disconnect between perception and reality.

“Older individuals with more positive self-perceptions of aging lived 7.5 years longer than those with less positive self-perceptions of aging.”

—Levy, Kunkel, Kasl (2002)

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9 THINGS TO MITIGATE THE IMPACT OF INTERNALIZED AGEISM ON YOUR BOTTOM LINE.

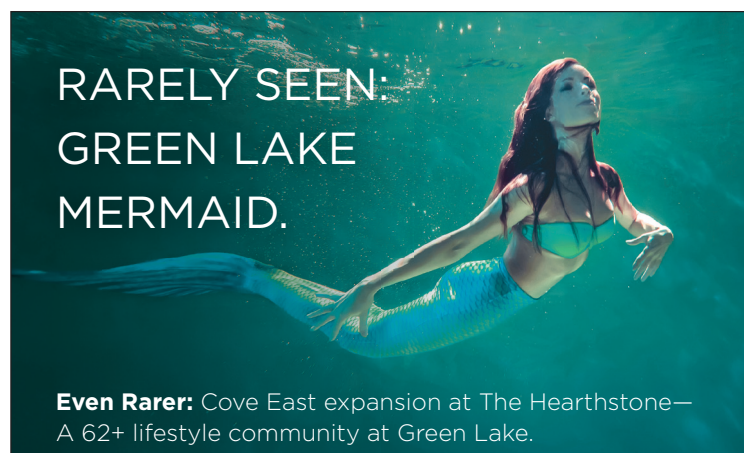
- 1. Remember that age is not a demographic.** Avoid defining prospects solely by age or care needs versus their aspirations, interests, lifestyles and goals.
- 2. Review and update your photo library.** Are you using care-focused images that trigger the number one fear of Baby Boomers? That fear can be summed up as “ending up in the nursing home.” Like most fears, it is not necessarily accurate or rational but still has sway over decision-making.
- 3. Position your community as part of a positive aging solution.** Potential residents are looking to see if your values and services match their own goals for their life in terms of wellness, healthy dining, lifelong learning and social engagement. What is the strongest pillar of your offerings? Focus on that in your branding and elevate it in your marketing. If you have nothing that stands out or your community does many things well, pick one that differentiates your community in your market. Note: “We care” or “We have great residents” are not differentiators.
- 4. Think beyond the building.** Is the main “hero shot” of your community a photo of the building taken from the parking lot? Unless your building is spectacular, consider a more interesting lifestyle image or amenity to feature. First impressions are everything.
- 5. Don't rely exclusively on advertising sales promotions.** No one ever said: “I saved \$2,500 by uprooting my entire life.” Therefore, competing on price and saying, “We're on sale!” is a losing tactic from a branding perspective. However, a money-saving offer is acceptable as a closing tactic to incentivize a prospect to act now during the contract presentation. Still, it is not an effective marketing appeal to fill the funnel. If your community is “on sale,” prospects will wonder what is wrong with it.
- 6. Avoid ageist dining practices.** If a resident moves from independent living to assisted living, do they receive the same quality of meals? If not, consider upgrading your dining program so a higher level of care doesn't result in a lower quality of food.
- 7. Get creative and conceptual.** You can advertise your community without using photos of buildings or photos of seniors. Instead, find a metaphor that works for your community or tap into something interesting and rare that you offer. We have provided some good examples on the next page.
- 8. Win over the Adult Daughter.** The Adult Daughter is one of your biggest influencers. If she can say, “I'd live here,” you're more likely to win over her parent. However, avoid using “othering” language, which is speaking about the person as if they have no agency or choice in the matter.
- 9. Educate your teams and staff.** While many are probably familiar with the concept of ageism, internalized ageism is less understood. Share this work with them, especially those in marketing, sales and social media.

5 MARKETING APPROACHES TO COUNTER INTERNALIZED AGEISM.

1. **Healthy people doing aspirational things.** Many senior living marketers will tell us, “That’s not our resident.” While an 87-year-old might never throw on a pair of hiking boots and trek five miles, they can still aspire to become healthier, steadier, more balanced, vibrant and happier. Who are we to say they can’t hope to be more? As cultural editors, we believe it is our role to lift people up and inspire them to become the best version of themselves at any age. It is ageist and ableist to assume prospects are in decline and can’t improve.

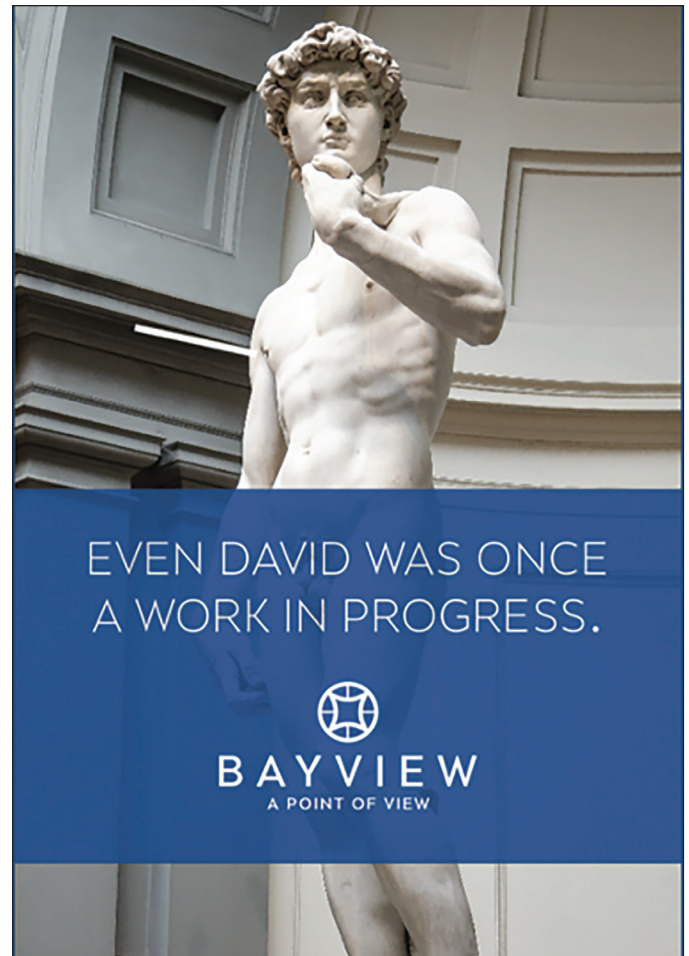


2. **Present a lifestyle or philosophy they can appreciate.** Many people are attracted to the Danish ideal of “hygge” or “hoo-ga.” This philosophy is about making the most out of simple, everyday things. We took inspiration from hygge and applied it to a community that served a large Scandinavian population in the Seattle area to great effect. What cultural ideas, philosophies or core sentiments can you embrace and adopt into your community?



3. **Get conceptual.** Where’s the rule that says you must show photos of seniors or buildings to advertise senior living? The mermaid campaign above demonstrates how a purely conceptual approach can grab attention and create a feeling of whimsy while still being relevant. This lease-up campaign generated 250 attendees over two weeks, and all 22 units had deposits in less than three months. It achieved a marketing ROI of 250:1. Visit 3rd3rd.com/mermaid to download the white paper on how we did it.

4. **Use humor.** Using visual metaphors and comparisons with humor can get attention and create positive associations. When done appropriately, it differentiates you while adding a new layer of meaning to your brand. For example, Bayview was under renovation around the same time the Statue of David had finished its restoration. Comparing Bayview's expansion to a masterpiece and renaissance paid off when we had very little to show.
5. **Lead with dining.** Dining is essential in senior living at all levels. If you have a good culinary program, leverage it in your marketing. People will excuse older interiors and buildings if the dining is good. As we say, "Meals are marketing." If your dining is above average, you can use event marketing featuring specialty items. If you don't have a great culinary program, you can still lead with food—ensure it is catered and delicious. Food images catch the eye just as well as lifestyle images.



NOTES:

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We hope this information is helpful. Let us know if there is anything we can do to help!

—Your friends at 3rd3rd

WHO WE ARE & HOW WE CAN HELP

THE UN-SENIOR LIVING BRAND MARKETING AGENCY.

What does it mean to be the only “Un-Senior Living” marketing agency? It means “un-ageist” content, unexpected creative, unforgettable work, uncommonly great ROIs, unparalleled service and unbelievable results.



3rd3rd develops one-of-a-kind branding, marketing and lead generation programs that work 100% of the time. We adapt to your speed and processes, working as a true partner who is invested in your long-term success.

Full-Service Brand Marketing Agency

Branding • Repositioning • Sales Coaching • Digital Marketing Public Relations • Web Development • & More

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