

Elite BEAT:

Janis Ehlers: Targeting boomers and active adults

LC: You have carved out a niche helping real estate developers and others reach the 50+ market. What's different about this age group?

JE: The most remarkable thing is the sheer size of the 50+ market as the boomer generation reaches its 50s and 60s. The numbers are staggering. More than 10 million Americans will be over 50 by 2010. So all kinds of advertisers want to target them. Ski lodges in Aspen have initiated a new ski program for boomers who are either going back to skiing or learning it for the first time. Harley Davidson has designed models with boomers in mind. At the same time, our image of this age group is undergoing a change. Someone in their 50s, or even their 60s, is no longer considered a senior. "Active adults" and "boomers" work better as descriptive terms. This is a generation of savvy consumers, less likely to be swayed by traditional advertising. Remember, these are the people who coined the phrase "Shop 'til you drop!" Advertising is good to create awareness, but the difference is that this consumer group is used to buying with plastic and is not afraid of going into debt for immediate gratification. So they need to be targeted differently. They like parties, personal attention, amenities and services that mean they have to do less themselves.

LC: What distinguishes The Ehlers Group from public relations or advertising agencies?

JE: Traditional public relations helps developers reach their audiences by getting their projects publi-

cized. While we can do that, we offer a much broader range of services. We help with marketing research, focus groups, strategic positioning - everything from putting together a developer's team, which could include lining up the advertising agency, bringing an interior designer on board or coordinating website development if that's needed, to getting people in to the sales office to preview the project. In essence, we become their marketing department.

LC: How did you develop a focus in real estate?

JE: It was a natural choice, given my background. I have an MBA in real estate from Nova Southeastern University, and before establishing The Ehlers Group I worked for two companies that developed active adult communities - Century Village and Levitt & Sons.

LC: Is marketing for active adults different in Florida, with its huge population of retirees?

JE: Yes. In South Florida, for example, if you're marketing a highrise where units are priced over \$800,000, you're automatically in this market. So there's not an overwhelming number of age-qualified condos going up. The Palace Weston, a luxury condo community, is one I'm working with.

LC: How did you make the leap from local firm to national consultant?

JE: I think the publication of my book, "Marketing Seniors' Housing," in 2002 was instrumental in launching my national work. Since then I've



been asked to address several national groups, and Ehlers Group has been consulted by developers all over the country who want to reach this market segment. After all, not everyone retires to South Florida! But it's a great place to learn the ropes. Having honed my skills here, I feel confident I can apply them any- where.

LC: What's next? Do you have any plans to expand?

JE: Right now I have five employees, and that feels about right. We like being a boutique firm; I prefer to be actively involved with all my clients. Personally, I'd like to take some time to travel. I love traveling to new places, not knowing what's around the corner. I'm thinking of trips to Spain and Italy next.

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