

Watermark Retirement Communities

COMPANY

Watermark Retirement Communities owns and operates over 70 award-winning senior living communities whose services include independent living, assisted living, and memory care.

LOCATION

Tucson, Arizona

PRODUCT USED

Hootsuite Enterprise
Hootsuite Analytics
Hootsuite Premier Services
Hootsuite Insights Powered by Brandwatch

INDUSTRY

Senior living



Watermark Gives its Retirement Communities a Voice

The senior living services provider empowers its communities to tell their own stories and build their own social media audience



What do you imagine when you think about retirement communities? For most of us, they're places where seniors are told when to wake up, when and what to eat, and when and how to be entertained; places where they exist but don't live. It's far from an ideal image.

Grounded in the belief that aging is about renewal rather than retirement, Watermark Retirement Communities paints a different picture: that everyone—no matter what age—deserves a life filled with purpose, possibility, and joy. The company's founder, David Freshwater, focused on building communities that offer and encourage choice along with fine amenities, integrative wellness, and innovative programs such as the award-winning Watermark University.

This original thinking makes a difference. Out of Watermark's 70+ senior living communities across 19 states, 23



91.4%

increase in engagement rate

(engagement rate went from 0.8% to 9.3%, much higher than the 1.2% industry benchmark for healthcare)



3348%

increase in impressions

(impressions went from 493,000 to 17 million)



1118%

increase in social media posts since using Hootsuite

(posts went from 616 per year to 7,500 posts per year since using Hootsuite)

of them have been recognized as Best Senior Living communities by the U.S. News & World Report 2023 Best Senior Living Survey. Fifty-seven Watermark communities were recognized as high performers in the Long-Term Care Equality Index by the Human Rights Campaign and SAGE (Services and Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Elders).

But Watermark is not just passively accepting accolades. Its focus is to keep improving and actively showcasing what's necessary to make a difference in the lives of seniors. Looking for new ways to spread its message, Watermark ventured into the world of social media but initially

fell short of its goals, struggling to reach the right audience and increase engagement.

All the communities co-manage their online presence, which makes it challenging to ensure consistent messaging. What's more, the company's employees—spread out across the country—had varying degrees of social media skills and understanding, some not having any knowledge of it at all.

The team made the decision to search for a platform that would help communities promote themselves while ensuring consistency of brand voice. That's when Watermark found Hootsuite.



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What they did

Before Hootsuite, Watermark only used social media to share blog entries written by separate retirement communities. When they were published on the website, it would automatically trigger a post to Facebook. This setup was very centralized and didn't offer the communities the freedom to post content their unique audiences would want to engage with. Everything changed with Hootsuite.

Diana Demers, Social Media Manager at Watermark, oversees the social media presence of the Watermark corporate channels and Facebook pages for all 70+ communities.

"We really liked a lot of the features that Hootsuite offered," says Demers. "For example, people can monitor, respond to, and engage with comments and messages on Facebook pages. But what really sold us in the beginning was being able to create an approval flow where communities could submit their posts and we could review them. We could use this flow to provide coaching on image size, writing, and so on."

After receiving training and support, each community posts directly to its own Facebook page, shapes its social media footprint, and influences audience growth using Hootsuite, including tools like the content library and analytics.





The outcomes are clear: Since the launch of Hootsuite, over 250 users have shared a combined 7,500 posts per year, compared to only 616 annual posts before. This resulted in average impressions per year growing to 17 million from 493,000 and the engagement rate shooting up to 9.3% from 0.83%.

“It’s not until I take a step back and look at some of these numbers that I see how much we have changed,” says Demers. “And I’m very proud of it all, but particularly of the communities because they now have experience in marketing on social media, which is not something that most were previously familiar with. They now know how to use hashtags, how to implement a call to action, and read and apply analytics.”



How they did it

The first step was setting up the Hootsuite approval flow to help communities learn how to create on-brand posts that are engaging and follow best practices.

“Thanks to the setup, we were able to reject some posts with a note explaining why this happened so that they could then resubmit it following our guidance,” says Demers.

Watermark also provides training that includes one-on-one sessions and short video clips from Hootsuite Premier Services—a service designed to meet more complex business needs, including tailored solutions, personalized training, and dedicated support from Hootsuite experts.

Demers’ centralized team identified top-performing participants in the

program and released them from the approval flow in batches. Over only six weeks, every community gained full independence and now posts directly to its own Facebook page, using Hootsuite to its full advantage.

This approach of planned independence helped individual communities highlight their

achievements, residents, and employees, as well as give families another way of keeping up to date with their loved ones' daily lives. It's also a chance for prospective residents to get a glimpse of what life is like in a local community so they can better determine if that's the one they would like to call home one day.

Setting up a system where existing and new employees can learn and practice before becoming independent in their use of social media proved to be the perfect solution. What's more, the tools that Hootsuite provides allow the communities to continue to build on this success without significant corporate oversight.

Using training to its full advantage

The Watermark team combines Hootsuite training with their own curriculum that includes photography tips, writing techniques, and company-specific best practices. There are lessons on the type of content that Watermark wants its communities to share, tagging other pages to maximize exposure, using hashtags, utilizing the photo-editing tool, and many other tips that make employees more confident and comfortable with social media.

"I've had some concerns before, but I am so proud and impressed," says Demers. "The communities are really doing an amazing job. I've seen so many improvements in the content that they're sharing. And since we began using Hootsuite, we've seen a large increase in participation with social media posts."



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Diana Demers

Social Media Manager, Watermark Retirement Communities

Watermark also decided to use Hootsuite Professional Services in an original way. The company requested a custom Hootsuite training recording, which it divided into smaller pieces and placed on its internal learning module. Premier Services will soon help Watermark build a dedicated page as well as formalize and update the videos, which will allow new employees to become educated faster on demand.

“But some people are intimidated by social media even after training,” says Demers. “So, I offer to put them in the approval flow, and we can review and edit their posts and talk about the changes we make. As they start to feel more comfortable, we release them from the flow. It’s been nice to still have that feature at our disposal.”



Providing the right tools for success

Each Watermark community has a community life director who creates engaging programs to enrich the lives of residents—they are also responsible for sharing content for their specific community. “Our community life teams play a pivotal role in Watermark’s multilayered marketing efforts, and their contributions to social media are invaluable. Their unwavering dedication, creativity, and compassion authentically illustrate the active, engaging, and fulfilling lifestyle our communities offer. Their ability to produce such extraordinary content makes them a unique asset to our big-picture strategy.”

Demers’ previous role as a community life director has allowed her to develop efficient tools and resources designed to maximize their poten-

tial for positive results. Offering them social media post templates via Hootsuite's content library has proven to be one of the most successful decisions on this journey.

There are templates set up for 12 months in advance and all that the community teams need to do is fill in the blanks, upload photos, and schedule the posts. There are also evergreen templates for associate spotlights and resident spotlights that provide the additional benefit of free testimonials when people comment on them.

The templates are a simple but effective way to ensure that the messaging aligns with the brand, that signature programs are promoted, and that communities can easily share content—even if they don't have time to compose a post. It's also been helpful for those who, at first, aren't comfortable with social media.

"A lot of people love the templates," says Demers. "I even had a call with a community life director the other day and she said the templates 'saved her life'. It meant a lot to hear that."

And although the templates remain incredibly helpful, those responsible for creating posts have increased their confidence and their skills. In almost no time at all, the quality of the content shared has improved so much that Demers is finding it easier to share it on the corporate page and focus on the bigger picture. "Hootsuite has allowed me to have my finger on the pulse of what is going on across the board and then be able to use that for the high-level strategy," she says. "I have a bird's-eye view of what is going on at all of our communities across the country; it's helped me develop national campaigns, collaborate across other departments, and share valuable insight with stakeholders."

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Recognizing achievements and analyzing data

Watermark has 256 Hootsuite users and 92 social networks, and their social media engagement is through the roof. The company's community standard requires a minimum of four posts per month, but many locations exceed this number significantly.

"One of our regions has excelled so much, I actually had to do a full portfolio-wide audit to make sure the

numbers were correct," says Demers. "Nine communities shared over 270 posts in one month, with one community sharing 75 posts in 30 days."

Demers created a social media star badge to recognize her social posters who exceed the standards, show appreciation for their work, and showcase what's possible. Recently, one community life director was recognized for going from 30 posts per year

to 327, reaching 20,000 more people, and increasing impressions by 418%.

Everyone in the company can cheer on and leave comments via the internal community channel.

"Being able to applaud people for their efforts also creates friendly competition," says Demers. "More people are getting recognized, and I think it's been a really great way to get everyone on board."

The journey from the approval flow to encouraging communities to play a more active role in their own social media created an entirely new universe of separate entities whose impact is easily visible through Hootsuite Analytics.

Hootsuite Analytics automatically sends over 70 reports every month to all the communities and their executive and sales directors. On a larger scale, regional directors of sales and

marketing review the reports on their monthly calls and the data gives everyone a chance to see the results and plan for the future.

“With Hootsuite Analytics, we can track our progress,” says Demers. “The reports also help recognize and celebrate community successes, acknowledge what a wonderful job they’re doing, and help them expand on their efforts.”



“Our associates hold a unique power to post content that resonates with people on a personal level—they’re sharing real stories that evoke genuine emotions and foster a deeper sense of community. I believe leveraging the power of human connection builds consumer trust and generates interest more rapidly than any externally produced B2C content ever could.”

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What's next

Watermark's journey started with low social media maturity and ended with engaged communities and millions of post impressions. But the company is not slowing down, and it recently purchased Hootsuite Insights Powered by Brandwatch.

"We'll be able to monitor not only mentions of Watermark Retirement Communities but also of our

nonprofit organization, Watermark for Kids," says Demers. "This will allow us to reshare new content on our pages, whether we're mentioned in a news article or in a community post that didn't tag us. Continuing to build on what we have and focusing more on how we can maximize our exposure overall is something I'm really looking forward to."

The company is also streamlining its Hootsuite onboarding process, starting with granting access and ending with a welcome email. Onboarding will also include training and materials hosted on the new Premier-built landing page.

But most importantly, Demers is happy that the platform will continue to provide a way for the communities to share their successes. It was the whole point of this journey and it's something that makes her incredibly proud to see.

Demers recalls contacting a community associate about a social post to capture the loving bond between residents and associates at Watermark. "The associate mentioned how sharing her life journey with residents is the greatest joy, including their constant love and support as she celebrates



important milestones. It was especially emotional for me to hear because I witness these moments through the lens of social media—the social posts she’s shared via Hootsuite over the years have shown smiling residents celebrating her life milestones, such as her engagement, wedding, promotion and baby shower. Her incredible story, accompanied by a heartwarming clip of a resident celebrating her pregnancy is one of our corporate channel’s top-performing posts this year.”

Watermark’s success highlights the value of organic social media in digital marketing; empowering the communities to share their stories has helped shape the brand while establishing meaningful connections with their online audience. “Our associates hold a unique power to post content that resonates with people on a personal level— they’re sharing real stories that

evoke genuine emotions and foster a deeper sense of community. I believe leveraging the power of human connection builds consumer trust and generates interest more rapidly than any externally produced B2C content ever could,” Demers reflects.

Through Hootsuite, Watermark communities have shared thousands of posts that inspire people to think differently about retirement and challenge the stereotypes commonly associated with senior living. Following Watermark’s guiding principle of “celebrate often,” Demers offers endless anecdotes that highlight their success.

“One of our communities recently shared the news that two of its residents, who’d met there, just got married,” she says.

“And I recently saw a comment on a Facebook page that said: ‘I love seeing all these posts. I came for a tour with my father and I’m so excited to have him be a part of the community.’” This is what it is all about.



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