

DON'T GET CHESTER'D

BY LAUREN BOSTON

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A SLEAZY CHARACTER HELPS ONE CALIFORNIA APARTMENT MANAGEMENT COMPANY SEPARATE ITSELF FROM THE COMPETITION WITH HUMOROUS MARKETING VIDEOS.

If you've ever rented an apartment, you've probably met a Chester. He's the sleazy leasing consultant who makes derogatory comments to women, answers the phone with an attitude and rents units that are filthy.

He's also nothing like the employees at Sequoia Equities.

That's the message the Walnut Creek, Calif.-based apartment management company wanted to get across when it recently launched the "Don't Get Chester'd" campaign—a series of humorous videos in which a leasing consultant named Chester makes every textbook faux pas when dealing with residents and prospects (<http://experiencesequoia.com/experience-sequoia/chester/>).

Lisa Trapp, Director of Marketing for Sequoia Equities, says the character of Chester was created to expose common industry misconceptions to both Gen Y'ers—a group who has a limited experience with the rental process—and Baby Boomers—a group who likely has not rented an apartment for a long time.

"Our brand promise is 'the experience matters,' so our plots illustrate ridiculous examples of poor customer service and demonstrate an obvious contrast to what our customer can expect from Sequoia," Trapp says.

Sequoia hired an actor to play Chester and recruited the rest of the talent from within. The four videos, each less than a minute and a half long, feature the fictitious leasing agent insulting residents at a community event, making sexist comments to a prospective female resident, refusing to help a resident with a maintenance request and giving a new resident the keys to a ransacked apartment. The videos have since been posted on YouTube and a vanity URL that directs users to a specific page on Sequoia's corporate site.





Sequoia Equities' employees show off their promotional t-shirts. Many have had acting roles in the video series.

The "Don't Get Chester'd" campaign was officially launched Aug. 1. To promote the videos, all onsite employees are wearing jeans and a "Don't Get Chester'd" t-shirt every Friday. Additionally, Sequoia is paying the actor who played Chester to post sarcastic and snide remarks on the company's Facebook page and visit communities at random. Residents who post a photo of the sighting are rewarded. Once the videos receive 1,000 fans on Facebook, Sequoia also will launch a "Tell Us Your Best 'I Got Chester'd' Story" contest.

Prospective residents are being targeted with follow-up e-mails that warn them of potential "Chesters" and include a link to one

of the four videos. "We assume this will be a welcome change to the traditional, canned follow-up response most companies auto-send to prospects through their property management and lead management software," Trapp says.

The 'Most Interesting Property Manager'

In addition to the Chester videos, Sequoia Equities launched "The Most Interesting Property Manager" campaign, which included a comical video targeted to future investors and fee management clients that features a fictitious and over-the-top property manager (<http://sequoiaequities.com/most-interesting->

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property-manager/). The video is a spoof on the “Most Interesting Man in the World” Dos Equis beer commercials.

“The concept is that most innovative property management/real estate investment companies come prepared with a slew of marketing materials, such as brochures and PowerPoint presentations, to pitch their corporate capabilities to this group of customers,” Trapp says. “While these items are necessary, Sequoia wanted to do something innovative which would help these folks remember our company amid a sea of competitors.”

Trapp says the idea for both campaigns originated during an internal brainstorming session last year aimed at creating ways for Sequoia to better utilize video media. The company wanted to create something that hadn’t been done before in the industry by making a memorable and humorous campaign.

All concept development—including script writing, storyboarding, talent sourcing, and prop and location scouting—was done in-house. Sequoia hired a production company to do the videography and editing.

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Walnut Creek, Calif.

Trapp says the total cost for all five videos for the campaigns cost \$15,000—a worthwhile expense, she adds. “These videos are a component of our overall consumer-driven marketing strategy, which essentially seeks to amplify consumer feedback, inspire conversation and subsequent engagement with current customers, while also providing prospects with the crucial information from their peers that they seek on platforms like Facebook and YouTube in advance of a purchase decision,” she says.

Though both campaigns are still in the early stages, Trapp says the videos have received positive comments on Sequoia’s YouTube and Facebook pages, and the company saw an immediate 30 percent increase in fans on both sites. 🐾

Lauren Boston is NAA’s Staff Writer. She can be reached at lauren@naahq.org or 703/797-0678.

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