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Using Digital Communication to Increase Community Culture

Communication is the cornerstone of an engaged community. Digital workplaces may have many benefits, but can virtual communication transform the community experience? The digital age has made it possible for us to reach our professional and personal contacts across the globe in a matter of minutes. More business transactions take place in virtual boardrooms than golf courses these days. It is impressive to see the impact technology has on businesses and the personal lives of every individual.

If there is one thing we learned from this global pandemic, it is the value of time and the ability to connect and transact at the stroke of a key, which has now become an expectation in society. Some organizations realized that the benefit of working from home could increase productivity for some businesses by reducing commute time for their employees and providing quality time for families. Due to this, orga-

nizations everywhere are turning to technology solutions to create a positive employee experience for everyone.

Why Switch to Digital Communication?

But how does digital communication affect condominium communities? Does it force the baby boomers away from the expectation of the dated paper notices delivered to their door? Must everyone have access to a computer or a smartphone to communicate effectively? Perhaps, there are ways of reaching a happy medium.

As a portfolio manager, I find it extremely important to be connected to my communities. With some buildings that provide limited onsite office hours, it is essential to ensure that residents feel comfortable reaching their manager when the need arises and that they do not feel isolated or neglected.

Many communication platforms are geared to serve the condominium market today, such as Max Condo Club,

Concierge Plus, Condo Control Central, BuildingLink and the 1Valet app. These platforms provide the ease of sending mass communication, emergency broadcast SMS messaging, managing visitor parking, parcel deliveries and classifieds for property managers. Residents can log in and update their unit profile, review important condominium documents, information certificates, minutes of board meetings and access standard forms for their communities. Some of these forms are fillable PDFs that no longer require the printing of hard copies, thereby reducing our carbon footprint.

For example, I recently implemented a handy new smart building operating system app in the community that I manage. The app allows residents to use their smartphones instead of a traditional fob to enter the building and the parking garage. The access is strictly controlled by management and is only for residents of the build-

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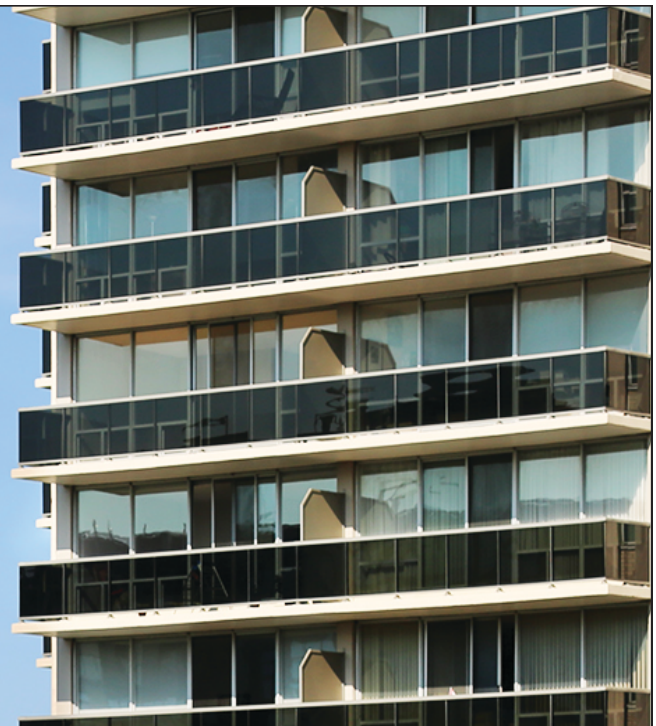
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ing. The system is a hardwired internet connection accessible in the underground parking levels where cell phone reception is not always present. The app also provides a parcel management system where couriers independently scan and drop off packages to a central parcel room. The system then notifies the resident directly, and the resident, by using a barcode, will access the room to retrieve their package. Parcel management is a very time-consuming task for the onsite concierge personnel

in many residential buildings. Taking this task away from the concierge provides them with more time to focus on essential matters such as the safety and security of the building and resident engagement.

Promoting a Positive Employee Experience

While digital communication improves and enhances resident engagement, it is also vital in building an intelligent workplace and provid-

ing an easy way for organizations to communicate in real-time with their employees. In addition to keeping employees informed, digital communication and technology enable all employees to have a voice throughout an organization.

In my communities, we have successfully created a WhatsApp chat group where pictures of common area deficiencies noted during inspections, security incidents and any pertinent information related to the sites are shared amongst the team. I have connected the site teams of my smaller communities to this group so we can share information and knowledge. Any team member may ask for assistance on a typical building issue they encounter. I have found it to be a very effective way of communicating as the responses are quick and informative. As businesses change, digital workplace platforms can help enable a positive and empowered employee experience, allowing them to be more involved and share their expertise and ideas.

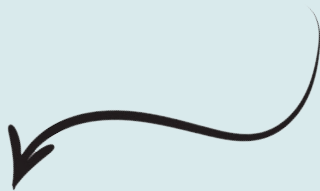
Shared Purpose and Values

The use of technology has become increasingly important, but it's not the only solution. There is still a vital role for in-person discussions, town halls, videos, and meetings in most organizations. However, when used effectively, the impact of technology can be profound. Management companies can be inspirational drivers by setting a higher standard of excellence and motivating their employees to join in their purpose. This will attract clients who love what they are doing, and it is that engagement that ultimately impacts a company's bottom line.

Enabling an excellent resident experience leads to happy customers and a successfully managed community. That's when you will really win! ■

Jessica Gunawardana, RCM, has been in the condominium management industry for the past 15 years and her experience ranges from managing highrise buildings, shared facilities with retail to townhome projects. She is presently employed with Melbourne Property Management as a Senior condominium Manager, managing a portfolio of 5 buildings plus shared facilities in the beautiful Etobicoke area. melbournepm.ca

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