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Bringing Communities Together in the Digital Condo Landscape

From a recent informal survey that I took the liberty of conducting for this article, I discovered, to no surprise, a majority of condominium owners prefer to get updates and community news online, and only a few prefer getting updates from handouts and bulletin board postings. Simply put, owners want information presented to them at lightning-fast speeds. Gone are the “good old days” when property managers would go from door to door dropping off notices and newsletters, navigating landmines (sometimes almost literally, in the case of condo complexes with a lot of pets) along the way. The idea that “we need information right now, not yesterday” has become the mantra throughout the condo industry. This is why property management firms are investing time and financial resources in online condominium-based community platforms with the likes of

Concierge Plus, Condo Control Central, Yardi, and so many others. It brings a strong social media presence, not to mention a tool to issue work orders, book amenities, and much more.

Embracing Social Media

When it comes to keeping owners and residents informed about the daily activities of a condominium complex, if there’s one thing I’ve learned, it is that management firms have no choice but to embrace social media and other online platforms. With the correct use of an online platform, property managers and the boards we serve can expand our point of contact amongst the owners and keep them well informed. This particular art form of keeping owners well informed requires effort to understand indeed. Many factors can affect the correct use of social media in informing condo owners.

Here are some quick tips property managers can utilize:

- With the aid of technology, property managers can truly take condo owners everywhere they go: online platforms allow owners to feel like they’re being kept in the loop all the time.
- Exercise restraint. Don’t write an epic novel when simple words and language will do in announcements and bulletins. Conversely, writing lengthy postings will stop residents from reading them at all.
- Balance the frequency of content: too many postings and announcements will undermine the intended effect; only post items that are relevant.

The advent of digital videos and photos has made relaying information about issues at a condo complex a lot

easier. Social media and online platforms have drastically changed relations between property managers and owners. In particular, it changed the way we communicate specific repair and maintenance issues. Videos and pictures of areas of concern have saved numerous hours, not to mention energy in deciphering exact concerns owners might have – be it leaks, noise concerns, etc. The old saying goes: “A picture is worth a thousand words.” In my experience as a property manager, sometimes it’s more like a million (if you’ll permit some slight hyperbole).

Additionally, video-sharing undoubtedly assists property managers with instructional information to residents. For sure, this has saved me time and energy in the past. For example, I used a video to demonstrate the proper method of securing entrance doors to residents of a high-rise building. Importantly, owners can now take and send videos of specific issues for managers to get to the root of the problem and dispatch the appropriate work orders for repair. Simply put, managers can get to the issue’s core faster with less frustra-

tion, and miscommunications can be avoided, saving valuable time.

Building Relationships

The effectiveness and importance of social media platforms come down to one simple thing – building relationships. In today’s world of digital media, understanding your condo owners and building relationships is simple - if you know what you’re doing, of course. Through online platforms, property managers now understand owners in specific property portfolios in ways never seen before. For example, a property manager using social media platforms to build relationships in demographics consisting mainly of students versus a more mature ownership base will be different. Social media has changed the way managers and management firms interact with owners. In the past, the primary method of interaction between property managers and owners was through handouts, mail (registered or otherwise). In the present digital age, owners can simply email or post questions on an online platform or share their thoughts on dreaded complaints. To engage in a productive relationship

with owners, property managers need to have a presence on social media and online platforms.

However, the desire to engage on social media platforms can be challenging as posts can often contain irrelevant information. Here are some methods to create relationships with owners on social media and online platforms:

- Establish clear and concise communication with owners. The property manager is the professional who needs to maintain their position as an authority or expert in the industry. Many owners who have a strong relationship with their property managers share similar goals in seeing the condo running smoothly.
- Some owners, not all, seek connection with the board and property manager, especially if they wish to share ideas and concerns. The property manager must evaluate their tone and language in any postings or announcements on online platforms. They should convey a



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welcoming attitude in connecting with owners.

- Take time to understand the ownership base. Follow conversations on forums to seek out specific issues that are important to the community. By highlighting how these concerns may be addressed, relationships with owners can be established with trust and understanding.

Using Social Media Successfully

Management firms who engage on social media and online platforms have higher chances of building relationships with the ownership. Engagement with owners demonstrates that managers are not cold-hearted professionals who nonchalantly post mundane information just for the sake of it. Owners are looking to connect with managers - this is one of the best ways of doing it.

Managers should be mindful of what they are posting and assess whether it will resonate with the community. Are managers providing owners with something of which they are concerned? If not, this can open up new issues. If the owners find value, they'll continue to engage with the platform. Every interaction is an opportunity to build relationships and deepen the condo experience. Additionally, no complaint should go unaddressed.

Social media is continuing to grow, and it's increasingly becoming a preferred channel for communication. By utilizing

online platforms to build relationships, managers can benefit significantly by helping owners understand the challenges of their job. Managers need to consistently investigate new ways to build relationships with owners to increase engagement and provide them with what they're looking for in property management firms and managers.

Social media has recently been scrutinized for its misuse and is earning a reputation for causing more harm than good in communities. This includes pitting owners against each other, thus adding stress to property managers who are dragged into refereeing Hatfield-and-McCoy-type feuds amongst neighbour condo owners. Conversely, online platforms can be used as a harmonious instrument for bringing communities together.

Boards of directors and property managers have used online platforms and social media as a rallying cry for gardening committees and volunteers to beautify condo communities. Events like this have sparked initiatives across condominiums throughout the province, with excellent results in bringing communities together for a cause. In cases like these, an outpouring of owners embracing common goals and can generate tremendous support.

Whether helping new owners understand the act, declaration, by-laws and rules of their condominium, social media can be an effective way to inform owners. Condominium communities are

not always cohesive units, and yes, some owners are not as engaging as others. They might not know their next-door neighbour, much less the family down around the corner in their townhouse complex. This is an excellent opening for social media platforms to help connect residents who live in the same condo complex but otherwise wouldn't have an opportunity to meet.

I discovered through experience that not every owner necessarily reads the notices and newsletters handed out, as mentioned above. Still, an increasing number of them are checking social media and online platforms. The tools provided can function as a community bulletin board and act as an avenue to request maintenance and repair work. Whether it's notifying owners about safety and security issues or just alerting owners to services being performed onsite, it's all about building community, and a community is all about trust. ■

Bill Lang, RCM, OLCM, BBA, is a Property Manager with CIE Property Management & Consulting. To accomplish various projects and major initiatives, he enjoys expanding communication lines between condo directors, owners, professionals and trades. He possesses a wealth of experience in property management and consulting. Bill currently manages condominiums in Guelph, Rockwood, Waterloo Region and Hamilton. He can be reached at blang@teamcie.ca



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