

Marketing Your CIC Management Company Through Social Media:

A Guide to the Most Basic Elements of the New Marketing Frontier

by Jeffrey C. O'Brien, Mansfield Tanick & Cohen, P.A.

A CIC management company, like any other business, needs to understand the tools available to them to market through social media. While this subject could comprise an entire issue of *CIC Midwest News*, a basic understanding of what the main social media sites are, what they do, and how they can be used, is key knowledge to anyone looking to grow their business in a cost effective manner.

It's hard to go anywhere these days without seeing some reference to "LinkedIn", "Facebook" or "Twitter." These three social media sites are at the forefront of a marketing revolution, a revolution which all businesses need to recognize and adapt to.

Social media is changing the way companies market their goods and services. Unlike the Yellow Pages, TV and radio, all of which reached a broad, untargeted population, social media allows users to

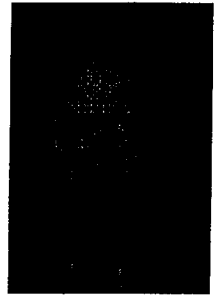
create their own target audience with which to target with their message.

LinkedIn (www.LinkedIn.com): LinkedIn is the most popular professional networking site. Here, users have a profile page which they populate with their education, employment history, website(s) and other information. LinkedIn also allows its users to establish "connections" to other professionals, and these connections can be used to make virtual introductions through a mutual contact using the LinkedIn site. Users can join groups (in fact, CIC Midwest has a LinkedIn group for members) which can include discussions among members and even from time to time, referrals of business. LinkedIn also accommodates company profiles in addition to individual profile pages. The most powerful marketing tool, however, offered by LinkedIn, is the recommendations section, which allows satisfied customers and clients to post recommen-

dations on your page. What could be better than positive word-of-mouth advertising that is displayed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year? LinkedIn is a *must* for all professionals, including those in the CIC industry of all stripes.

Facebook (www.Facebook.com): Facebook made its name as a site for connecting friends on a personal level, but Facebook's exponential growth (if it were a country it would be the fourth largest in the world) has led to an inevitable targeting by the business world. Having a "fan page" on Facebook has become almost as imperative as having a LinkedIn profile, and you can inform your "fans" of

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Find your evangelists. The term "evangelist" is one you'll often see in relation to social media. Your evangelists will use word of mouth marketing on your behalf because they believe in your management company or your community, and they have had good experiences. Keep in mind that evangelists often pop up out of what was once a negative situation. If you handle complaints well, you can earn a great deal of respect from those who originally felt wronged by you.

Monitor what is being said. Set up free Google Alerts for your company name, your company owners and managers, or your association - whatever you'll find helpful to monitor. Consider setting up alerts for your competitors. Whenever your company name (or other alert) is

mentioned on the internet, Google sends you an email with this information.

Create a response plan. Respond appropriately to the comments you receive in your alerts. Reach out to whoever's doing the talking, especially the unhappy ones.

The number one rule of thumb when engaging in social media is transparency. The more honest you are, the more credibility you'll have.

Act as quickly as possible and always approach (legitimate) complaints with empathy. We've all had bad experiences or just plain bad days. Chances are that people won't take the time post some-

thing negative unless they feel they've been wronged somehow. Thank them for bringing the issue to your attention. Give an honest explanation of the situation, and show that you're taking action to correct the problem.

Robert Turnbull says that if you are honest and funny about a negative situation, your Generation Y clientele will embrace you.

Truly off-the-wall and crass comments, on the other hand, do not require a response. When people use profanity and are disrespectful, they've already discredited themselves and disqualified their own claims. Have your evangelists rally around you. Let *them* call out the negative person. This often happens naturally, without prompting. ■

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moving into our communities have grown up with the internet and have come to expect instant information. The board and manager's time is valuable and can be quickly used up with requests for information that may be more easily provided online.

Second, consider the benefit of accessing data rather than creating reports. It sounds peculiar, and yet ours is a very resource intensive industry, especially when it comes to paper reports. Consider the time required to compile the data for a management report: creating the individual components, making copies and collating the pieces into a packet and then photocopying the entire packet for each board member. Time, paper, copies, delivery and then storage all consume resources and add cost to running a community. Better to talk about accessing the data electronically, printing only what you require, and saving money in the process. One association (of 220 homes)

where we track metrics now saves \$4,500 per year by allowing the board and manager access to online data. This has reduced time, paper and postage.

For management companies, consider the availability of shared data and the time that can be saved when internal staff can access all data through an online system, reducing the need to constantly go to the manager to find the information. In addition, customer service to home owners can be significantly enhanced when they can get data either online or through a client service person easily and quickly. The type of functions and information in this type of role and password protected system can include: homeowner ledgers and payment history, direct access to a specific accounting person, maintenance requests, architectural requests, newsletters, and documents specific to the community. In addition, management companies can save money, not only on document production, but on document storage as well.

The average file cabinet takes up approximately 4 square feet of floor space. If that storage space happens to be in your main office, you are paying for it as if it were any other office space, which can be costly.

Communication

The web offers us many avenues for communicating with people. "Social media" has become a buzzword that refers to any methodology that allows a group of interrelated parties to communicate. Facebook, Twitter, texting, blast emails and auto dialers all provide functional communication. The question that must be asked is, "what is needed and helpful in your community"? As I said earlier, many of our homeowners do not use computers and require traditional correspondence. Whatever system you choose should have the ability to use both mediums. Next is "how much is too much"? I hear often that emails have just

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special deals or other information about your company.

Twitter (www.twitter.com): Twitter is perhaps the most misunderstood of the "Big Three" of social media websites,

and it might possibly be the most effective. Twitter is a "microblogging" site which allows users to "tweet" information to their "followers" using 140 characters or less. Through a variety of third party applications – Hootsuite, TweetDeck,

Seismic and Twitpic, to name just a few – users are able to post links to news stories online, blog posts and pictures, and they are also able to converse with their followers on whatever catches their fancy. Nonetheless, the ability to push educational content through Twitter to individuals all over the world is a powerful tool that, when used effectively, can greatly expand the reach of your business. Businesses who take the time to learn how to effectively use Twitter often find themselves in the media spotlight as the "it" company.

Social media is not, as some might think (or hope), going to go the way of the pet rock of the 1970s. Social media is here to stay as a marketing medium, and businesses of all sizes need to take advantage of these tools. Those that avoid social media do so at their own peril, as participation in this new form of communication is quickly becoming standard operating procedure for marketing your business. ■

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