

MARKETING Top Three Tips for Utilizing Social Media in the Multifamily Industry

By Christina Failla

Social media sites like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter have really transformed the internet. These sites have allowed individuals (including renters) to go from being content consumers to content producers. How are our residents and prospective residents using social media? And what can apartment managers do to tap into and leverage these platforms?

1. Listen: What are people talking about?

Good or bad, social media sites allow users to voice their opinions and share information. These venues are an opportunity for you to gain insight into the thoughts of your residents and prospective residents. It is possible that your community is a topic of discussion in these public online forums. If so, it's advantageous to be in the know and to have a strategy for monitoring the online conversation.

Social media monitoring tools will help you track the social media content that is of value to you. Here are some free and easy-to-use tools you can use to monitor what is being said about your company and communities on the web.

Google - Google Alerts is a free tool that tracks online discussions related to specified

keywords and provides you with email updates when those keywords appear on social media sites or online discussions. We recommend setting Google alerts for your property management company name, community names, and your website address. You can also create search strings such as "moving to (City, State)" to help you locate where prospects are starting discussions.

Twitter - Twitter enables its users to send and read messages known as "tweets." Tweets are brief posts and are delivered to the author's subscribers, known as followers. Twitter Search and Tweet Scan are helpful tools that allow you to search all Twitter posts. TweetDeck is a personal browser that allows you to review all of your Twitter information in one place - you can quickly create columns to view updates of your followers, mentions of your tweets, saved searches and more. It also will inform you throughout the day of new tweets that are relevant to your business with a quick pop-up notification.

2. Participate: Contribute to conversations started by others.

Once you set up the tools to listen to your target audience, the rule of thumb is to concentrate 80% of your social media outreach on participating in the discussions rather than simply promoting your company. If residents are talking about their experience at your property or with your staff, chime in with constructive commentary and let them know you care. Answer questions that you have expertise in, post content that you feel will be of interest to your audience, and get your subject matter experts involved in the conversation.

It's also important that you build relationships with other social media users. This will give you credibility and extend your reach. For instance, let's say you have 10 twitter followers and you send a tweet that links to an

article about leasing. If each of those followers has 10 followers and they each forward your tweet to their group you've just increased your reach to 100. Your followers are more apt to forward (or retweet) your content if you've done the same for them. Participation translates to promotion!

3. Share: Engage in social media by sharing your content.

You can enhance your resident loyalty and provide additional value to future tenants by providing them with information about your community through social media outlets such as Facebook. A Facebook page offers both current and future residents access to an online community that not only reflects the character of your properties, but offers valuable information. Your Facebook page is also a great vehicle for sharing your apartment community updates such as: pool opening and hours of operation, trick or treat hours, parking and snow emergency policies, etc. Local events can also be highlighted on your site such as theatrical productions, holiday gatherings, street festivals and farmers markets.

If you are new to social media, remember to start slow. Don't go out and sign up for a Facebook page, Twitter account, blog site, and a LinkedIn profile all in one day. Although most social media sites are free, the biggest cost is the time it takes to monitor and contribute to them. Pick the most strategic medium for you and start slow. You can ramp up as you gain experience and recognize where you are getting the most return on your efforts.

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The 2010 CAA Expo:
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Get !Nvolved:
What is the Expo?

The Central Ohio Multifamily Exposition is the CAA's annual trade show and education conference. The 2010 Expo will be held **April 21st from 11 AM to 4 PM** at the Aladdin Shriners' Complex (3805 Stelzer Road).

Get !Nspired:
What education can you expect this year?

Bed Bugs 101
Instructed by Bill Willis, Attorney, Willis Law Firm, LLC
9:30 AM - 11:15 AM • 2 CEUs • \$49
This course is an update to CAA's nationally recognized Bed Bug Management Plan. This course is for anyone in the apartment industry and will cover: debunking of common myths; who is responsible for the cost of treatment; what can I do if the resident isn't prepared or doesn't cooperate in the treatment.

Answering Social Media Questions
Panelists include Andrew Moon, Network Logix, Angela Siefer, ShinyDoor and Jody Swickard, Bell Partners
April 21
Save the date and get your questions ready. This session will cover challenges and issues dealing with social media sites and tips and tricks to using social media for your communities.

Are you !Ntrigued?
Are you interested in attending?

The details are online at www.caahq.com or e-mail cwillis@caahq.com for the latest information.

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