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facebook

LinkedIn

twitter

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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