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Technology

Condominium Management in the Digital Age

How Technology Has Impacted
the Way Managers Operate

It wasn't that long ago that the condominium industry looked substantially different… and I'm not referring to the Protecting Condominium Owners Act, 2015 which has created many new challenges for condominium managers and corporations.

When I first entered the industry in 2002, software specific to condominium management was still a new concept, with most products available having been adapted from the rental market. Managers didn't carry smart phones. Correspondence was generated only by snail mail and fax, as most clients and firms did not widely use email. Email itself was still a relatively new technology — home internet service only hit the scene in the early 90s, and free email services such as Hotmail were introduced in 1996/1997.

How times have changed! Use of technology is now an accepted (and expected!) part of our daily lives. Generation X (the "MTV generation") and Generation Y (the "Millennials") have merged in the work force. Gen Xers have had to adapt to changing technologies, and Millennials have had to figure out how the technology of their youth integrates into the workplace. Personally, I fall into a microgeneration sometimes referred to as "Xennials". A flannel-shirt wearing, MTV-watching grunge rocker — that grew up with a home computer. I've been uniquely positioned to watch technology explode everywhere, while already having solid understanding of technology as a tool in my life.

As technology advances, and more of the physical management of condominium structures becomes automated, more time must be dedicated to use of technology to improve communication and customer service. In the age of social media and smart phones, there is increased demand for greater communication. Technology makes things available in a more immediate way. How does this impact the condominium management industry? Let's look at a few trends.

Communication Websites

Many condominium corporations and management firms are now making use of websites to improve communication in their communities. A wide variety of web platforms designed for use in condominiums are now available.

While for some managers there may be a learning curve in maintaining a community website, the platforms are very user-friendly. If used consistently, a community website keeps residents more informed about the operation of the condominium — reducing the volume of questions for their property manager.

If your website is interactive, there is more chance residents will actually use it! Ensure though that you are actually monitoring the interactive features — in particular, any discussion forums — to make sure you are aware of the content being posted. Some

IS YOUR BUILDING SUSTAINABLE?
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could be inappropriate, but the discussion will also give you an indication of what is important to your community members.

Many of these community websites are now also accessible through smart phone apps, making them even more effective tools for residents to use!

Social Media

It is not unusual for community members to connect with each other through social media such as Facebook or WhatsApp. Why not consider being part of the conversation? People tend to speak more openly on social media about their view points and situations that have impact on their lives. In my view, this is the best reason for a condominium corporation (and their manager) to set up social media in their communities.

Digital Signage

Every building goes through periods where multiple projects affecting residents happen at the same time. The challenge in doing things the "old-fashioned" way with paper notices is that there may not be adequate space to neatly display all the communication required.

Digital signs look clean, modern, and can be programmed remotely with as much communication as you can produce. What a difference!

Online Dispute Resolution

The revised Condominium Act, 1998 has introduced the Condominium Authority Tribunal and the Condominium Authority of Ontario. This dispute resolution platform provides for electronic mediation of condominium disputes. I hope that the process is effective at creating a better, faster, and less expensive forum for dispute resolution.

Administration Software

In condominium management, much of what we do requires us to be on-site. This enables a manager to directly communicate with owners in person (a somewhat lost art in our digital world). However, much of what we do also requires us to be available in the office! An interesting dilemma!
As software advances, new tools are available which allows for Property Managers to have all the tools to complete their roles from any location. A mobile workplace however does present supervisory challenges and so it is important for senior managers in the industry to adapt their management style.

Data Storage

Is your data in the cloud? I believe that soon the days of large banks of filing cabinets will be gone. A mobile workforce needs access to all the same information as they did when we were chained to our desks.

Before utilizing cloud computing tools, it is important to consider data security and redundant back-ups. You wouldn't want your clients' information to be lost or stolen!

E-Meetings

Prior to the revision to the Condominium Act, 11998, Board meetings could be held electronically (via teleconference) provided that the corporation passed a by-law. With the changes to the Condominium Act, 1998, Corporations can now hold a meeting by teleconference without a by-law provided all directors consent to the means for holding the meeting. There are many software tools available such as Skype, or even FaceTime on an iPhone or iPad.

This may help to spark interest in volunteering from community members that previously might not have been able to fully participate due to travel commitments or

commute times from their place of business. Since mandatory director training is fully electronic, perhaps we're inviting a new age of tech-savvy directors.

E-Proxies

Every manager at some point in their career has struggled with a community that lacks involvement in the operations of the condominium. Achieving participation at meetings can be tough. And what about having to knock on doors or spend hours on the phone to collect enough proxies to hold a meeting?

Forget about those struggles. E-Proxies are a great tool to easily communicate about meetings and votes required in your community. Additionally, completion of an electronic proxy is much simpler for the condominium owner – it can generally be done in less than a minute.

Sustainability & Building Performance

Is your building sustainable? What's your carbon footprint? Do you recycle? Can I charge my electric vehicle?

The world's population today is much more mindful than past generations about their impact on the environment. It's not surprising that there are changes coming to the building code relating to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and access to electric vehicle installation.

Energy conservation has been a hot topic in the condominium industry for many years now. Options available are too numerous to list in detail but worth mentioning are retrofits (lights, boilers, etc.) and renewable energy generation.

Not only is being mindful of the environment important, but the added benefit is that such initiatives have a positive impact on spending.

In closing, adapting to new technology is a must for property manager and condominium corporations! Ask yourself if you're taking advantage of all the tools available to you. You can simplify your communication, automate your administration, and reduce your carbon footprint. Don't YOU want to make your life easier? CV