

# COMMUNITYMANAGER

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## Fueling Objectives

How strategic communication can improve member awareness and engagement.

BY BETH WENGER

**D**og poop: No one wants to see it laying around, and yet some people miss the memo to clean up after their pets. It's a problem many community managers face on a variety of subjects: How can we be heard?

The answer, says Bruce Gran, CMCA, AMS, PCAM, CEO of Gran Community Association Consulting in Scottsdale, Ariz., is to create a culture of good, effective communication. "The better the communication, the better the relationships and the better the investment," he says. Wendy Taylor, CMCA, AMS, LSM, PCAM, general manager of South Riding Proprietary in Chantilly, Va., agrees. South Riding recently rebranded, aligning

all its communications and interactions to its mission and vision to be the most desired place to live in Northern Virginia. "We create a small town, hometown feel," Taylor says, and good communication is essential.

### THE SEVEN C's OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

According to *Forbes*, effective communication boils down to what it calls "the 5 C's:"

- Be clear
- Be concise
- Provide a compelling request
- Be curious
- Be compassionate

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CAI news and upcoming events.

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A community association's ability to adapt to change is essential for its long-term success.



Both Taylor and Craig Wilson Jr., CMCA, AMS, PCAM, president and CEO of Vanguard Management Associates Inc., in Germantown, Md., would add two more C's: be creative and clever, even about picking up dog poop, says Taylor. While she admits that usually her team posts straightforward messages about this par-

to communicate most effectively. For the communities he manages, he relies on task forces, ad hoc committees, town hall meetings, and surveys. "I want to know what an association is thinking regarding its investments and why a board makes the decisions it does." Gran wants to hear it all: good and bad.

says Gran. "You really have to see what's being said and who's saying it." Taylor concurs. A volunteer leader within the community monitors and responds to what's being said about South Riding on Facebook.

"You need to respond to everything in a timely and positive, effective manner," says Gran. But, he stresses, you also need to get a sense of who's commenting. "You need to figure out if the person is always negative and only uses the internet to complain." Regardless, the company and community image is at stake, and all responses need to be consistent with the good, positive culture Gran and his team have created. Gran admits that a harsh review is tough, no matter who it's from. "The worse something is, the worse my reaction will be. If I step away and let it sit, I can respond better after I've mulled it over a bit."

Gran's company recently invested in a new telecommunications system that helps him stay abreast of anything being said online about his communities or company and easily connect with community members. "The system's software provides a dashboard with over 100 portals where people could be commenting or making a gripe." It also allows him to use many forms of communication through one system.

Communication is key, and yet many boards don't recognize its value, notes Wilson. "The more you can convince your board to invest in communication to members, the better off you are."

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## Communication is key, and yet many boards don't recognize its value.

### "The more you can convince your board to invest in communication to members, the better off you are."

ticular matter, sometimes they find a fun, different way to say it, to wake people from the same old noise.

"You can't bombard people with all rules and things that they can't do. Too many noes and people will just tune you out, become deaf to it," says Wilson. "Convey rules in a positive way, in a way they can see the benefit." Doing that, Wilson acknowledges, takes thought, creativity, and time—time community managers don't always have. But, he says, a lot of material is boiler plate stuff that can be created whenever. Wilson uses spare moments to focus on creating thoughtful content his managers can grab later when they need something fresh.

### PUTTING COMMUNITY IN COMMUNICATION

Most of what community managers and homeowners associations do, of course, is intended to benefit their communities and their residents. Those efforts can get lost or fall out of sync with community members if they aren't well-communicated. Gran uses every resource available to learn about people and what makes them tick and to learn about what's important to his community members. For the broader picture, he relies heavily on CAI's extensive resource library, TED Talks, *The Harvard Business Review*, and other resources to educate himself on human psychology and how

### GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT

These days, different messages require different modes of delivery: email blast, snail mail newsletters and magazines, websites, YouTube, text messages, phone calls, electronic signs, and placards. South Riding, for one, uses them all. "We're constantly cognizant of how to reach people in different ways," says Taylor. It all depends on the type of messages, which range from urgent alerts to recaps of social outings within the community.

### ON REVIEW

Even if community managers and homeowners associations create good, open lines of communication, someone is bound to have some experience—good or bad—they'll share online. "I want to know what kind of reviews are out there,"



### Communications: How Community Associations Stay in Touch

A comprehensive, proactive communications program will contribute to productive meetings, satisfied homeowners, balanced budgets, informed consultants, supportive residents, eager buyers, low delinquencies, and more. Find out how with this guide to communicating effectively. Covers writing and correspondence, public relations, communicating with policymakers, communications technology, newsletters, annual reports, and more. **Members: \$15. [www.caionline.org/shop](http://www.caionline.org/shop)**