



START SPREADING THE NEWS:

BY BOB GOURLEY

ARE YOU LISTENING TO ME?

How many times have you tried to get an important message across to your community members only to find yourself frustrated with the feeling that nobody is listening?

I hear many listening-related complaints from condominium management professionals. These are the items that ail them. Do you suffer from any of the following symptoms?

- » The community website is rarely accessed.
- » The association newsletters aren't very well read.
- » Mailed notices are going unnoticed.
- » Posted signs are being ignored.
- » Meetings are poorly attended.

Apathy is a sure sign that your community is not listening.

There are more sources of information bombarding your audience than ever before. TV, radio, billboard, newspapers, Internet – our society is filled with a seemingly endless supply of banter aimed at getting the attention of your community members. You are competing with all those distractions when you try to get your message across. To be effective you must be creative.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Take a cue from the world of corporate advertising. Your message needs to stand out. Differentiate yourself from the crowd. Tell your story well and tell it often. Make your messages fun or dramatic. Develop a flare for promotion. Get help if you need it.

Think about some of the more successful communication stories in the world today and learn from them. "The Apprentice" has become a top-rated TV phenomenon. Even if you've never watched the show, you probably know who Donald Trump is and have heard the show's catchphrase "You're fired!" way too often. Bad hairdo and oversized ego aside, Mr. Trump is a master of self-promotion. Yet you have something over him when it comes to communicating with your homeowners. You know where they live, how to reach them and the specific items that they will find interesting. It's time to put on your

game face and show "The Donald" who's really got the right stuff.

I am not suggesting that you invoke the wrath of homeowners in your communities by firing anyone. What I am suggesting is that you learn how to compete with their other interests and speak to them in ways that they will take to heart. If you have not already done so, this would be a great time to take a look at branding your message. Branding is the concept of message consistency in all of your communications. Can you imagine any Donald Trump project without his name all over it? He wouldn't stand for it because he knows the images invoked by his name help sell his products. Your branding efforts should be just as strong and consistent. Advertising agencies base entire campaigns around this concept and corporations pay millions of dollars for it. You can do it for free! Take that, Donald!

No one wants to be lectured to. Make sure your communications are upbeat. Take your cue from the political spin-doctors out there who turn lemons into lemonade for a living. Let's take that age-old problem topic for community associations everywhere – pet waste. Sure you can lecture until you're blue in the face about fines and pooper-scoopers but it may not solve your problem. One association I worked with recently addressed its pet waste problem with a friendly reminder mailed to homeowners. The letter reads, "We love your pets but not their waste. Please clean up after your pet. The best way to have good neighbors is to be a good neighbor." That's a much nicer way to ask pet owners to behave responsibly than the stern warning of "Pick it up or pay a fine!"

The bottom line is that it doesn't matter what you are saying if nobody is listening. If nobody is listening, you should reconsider your message and your message delivery methods. You can make a difference and your message will be heard. Are you listening to me?

Bob Gourley is one of the founders of MyEZCondo. He also serves as board president of Captain's Walk.

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