



WHO TELLS YOUR STORY?

Lots of people are telling lots of stories today – newspapers, magazines, websites, 24-hour cable news – it’s hard to escape the seemingly endless stream of information that is being broadcast to us daily.

When it comes to sharing information with community association members, who is responsible for telling the story? Unlike much of the “news” from the above sources, the news that residents need will directly affect their daily lives. It may be information they need about changes to their homes, expenses they need to budget for, or even a new neighbor who is joining their community. Controlling the distribution of that information and deciding who will tell your story is critical to your community’s success.

The person who takes responsibility for telling the story gets to craft the message delivered to the community. Thus, that person has an opportunity to persuade members of the community to come down on one side or another of an issue.

Take a hot topic like satellite dish antennas. Associations around the nation are struggling with whether or not to allow their members to install these systems in their homes. If the person telling the story to your community is in favor of those installations, what do you suppose your news story would look like? Would the story be objective or would it have a slant toward allowing satellite dish antennas?

So who should tell the story? Let’s look at the possibilities, along with the benefits and disadvantages of each choice.

VOLUNTEER COMMUNITY MEMBER

Pros: *inexpensive or free*

Cons: *inexperienced, could have a hidden agenda, lack of continuity*

When a community member volunteers to produce the association newsletter, the community has an insider telling the story first-hand. If this person has no agenda other than to be a resource to his or her neighbors and to make the community the best it can be, then the association has found a suitable storyteller. Some of the best-written newsletters and websites have come from associations that can boast English professors and webmasters amongst their members. On the other hand, communication efforts can fail when the volunteer is inexperienced or decides to abandon the effort or leave the community. A volunteer with a hidden agenda can also

significantly undermine the communication efforts of the board.

THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OR BOARD PRESIDENT

Pros: *inexpensive or free*

Cons: *overworked resource*

A member of the board of directors knows (or should know) about all of the inner workings of the community. He or she has access to the minutes from all meetings and has the attention of the manager. Unfortunately, the qualities that make for a great board member do not necessarily make for a great communicator. Also, board members are generally the most overworked and under-appreciated assets communities have. Producing a regular community newsletter is no easy task. Board members are generally too busy working on association projects to stop and write about them as well. They are volunteers and most would rather fix a roof than write about the bid process or the new 15-year warranty on it.

THE PROPERTY MANAGEMENT COMPANY

Pros: *property expertise*

Cons: *overworked resource, has a business agenda, can be expensive, lack of continuity*

By far the most common scenario is for the property management company to provide the association news. This is a natural extension of the company’s services. Larger property management companies may even have their own dedicated staff for producing newsletters or may use an outside firm on a subcontracted basis. While there may be no charge to the association for this service, the fees are built into the management fees and are ultimately born by the association member. This arrangement also marries the association to the property management company by making it dependent upon the management company for its news.

AN OUTSIDE VENDOR

Pros: *control of content and message, professional presentation*

Cons: *an outsider to the community, could be expensive*

The newest and most innovative approach involves hiring a firm to tell your community story to your members. Working in conjunction with the property manager and the board of directors, this

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and materials, the components should be compliant with RTI or manufacturer's specific installation guidelines as well as any applicable regional codes or standards.

THE ROLE OF THE ROOF CONSULTANT

Roof consultants may become involved with tile systems in a number of ways. A client

may request an inspection to locate current leakage or to evaluate remaining service life of a tile system. Owners of larger tile roofs may require maintenance planning or project management. Problems that occur in tile systems prior to the end of their service life may be the result of installation errors or extreme environmental occurrences. In many cases involving construction defects, the consultant may testify as an expert witness in arbitration or litigation.

In finding the answers to the questions mentioned at the beginning of this article, the consultant will often uncover other relevant information that helps create a complete assessment. The result should be a thorough, accurate, well-documented opinion or report, one that will help with repairs, maintenance and future project planning.

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Preparing for a roof inspection of U.S. Naval Officer's Condominiums, Winter Harbor, ME.

third party offers expert service in the association's communication needs. All messages are treated apolitically and are reviewed by the property manager and/or the board of directors before being distributed to community members. Although this service might be expensive, there are creative ways to shift costs away from the association by way of advertisement or sponsorships.

ALL OF THE ABOVE

Pros: *the best possible communication is achieved*

Cons: *may seem expensive until the community realizes the value*

The most successful communication comes from a team approach. While this method takes some initial effort to develop, the long-term benefits are significant. In this model, a community can take advantage of its residents' writing skills in conjunction with the outside vendor, who will compile stories from members and leaders of the community. The property manager has an ally to produce communications in a professional and timely manner. Com-

munity members tend to take professional-looking communications seriously, meaning they will be better read and understood.

Of course, there is another option. You could choose not to tell your story at all and then wonder why rumor and gossip have become the primary methods your community members use to get their news. Uninformed community members will generally thank you for keeping them in the dark by becoming disgruntled and angry. I can't imagine how that scenario benefits anyone, can you?

Whoever you decide to let tell your story, I suggest you do not leave it to chance. Choose your storyteller well. Get help if you need it. Embrace a team effort and get the job done. When the story is told well, the whole community benefits and that's a story you can tell again and again.

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