



Building communities via social media

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If residents of 88 Erskine Ave. want to know what's happening in their building or in the surrounding community, they may be logging on to Facebook to check out what's new.

The Greenwin Property Management building, located in the Yonge and

Eglinton Ave. area, runs promotions and contests on its Facebook page to help build community. For example, this week it launched a Halloween costume contest encouraging tenants to post a photo of themselves in costume for a chance to win one of three \$50 retail gift cards. A photo of last year's winner is posted in the photo section of the Facebook page. There's even an offer for the concierge to take the photo if you don't have a camera.

Other photo galleries include shots of personal gardens tended by tenants and pictures of those who attended the building's 12th annual barbecue. There is also a selection of videos promoting the amenities at 88 Erskine, such as the building's Wi-Fi room, concierge services, the on-site convenience store and the car wash. It all adds up to an inexpensive way to not only promote community, but also the lifestyle of the building to prospective new tenants.

About 107 people have "liked" the 88 Erskine page and a few tenants have offered mini recommendations of the building such as "Great building. Great location. Great staff," or "Lots of dogs and friendly people."

There isn't a lot of activity on the building's FB page, but there are signs tenants are using it to interact, at least for special events and community information.

"Facebook is more about building community," says Jessica Green, former marketing manager for Greenwin Property Management and a former resident of 88 Erskine.



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Greenwin Property Management has a Facebook page for its property at 88 Erskine Ave. so that residents can share and build community online.

Greenwin also uses Twitter to promote its brand in addition to its website, proof many companies see the need to have a social media presence in addition to their standard brochure sites.

"We set up the Twitter account last October and it took a while to build a following, but it's a great way to send a specific and direct message out to a lot of people very quickly," says Green. "Because you don't need to be a member or have an account on Twitter to view a feed, it can be used for the quick dissemination of information and updates. But it's still very much in the early experimentation days."

The Greenwin Twitter page (@GreenwinTALKS) has 7,600 followers and serves as a supplement to the company's main website, offering information on a broad range of issues that deal with property management and renting.

Green was shown the social media ropes by Chaim Rivlin of Rentseeker.ca (@RentSeeker) who believes strongly that social media tools are going to be important avenues for property management companies and landlords if they want to communicate and engage with a growing demographic that gets its information increasingly from mobile devices using web-based technologies.

When it comes to using Twitter to promote units, Green is a little more skeptical of its effectiveness.

"I don't think enough people are using Twitter to look for apartments yet," she says. "I know a lot of companies are using it for that."

However, that trend may be growing, says Rivlin.

"You will see people post to their personal Twitter accounts with messages such as: 'Loking for rental in X neighbourhood,' which suggests word of mouth is at work," he says.

Some companies are using the 140-character Twitter format and short forms along with the clever use of hashtags to advertise available units and offer rental incentives such as \$200 off a month's rent.

CAPREIT Apartments (@Caprent) has 28,000 rental units across Canada and has more than 1,630 Twitter followers. It uses Twitter to promote open house specials at their properties and targets Tweets to students such as one sent out Oct. 7 which read: "Please RT to anyone looking for an #apartment in #halifax, B, 1, and 2 bdrms close to DAL, SMU & the Bedford Basin," and then a link to more information on the building.

"Twitter is still very much trial by error and there is obviously still a large group of the population not using it, but it is growing," says Rivlin.

Housing associations such as the Federation of Rental Housing Providers of Ontario have also taken to twitter (@FRPOFacts) to share information on all issues related to the industry, posting and re-Tweeting articles on the industry to its 1,880 followers.

"It's a sharing game, so we re-Tweet posts from our followers and that expands the reach," says Rivlin.

"It's really being used for marketing right now and some companies don't quite understand that it should be for that purpose, especially at this point."

Apartment Therapy, a New York-based website that posts lifestyle articles for the renting population, is one of Rivlin's Twitter favourites to follow (@apttherapy). It has over 39,000 followers offering articles on everything from five reasons fall cleaning is as important as spring cleaning, to the pros and cons of upper floor versus ground floor apartments.