

The X Factor



Give your community an edge by keeping up with the latest trends in technology

When community leaders talk about technology, they reference it from their own points of view. Some are on the cutting edge and want their HOA to purchase the latest and greatest without any proven research or information to back up their claims. Others don't want a thing to do with technology or our so-called "progress," steadfastly refusing to get email addresses and wondering why their members aren't kept informed. Sometimes it can be difficult to manage and make recommendations with these opposing paradigms at play.

Leaders who take the time to become more aware of changing demands and expand their knowledge of trends can be a very valuable resource to their communities. Today's hot button issues are sustainability, energy efficiency/energy management, water savings, wireless communications and social media – but what works in the long run? What will give you and your community that X factor?

Implement a Sustainability Vision

Apply thought leadership to sustainability and, in the end, you'll come out a winner – and so will your community. Your sustainability vision should be focused on long-term viability and include social, environmental, economic, community and cultural components. We can no longer continue to operate in a "business as usual" mode. Embracing a balanced, forward-thinking vision will keep you in the game.

On the topic of energy efficiency and management, one energy component that is continually increasing in cost is electricity. But, there are ways to proactively reduce it now so you'll be a step ahead in years to come. Smart lighting decisions are one way to save energy now and in the future. Use low-wattage, compact fluorescent bulbs and LED lights, along with lighting control panels and distributors to promote energy savings. Install lighting occupancy sensors to reduce overall usage, or put lighting on a time schedule you can adjust remotely so that lights are only on during activity.

To achieve water savings, use low-flow water devices, and investigate water management services that reduce water consumption. Use wireless technology (incorporating NWS weather data) to monitor and control existing irrigation controllers and clocks.

Share Information Online

Online innovations allow HOA members and service providers to collaborate in new ways. Social media, for example, has the potential to improve how people work together, connect and share information. LinkedIn allows associations to create business-oriented groups to share information among its membership, while Facebook groups are socially oriented in more personal ways.

Bookmarking tools help people find information by tagging websites and important information.

Bookmarking allows associations to share pertinent

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Finding the Right Technological Fit

Understanding how new technology tools work and how they can be effectively applied to community association management can be a daunting task. There are so many tools available – and they are changing rapidly – that you may not know where to start.

Here are some simple steps to set you on the right technological path:

- Poll your membership base to find out who is using what to judge their comfort level with technology.
- Ask your contractors how they are using technology: what's worked, and what hasn't?
- Volunteer to beta test emerging technology to see if it will work well in your community.
- Ask your peers how their management companies/HOAs are using technology.
- Attend a CACM course or event to meet colleagues and share ideas.

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websites related to topics of interest, which can serve as a way to provide access to best practices. Community members can flag websites and information for residents by creating a set of bookmarks that make important information easily available to anyone in the community.

We've all seen the rise or fall of an individual via YouTube. Digital video now allows anyone to share stories and offers an effective platform for HOAs and their members to communicate. Video sharing gives you a new way to tell your success stories and tips regarding work completion and challenges.

Community websites and online access to forms, documents and calendars are essential to bolstering community knowledge and information sharing. These tools allow you to share community information in a more open forum that benefits the entire community, so be open to them!

Smart maps help us stay connected to our association's

critical needs, including mapping crime and security areas, maintenance/work orders, trees and more. Mapping tools can also facilitate parking, traffic, and event planning, and help residents, boards and managers understand the distribution of needs. By bringing together mobility and advanced communication platforms, companies can deliver anytime access to operational data from virtually anywhere. This allows you to know when you have an emergency so you can take immediate action. The level of communication available allows for an exactitude and efficiency never before possible: work orders that can show exactly which tree to trim, what parking stall to stencil, which light is out, etc. No more double work or excuses. No more delays.

Together, these enhancements are transforming how communities find, share and interpret information. It is important to recognize that communities have the ability to use these online options to impact and improve what they already know and do. It's time for management companies and HOAs to either catch up with these innovations or risk getting left behind.

Resist the Urge to Ignore Technology

New technologies are continuing to emerge, and management companies and associations that can integrate and capitalize on these developments will have an advantage. Try asking yourself these three key questions annually (perhaps around the time the annual emerging trends issue of *Vision* magazine is released?):

- How is technology changing the competition?
- How is technology changing client expectations?
- How can technology help us compete and deliver?

To stay relevant in their communities, management companies and boards cannot remain static as our world continues to change. By addressing these issues regularly, you can help ensure your company and/or your association(s) is operating with the latest and greatest technology.

A new paradigm must be created, one that analyzes opportunities by viability and sustainability. Not all technology will be valuable for all communities, but it's important to at least consider each and every possibility. Leaders who embrace these opportunities and stay relevant in our ever-changing world have the ability to break down barriers and achieve long-term goals for their companies, their associations and the industry.

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