

Get Out the Vote

Dealing with a single person may seem more efficient, but getting all condo homeowner association members or property-owner personnel on board early saves you plenty overall.

By Bryan Rader ■ *Bandwidth Consulting LLC*

I was recently hired by a condominium board to assist in selection of the right technology and service program for the community. While I don't normally do this type of work, I thought it was a good opportunity to once again hear and see a property's "cable TV dilemma" firsthand from the residents' point of view.

Over the years, I have been in hundreds of condominium board meetings and real estate owners' conference rooms. I've watched as decision makers debated what services they needed, what options they wanted, what features they required and what economic guidelines to use.

Some owners and HOA boards are not so democratic. Some of them are more like dictatorships. On the surface, this seems easier for the private cable operator – deal with one key decision maker, address his or her concerns, respond accordingly and you can win a new property.

But the best relationships between a PCO and a new property often develop based on how the "courtship" process is handled, and a "democratic" one often works best.

I remember this well during many years of heading my company's business development efforts. Sometimes we could close a deal by flying up to Chicago for the day to meet with the owner. "Yes, I am ready to sign a new agreement with your company. Call my property manager in Atlanta and tell her the good news."

Er, she doesn't already know? Was she not given a chance to offer some input in this process? "Nope, I'm the CEO around this place. If I make a decision like this, she will support it."

I used to walk out of meetings like this with mixed emotions – happy to have the contract, but concerned that no

one besides the CEO had bought into our program.

DEMOCRACY HELPS

Even though it required more work, I always preferred the "democratic process" of selecting a PCO for the community. By the time we were awarded the project, we'd have met with the property manager and her staff, the regional manager, the marketing person and the corporate office. Everyone participated in the process – sharing their concerns, their views, their needs. Everyone's issues – not just the CEO's – were addressed during this courtship.

A few years ago, we were working with a national real estate company based out west. We came across a property we really wanted, and felt that we could build the right technology program to satisfy its residents. Fortunately, the home office agreed.

But not so fast, they cautioned. "We have a few constituencies around here. Even though corporate likes your plans, our Atlanta regional office must approve it, too."

"OK, not a problem," we said. "When can we meet?" I asked.

"And you have to complete a site review with our construction/engineering team," they continued. "And meet our marketing folks, and of course meet with on-site management."

Well, we completed all of those steps and then successfully built a triple-play technology program that met with everyone's approval. And it turned out to be a much better relationship in the long run. Even the CEO was happier that he didn't make a unilateral decision without his staff's approval.

COUNT THE SAVINGS

I believe that taking these steps during the business development process actu-

ally leads to better assistance from the client during construction, during the product launch campaign, and over time with move-in promotions. Staff buy-in from a democratic process like this results in measurable gains.

Condominium boards operate the same way. Sometimes there is an HOA president who says, "I know what the people around here want. I'll pick the provider for them and they'll be happy."

It's best, however, if the board seeks input from a TV committee, from counsel, and from residents. Sure, it is not always fun to show up at 7 pm for the "Open Resident Party to Discuss New Cable TV Options." But you do get a chance to win over 300 future potential subscribers. And that can form the basis for a great new account.

My new condominium client did it the right way, too. The HOA sent surveys to residents, invited engineers to speak to the TV Committee, and brought me in to meet with the board ahead of time.

It's not just the CEO who matters. He may sign the agreement. But other constituents matter, too. Encourage input from everyone on your client's team. It will make your program stronger, and make buy-in greater when you're selected.

And if a PCO can manage to work through this type of "democratic" process, it will get my vote every time! **BBP**

About the Author

Bryan J. Rader, former CEO of Media-Works before selling the company in 2006, has recently founded a new firm, Bandwidth Consulting LLC, to advise operators and providers in the MDU market segment. Contact Bryan at bryanjrader@yahoo.com or at 636-536-0011. Learn more at www.bandwidthconsultingllc.com.