



October 1, 2015



## Community Advocacy Network Alert



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Social media can be a great tool for community associations. It keeps lines of communication open between residents and board members. It can be an invaluable tool during a natural disaster. It provides immediate information regarding community events and news. It keeps residents in the know so that they feel connected to the board and other residents. It can even serve as a marketing tool for potential buyers. And with Facebook surpassing over 1 billion users this year, they have to be doing something right . . . right?



But it can come with major drawbacks and risks. Social media has the potential to be misused. And it can expose the board to negative feedback and litigation. Despite these risks, it may still be a good (and free) tool for your community. The following are a few ways you can manage your community's risks.

Create a Terms of Service: Each user must agree to your terms and Social Media Policy before signing up. That little "I agree" box means that he or she must legally adhere to the rules of your site. This makes the users responsible for whatever they post. It also means that you have the authority to terminate the user's status should he or she post something inappropriate, wrongful or offensive. But make sure you don't over-regulate your site and try to stay consistent (adopt a policy) with what types of content you will and won't allow. Create a clear Social Media Policy. Give users a warning before you block them or terminate their status.

Have an Indemnification Clause: This requires your users to hold the association harmless in the event they feel they have been harmed by using your site.

Create a Closed Group: One option is to create a Facebook page for the public to use as a marketing tool

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for potential buyers. Members of the association would be a part of a "closed group" in which certain information would only be accessible to members approved by the site operator. This creates a little extra security for homeowners who may be worried about their information being too public.

Designate a Site Manager: Make sure that person is clear about how the association wants to use the site and how to enforce the Social Media Policy. Keep posts and messages consistent. Continuously monitor the site so unwanted comments and posts are regulated.

Remember that Membership is Optional: Not every resident is going to want to join the community social media group and that's ok. Make sure to balance the concerns of the residents and proceed with caution.

Do Your Homework: Educate yourself on the risks before you agree to create a social media page for your community. Social media can expose your association to potential law suits for libel, defamation, copyright infringement and invasion of privacy. What may start as an innocent page can quickly spiral out of control. Review your insurance policy to see if it includes actions arising out of social media use. Talk to your insurance agent or attorney so your board can make an informed decision prior to putting up your site. Although sites can be easily taken down, any information put into cyberspace, whether it's in an email or website can never be retracted. For some associations, this may be too great of a risk.

Social media may not be for every community or every person, but when it works, it can be a terrific tool. Chances are some residents will be quick to jump on board while some may be opposed. It really depends on what is right for your specific community and if you have a member who is willing to take charge and manage the site. Always know the risks before engaging in social media. If you ever have any questions, we are always here to help.

Yours in Community,

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Community Advocacy Network (CAN), Chairman

The Community Advocacy Network (CAN) is Florida's leading voice for the interests of 60,000 community associations statewide, leading the fight against over-regulation of private residential communities by state and local governments. Each year since its inception in 2007, CAN spearheads important State legislative reforms designed to protect and enhance Florida Community association living, CAN continues to foster financial stability and operational integrity to all common-interest ownership communities statewide.

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