The Association Directory

Printing challenges and low-maintenance alternatives for this essential community tool | By Melinda Young, CCAM, PCAM

Board members are often asked to create a resident directory for members of the community. On the surface, a printed directory may seem like the most logical way to go. After all, there's something nice about having a tangible book full of neighbors' names and information that you can thumb through at your leisure. But, the traditional printed directory may no longer meet all of your associations' needs (or its budget for that matter), and creating and maintaining it may not be as easy as it seems.

The first challenge in creating any form of an association directory is actually obtaining the contact information from the residents, as well as ensuring you have approval to publish it if you're creating a printed handbook. While Civil Code indicates that every member of the association

has a right to the ownership listing upon request and records of ownership are public information, it is imperative that the association obtain residents' approval prior to printing/publishing their information. This task is often as daunting as organizing a very large party with an extensive RSVP list and menu choices – but, it's an essential step.

The next challenge in creating a printed directory lies in translating that information into a suitable format. Most management database systems are not designed to create listings that fit the typical directory look; they are more designed to maintain significant financial and ownership information. While much of the information may be transferred to a software program that can put the information into more of a directory

format, significant review of the information and data is generally needed.

Once a suitable format has been adopted and, assuming residents have responded quickly and clearly with their approvals, the board now has to distribute this printed directory to all members. Aside from the printing and mailing costs, there are some other questions that need to be addressed: How often will the directory be updated? Will it be reprinted and distributed every time there is a change in ownership? Should tenants be included as part of the directory? It isn't difficult to see how this "simple" task can become overwhelming and possibly spin out of control.

There is also the danger that a rogue homeowner will use the directory to his/her advantage and communicate views that may not be supportive of the board or the association. The board has no recourse against this activity and it may result in many members asking to be removed from the directory. It only takes one individual to negatively impact the original goal of building that community feel and encouraging neighbor-to-neighbor camaraderie. (And, while the rogue homeowner does have legal access to names and mailing addresses as stated, he/she is usually far less inclined to go to the trouble of obtaining an official mailing list.)

The good news is there are alternatives to a printed directory. After all, even though printing may not be an option for your association's directory, you still want to create a similar tool that will build a sense of community and strengthen relationships between neighbors. The way to reach this goal is to look outside the confines of a printed, published directory.

For those associations with community websites, it is a simple matter to create a directory of residents and to post that information on the website – just remember to keep the information in a password protected section of the website, making it available only to registered members of the community. Even without a website, the association can create an electronic directory that is provided upon request and easily updated with changes, corrections, additions or other revisions. Both of these methods are far more cost effective and easier to manage.

And finally, nothing beats a good, old-fashioned welcome or social committee. If the goal is to build a sense of community, the board can task this committee with greeting new residents, providing welcome packages with general association information and familiarizing the new neighbors with their surroundings. Depending upon the number of homes within the community, a directory handbook may easily cost up to $5 per resident for printing and mailing – think how many "welcome to the neighborhood" gifts could be created with that money saved!

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