

# Best Practices In **ONLINE** REPUTATION Management

FEATURING



Interview with Tiffany Alsup  
Group Marketing Manager

**Cardinal Group**  
MANAGEMENT



CGM

Cardinal Group manages the number one student housing property - Skygarden in the Top 100 Student Housing ORA™ Power Ranking for 2017. It also manages two other properties – College Place Uptown and The Edge Merrimack which rank among the top 10 properties for online reputation in this ranking.

## **Q How important is the online reputation of a property and a company to succeed in the student housing industry?**

**A. |** Online reputation has a huge influence on why and where people decide to lease today. In student housing our prospective residents are part of a generation that was raised with online reviews readily available to aid them in every consumer decision they make. Having a focus and ensuring there is a concerted effort to manage your positioning on platforms such as Yelp and Facebook are crucial and non-negotiable parts of operating student housing communities today. The online reputation of our communities tells a story to prospective residents and their parents, and our goal from the site level all the way to our HQ teams should be to tell a very compelling story.

## **Q What are some of the biggest challenges in online reputation management while dealing with Generation Z? What are some unique aspects about online reputation management in the student housing industry?**

**A. |** The largest challenge faced when dealing with Gen Z is simply keeping up. Gen Z operates in a fast-paced world of new technology, and what resonates with them could simply be what is trending at that given moment. Staying in tune with what is currently engaging this generation is difficult, but to be successful we must not only manage this, but also be proactive enough to understand what is on the horizon and what the “next big thing” to take hold is. This could simply be understanding what the primary review platform students are getting their information from at a point in time. Our teams need to understand this so that they can focus their strategies to have a heavier emphasis on generating positive content to that specific platform. Student housing itself

has unique aspects when it comes to online reputation management simply due to the very specific clientele that is being catered to. The current generation of college students are a very tech dependent group, and don't think twice about hitting every major review site with a negative review the second something might go array. Many other industries that may cater to a slightly older demographic most likely do not face such a dynamic use of review sites. Our team is also seeing a trend where students today have much more faith in the content of review sites than older generation did when these platforms first came out.



## **Share some best practices of Cardinal in online reputation management.**

**A. |** Our team places a heavy focus on being authentic and creating a personal connection with our prospects and residents. The authenticity factor is discussed with our onsite teams on a weekly basis to ensure our residents truly feel a connection to our staff. When residents feel that connection they know our teams are working to provide them the best experience possible. This both becomes a defense when the inevitable issue does arise, that the student is much less likely to go straight to posting a negative review; but also creates a much higher likely hood that a resident will feel urged to take the time to post a positive review. We all know that online review sites are primarily a pit of negativity where people go when they are angry, but we feel that generating those positive interactions and relationships truly aid in generating organic positive reviews and might just be the key to getting a good review the next time you ask. Our company has also implemented standard rules such as a 24-hr response time for reviews. This is to ensure that as much as we can we are taking control of our online reputation. Our practice is to respond quickly and create an honest response that doesn't feel scripted, but that instead uses the persons name and is relevant to the situation they have referenced. We also focus on taking ownership of the situation which helps show our desire to improve. One of our company core values is "Build an open and honest relationship with communication." And we take this value and the relationship we build with our customers seriously.



## **You mentioned that ORA™ has become part of your company culture, it's one of the 10 KPIs for your employees. Please elaborate on how Cardinal uses ORA™ as a metrics to evaluate and measure the performance of your portfolio and team with regards to online reputation? Did you use any metrics prior to ORA™? If yes, what were the challenges?**

**A. |** ORA allows our teams to have a status quo of online reputation performance in the industry and provides a system for goal setting. ORA is currently part of a monthly report, along with several other metrics, our company generates that ranks all of our communities. Reporting on ORA allows our leadership to create accountability for online reputation management, but also creates some good ole fashion competition among the teams. Beyond a general metric for ensuring a company wide focus on online reputation, often team members that are directly tasked with generating positive reviews and increasing ORA are incentivized or have bonuses contingent on the scores growth. Prior to utilizing ORA teams were often simply tasked with monthly positive review goals, with the hope that our positive reviews were out weighing our negative reviews. Having the ability

**Q** to aggregate the yield of those efforts over multiple platforms and understand a community's position against a national average is much more beneficial.

## **Do you see a difference between high and low ORA™ properties in terms of traffic and closing ratio?**

**A. |** There is definitely a correlation in traffic for our communities that have nationally high ORA scores. ORA is a looking glass into each communities' online reputation, which directly affects a prospect's decision of whether to inquire or tour at a property. We especially see this in communities with ORA scores of 85+. These communities have been able to build a solid reputation and are passionate about the customer service and resident satisfaction they provide. I think listening is key and we notice the properties who tend to stand out also provide ways for residents to interact and listen to each other through outlets such as private resident Facebook groups. Denizen, Amaranth, and Skygarden are a few that come to mind who do an amazing job of adding that personal touch and each have ORA scores of 95 and above.

**Q**

## **How does Cardinal manage dealing with a growing review sites universe? Which review sites do you focus on and why?**

**A. |** Keeping up is a challenge in our industry when it comes to anything to do with digital marketing or online reputation. When Facebook launched their reviews platform in 2013 we had to quickly react and ensure our teams were aware that this popular social media site was now another way for prospects and residents to leave reviews. Cardinal tends to focus on the quality of the major platforms over attempting to poorly manage the vast quantity of platforms that exist. We are able to identify which platforms our demographic is engaging with most and do place an emphasis on those. With our residents we tend to see the most engagement of reviews being posted on Facebook, while we see the most reviews being consumed by prospects through Google. This makes sense as a resident is already aware of our brand and has the ability to go directly to a Facebook site to post a review, while our prospects are typically searching for housing using general search terms and will come across our Google reviews while browsing for their housing. Yelp would be the another important platform, but still tends to be more heavily utilized by our demographics for the food and beverage industry.

**Q**

## **How do you use ORA™ to train and motivate your employees to achieve your online reputation management goals?**

**A. |** At Cardinal we use the ORA scores to show our teams where there is room to grow and improve. We set monthly goals and review these with the teams to identify areas that need more attention. Since our community's reputation is directly correlated with the day to day services our teams are providing, making sure we are hiring the right team members who fit with our brand and culture is very important. ORA is a great tool to use to show the onsite teams that the customer service they are providing daily does have an impact in the overall picture and success of the community.

**Q What strategies do you use at the grassroots level to gather, manage and respond to online reviews from residents and prospects? How has J Turner Research helped you in your efforts?**

**A. |** Our approach to negative reviews is pretty simple and starts with “Listen first, then Respond”. Being able to look at things from someone else’s point of view before drafting a reply is very important and shows we are listening to their feedback. Response time is also a key part of our process when reviews from residents and prospects come in. Ultimately, our teams goal is to post a response that might garner a phone conversation or an in person meeting that can show the reviewer we have true concern about their issues. This hopefully results in the reviewer having a revised outlook on our community and possibly in turn prompts them to change their review. JTurner has helped our teams be quickly alerted when these reviews are submitted, so that we can ensure a quick response time from the onsite team. This makes for a much more efficient process and saves our employees the time it would take for them to check these individual sites.

**Q In your opinion, what do you think will be the next biggest wave in apartment marketing to students and parents?**

**A. |** I think we are already seeing the movement to a faster pace way of marketing to students. Our advertising approach has dramatically shifted away from paper-based platforms and even ILS’s, with more money being pushed into social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook. With the short amount of time we have to catch student’s attention we have found it most effective to utilize short ads on social platforms they are looking at on a daily basis.



**Watch the video**

