

Best Practices In **ONLINE** REPUTATION Management

FEATURING



Interview with Kurt Conway
Senior Vice President Brand Strategy & Marketing

AvalonBay
COMMUNITIES



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AvalonBay Communities, Inc. has consistently maintained a stellar online reputation in the ORA™ Power Rankings both in 2017 and 2018. AvalonBay Communities, Inc. was named the top multifamily REIT in the country for 2017 by online reputation for the second consecutive year.

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Q What is AvalonBay’s philosophy with regards to the role of online reputation in determining its success?

A. | Reputation in most businesses is everything. It drives future business and success. And, in today’s online search and shopping world where customers routinely use ratings and reviews as input to their decision-making, having a good online reputation is vital. Not only does it impact our customers at a critical moment - when they’re searching for an apartment home - but, as real estate developers, it also impacts our image in the communities where we seek to create new communities. The reputation we have online is a direct reflection of our core values and our associates’ focus on delivering great service to residents at our communities every day. Anyone can say they deliver great service, but the customer is the ultimate judge of that and online reputation is independent verification that you do what you say.

Q What is your strategy to manage your online goodwill across your portfolio?

A. | We really think about our online goodwill as an outcome of what we do every day to serve residents. That’s where our primary focus is - providing great service. When we meet and exceed expectations and customers share that online, we’re very thankful. When we don’t deliver on expectations and they share that, it is an opportunity for us to get better. We do monitor reviews closely and have established goals for follow-up. For those reviews where customers have told us we can do better, we work with them to resolve their issue as best possible. We track the review comments and follow-up activity and looking for themes. This helps us reinforce our strengths and improve areas where customers have told us we can get better.

Q What are some of the biggest challenges in online reputation management and how do you address those?

A. | The sheer volume of reviews can sometimes be a challenge, but we strive to deliver personal responses and follow up to every customer who's taken the time to give us feedback. Also, providing great service is very important to our associates so when a negative review comes in, sometimes it's hard not to take it personally. One of our core values is continuous improvement, so that's how we reframe it with our associates and focus on how we can make things better.

Q As a multifamily REIT, what do you do differently to excel in online reputation?

A. | Because we have scale, we are able to dedicate a small team to handle our online response to reviews followed by even more individualized feedback from community associates. This specialization, we believe, results in better quality.

Q How do you train and educate your employees – the property management teams to achieve your online reputation management goals?

A. | Again, we focus on what is most important first and that is understanding our customers as individuals and delivering great service every day. And, that starts with hiring and retaining the right people. We hire associates who fit our core values and have a knack for service. Then we train them on AvalonBay's approach to service and reinforce that through coaching and recognition. All of this effort comes through in our reviews - customers talk about the great service they got and very often mention an associate by name. We're pretty proud of that. We do set goals for communities which helps reinforce the importance we place on great service.

Q What strategies do you use at the grassroots level to encourage and manage and respond to online reviews from residents and prospects?

A. | We use Salesforce as our CRM system and all of our reviews are loaded into Salesforce so community associates can review what residents are saying about us online. Salesforce is also the tool we use to track the type of review and all of our follow-up. At daily huddles, communities share the latest reviews which provides an opportunity to reinforce best practices or brainstorm how we could have done things better.

Q What is the role of social media in your marketing efforts? Which platforms do you use the most to interact with your residents and prospects?

A. | We're active on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn - all with strategies to engage residents, future residents and future associates.

