

# Best Practices In **ONLINE** REPUTATION Management

//////////////////// **FEATURING** //////////////////////



Interview with Ian Mattingly, CPM  
President, LumaCorp Inc.



## **LumaCorp Inc.**

We view online reputation as another way to get operational intelligence.

Just as I wouldn't go for two years without setting foot on one of the communities that we manage, I feel it's important to survey our digital real estate at least as frequently. We include online reputation as one of our significant KPIs in our overall dashboard of community health so we can monitor our "digital curb appeal".

### **Q What is the relevance of online reputation to your business?**

**A. |** A positive online reputation gives us a competitive advantage. We are a small operator that competes with much bigger companies with huge advertising budgets. In many areas, we are competing with new construction too. Having a great online reputation is critical for getting onto the radar of our prospects in those areas.

### **Q What is your company's online reputation management strategy?**

**A. |** I am a big believer in Ken Blanchard's philosophy on customer service. We absolutely have to start any online reputation strategy by delivering excellent service that creates raving fans. If we are not doing that, it doesn't matter what else we do, we are not going to be effective in managing our online reputation.

The next part of our strategy is to proactively go after raving fans once we've made them and convert them into messengers for our community.

## **Q Which review sites do you focus on and why?**

**A. |** We try to cover as many websites and apps as we reasonable can. We believe that the review sites that are not as mediated and not affiliated with an internet listing service are the most trusted, and those are the ones where we focus most of our time and attention. That would be ApartmentRatings.com, Yelp and Google. Since Google is the place most apartment searches start that's really the one that we are trying to most proactively go after.

## **Q How do you encourage residents to share online reviews?**

**A. |** If we just say hey these are the four sites we would like for you to leave reviews on- it's too much, and we are not going to get anything from it. We look at the email addresses that we have on file for our residents, and if they already have a Gmail address we will ask those folks to post Google reviews, since we know they already have an account. The rest we drive to some of the other sites depending on where the need is for fresh content. We primarily solicit reviews through personal one-to-one contact, but we occasionally do bulk messaging depending on the situation.

## **Q How do you handle responding to online reviews at LumaCorp?**

**A. |** At LumaCorp, it is the responsibility of the senior management to monitor and respond to reviews. Their community personnel do not respond to reviews.

I monitor and respond to reviews personally. As does my VP, and our regional supervisors. All reviews are handled at the senior/supervisory level because that's how we show how important it is to us. We don't have onsite personal responding to reviews.

Frankly, when people look at reviews, I think they are fairly sophisticated, in how they evaluate them and weigh them in their decisions. How you respond to the reviews does make a difference in people's perception of those reviews. If we respond positively, proactively, and at a high level, even if the review is negative, people will see that we take it seriously. It is less of a hurdle than if somebody onsite who has been personally called out starts getting defensive or argumentative.

## **Q Why does LumaCorp's senior management respond to online reviews?**

**A. |** We proactively engage at a high level. We view online reviews not simply as an advertising or marketing strategy, but as operational intelligence to figure out what we are doing well and what we need to improve. It is important to be very responsive with people who post those reviews.

## **Q How do you use Facebook?**

**A. |** We view Facebook primarily as a resident communication tool. It is often where our residents go to celebrate, complain or commiserate. We want to be involved or engaged in that communication because resident retention is largely driven by a sense of community. So if we are not engaged in that community building exercise, we are losing control of the narrative.

## **Q Share some best practices in online reputation management.**

**A. |** We've been doing online reputation management for over 10 years. We made mistakes earlier on, as with any new initiative. We tried doing contests and drawings and rewarding people for going online and posting reviews. Very quickly we learned that people felt that the rewards undermine the process. The backlash was swift and intense! We have instituted a social media policy that prohibits any kind of gifts other than a sincere thank you for posting a review.

