



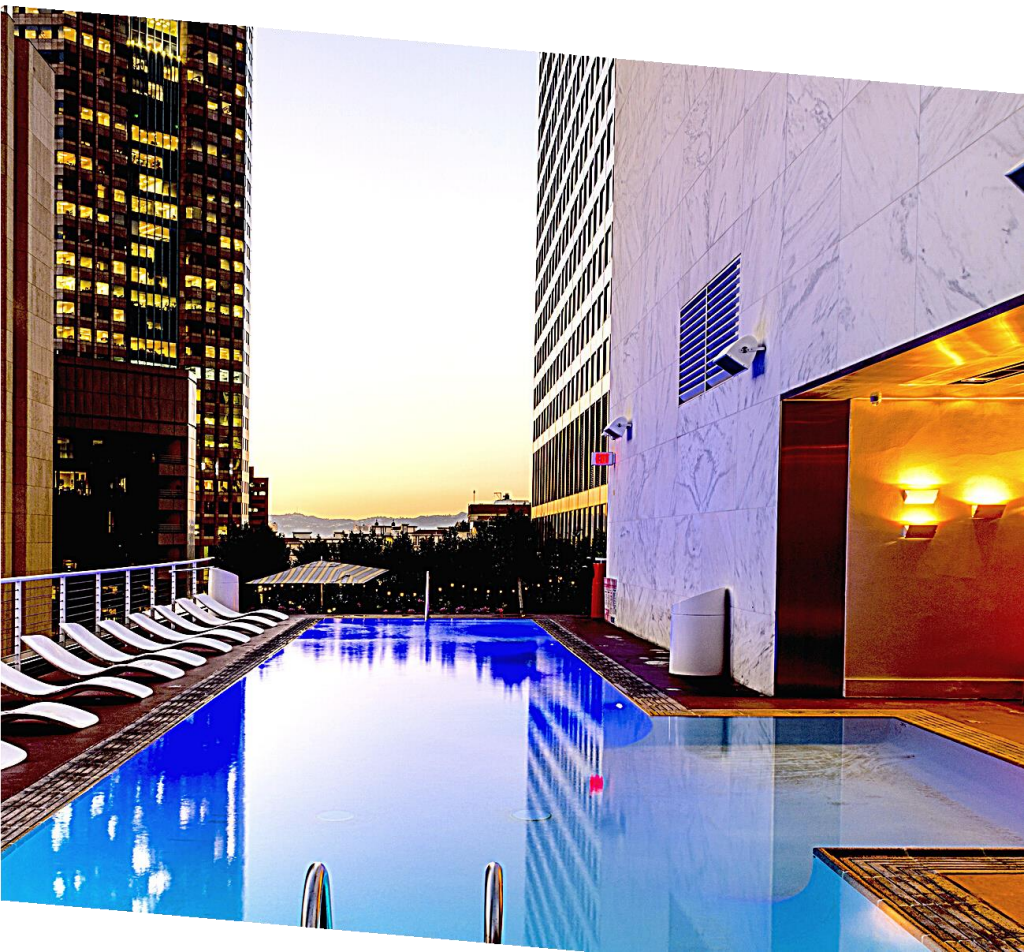
# Condo<sup>and</sup> HOA Management for the 21st Century

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Today's Condo  
& HOA resident  
is looking for  
convenience.



Today's association resident pool is diverse and has different needs. Flexible work schedules and varied household situations make 24 hour accessibility more of a necessity than a luxury for many of today's residents. Yet, many communities still operate the same way that they did 20 years ago. Times have changed and association management must change with it if the community is to meet the needs of today's residents.





## Outlook for Condo and Homeowner Associations



The primary purposes of Condominium and Homeowner Association boards are to preserve community property value, provide services and amenities to residents and to ensure that the collective rights and interests of property owners are respected and preserved.

While stories abound about condo commandos and other constraints of living in an association, the reality is that Americans living in homeowner associations and condominiums are overwhelmingly satisfied in their communities. 85% of residents rate their overall experience as positive according to the Community Association Institute's (CAI) 2018 Homeowner Satisfaction Survey.

Another clear sign that associations' popularity is on the rise is the growth in the number of available communities. Association communities grew from 222,500 communities in 2000 to 344,500 in 2017.



Why should you bring your association into the 21st Century?

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the way in which we all operate in an expansive and far reaching way. Almost all face-to-face encounters and social interactions have migrated to the web and become virtual interactions. As a result, it is even more important for association communities to embrace 21st Century tools and techniques to keep both residents and staff safe while fulfilling their duties.





Setting up an online presence can speed up processes and help to reduce costs. At the board member level, it can also make serving on your board more efficient and less time consuming.

Here are some of the major reasons for embracing technology and ensuring that your condo or homeowners association has an online presence.

- ◆ Communities with more than 150 units are required by law to have a website.
- ◆ Information will be available for residents and applicants on a 24/7 basis.
- ◆ Information will be available online instead of by hard copy, reducing printing and postage costs
- ◆ Information is easier to disseminate and events are easier to promote. More information helps to create a greater sense of community and engage residents.

Additional benefits from an online presence are:

- ◆ Faster and less expensive release of time sensitive information/materials
- ◆ Convenient location to answer frequently asked questions
- ◆ Faster and more secure payment options for your residents
- ◆ Creates a forum that allows feedback from residents



There are some specific functions that bring applicant and property owners in closer contact with their association. These functions typically center around:

- ◆ Applicant screening
- ◆ Board meetings
- ◆ Payments and financial reporting
- ◆ Record retrieval and retention

Traditional association management processes around these functions have been paper intensive and required in person interactions. Start to finish the process is cumbersome. Let's look at the process for approving a new applicant to the community.





First, the applicant is required to pick up the application. They must then complete it manually, make copies of the required documents that are to be attached, go to the bank or other provider and purchase a cashier's check or money order. Then, the applicant must combine all elements into an application package and submit it to the association either by mail or in person.

Next, the property owner must make arrangements to provide the applicant with the condo documents. These documents often include one or more inches of paper. If the transaction does not go through, the applicant is responsible for returning the documents to the owner who must make them available to a subsequent applicant.

For the actual screening process, the applicant's paperwork is copied and distributed to each member of the screening committee. The committee meets in person, usually in the manager's office or the community clubhouse/social space, to host the meeting. To meeting coordinator has to ensure that all parties are available at the specified date and time. .

The applicant must also be available and must travel to the meeting location. Between multiple trips, coordinating the paperwork and schedules involved, it is little wonder that the average association screening requires 30 days from application to approval. The diagram below shows the process flow as well as the number of trips made by a typical applicant.





# The Good News

The good news is that it does not have to be this way. Modern Technology gives us more efficient options to share information and to meet with applicants.

In 21st Century Screening, the community has an online process. Readily available information that can be downloaded from the website include:

- the condo documents – articles of incorporation, bylaws, etc.
- the community application form
- the list of requisite accompanying documents
- the application fee amount with online payment options.



The new applicant process flow can be completed without multiple trips and in a much shorter time frame.

### STEP 1

Applicant access forms online and uploads supporting documents including payment processing



### STEP 2

Association receives electronic copy of application with documents and proof of payments



### STEP 3

Committee arranges meeting and informs the applicant



### STEP 4

Applicants downloads condo docs from the web, attends meeting and is notified by email of approval



Applicants can complete the form online and upload the supporting documentation requested. They can also pay the application fee online to submit the complete package. The applicants can also download a copy of the condo documents to familiarize themselves with the community's rules and regulations.

The association will receive an electronic copy of the application along with proof of payment. This package can be immediately sent to the screening committee. Using a calendar software application, the screening appointment can be scheduled among the committee members and the applicant can be notified.

The meeting is scheduled to take place electronically and all parties dial in at the pre-arranged time. After the meeting is concluded, the applicant is approved or rejected and a notice is sent out informing the parties of such. There are no stacks of papers to copy or print and information can be permanently stored digitally. .





# Online Presence/ Portal



While Florida law requires associations with 150 or more units to have an independent website or portal, this is a good practice for smaller associations as well.

Making documents available online not only makes it more convenient for the public but it also reduces the amount of time that association staff, or worse volunteers, spend fielding calls and providing documents.

At a minimum, your website should include:

- A sale and lease application form
- Community rules and regulations
- Architectural modification Forms (if modifications are permitted)





There are many options for creating a website. Options range from turn key websites with everything done for you to DIY template services like Webley.com, Squarespace.com or Wix.com. **Note: No matter which option you choose, make sure that the community owns the domain name.** This will ensure that the association will always have its domain name even if the community changes service providers.

To find out who owns your domain name, Go to the WhoIs database and search for your domain. Make sure your community's information is listed in both the "Registrant" and the "Administrator" fields.

If the domain is registered by a third-party service provider, make sure that you have a written agreement that clearly lays out what happens to the domain name if the event that the relationship is terminated so that you don't lose your domain name.

# Mass Communication Tools



Mass communication enables you to reach out in real time to a large group of people with a particular message. It can stretch across multiple channels – text, voice calls, mobile app pushes, social sites – and devices. It is an important tool in your association toolbox when relaying critical information is crucial. Keep in mind, speed and reliability are two of the pillars required for your notification system to succeed.

Mass notification systems may be used for community events, emergency recovery, natural disasters, security related issues and any other situation where you want to notify a large group with one call or text.





For email only services, resources such as Constant Contact or Mailchimp are two industry leaders. There are however many other service providers. Google “email campaign” or “group emails” for an expansive list of options.

Sending bulk voice mail (robocalls) and text messages are also useful tools for the modern community association. Here again, there are multiple providers. Balance the level of service, ease of use and pricing to make your best decision. Dialmycalls.com and EZ Texting are two solid providers. Choose the service provider that best suits your needs.

# Remote Meetings

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The trend towards online meetings has been growing for several years. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated that process. Now that society has realized the amount of travel and coordination time that can be saved with virtual meetings, it is hard to imagine that we will ever go back to the same number of in person meetings.

Functions like screen share, polling and the ability to provide handout materials really reduce the number of face-to-face interactions that are needed to conduct association business.

Save staff and/or volunteer time by using one of the many meeting platforms available. Market leaders like [zoom.us](https://zoom.us), [gotomeeting.com](https://gotomeeting.com) and Microsoft Teams are among some of the quality meeting services that are available at very affordable prices.





Factors to consider when choosing a cloud storage alternative is reliability, continuity and security. Stored information should be protected from unauthorized access.

Choosing a provider that has a track record is also important - a cheaper alternative is not necessarily the better choice.

Some of the powerhouse services in the industry include Amazon, Google Drive and Dropbox. As with the other services, research available providers and pick the one that makes the most sense for your community.





# Conclusion



Modernizing your association operations is a great way to save staff time and ultimately reduce costs to the community and can be a huge help when you need to keep your residents informed during an emergency or natural disaster. It can also increase engagement and makes for a more cohesive community. This increased sense of community can make the association more attractive which in turn, may help to improve and preserve property values.

At the end of the day, preserving and improving the value of the community is what it is all about?



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Renaissance Management Group, Inc. has been managing properties in South Florida for more than 20 years. Located in Central Broward county, RMG provides private residential property owners and condo and HOA associations with the management, maintenance and administrative support that they need.