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MHN Interview: Centaur Properties' Harlan Berger

Web 2.0 platforms represent the marketing venue of the modern age. Unfortunately, the multifamily industry can tend to drag behind new technologies. Harlan Berger, founder of Centaur Properties, talks to *MHN* about ways to leverage web 2.0 technologies when marketing properties. For example, his company recently created buzz around the launch of its condop venture in the Chelsea neighborhood of New York, 305W16, through a cross-blend of new media.



MHN: What are some innovative ways that web 2.0 is being used to market multifamily properties? Obviously social-media sites and blogs are now prevalent; in what ways are digital marketing channels being used that people might not be aware of?

Berger: The blog platform has been an interesting tool to experiment with for our marketing purposes. It's not right for every project, but at 305W16, which is in a lively downtown location and includes a nice mix of studio apartments and one-bedrooms along with the two-beds and three-beds, we knew that most buyers would be very comfortable with blogs and social media. So we collaborated with CORE, the firm handling the sales and marketing of 305W16, who is very strong in the social media arena, to essentially turn the project's entire website into a blog. That's instead of the traditional marketing website that basically remains static and acts like a billboard. Most of the content so far has been focused on the building's launch and the neighborhood, but the plan is to now transition into building updates and other forms of unique content.

MHN: The residences at Chelsea's 305W16 were the recent site of a rooftop launch party that involved DJs, body painting and fire-eaters. How were these elements incorporated into the digital marketing, and how were those elements tied to one another across platforms?

Berger: Photo galleries and video from the event were posted on our website, Twitter and Facebook pages, and CORE did the same on their end, and that all helps

to virally spread the message of the property to the people—and their people, and their people’s people, and so on—in the industry.

MHN: The multifamily industry can sometimes be slow to adopt and adapt to new technologies. In the case of marketing technology, how is the industry keeping up with the pack?

Berger: The industry isn’t really keeping up with the pack, honestly, but that’s to be expected. Especially when it comes to real estate in New York City, change is scary. After all, things have been going pretty well in terms of property values for, what, a few hundred years or so? Even now, some new developments don’t even have a website, which shocks me. But we’ll eventually see the trickle-down of new technologies into the industry, once there are tried and true methods of gaining an advantage from them.

MHN: What are some of the misconceptions about digital marketing and social media that need to be dispelled? In what ways do you see people missing opportunities by misusing or underutilizing digital tools?

Berger: That social media is a fad, that it has no genuine impact, and perhaps most importantly, that it’s easy—and free! The implementation of a useful social media campaign takes as much, if not more, expertise and resources than a conventional print media campaign. We’re having fun experimenting and collaborating with CORE, and we’ll use the lessons learned to better inform our next project. And then we’ll use what we learn from that on our project after that. This is a fluid process, and that’s what’s so exciting about it.

MHN: What do you see on the horizon that could possibly go beyond web 2.0? What are some of the mavericks in the industry dreaming up?

Berger: If the Hollywood studios are right, then I guess every new development’s website will soon be in 3D! But seriously, the focus right now is on the full integration of all the digital tools available to us to get the right message out about our building, and to the right audience. And in the future, who knows what other tools will become available to us?