

Yes, I Love Boo!

Lee O'Conner // President // @Lee_Ellipse

I am not sure when I discovered Boo or even how, but I know that he changed my life. Boo is a dog. Yep, just a dog. But to his more than 1 million fans on Facebook, he is so much more. Boo is a Pomeranian that lives with his human in what I can only assume is Chicago. I know this because he wears a Chicago Cubs hat and shirt during baseball season. Boo likes to eat and sleep and chew on toys and go for walks. He doesn't do stupid pet tricks or even really anything special at all. He is just a really cute dog. So, why is Boo so special? Because his human takes fun, cute and precious pictures of him, posts them on Facebook and the whole world, and I mean the WHOLE world, goes AWW! Every Wednesday over a million people get an update from Boo for "Naked Wednesday". This is the day his human takes his pictures without costumes. No less that 10,000 people then make comments on the photo and a countless number of "likes". I've seen multiple languages on Boo's pages, and he is so popular that he is considered a "public figure" by Facebook standards.

So why is Boo such a phenomenon? Because he is transparent. He's not selling anything or promoting an agenda. He's not sponsoring anything. He didn't ask for fans. He really just became a point of happiness for a million people. A true social media icon, not a YouTube link sent out for a viral marketing



stunt, but a Facebook profile set up for a dog. The only marketing activity seen thus far was a link out to the dog food Boo eats and on Boo's 5th birthday, a link for donations to raise money for a cleft palate group, but other than that, he really is just a dog. Who knows what prompted his human to set up the page and now who cares? I for one am happy that she did (you see her legs in pictures) and that I found him. It reminds me of Curious George only as a real life dog. It's amazing what a little dog can do to warm people's hearts. I hope that his human keeps him true to himself and lets him continue to bring joy to the world without getting caught up in all the fame. It's so sweet how he doesn't even know or care that he is famous. He is not competing for fans, he is just a dog.

I love Boo and enjoy seeing his pictures, it makes me smile and I say out loud "oh, I love Boo". I tell people about Boo and share his status updates on my Facebook page. To

me, that is the power of social media. It's about sharing real stuff and finding others that share in the same likes as you. I for one am tired of all the business related updates that flow across my page and for me, it has made Facebook more of a marketplace rather than a social place. Slowly but surely I am removing myself from being a "fan" or liking anything that is not personally appealing to me. I am taking back my Facebook to a personal and social media outlet, just for me. At some point, the only updates that come across my newsfeed may be from Boo.

But for now, I just log on to Facebook on Wednesdays to check out Boo and to enjoy a moment of peace and harmony with the world, and say a collective "aww, I love Boo".

Lee O'Conner



A Case of the "The Haves vs. The Have Nots"

Lisa Benson // CEO



Beginning February 2011, Lee O'Conner, our President, and I began conducting corporate site level visits with our management clientele and their executive members in an effort to ascertain the state of our company, its products and services and the latest in the Multifamily Industry. Or, what is affectionately known internally as the "Ellipse Tour" - a brutally exhausting, laptop in tow schedule already including more than 50 companies and countless hours of meetings and dinners. With no end in sight until after April, we forged ahead knowing we could only get to 65+% management accounts. An open invitation—If we have not stopped by your place of employment, you're welcome to add your company for some free consulting, industry chat and new technology content.

Ok, so it hasn't been all bad...there have been lots of great things uncovered and

exchanged. Of course we heard about the typical concerns with timeliness of issue response, bubbling competitive offerings, and some data access and integration problems. Everyone can be assured those were immediately addressed by an Ellipse employee, once safely in reach of a cellphone or on email. Many of the key concerns presented include the lack of cooperation between the various industry technology providers. "Why can't I have bi-directional integration of my unit availability and my Property Management Software console, allowing me to actually have the 'live' content I was promised?" Or, "I keep seeing references to providers in the industry selling an Apple App for iPhones or the iPad, but I can't find them in the Apple Store?" And, how about the "I have purchased all these different technologies, but many appear to be repetitive in functionality. How do I make good business decisions when, honestly, I'm not

knowledgeable enough to make them?" And finally, "I've been promised so much, A Case of the "The Haves vs. The Have Nots" but when it really comes down to it, so much does not work as described.

As I read the new technology advertising supplements by NAA and MFE, I too took solace in my own frustration over client complaints regarding false competitive offers and the associated supplier deflections. I concluded our marketplace is becoming the "Haves and the Have Nots", separating those who perform with the knowledge, vision, conviction and experience to generate success and those unable to do so, management members and suppliers alike. Successful and engaged businesses took advantage of the last 15+ months to revisit their processes and parse out the non-performing and ineffective. Management members didn't just pare down expenses, like so many others did, but held firm in their perception that the markets would recover and they would be first in line for those coveted operations contracts or development funds. Companies like Flournoy, Bell Partners, The Lynd Companies, Morgan Group and Greystone Asset Management come immediately to mind with teams of talent applied in conductive reviews of service commitments. Their in-house technology groups and online marketing teams are putting the proverbial smell test to each detailed product and service agreement, ensuring functional, baseline, product standards are being delivered. They are training their teams on the product consoles and revisiting those operational controls to ensure active, prescribed engagement. When it doesn't, they are picking up the phone and calling their carriers. Be assured, we too have gotten those dreaded calls and at the time it's embarrassing, but the end results are frequently a change to a systemic oversight within a product element gone awry and we're grateful for it being called to light. 🐛

This editorial by Lisa Benson was originally published in the 2011 March/April edition of *Multihousing Professional*.

Why Pay for a Click?

Lisa Benson // CEO

First off, I would like to say thanks to Google and all the other search engines following their lead in making true word matches the top results in search activities. In other words, they're giving the top resulting organic search spots to the actual companies the consumers are seeking. Last fall when a prospect typed in "Lakeview Lofts in Houston", Apartment Ratings, ILSs and regional apartment locators were awarded those top spots, while single community websites were frequently relegated to the lower listings on subsequent pages. Today when typing in the same search term the results begin matching by just entering "Lakeview lof ", displaying the **community website as the first natural match**, including the neighborhood map reference. Can we hear an Amen for that sister?

So why the change? Google is interested in obtaining more revenues from small businesses for their Ad Words program, a paid for click advertising system. Ironically enough, by providing hyper micro business matches (like apartment communities) the search engines elevated the need for sponsored ads when marketing generic search terms, such as Apartments in Houston. Since this change, the cost for those "little boxed ads" showing up in the right side margin dramatically increased, so I guess it's working. Is it necessary to purchase online advertising today?

Maybe. There is sincere value in online paid advertising when your demographic is engrained to click on those ads, such as in a Gen Y urban infill high rise. On the same note, don't bother with a Gen X suburban garden style community, since those consumers don't trust the Internet enough to buy even a pair of LL Bean jeans, let alone be convinced to lease an apartment sight unseen. Just think our communities can finally get back to business as usual, including our traditional community outreach and corporate marketing. Back to working the right marketing angles that engage qualified prospects living in the three mile radius of the property, enlightened by our terrific curb appeal and participation in our local functions. Frankly, Internet marketing never did deliver those coveted online consumers previously

touted by many industry leaders and suppliers. Stalwart systems, such websites and resident portals, are morphed into self-help centers where visitors can determine a match between their housing needs and financial viability even during off-business hours. As a result of the above detail, what's the plan to emphasize and improve our online presence in conjunction with those search engines? Ironically enough, there's nothing to do. The clearest advice to management members includes updating and improving their dynamic, integrated online content ensuring each consumer visit captures the best returns. Be honest to the following question - Does your online presence still

include out of date information such as expired rental specials, past community events, and a vacant online calendar? Shame on you if you answered yes to even one of these elements! No matter how much traffic you can draw into your corporate or community website and social media outlet(s), each lost marketing opportunity or transaction will far negate your positive efforts. ☹

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SEO vs. SEM

Jennifer Bird // QA/Training Manager // @Jenn_Ellipse

As an Internet marketing strategy, search engine optimization (SEO) considers how search engines like Google, Yahoo! and Bing work and what people are searching for; however, top search engine providers do not disclose the algorithms they use to rank pages. They continually change their techniques to prevent web developers from "tricking" their systems, thus making it impossible to be a true "expert" in SEO.



While SEO relies on un-paid or organic search results based on search engine algorithms, search engine marketing (SEM) is based on pay per click. SEM can be very costly and yet not cost effective, as this does not guarantee the visitor will stay on your website for an extended period or make a purchase. SEO is better for long-term marketing though it may take several months before seeing the results. The first trick is to make sure your website is optimized.

Optimizing a website involves editing the page content and meta data to increase

relevance of specific keywords. Here are some quick tips for optimizing your site:

Brief, unique meta titles for every page. Example: *Ellipse Lofts, Luxury Apartment Community, Dallas, Texas*

Brief, unique page meta descriptions which include the same keywords found in each page's text and title. Example: *Ellipse Lofts is the newest luxury apartment community located in Dallas, Texas near the American Airlines Center and Downtown Dallas.*

Brief, descriptive welcome text that includes links to two prominent venues near your property's location. Example: *Welcome Home to Ellipse Lofts, the newest luxury apartment community located in Dallas, Texas near the American Airlines Center and Downtown Dallas. Our pet-friendly community features unique oversized floor plans [link to floor plans page] and remarkable onsite amenities [link to amenities page].*

All social networking links such as Facebook, Twitter and blog.

SEO takes continuous work and is not something you can set and forget. It requires that you continuously update and maintain your website's content as search engines look for websites that are being updated on a regular basis. Think about what keywords/phrases people use to search for your community and make sure the content throughout your site matches. If you have any questions on how you can be more effective with your site's SEO, Ellipse is here to help. Call our office today at 888.678.3869 to speak with your Business Development Manager or National Sales Director. ☎

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Mobile Marketing to Residents!

Kim Cory // Sales/Marketing Director in Student Housing for University Village Columbus. OH



If you really want to know the best practices for using text messaging as a way to market and communicate, then you need to think first and foremost: it's about your residents! When

you make it about them, offer incentives or announcements they will benefit from or pass along useful information they want to know, you will create a successful mobile texting campaign. I think too many are wrapped up in the concept that texting is only about one-to-one conversations, but many industries, specifically retail, have gained raving fans from texting campaigns that have nothing to do with conversations. Any forward thinking company or communities who are getting with the times are all using or considering texting programs with their residents.

I have observed as well as used mobile marketing trends outside of our industry that I know our residents already focus on. The

purpose for our Mobile Club is to immediately communicate about information, deals, promotions, social events, or emergencies we know "they" want to hear about. If we only made it about us and sent rent reminders, I am sure we would have more of our mobile club users opting out or not gaining any new members into the club. When talking with our residents about announcements of events or things going on around the community we often hear, "I wish you had texted me the details...I rarely check my email anymore." With the constant flood of junk/spam email being sent to consumers today, we knew our emails are being lost or not even opened. With an open rate of less than 15% on emails, I decided to venture out and incorporate texting as a method to communicate with my residents. It doesn't matter what age group or demographic resides at your community, because just about every age group is obsessed with texting... even the senior boomers! The reality is, texting has become the dominate method of communication of all ages and is continuing to grow at a rapid rate.

The biggest benefits we have found from our mobile club program is how easy it is to send out mass messages to our fans, reduced cost in printing/payroll to distribute flyers

and, most importantly, eliminating the time delay in sending and receiving information to our residents. I have partnered with a tech savvy ILS (ForRent Media Solutions) to develop a customized program to help with automated and blast announcements via text. When we announced our mobile club program to our residents in August of 2010, we had 88 out of 2,000 residents sign up with very little marketing. Now we have had an ongoing marketing campaign through signage, website, Facebook and newsletter to encourage residents to join in. In the past 8 months we went from 88 members to over 500 and the numbers continue to grow monthly.

The important question to ask before embarking upon a texting program is what kind of information will I be sharing, and do they want to hear about it? Start with these steps and soon you will have raving fans beyond Facebook. Finally, these texting programs are very affordable. I have looked around at available platforms and found many offer a valuable product for under \$100 per month. The time savings, instant communication, as well as cost savings from printing flyers for your residents is worth looking into texting programs. ☺

Do You Need Training? Call Us!

Jennifer Bird // QA/Training Manager // @Jenn_Ellipse

A prospect contacts your property through Did you know that Ellipse Communications, Inc. provides complimentary training for our clients? We strive to make sure you know all of the ins and outs of your website, Apartment Toolbox[®], Relate 24/7SM system and any other Ellipse services that you have purchased.

Our biggest goal during your training session includes providing you with ways to drive between 1100 to 1500 unique visitors to your website each month. By using your website as a leasing tool, a resident retention tool, and a marketing tool, statistics show that you can gain one to two leases per month or,

alternatively, one lease and one renewal.

The first step is to make sure your website address is out there for prospects and residents to find. Here are some helpful tips on how to accomplish this task:

- **Phone** – Ensure that your answering machine, hold music, or answering service refers callers to your website. At the beginning of the message, have something like, "We are sorry we missed your call. Please visit us online at www.ellipseinc.com" mentioned.

- **Signage and Banners** – If your property is under construction, definitely ensure that your Marketing Director puts your website address on your monument signs. For existing signage, consider adding a placard or nameplate to your signage with your website address. Most importantly, ensure that your website address is clearly visible from all those building and/or rooftop banners. It is much easier for a prospect to remember your website address than your phone number.

- **Internet Audit** – Every item that leaves your office must display your website



independently or even as a refresher course.

If you are not taking advantage of this system, you are certainly missing out! Imagine adding an additional leasing team member to the staff whose sole job responsibility is email follow-up. This person works seven days a week to ensure that messages are sent on a relevant and timely basis to prospects, residents and move-outs. Here are the ways Relate 24/7SM can help you stay keep in touch:

> Prospects receive the Prospect Campaign which reaches out to them during their decision making process.

address. Don't forget items such as your fax cover, business cards, stationary, thank you cards, envelopes, and return address labels. In addition, all of your onsite marketing materials such as property newsletters, resident notifications, and direct mailers should contain your website address. Also consider grabbing your property's logo from the Art Center in the Apartment Toolbox[®] and making labels for water bottles or other refreshment items you offer to your prospects. Again, don't forget to include your website address on the label!

- **Stickers on Packages** – We know how much you love all of the residents' packages in your office! Take advantage of those packages by stamping them with your website address. You can have an inexpensive stamp made at your local office supply store. Use your creative talents by making stickers with a community message or the community's policies.

- **Business Center** – Use the computers in your business center to ensure that your residents know about your website. Save your

website's "Residents Page" as the home page for your Internet browsers on your computer (Internet Explorer, Firefox, Google Chrome, Safari, etc.).

For instance:

- > Go to the page you want to appear as your home page when you start up Internet Explorer.
- > In the top right is the Tools menu, click the last option in the list, Internet Options.
- > Click on the General tab.
- > Under Home page, click the Use current button to make this website your home page.

One of the other most important services covered during your training session is using the Relate 24/7SM system. Relate 24/7SM is Ellipse's dynamic email communications program that generates automated, outbound email messages supporting your proactive resident and prospect communications. Our training team can cover this during your website training, it can be scheduled

> Residents receive the Resident, Birthday, Holiday, Lease Renewal and Rent Reminder Campaigns periodically as a way to reach out to them to increase resident retention.

> Move-Outs receive the Move-out Campaign that keeps in contact with a former resident in hopes of regaining the traffic.

> The On Demand Message section is an added resident service when used to notify residents of inclement weather, community events, package notifications, maintenance, and/or newsletters. Prospects also benefit when the On Demand Section is used to notify them of any current specials your community is running.

The tools that you have purchased from Ellipse stand to make your job easier and run more smoothly, so if you need a refresher, we are here to help! Remember all trainings are complimentary, so please do not hesitate to give us a call at 888.678.3869. ☎

Choose Your Corporate Website Administration

I want Ellipse SymphonySM!

Ellipse SymphonySM is the most advanced suite of technology tools available to the property management industry today. Designed to help you maximize your marketing, leasing, resident retention and managing opportunities successfully, Ellipse SymphonySM sets the standard for others to follow.

Apartment Toolbox[®] Gold

Our Apartment Toolbox[®] Gold provides pre-determined navigational centers for business applications under a hierarchy of administrative controls with password and function protection. This cost-effective solution is specifically developed for management organizations supporting a portfolio of 5,000 to 15,000 units.

Apartment Toolbox[®] Platinum

Large property management organizations supporting a portfolio of over 25,000 active units or higher will find this dynamic product impressive. Modular in design, this suite consists of a comprehensive set of services that provide timely, relevant property and communications data to all members within the company's hierarchy.

Choose Your Executive Tools

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- EllipseNetSM
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Ellipse Communications, Inc. can work to create integrated corporate and community website marketing campaigns, encompassing advanced website services for marketing efforts. Custom designs, graphics and Adobe Flash[®] technology elements will complete these sophisticated presences.

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visit www.ellipseinc.com for a complete description of each item.

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- Site Map
- Pick-A-Floor/Sitemap
- Tell-A-Friend Postcards
- "Flash" Introduction
- Virtual Guest CardSM
- Resident Links with Image Control
- Welcome Text Editor
- Resident Referral Center
- Photo Upload
- Resident Links Center
- Specials Coupon Control
- Click to Call
- Click to Chat

Tell Us About You

Company Name: _____

Contact Person: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____ Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____ Current Website: _____

Special Comments: _____
