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SEO Is Dead

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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

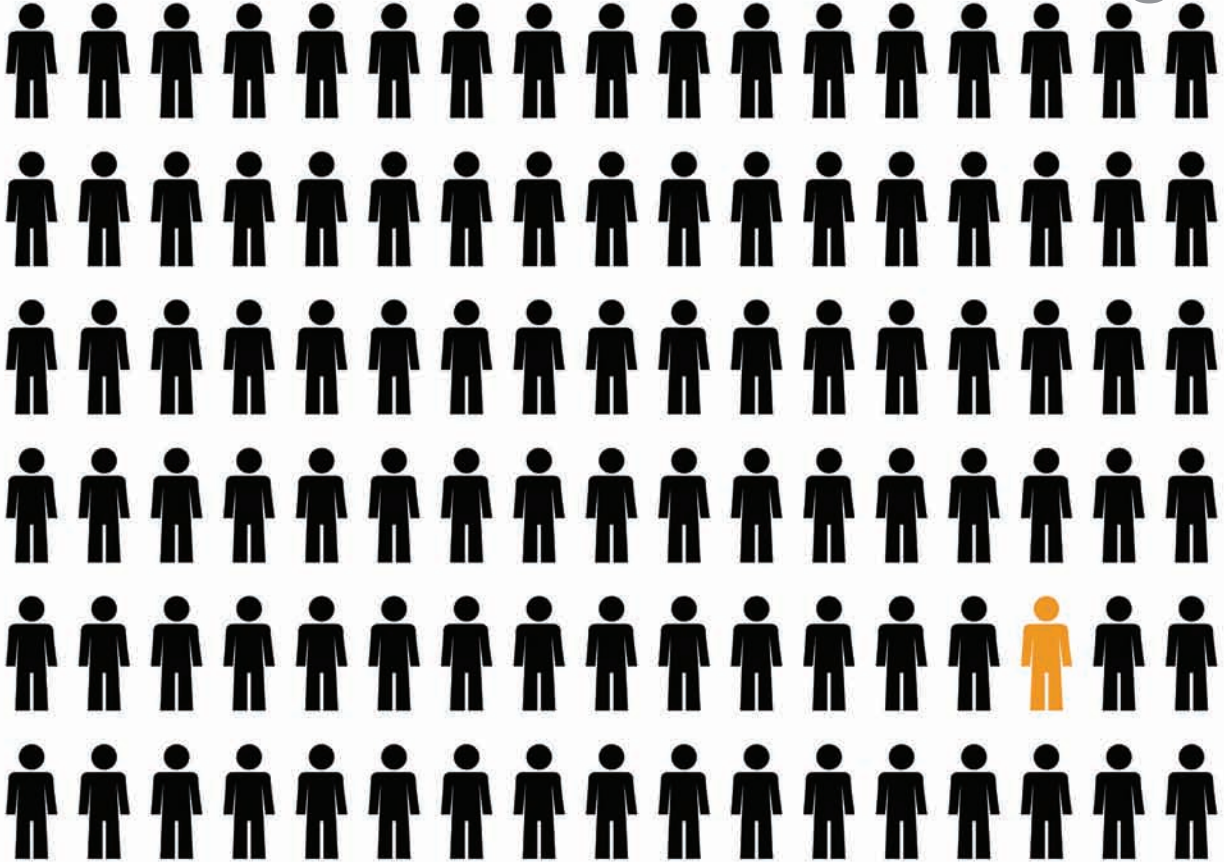
enough to buy even a pair of LL Bean jeans, let alone be convinced to lease an apartment sight unseen.

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.

Lisa Benson is the CEO and Co-Founder of Ellipse Communications, Inc.; the largest provider of custom applications and website development for the Multifamily Industry. Visit her blog at www.ellipseinc.com/ceoblog

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