COMMUNITY PORTALS BUYER'S GUIDE

4 Must-Haves to Increase Homeowner Engagement + Satisfaction

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Dear reader,

When it comes to community portal software, there are a lot of options to choose from. Most HOA accounting systems include a basic homeowner portal as part of their software package. Several vendors specialize in community association portals, and in turn integrate with multiple accounting systems. A few multifamily real estate software providers have adapted their portal products in an attempt to serve the HOA market.

The abundance of options has a clear driver. Portals have risen in importance because they solve three business imperatives for management companies:

- Containing the surging volume of homeowner requests that cause **community manager burnout and turnover** if left unchecked
- Demonstrating your commitment to a superior homeowner experience, which **increases the win rate** for new clients
- Satisfying board member needs for transparency, self-sufficiency, and convenience in managing their communities, which leads to **longer-lasting relationships**

No matter where you look for a community portal, you should start the process knowing what to look for. Through our time in the industry, we have learned a lot about providing solutions that help community leaders achieve their primary goals of protecting, preserving, and enhancing property values.

I'm excited to share these lessons with you and am confident that they will inform your buying process.

First, users expect a simple and intuitive user experience. Without that, adoption will suffer – and a poorly used portal is an ineffective one. Second, boards and CAMs need strong communication tools. Emails, text messages, voice broadcasts, and in-app notifications reduce the noise and uncertainty in a community by keeping everyone informed of repairs, weather events, and other timely news. Third, support must extend to homeowners. If the provider doesn't directly help residents with creating and managing their account, your team will bear the burden.

There is a lot for executives and community managers to navigate. I hope this report helps you calibrate your portal needs in the years ahead.

Sincerely,

Matt DeWolf
Chief Executive Officer
FRONTSTEPS

Requirement #1: Intuitive User Experience

Defining an intuitive experience is simple, even if designing one may not be. Our definition of "intuitive" is an experience that works the way the user expects it to.

Software Adoption

When a homeowner, board member, or community manager is using software, they are typically focused on the problem they're trying to solve. If their attention is split between the problem at hand and a secondary distraction, such as wondering how to navigate the interface, it'll pose a significant challenge. Any useful community portal needs to be intuitive for users to navigate. If it isn't, they'll reject the product and find an alternative approach to addressing their need. For homeowners, this means picking up the phone to call their community association manager, instead of using the community portal.

Training and Support

Another benefit to an intuitive community portal is that it requires less training and support. If an interface works the way users expect it to, they don't need to spend time learning how to use it. Intuitive design creates happy users. Building an intuitive design may take effort, but doing so will reduce training time, lower frustration, and prevent burnout among community association managers.

Improved Efficiency

Tasks can be completed faster when the product works as expected. This means that community managers receive time back in their day to focus on building relationships in the communities they serve. Homeowners can self-serve to reserve facilities, make payments, create posts in a discussion board, and view upcoming events.

TAKEAWAYS:

- Community portals that are difficult to navigate result in a poor adoption rate amongst homeowners.

- Intuitive portals reduce the need for training and support, giving community association managers time back in their day.

- Only portals with an intuitive user experience can serve as an effective channel of communication for users.

Requirement #2: Robust Communication Tools

Effective portals reduce the volume of one-on-one communication by helping managers and board members reach the right homeowners in ways that get their attention.
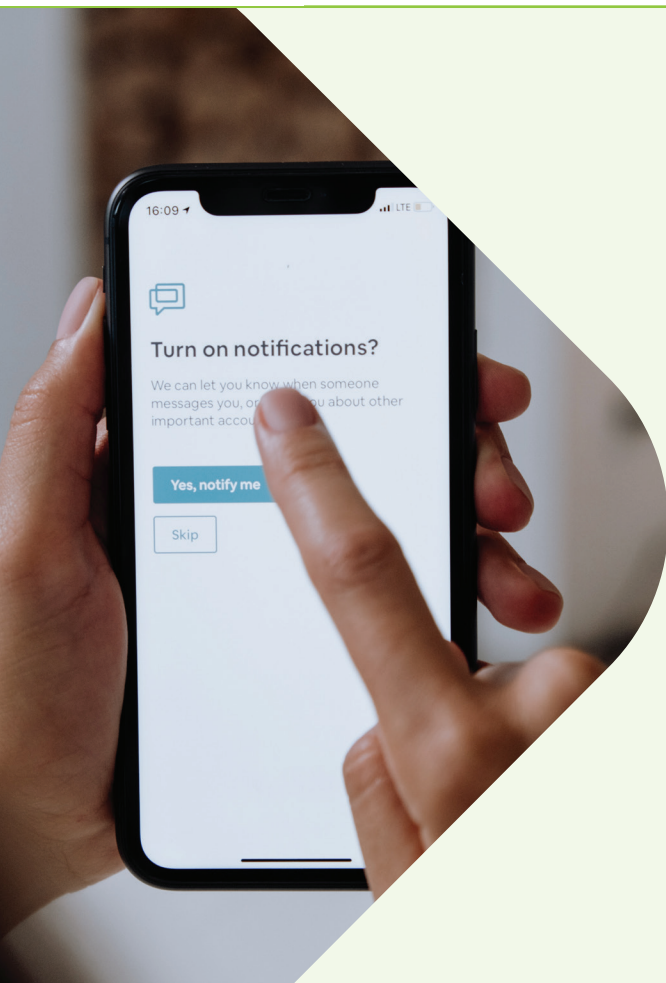
Urgent Situations

When it's imperative to get a message across immediately, you need tools that will reach more homeowners – and get their attention. For example, let's assume that your community has just received significant snowfall and the roads are yet to be plowed, which is impacting entry and exit points in the community. Sending an email would reach most homeowners, but it may not get immediate attention. Complementing that with an in-app notification or voice broadcast, however, will maximize your reach and minimize the headache and risk of uninformed homeowners.

Collecting Feedback

Have you ever wanted to pose a brief survey to residents in the communities you serve? Feedback gathered directly from residents can drive significant decision making within your communities. Instant polling is made possible directly within your portal and mobile app, for the mutual benefit of you and your homeowners

Information Sharing

Communication works best when you're able to share information in a variety of channels and formats. Not all homeowners prefer communications in the same way. They have varying preferences and will be more receptive when you cater to the communication formats that they're most accustomed to.

TAKEAWAYS:

- Homeowners expect instant and full transparency in your communication, particularly during states of emergency or urgent situations.

- The polls provided by portals can effectively gauge homeowner feedback and help you take a quick pulse of your community.

- Variety is essential to communication in HOA's. Emails, texts, in-app notifications, voice broadcasts, and polls are all must-haves in an environment where homeowners need quick and effective communication.

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Requirement #3: Resident Support and Engagement

What value does a community portal serve if no one uses it? This is where login assistance and awareness campaigns provide significant value. Your homeowners need to have awareness that the community portal is available, and they need to understand the advantages it provides.

Spreading Awareness
Find a software partner that understands the importance of spreading awareness about your new community portal. Without homeowner awareness, you'll struggle to gain adoption. It's critical to spread the word early and repeatedly with your new portal users. Good software providers will make it easy for users to register and log in. Great software providers will offer free customized engagement campaigns to increase portal adoption among your residents.

Login Assistance
The initial step of setting up an account is often a bottle neck for any new system. This could present a substantial time commitment for community association managers involved in the launch. Ask software providers if they have an on-staff resident support team to offload homeowner questions from your CAM.

App Accessibility
People are becoming increasingly bound to their smart phones and computers. If you want to see high and sustained usage of your new portal product, it must have iPhone and Android apps that are appealing, convenient, and packed with useful features. Portal products that are advertised as merely "responsive to mobile phones" but lack a true app often suffer from slower performance and more cumbersome navigation.

TAKEAWAYS:

- Once you get your new community portal live, it's crucial to spread the word and get homeowners online.

- You can expect some support requests when you launch any new system. A true partner will take the burden of those support requests off your team's plate.

- Let your software partner take on the work of spreading awareness of your portal and increasing resident engagement. That way you can focus more attention on building and strengthening relationships in the communities you serve.

Requirement #4: Taking Control with the Mobile App

As the HOA landscape changes, skewing toward a younger demographic, the demand for mobile access is on the rise. It's important to offer mobile apps to ensure high usage and adoption among this new generation of homeowners.

Board Approved
It's becoming clear that board members appreciate the ability to keep an eye on their community from a mobile app. Grant them the access they desire to stay informed and connected with the happenings in their community.

Painless Payments
Assume you're trying to complete a banking transaction; would it be more convenient to drive to a local bank branch during business hours or complete the transaction from your smartphone? The convenience associated with making online payments is unmatched. Providing this option of automatic, recurring payments is a convenience that your homeowners have come to expect.

Community Enrichment
Take advantage of the HOA perks that come easier with the mobile app:

- Architectural requests will go straight to the review board.
- Work orders for communal spaces are made easier, reducing the friction for homeowners making repair requests.
- Amenity and facility reservations become instantaneous and clear, eliminating the potential for disagreements amongst homeowners.

All this convenience leads to an enviable and delightful experience for the homeowner. However, to accomplish this, it must be at their fingertips on a native app specifically designed for the user.

TAKEAWAYS:

- New technology can help you reach higher levels of board member and homeowner engagement.

- Homeowners expect the convenience of painless payments because it already occurs in all other areas of their life.

- With the mobile app, every aspect of your community becomes enhanced, leading to a delightful resident experience.

Interested in learning more about what a best-in-class homeowner portal can do for your company?

Schedule your demo today!

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FRONTSTEPS provides the most complete, connected, and homeowner-friendly technology solution for association management. The FRONTSTEPS suite improves efficiency for community management teams, increases security for homeowner's associations, and delivers superior service for homeowners and boards. The platform is trusted by more than 1,400 property management companies and 34,000 communities, representing 5,700,000 homeowners.

GROW WITH FRONTSTEPS.