



It's like Facebook for your condo

MARY GOODERHAM

Published Monday, Jan. 03, 2011 05:00AM EST

Last updated Wednesday, Aug. 22, 2012 09:52AM EDT

Two years ago, when he moved into a condominium in downtown Toronto, David Feldt quickly realized the conundrum of multiple-dwelling life.

Despite living side-by-side to hundreds of people, Mr. Feldt didn't know any of them. Nor could he easily find a parking space, reserve the building's amenities, submit a maintenance request or find the best sushi place in the vicinity.

He met a few people in the elevator or passing in the hall; he could make bookings and requests in the manager's office, but the hours didn't jibe with his; and he finally found a parking spot, through a handwritten note posted in the basement.

"I thought there had to be a better way of doing all of that," says Mr. Feldt, who today is chief executive officer of JazLabs Inc., a small business that helps companies use the Web.

Figuring other residents of the building - and the 25 per cent to 30 per cent of people worldwide who live in apartments - had the same issues he did, Mr. Feldt came up with an idea. Given the popularity of social networks, why not construct one specific to residential buildings?

He and his JazLabs partner, Layla Jazrawy, along with other team members, developed JazLife, an online service that allows people in apartments or condos to submit maintenance requests and find out about businesses in the area, as well as meet and learn about each other.

The new Web-based tool, released last September, is being tested by several property-management companies and tenants in Toronto, with plans to expand to other markets such as Halifax and into the United States.

JazLife has the potential to reduce the isolation and frustration of living in multi-unit buildings, Mr. Feldt says. "It's designed to break down barriers, connect people socially, promote discovery, increase accessibility, add convenience and build trust within a condo or apartment building and the surrounding ecosystem."

The service offers a concierge section, where tenants can get information about the building, book amenities and contact the management about maintenance and other issues. There is a "resident marketplace," where tenants can advertise items available or wanted, and a community bulletin board where people with similar interests can meet each other. Local businesses can post promotions or specials.

For building owners and managers, the software-as-a-service model, where all data and programming is stored on the Web, comes at a low cost and with little hassle. The system can be customized to reflect building amenities and local business information. Tenants are given unique log-ins and user accounts. The cost to the building management is \$2.50 to \$5 per unit each month.

Tenants can choose how much information about themselves they want to share with others. "You get the benefits of a social network and the ability to manage your condo experience online," Mr. Feldt says.

Afshin Mousavian, 27, rents a condo in a 15-story building in downtown Toronto and has lived all his life in such buildings. He says the JazLife system, which he is trying out, could provide "better and more constant service for tenants." He says the rules and procedures for booking visitor parking spots in his building keep changing, and the system is never functional after hours. Until now, residents who had items for sale had no way of promoting them. And there is no dedicated online system for meeting and communicating.

"It's all about relationships," Mr. Mousavian says about JazLife. "You know who's in your building and you can communicate with them."

The potential market for the product is vast and largely untapped, Mr. Feldt says. The Greater Toronto Area has 356,000 condo and apartment units, while Vancouver has 260,000 and Chicago has 370,000.

Mr. Feldt says that traditional mass-market networks don't suit small groups as well as a "local, niched and private" communications platform such as JazLife. "It doesn't make sense for me to notify or publicize to my 1,500 friends on Facebook that I've booked the party room in my building, that my refrigerator is leaking or that I've reserved guest parking for my sister who's visiting from out of town."

Such an online system also allows businesses to contact residents in a more meaningful way, he adds. "No more flyers in the mail room."

© 2012 The Globe and Mail Inc. All Rights Reserved.