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OPINION

Feb 8 2018 at 12:15 AM

Updated Feb 8 2018 at 9:41 AM

You can make apartment strata decisions online with tools like Stratabox.com.au

by Jimmy Thomson

When strata blocks were mostly two- or three-storey walk-ups, everybody was on the committee and communication was chats in the hallway and notes slipped under doors. In these days of mega-complexes of more than 300 units, that isn't going to happen.

As a result, meetings become more formal with individual owners not as involved with the daily running of their blocks.

In the meantime, though, we have all become hooked into some kind of social media or another. Clearly, there's an opportunity to exploit the new to bring us back to something approaching the old.

This surfaced in the [Flat Chat Forum](#) recently when an owner who had set up a website for his block was concerned about privacy issues and continuing management of the site.

These are two critical questions and if you are thinking of going down that road, you might be better off finding a commercial product that does the job for you and continues to service the [strata scheme](#) when you have moved on or lost interest.

Factor in the legislation in many states that allows owners to vote online, and this is clearly an area that can only grow.

What's on offer

For instance, Stratabox.com.au is a self-management programme that will appeal to small schemes that don't have a strata manager or larger schemes that want more input into how their strata manager runs things.

As well as the nuts and bolts of levies, maintenance, meeting agendas and online voting, it also has noticeboards and forums where owners and committee members can discuss issues and ideas as they arise. There's a free component but the premium service costs about \$1 per unit per month.

Strata Chat is a bot-based information service for your scheme, which also has chat rooms with different levels of access. It's free of charge.

Strata Vote provides a reliable and legal framework for online voting so that more owners can be more involved in the decision-making without having to turn up at meetings. It charges on the size and frequency of votes taken.

There are many other options, although most of the biggies have developed from strata management software and often aren't all that user-friendly for your average amateur strata committee member.

And then there are in-house websites and Facebook pages. These are fine, as long as someone competent is looking after them for a sustained period.

But they would be hard-pressed to have a rock-solid online voting component. And the inevitable sound and fury of [owners arguing over issues](#) that quickly get personal can see them shut themselves down for fear of legal action.

The future of strata communication is definitely online. Just make sure your old-school committee doesn't saddle you with a system that doesn't work, doesn't fit and – most importantly – doesn't get used by residents.

Jimmy Thomson edits the apartment living advice website [flat-chat.com.au](#). Stratabox is a sponsor of Flat Chat. Different states have different strata laws.