

Columns

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The Double-Edged Sword of the NextDoor App

Amanda Thomsen

NextDoor is a private social network that allows people in a neighborhood to connect on a message board using an app on your smartphone. Need a roofer or a babysitter? You can ask for referrals from people in your neighborhood. Looking for a caterer for a party? You can get a million suggestions. Is there a rash of break-ins? Hear all about the latest. Did your dog get loose? Post a photo and a cry for help. Need some pants hemmed? Want to trade window valances? Want to give away your old bean bag chair? Need to sell your old sofa? Post it. Each member signs in with their real name and has their address verified, then members are grouped together with others in their hood, so it's all totally legit. But finish this column before you sign up, okay?

In my neighborhood, mostly people are asking for recommendations of services. One of the things people are most often asking for are referrals for lawn and tree service, especially in the spring. So if that's a service you offer, you should get this app and make sure you're fielding those posts. But make sure you finish this column first.

You can also publicize your garden center there, too; you can create a business page or just chime in as a neighbor with a local biz. Basically, it's another resource to explore if you've already mastered Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. I'm all for becoming more involved in your community and this is maybe even a step TOO involved. However, it's free and easy to use and, in the best-case scenario, you could end up really helping someone out or going that extra mile in customer service needs. But, uh, finish reading this page first.

Just like any neighborhood, there's good and bad. Sadly, neighbors who like to complain in real life get a larger soapbox/megaphone on NextDoor. As do neighbors who have a little more time on their hands. It would be great if everyone used the app to draw people together, to organize block parties, help each other out and to work on neighborhood clean-up parties, but every bridge has a troll living under it, it seems. A neighbor can complain that someone on the other side of town has weeds growing around their mailbox and hurl that complaint like a water balloon full of glyphosate and run in the other direction, opening a thread of discussion about someone who may have no idea it's happening.

Something like this actually happened to me, recently. Some grumpy neighbor complained that people on

Main Street have really let things go this year (they haven't) and it opened up a nasty can of worms where ...

1. A kind woman felt she had to explain she was 42 weeks pregnant and couldn't she wait to give birth to pull the weeds near her mailbox? Wouldn't that be okay, pretty please? And ...

2. A woman down the street from me complained that I have a headless mannequin next to my front door that I change the costume on, seasonably. It's true, I do. I'm not sure why a goose is acceptable but a mannequin is not, but that's her problem, not mine.

So before you jump in with both feet, beware that you might get involved with something you don't want to be embroiled in, hear feedback that's baseless or have the font on your store's sign assassinated. There seems to be a boatload of neighbors who don't understand that if you burn down the house next door, it doesn't make your house look any better. Face to face or in an app. **GP**

Amanda Thomsen is now a regular columnist in Green Profit magazine. You can find her funky, punky blog planted at KissMyAster.co and you can follow her on Facebook, Twitter AND Instagram @KissMyAster.