Here's an app that takes the frustration out of estate management

By Sindy Peters   19 Sep 2017

Founded in 2016, EstateMate was born out of the frustration often experienced by being a resident, owner and body corporate member in a residential estate. Co-founder Jens Hiestermann believed that there had to be an easier, more efficient way to manage complexes, and improve communication between residents and management. After some thorough research, his idea developed into what is now an innovative cloud-based solution for the South African property management industry.

Developed for web, iOS and Android operating systems, the EstateMate platform aims to simplify the day-to-day management activities within residential complexes and estates, reducing the workload of property portfolio managers.

We interviewed the platforms founders Nicole and Jens Hiestermann to find out more about some of the innovative features of EstateMate, what its reception has been like within sectional title complexes, and what further innovations they foresee in the proptech space.

▦ *Give us a brief breakdown of a few of the app's most innovative features.*

There are plenty of great features in the EstateMate app, a few really great ones are:

- A panic button (silent security request with your immediate geolocation),
- The ability to send a community alert or anonymous tip-off,
- To be able to request pet approvals, alteration approvals, or other approvals directly through the app,
- We have partnered with Lightstone, where you can get your homes evaluation report through the app,
- Receive and respond to newsfeeds and notifications,
- Receive all your bills on the app,
- Details of complex or estate contracted service providers,
- Complete community information,
- Report function to report anything from noise complaints to insurance claims, and
- Access to a list of authorised service providers over 12 different provider categories.

What makes the Estatemate app unique is that it has built-in user roles (resident access vs director access) and therefore

management experiences a different app with more features that support the management of these communities. To name a few:

- A management group chat,
- You can approve/reject requests via the app,
- Respond directly to reports from residents,
- Search residents by their unit number and view their profile, and
- Create one-time, recurring or scheduled notifications.

⠿ *What has the reception been like among trustees and homeowners in ST complexes?*

EstateMate has had a very positive reception from both trustees, management and residents. We began to pilot the product in a few communities a year ago and have refined and developed the app to where it is now. Along the journey, we have had great feedback, very positive responses and a large amount of relief being expressed from clients that no longer have to battle to communicate or rely on Whatsapp groups.

Trafalgar Property Management recognised the space for this type of technology within its residential communities. We approached them as we wanted to provide a value-add for property management companies. They were interested in our white labelled option and they have worked closely with EstateMate to create their own Trafalgar App to serve their national clientele.

EstateMate have created the first version of the Trafalgar App, and with the help of the portfolio managers and sales managers, are in the process of providing this app to Trafalgar's current and potentially new client base around the country. The approach is to release the app to a selected few communities first, and then test, refine and improve the user experience even further. Every community can have a unique set of requirements and therefore EstateMate will constantly innovate the product offering to suit the residential setting.

⠿ *Some HOAs avoid using social media tools for intra-complex communication due to security concerns. How cyber secure is the app?*

EstateMate understands the security concerns expressed by HOAs and similar communities and therefore prioritise the security of all user information. We make sure that all our server's are encrypted with the latest security certificates, and use global standards in terms of system security. The EstateMate app is not a public facing and/or open access app where anyone and everyone can register and link to a community. All app registrations are strictly vetted through database cross-checks and user approval mechanisms. The platform does not share any personal information, and we don't splash our app with advertising from third party vendors. Our aim is to provide a robust solution that serves the user and the community they live in.

EstateMate founders Jens and Nicole Hestermann

⠿ *What further innovations do you imagine we'll see in the proptech space in the long-term?*

We believe proptech is an exciting space, and we are excited to be able to innovate in this space. Many industries are experiencing the pressures of 'technological disruption', but this pressure also provides opportunity because we tend to relook at how things are done and how business can be done more efficiently.

Another hot buzzword is 'IoT' (internet of things), and the solutions and innovations evolving from this space are certainly game-changing. Companies are now creating IoT-enabled building management systems which consume data, analyse and provide insights, which help facilitate intelligent decision making. EstateMate is definitely conscious of this space and the opportunities it provides and therefore have been speaking to the like's of inGenu to see how we can use the power of IoT to innovate our product offering even further.

The EstateMate app is constantly adding to its features and functions to better improve the user experience. Currently we are working on a number of new features.

With EstateMate's strong focus on improving the customer service experience between the property manager and resident, we are developing and close to releasing our management dashboard. The management dashboard is redefining the interaction between managers and residents through smart workflow's, task management, live chat functionalities and much more. The objective of the management dashboard is to compliment the property managers existing system in place. The aim of the system is to automate the tedious tasks (and endless emails) while still giving the manager's the power to service their clients effectively and efficiently.

⠿ *What other local apps or initiatives do you find truly innovative?*

Hmmm, there are some incredible local apps emerging, but to point out a few:

HouseME: We think they are revolutionising the rental industry and using the latest technology to connect tenants and landlords. The comprehensive system includes everything from smart vetting processes to rating systems, providing peace of mind for all involved.

Bull Horn Panic Button: A free, innovative app which focuses on security and turns your phone or smart watch into a panic button that will instantly, silently call and SMS your emergency contacts. It even sends and receives alerts of local crimes and suspicious activities in your neighbourhood.

Snappy Home: In a competitive app space, Snappy Home seems to shine when it comes to service provision. Snappy Home is a business that provides you as a customer with services around the home, and guarantees excellent service through trustworthy and accredited service partners.

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