

Earlier this month, Sierra Highland resident Hector Anguiano posted a clip from his video doorbell, titled “Be careful. People are crazy,” that showed a reckless driver sideswiping a garbage can as it drove down a residential street—uncomfortably close to a man out walking his dog.

The post cascaded into everything from goodwill commentary (“maybe he was just having a bad day”) to junior detective work. (“It was indeed a Dodge, but it was actually a Sebring from around 2007. Excellent eye though.”) Another poster thought the car matched a recent post from Nevada Highway Patrol. (It didn’t.)

Travis Warren, Reno Police Department’s public information officer, confirmed that RPD has seen an increase in evidence to support cases coming from video doorbell and surveillance camera footage, especially in cases where the immediate suspect description is not available.

Warren said sites like Nextdoor do help others share information and inform the community what to be on the lookout for, but to also remember that community outsiders do make visits.

“You may have family members of those in the community who are visiting for the first time, or someone is meeting a neighbor to discuss retirement plans, or a representative from a legitimate business is there,” he said. “It’s important to remember that normal people are doing regular, everyday things from time to time.”

He advised that in cases where someone looks unfamiliar, best practice is to verify: contact RPD and ask if they’ve received reports of suspicious vehicles or speak with neighbors first to see if they’ve noticed something

Anguiano says that in the eight years he’s lived in Reno, he hasn’t seen a spike in suspicious activity, but did say he installed the video doorbell after several instances of interference to his property. While he doesn’t feel that the cameras themselves will deter crime, he said “Sharing information about neighborhood safety is a great idea.”

BEHIND THE CURTAIN

Improving safety or helping small businesses on Nextdoor may prove to be effective over time, but it also opens the door for other issues.

A year ago, a Glenwood Estates resident published a post, warning of a “suspicious black truck” with two people “who do not belong in the neighborhood”—with no actual description of the riders or why they were determined to not be from the area. When the poster was asked to clarify, angry comments followed.

Media across the country has reported on instances where these fine lines can cause large problems, from San Francisco’s controversial capture of a “porch pirate” by way of Nextdoor doorbell video, to false accusations that damaged a local restaurant’s reputation in Asheville, North Carolina.

One source of the problem is that Nextdoor may be growing out of its terms and conditions. The site prides itself on being an a resident-run website. One resident per neighborhood acts as the “lead” for their geographical domain. That person decides what’s appropriate, what isn’t and can basically curate content.

Like Facebook, anyone can report another user on Nextdoor, resulting in permanent removal from the site. Increasingly, Reno users are complaining that a post has mysteriously disappeared (both stand-alone posts and responses in a thread). And since it’s on a case-by-case basis that’s reviewed after the lead takes action, there are no clear safeguards for equal treatment (a problem that platforms like Facebook and Twitter still publicly wrestle with).

Per the site’s terms and conditions, “Neighborhood Leads can report content, review and vote to remove reported content, or close discussions that were started in their neighborhood. ... Neighborhood Leads do not have the power to limit a member’s ability to post or to restrict their access to Nextdoor. Only



Nextdoor staff can take those actions.” (Nextdoor also advises residents to “Not post concerns about moderation in the main newsfeed.”)

As the site grows—both in membership and its ever-expanding corporate partnerships and marketing programs—it’s not unreasonable to wonder whether Nextdoor-employed moderators will become overwhelmed, and lean too heavily on neighborhood leads to make the call for them.

Regardless of what Reno’s presence on Nextdoor continues to become, it’s prudent to remember that social media channels are built around people, and that means it will have two characteristics: the beautiful display of generous, curious and unique qualities, and the rapid deterioration of common sense and humility. Post wisely. □

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