



MULTIFAMILY FLORIDA

FALL 2021

FIGHTING BACK

FRAUD IS ON THE RISE, BUT SO ARE RESOURCES TO DETECT, COMBAT IT

**MAINTENANCE
TEAMS TURN
TO TECH**

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**APARTMENTS
BY THE
NUMBERS**

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Apartments By the Numbers

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Stronger Together

BY KIMBERLY MAGGARD, CAPS, CPO | ROYAL AMERICAN MANAGEMENT INC.

IF THERE CAN BE such a thing as a silver lining to a pandemic, one would be the emergence of new ways to connect and collaborate – for both the Florida Apartment Association and the state's multifamily industry.

That became apparent as I and my colleagues at other multifamily organizations reached across company lines to determine how we could continue in our essential roles of providing safe housing to our residents and looking out for the best interests of our employees. We've always had good working relationships, bolstered by seeing each other at affiliate meetings and trade shows, the FAA Annual Conference & Trade Show, and other industry events. During the COVID-19 crisis, all of those were postponed or shifted to virtual events. "Unprecedented" and "uncharted" have almost become clichés when we're talking about the pandemic, but they are accurate. We all found ourselves in extraordinary circumstances, and I'm grateful that we were able to share ideas and seek solutions.

Likewise, the Florida Apartment Association and its 10 local affiliates made the most of the pandemic to strengthen their network. The Association Executives Council, which comprises the executive officers of FAA and its affiliates, met via Zoom every week, beginning as soon as it was clear that the pandemic was going to dramatically affect day-to-day life. During these meetings, the AEs collaborated on how they could best provide vital information to members, from offering webinars and roundtables to sharing resources about health and safety practices and the patchwork of state and local regulations.

Even before the pandemic, FAA affiliate executives and volunteers had worked together to verify that all Florida affiliates met or exceeded benchmarks approved by the National Apartment Association in late 2019. NAA established the criteria to ensure that all members, regardless of the size of

their affiliate, would enjoy minimal standards of service. Those benchmarks include financial and other operational policies, board meetings at least annually, at least two membership meetings or events per year, member communications, and timely reporting of member rosters to NAA.

Those efforts were underway before the pandemic, and by banding together in a time of need, the AEs helped further advance the 2020-2022 FAA strategic plan goal to **strengthen the affiliate network**.

Overall, FAA has made significant strides toward achieving the goals set forth in the strategic plan, in spite of and perhaps partly because of the unusual challenges faced during the past year.

As this is my last message to you as FAA president, I would like to thank all the members for allowing me to serve in this capacity. It has been a valuable experience both personally and professionally. FAA is a well-respected and highly regarded association, and it has been such an honor to be a part of a leadership team that continues to strive for the best interests of the apartment industry. FAA's reputation is enhanced by the many multifamily professionals who contribute their time and expertise to advancing the association and the industry. I have been fortunate to have worked closely with our staff, board, and committee members and appreciate all they have accomplished for FAA members during my term.

It has been another year living with this seemingly never-ending pandemic, but we have adapted and been able to make some meaningful progress on our association's goals. Throughout all of this, FAA members have remained vigilant in our professional responsibilities to all those we serve. I look forward to continuing to support the FAA leadership as it charts the association's future path. Again, thank you for allowing me to serve; I'm walking away with memories and friendships that I will forever cherish. **MF**

You Just Can't Replace Being Face to Face

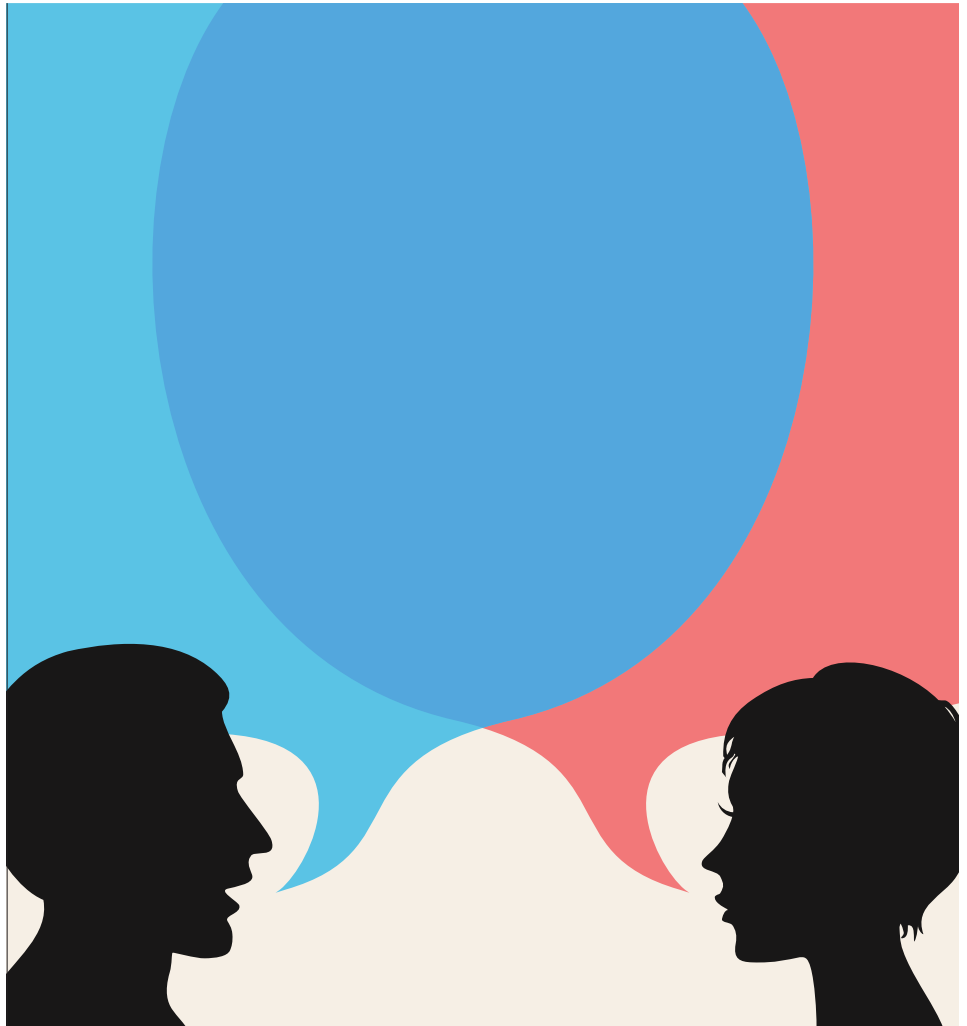
BY JOSH GOLD, CAE, CMP | EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

LAST YEAR AT THIS time, we were hard at work preparing for our first-ever virtual annual meeting – something that a few years ago, I never would have imagined saying. After all, associations are all about coming together, and until last year, that meant in person. This year, “in person” is no longer necessarily a given, as many events are taking place virtually or as some type of hybrid.

The multifamily industry is a people-focused industry. Over the past seven years, I've observed how much FAA members enjoy getting together and how you support your colleagues even though they're at competing companies – more so than in many other industries. A year or more of staying away from other people has been especially difficult for many of you. Getting together in person at the 2021 FAA Annual Conference & Trade Show is exciting to anticipate. It's also important for several reasons.

Being face to face is key in building relationships. Small talk, shared experiences, laughing together – all forge bonds that are less likely to develop during a virtual event. Researchers at the University of Chicago and Harvard correlated shaking hands with more open and honest negotiations, and better outcomes. A handshake, they found, literally conveys warmth and activates the part of the brain associated with rewards. It remains to be seen whether shaking hands will again become standard practice in post-pandemic business interactions – or whether alternatives such as a fist or elbow bump, a wave, or a “namaste” bow will offer the same benefits.

It's better for business. Research shows face-to-face requests are 34 times more effective than those sent by email. The Human Dynamics Lab at the



Massachusetts Institute of Technology used electronic badges to collect data such as tone of voice and body language. They found that teams that met in person performed measurably better.

Communication is more effective in person. We've all experienced a text or email being misconstrued because there's no tone of voice, facial

expressions, or body language. Virtual meeting platforms where we can see and hear each other have helped alleviate some of these misunderstandings, but they're no match for being face to face. In fact, experts say that facial expressions can be more important in conveying a message than tone of voice and word choice combined.

The eyes have it. When people are happy or excited, their pupils tend to dilate; conversely, fear, anxiety, or sadness cause pupils to contract. You may get the feeling that someone isn't exactly warming to your message without knowing why, but your subconscious mind might be trying to tell you something. Communicating without eye contact doesn't give rise to the same instinct.

Emotions are contagious. Neuroscientists talk about "mirror neurons," meaning your brain fires up the neurons associated with an action you observe. When someone you're speaking with smiles, a part of your brain also smiles. If you want someone to get excited about an idea or a product, share your excitement in person.

Technical difficulties are less problematic. Sure, a microphone

might malfunction during a meeting or a PowerPoint presentation might glitch. But those are typically temporary and not very common. On the other hand, how often during an online meeting do we hear "You're on mute" or, conversely, "Please remember to mute your microphone." We either don't hear what the individual was saying, or we hear side conversations that were never meant to be shared.

It's easier to be present when you're, well, present. It's harder to be distracted or tempted to multitask when you're in the same room with someone. Have you ever surreptitiously checked your email while on a Zoom call? Of course, you still might do that during an in-person education session, but you're less likely to "check out" entirely.

Spontaneous connection is more likely. Virtual meetings don't create opportunities to cross paths with a colleague heading from one session to another or bump into a speaker in the coffee line. These informal one-on-one moments can be a great source of nuggets of information or valuable building blocks of a positive working relationship.

Appreciation is better delivered face to face. The FAA Annual Conference & Trade Show includes recognition of local volunteers, members of the Executive Committee, Leadership Lyceum graduates, major investors in the Apartment Political Action Committee, and top sponsors – all of whom play important roles in the success of the conference and in making the Florida Apartment Association what it is. **MF**



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FIGHTING BACK

FRAUD IS ON THE RISE, BUT SO ARE RESOURCES TO DETECT, COMBAT IT



BY BRAD KUHN

Mallory Hoffmeyer, community director of the Essex Luxe apartments, a high-end 330-unit multifamily development in Central Florida, has seen it all. She's seen people rise from the dead to apply for an apartment lease and witnessed deadbeat tenants from other properties miraculously make their unpaid balances disappear.

"Digital documents have made our lives easier," she said. "But they have also made it easier for people to falsify things."

Digital technology has made modern property management better in many ways – from access control and amenities management to virtual tours and online leasing. COVID-19 and the need to socially distance in 2020 accelerated the adoption of such technology. But every opportunity has its opportunists. As the multi-family industry automated to accommodate contactless leasing, fraudsters did their best to take advantage of the increased anonymity. The degree to which property managers respond and adapt to this evolving threat could have a significant effect on performance in 2021 and beyond.

A growing threat

A study by TransUnion found that, as of August 2020, more than 15% of all apartment lease applications were fraudulent, up from just over 10% in the prior year. Almost two-thirds of respondents

indicated that they had experienced application fraud in their portfolios and more than 40% failed to discover that fraud until after the fraudsters had moved into their property.

“A majority of applications these days are being submitted online,” said Timothy Fortner, CEO of property management software maker BetterNOI. “Technology has advanced to where people can produce forged documents – fake pay stubs and even IDs – at home. If you don’t know who you are dealing with, it makes it hard to prosecute or collect on a debt.”

The most common document-related application fraud schemes, according to Fortner, include:

- Altered identifiers – switching from first to middle name, changing a birth date or phone number.
- Stolen identity – using the Social Security number or credit score of another person – often deceased.

Corporate Leases

Don't let enterprising fraudsters sell you short

BY BRAD KUHN

Verifying the identity of the person signing a lease is only half the battle. These days it is equally important for property managers to verify that the person whose name is on the lease is also the person who will occupy the unit.

The popularity of short-term vacation rental platforms such as Airbnb and Vrbo has been a persistent problem for landlords for several years now. It was bad enough when tenants

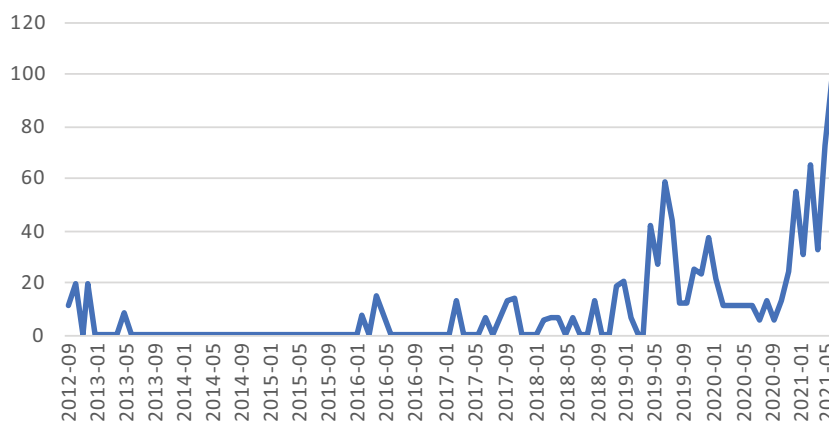
who actually lived on the property sublet an extra bedroom. Since the pandemic, however, things have taken a turn for the worse, as entrepreneurs, encouraged by online promoters, have taken the idea to the next level, forming corporations, and renting and subletting blocks of rooms, hoping to strike it rich.

The concept is called “rental arbitrage” – the exploiting of market price differentials to make a

profit. In this case, the difference being exploited is the relatively low daily cost of a long-term lease versus the much higher rate a hotel might charge for comparable accommodations. And judging by recent Google trends, the idea, which lost some momentum during the pandemic, is gaining popularity.

Mallory Hoffmeyer, community director at Essex Luxe apartments, which opened last fall

Web Searches for Rental Arbitrage in Florida



Source: Google Trends

► Continues on Page 10



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- Synthetic or false identities – using digital technology to manufacture an entirely new identity.

Hoffman said she has experienced all of those in the past year, including an applicant who tried to use his own good name and credit to sign a lease on behalf of his brother, a felon, who would not have qualified based on his criminal record, and another who presented a Social Security card created from an online template.

“Anything in an editable format, even if it doesn’t appear to be edited, we reject automatically,” Hoffmeyer said. “A PDF is not as big of a red flag for me because those are harder to change, but there are still ways.”

Effective detection

Catching fraud during the application process is critical because applicants who establish occupancy under false pretenses tend to be high-risk tenants, and it can cost a property thousands of dollars to correct a problem after the fact. In addition to the actual cost of eviction, there is the possibility of physical property damage, the missed opportunity to rent to good tenants, the potential for criminal activity, reputational damage, and the potential loss of other neighboring tenants.

Traditional background and credit checks are good as far as they go, but it is becoming

► Continued from Page 8

in Orlando’s I-Drive entertainment district, said she began to notice a surge in subletting activity at her 330-unit luxury community right away. She said she shifted into “Nancy Drew” mode, name-checking the girl detective from a popular children’s book series.

“We audit for Airbnb rentals weekly,” Hoffmeyer said, “although most of the time these come to light when an unsuspecting vacationer shows up in our clubhouse with their luggage.”

Hoffmeyer said she had experienced rental arbitrage at other properties, but not with this degree of sophistication.

“We were getting an unusually high number of requests for corporate leases,” she said. “There were a lot of red flags. We would ask for trade references and they wouldn’t know what we were talking about. Some would claim to be working with a number of local companies, but they couldn’t name any of the companies they were working with.”

Most of these requests arrived via email, Hoffmeyer said, and they seemed to be following a common template.

“There is a whole industry of online courses that has sprung up in the last couple of years telling people they can become millionaires renting out leased apartments as Airbnb rooms. They make it sound as if this is something that landlords are okay with. We’re not.”

Hoffmeyer says rental arbitrage accounts for almost two-thirds of the application fraud she has experienced at Essex Luxe. This is much higher than what she has experienced at other properties, a fact she attributes to the property’s proximity to popular tourist destinations.

In addition to application screening, Essex Luxe encourages residents to notify

management of unusual activity, such as different people coming and going with suitcases on a regular basis. Other residents are an important resource because they don’t want the noise and competition for amenities that come from short-term vacation rentals.

There is also a security concern, because while a landlord may know the person who signed the lease, they have absolutely no information about short-term guests who come and go without the benefit of a background check. Hoffmeyer said she relies on video callboxes with cameras at the front gate and the entrance to each building, which capture images of everyone entering and exiting a building.

Technology has been a powerful tool in helping to crack down on illegal short-term rentals, but sometimes there’s no substitute for an old-school property inspection.

“Our lease requires 12-hour notice,” Hoffmeyer said. “We’ll give them notice and go in the next day. Sometimes you have to because the tenants will lie to your face.”

One of the most obvious illegal rentals had a welcome packet out on the living room table. Another kept clothes in a closet as proof of residency.

“The tenant asked, ‘didn’t you see my clothes in there?’” Hoffmeyer said.

Hoffmeyer acknowledged that she had seen the clothes — which looked out of place in a unit otherwise crammed with the trappings of an Orlando family vacation. She had also seen something else that proved her suspicions and gave her grounds to terminate the lease. “There were no spices in the kitchen.”

Nancy Drew would be proud. **MF**

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increasingly necessary to verify the identity of an applicant to ensure that the background being checked is actually that of the applicant and that any documentation provided is true and correct.

"There are more than 10,000 active fraud rings in the U.S., creating false identities with documentation," said Brian Zrimsek, industry principal with MRI Software. "I think it's closer to 30,000."

MRI Software allows property managers to match applicant-presented pay stubs with actual source data from payroll processors and actual bank deposits over time.

"When you consider that it can take six to seven months to resolve a fraud case, that's \$9,000 in lost revenue, and maybe even more under an eviction moratorium," Zrimsek said. "By using all of the technology that is out there to increase fraud detection, if you prevent even one, you've paid for the software."

Citadel ID offers a similar service, allowing landlords to verify up to three years of applicant payroll data directly from the source.

"One in six applicant pay stubs is fake," said Kirell Klokoy, founder and CEO of Citadel. "You can no longer rely on documents that come in the form of a PDF"

Early detection might have helped Hoffmeyer avoid the hassle of evicting a tenant who gained access to the property using fraudulent credentials, lived rent-free under the promotional terms of his lease, and then filed a COVID-19 hardship claim that prevented Essex Luxe from evicting him for several months. He never paid the landlord a dime.

Practical considerations

As is often the case, there is a gap between the potential benefits of advanced screening tools such as MRI Software and Citadel ID and the day-to-day realities of taking care of business.

Michelle Lawrence, compliance manager at WRH Realty Services Inc. in Jacksonville, said she relies primarily on the screening capabilities embedded within the Yardi Multifamily Suite software the company uses to manage all of its properties.

Instead of investing in new technology, WRH recently consolidated application review into a single, centralized processing center. The arrangement, she said, gives her team better insight into fraud trends by giving them 700 to 800 applications to review per month, instead of the handful or so that they might

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otherwise encounter during the same period at an individual property.

The company has also developed a culture of communication and information sharing, which has resulted in the creation of an encyclopedia of various fraud schemes.

“We call it our fraud bible,” Lawrence said. “It’s something we’ve been building for years and years.”

One piece of advice from the WRH fraud bible: Look for simple but meaningful mistakes that might be red flags. In one instance, for example, they found an Amazon pay stub purporting to be from 1918 instead of 2018. In another, the back of a purportedly legitimate Social Security card was crumpled and faded, while the front was pristine and unblemished.

Hoffmeyer is also reluctant to invest in new technology, preferring to rely on her own instincts and the screening capabilities built into her property management software.

“We run every resident through ResidentVerify. That will usually catch the obvious ones, such as those trying to use a deceased person’s Social Security number. We’re still doing pay stub approvals in-house.

If we don’t see any red flags, we don’t investigate further. Administratively, that would be a nightmare.”

A healthy dose of skepticism can go a long way, Hoffmeyer said. Beyond that, she relies on an even simpler tool: “Google is my best friend.” **MF**

Emotional Support Animal Fraud and Abuse Update

BY LAUREEN CROWLEY

As pet ownership boomed during the COVID-19 pandemic, many in multifamily saw a corresponding increase in requests for emotional support animal accommodations. Fortunately, an FAA-backed law that went into effect in July 2020 has provided property managers another tool to help protect against fraudulent ESA claims. The law requires residents to provide documentation from a medical professional with whom they have a bona fide professional relationship — rather than an online certificate mill — when they request accommodations such as exemption from pet fees and restrictions.

“We have used the statute quite a bit,” said attorney Ryan McCain of Barfield McCain PA, “to either obtain proper verification from the residents and their health care practitioners where insufficient documentation was initially presented, or for cases where multiple support animals have been requested.” The law also requires verification of the need for each animal and establishes a penalty for doctors and others who falsely certify as well as for residents who present false documentation.

PetScreening, which reviews requests for ESA accommodations, recommended approval of a higher percentage of requests from July 2020 to June 2021 compared with the previous year. Notes owner John Bradford: “This is less likely attributed to the ineffectiveness or effectiveness of the statute but likely attributed to more individuals having a legitimate need for an assistance animal during the pandemic.” **MF**

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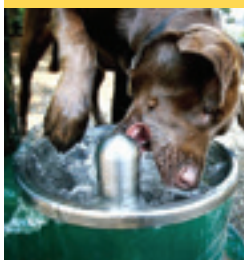
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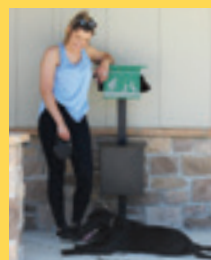
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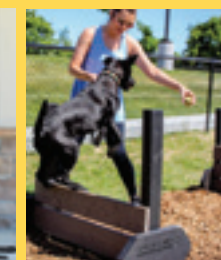
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FAA drafted and passed legislation to reduce emotional support animal (ESA) fraud.

This new law will deter fraudulent ESA requests, saving an apartment community thousands of dollars each year and putting an end to ESA certificate scams.

FAA supported legislation to remove the subscribing witness requirement for leases that exceed one year.

This change simplified the leasing process, saving apartment communities both time and money.

FAA supported the passage of legislation to provide COVID-19 liability protections for businesses, including housing providers.

This bill was signed into law in March 2021 and protects housing providers from frivolous lawsuits.

FAA worked diligently throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to provide feedback to state government related to Florida's eviction moratorium and the critical need for rental assistance funds.

This feedback resulted in key changes and the eventual expiration of Florida's eviction moratorium.

FAA blocked more than 80 bills that would have been detrimental to the apartment industry.

Legislation that FAA opposed would have: prevented evictions during a declared state of emergency, allowed local governments to pass rent control measures, instituted a state renters bill of rights, allowed evictions to be expunged, or made other sweeping changes to Florida's landlord/tenant law to the detriment of housing providers.

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MAINTENANCE TEAMS USING TECH GADGETS TO IMPROVE ON-SITE EFFICIENCY

BY PAUL BERGERON

WITH AN INCREASING NUMBER of communities struggling to find, hire, and train maintenance technicians, some companies are leaning more heavily on technology to help bring greater efficiency to their on-site operations.

Among the strategies are using drones for due diligence, providing virtual training, and automating unit inspections.

Taking Due Diligence to a Higher Level

Steve Hayworth, director of maintenance, Drucker and Falk, said he's benefiting from using drones during inspections on properties that his company is considering purchasing or if he is assessing major renovations.

"Shooting aerial images and video allows us to get a much better look at things compared to previous inspections," Hayworth said. "We check on asphalt, chimney caps, siding, windows. They also help when looking at wooded areas, such as the trees touching the roof, and give us a good look at the condition of the gutters. This helps us save a great deal of time, and they are much safer than using ladders."

A drone was recently used by Cypress Run Apartments in Orlando as it assessed a \$5 million, three-year renovation that is expected to be completed next year.

Drucker and Falk has six drones serving its portfolio. They are housed in its corporate offices in North Carolina and Virginia and then provided to properties in need. A few years ago, it purchased the DJI Phantom 4 model for about \$1,400. Since then, it has chosen a smaller and

lighter model, DJI Mini Mavic Pro, which can fit in the palm of a hand and sells for about \$600.

"The smaller version is easier because you don't have to carry it around in a big, clunky case," Hayworth said. "It's easy to fly using a remote. You can use your smartphone with it and see where the drone is flying and where the camera is pointing, and that helps you to position it better."

Drucker and Falk also is using iPads during walk-throughs to take images of things such as appliances, flooring, heating and air conditioning systems, and water heaters. The iPads display all the images in one report.

"This makes things easier for us," he said. "And we've installed moisture meters and red-image cameras that help us to identify hot spots and cold spots, water intrusion, and to look behind drywall or under flooring."

Exciting Times with Virtual Training

For training, Hayworth likes the Interplay Learning product because it immerses the maintenance tech trainee into the training through video and a virtual headset.

"It can walk them through an electric meter test, for example," Hayworth said. "This makes the experience more real compared to watching a video or reading a manual. Because they are actually able

to do the work during the training, it gets them more excited about learning."

Unit Inspections Made Easier

As more management companies transition to using single leasing teams and shared maintenance crews across multiple properties, task management and logistics become the key to efficient operations. Mobile-first task-management technology has become a necessity to ensure that associates have the tools they need to stay on task and effectively serve their communities.

SightPlan Work provides on-site teams with actionable insights that enable them to respond quickly and strategically, eliminate redundancies, and maximize time management.

The Laramar Group uses SightPlan at its two individual properties (Jacksonville and Palm Harbor) and at its Local by Laramar Tampa – a portfolio of smaller properties. Its interactive communication capabilities – used not only among associates but between team members and residents – have been invaluable.

"To be able to create a service task, quickly assign it over to our techs, and immediately notify them of the assigned task has been game-changing," said Stacy Valentine, vice president of innovation and technology



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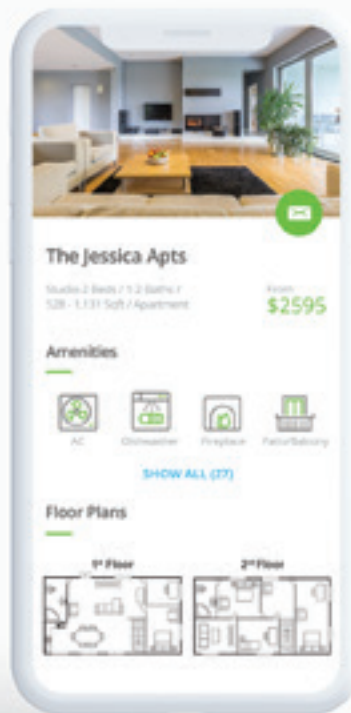
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SightPlan Inspect provides details that enable maintenance teams to turn units more efficiently.

at Laramar. “And in a world where we don’t always have the ability to easily connect face-to-face with residents, that bidirectional communication around their specific request is huge.”

Nimble Automation a Big Plus

By automating the inspections process, SightPlan Inspect ensures the immediate initiation of unit condition assessments upon move-out. By immediately generating an inspection task for maintenance teams

and providing real-time reporting during inspections, the automated platform expedites the process and quickly enables operators to plan for capital improvement expenses and preventative maintenance.

The inspection platform streamlines the due diligence process during acquisition, enabling teams to move through property assessments quickly and consistently, and remain nimble during the process. SightPlan Inspect has provided Cortland with an efficient, cost-effective means to close more deals.

“With SightPlan, you’re capturing the information in real time, so I can go in mid-inspection, and if I have concerns that need to be addressed with the seller, I can do that right then and there,” said Carlos Smith, Cortland director of pursuit and transitions. “Having that tool to quantify the data and turn out the results quickly has allowed us to pick up our pace with acquisitions. The real-time data also empowered us to move away from some deals because we’re quantifying all these issues as we go.”

Cortland uses the product across its entire portfolio, including in Florida.

Matt Easton, founder, Leasing University, said technology users should not forget about pen and paper. “For me, I find the best ‘gadget’ to be when techs write down what they are hearing from their residents – it reduces complaints by 81% and improves resident satisfaction by 241%.” [MF](#)





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MARKETING BEST PRACTICES: 11 TIPS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA SUCCESS

BY ASHLEY TYNDALL

EVEN IF YOU HAVE a great social media strategy and a lot of followers, there are always ways to improve your property's online presence.

Social media is critical to attracting and engaging with residents. No ifs, ands, or buts – your residents are active online, using multiple social media platforms.

With more and more businesses shifting their marketing budgets and ad dollars to the web, developing a social media strategy is more important than ever. It's no longer enough just to set up your accounts and schedule a few haphazard posts a couple of times per month.

Social media presents many opportunities for apartment marketing. So, how can you leverage these powerful platforms and online communities to achieve your property goals?

1. Identify Your Apartment Marketing Goals

Many multifamily professionals use social media but have not set goals and don't track any key performance indicators. Think about how your online platforms impact occupancy rate and turnover. If your biggest priority is to increase apartment lease-ups, for example, consider leveraging social media advertising to boost content to the right audience.

2. Determine Your Social Media Strategy

Each part of your apartment marketing strategy should fit together into one cohesive piece. Your website, social media presence, user experience, and customer experience should operate in harmony. Start by thinking about your buyer personas: their wants, needs, careers, lifestyles, and what they look for in an apartment community. The reason we create personas or join conversations is so we can get to know the people we are marketing to. When you know what's important to your renters, you can serve them better than anyone else.

3. Prioritize Quality over Quantity

Sometimes less is more when it comes to marketing on social media. If you post too often and run out of quality content, your posts become stale, forced, and even meaningless to your followers. Start with a few posts per week and gradually increase as time (and your creativity) allow.

4. Choose Your Social Media Platforms Carefully

Not everyone uses every social media platform. Consider the major social media platforms and your buyer persona and only make yourself present on the most popular platforms. For example, if your property is a high-rise luxury apartment community located in a metro area, your audience might be mostly millennial professionals. Based on those demographics, you might want to focus on Facebook and Instagram.

5. Brand Yourself

All social media platforms have a place for a profile image, and some have a place for a cover image. Consider using your logo for your community's profile image and a high-quality image of your apartment building or exciting amenities for the cover image. Ideally, use the same images across platforms for brand uniformity.

6. Share Helpful and Relevant Content

Social media can be a microphone for self-promotion, but it's more effective to be a resource, a thought-leader, or a value-add for your audience. Think of social media like a cocktail party; you wouldn't barge in, stand on a table, and talk about yourself nonstop. You would mingle with other guests, get to know them, and wait for your turn to speak. This "cocktail party approach" is also what we call the 80/20 rule, in which 20% of the conversation should focus on you while the other 80% should be about who you're talking to. Share articles,

recipes, local events, restaurant openings, and quick reminders with your residents and they'll start coming back for more.

7. Research Your Hashtags

Including hashtags with your posts helps categorize content for your audience. From your followers' perspective, hashtags allow them to find posts that are relevant to their interests and to interact with others who share those interests. On Instagram, users can even follow their favorite hashtags.

8. Don't Forget About Resident Retention

Social media isn't just for attracting new residents – it should also be used to keep the residents you have. Residents who feel connected to an apartment community have more motivation to renew. Use social media to delight these residents by sharing great happy hour specials, nearby dog parks, wine walks, or trivia nights.

9. Engage in Your Community

Reach out to the surrounding community to find out what's going on – festivals, charity events, restaurant

openings, and the like. Build relationships with local businesses for future events, promotions, or partnerships.

10. Respond to All Online Reviews

Renters are looking and residents are talking about you online. Online reviews can be scary, but observation is a great source for marketing insight. Encourage Yelp reviews regularly, rather than waiting for an angry resident to speak up. Filter through the delighted and disgruntled residents with an eye for improvement. Listen, learn, monitor, and respond.

11. Employ Social Advertising

Once you've amplified your social strategy, boost your blog content, social promotions, or apartment ads to the right audience. Facebook advertising offers detailed targeting down to ZIP code, job position, lifestyle, and even recently moved. Boosting content through social media advertising can increase your reach, impressions, and engagement. Allocate your budget accordingly, and make sure you are tracking cost per click and cost per lead to determine if social advertising offers you a cost-effective return on ad spending. **MF**

Ashley Tyndall is chief relationship officer at Swifty.

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The Flats at Ninth Avenue: Pensacola's Best-Kept Secret

BY CAMILA CAL



PENSACOLA IS ONE OF the largest cities in Florida's panhandle. Known for its white sand beaches and emerald green Gulf of Mexico waters, the city is a combination of relaxing beach town and thriving metropolitan area. Similarly, The Flats at Ninth Avenue, an apartment community located in Pensacola, has the best of both worlds: a beachy influence of bright colors and palm trees while just a few minutes away from the bustling city life.

"We're right in the middle of a lot of the hot-spot premier shopping areas in Pensacola. Cordova Mall is about two miles down the road, and Cordova Commons,



which has more high-end stores, is also nearby,” said Nora Swain, property manager of The Flats.

The community is also located a short distance from historic downtown Pensacola, the famous Pensacola beaches, and the University of West Florida. Because the Pensacola Bay area is the official home of the U.S. Navy’s Blue Angels, it’s not unusual for residents to experience the Blue Angels flying practice runs above The Flats. Swain explained that residents love these air show “freebies.” On the weekends, downtown Pensacola hosts an open-air market where local farmers, hobbyists, and artists can sell their wares on Palafox Street.

As far as design, The Flats prides itself on being colorful and calming, with buildings painted in orange and blue, and lush landscaping throughout the community.

“It feels like a South Florida vibe with the palm trees and the bright colors. But we also have a lot of nature, like bushes, trees, and flowers. It has a nice, quaint,



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► Fast Facts:

- **Number of units:** 168
- **Apartment size:** ranges from 735-975 square feet
- **Built:** 1971
- **Managed by:** Weller Management



garden feeling,” said Ashleigh Sweatt, district manager of Weller Management, which manages The Flats.

“When Weller began managing the community, they gave it that South Beach feel. They changed the exterior paint, and it just makes it look like those beach condos. They’re beautiful and so calming. The residents have all commented on how much they feel at peace when they come home,” Swain said.

The units are open floor plan with galley-style kitchens and a conversation-promoting breakfast bar. The floor plans are designed so that the bedrooms are all on one side of the apartment and the living area, dining area, and kitchen are on another side. Some apartments also have screened-in patios facing the courtyard.

“A lot of people comment on the fact that down the hallway of the bedrooms, there’s seven closets from one end to the other. There is a lot of storage, and they like to say that it goes on forever. It feels very spacious inside,” Swain said.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, The Flats continued to foster a sense of community by getting creative with its events. Swain explained that while residents were staying safe inside their apartments, the community invited a guitarist to play in the courtyard. She sat in each courtyard and people were able to go out to their balconies to listen to her play for close to an hour. Now that it’s safer to gather, the community is inviting her back to a pool party, its first outdoor event since the lockdown.



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“Residents are so gracious to us when we host events like this for them. A lot of them tell me that they come from communities that don’t put effort into creating a sense of community, so they love it here,” Swain said.

Another favorite event is the yearly pet photo shoot, where residents dress up their pets in different themes, such as Star Wars, and can even add accessories such as sunglasses or bonnets. After the shoot, residents take home a framed picture of their pet to display in their home.

Residents also enjoy spending time at their favorite amenity, the spa-inspired pool with a large sun deck.

“We also have a lounge right at the pool area. Some people like to lounge on the couches or the other outdoor seating. It’s nice because if a resident doesn’t want to sit in the sun, they can still relax in the shade,” Sweatt said.

The Flats also has a recently renovated laundry center with smart machines that use an app to notify residents when their cycles are finished. A fitness center and dog park are other amenities that are popular in the community.



But by far, the most popular feature of the community is its mascot, Flats.

"There's a cat at the property, and it was left a couple of years ago, just a kitten at the time. He took a liking to the office. His name is Flats, and the entire community loves him," Sweatt said. "He hangs out around the office. We feed him and take him to the vet. And when the office is closed the entire community takes care of him. He knows where to go."

"He's even gotten leases for us. People will come in, and they say "Wow! You have an office cat. That's

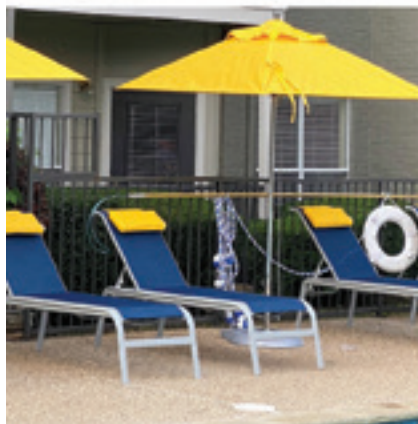


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it. We're leasing here." And then they will make special trips to come up and pet the cat," Swain said.

The Flats is nearly 50 years old, and it has been through many changes, such as personnel, landscaping, and ownership. Even so, the sense of community is strong enough that many residents have stayed. Some residents have lived in the community since the very beginning, Swain said. They like that they can take part in helping The Flats support the surrounding community through food and toy drives.

"We keep evolving and changing with the times, and we try to make things as accessible to people as we can. The residents have changed with us. They say that they appreciate the fact that we look out for them when things are changing in front of us," Swain said.

"It's just different here. Weller Management started managing the property a couple of years ago, and their whole goal for taking it over is to have this property for years. They're always brainstorming to continue improving the community and helping it grow. This is a long term investment for them, and the residents can tell," Sweatt said. **MF**

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(APRIL 2020 - JULY 2021)

COMMUNITIES OFFERING RENT CONCESSIONS

PRICE CLASS A

33.5
Percent
April 2020

42.7
Percent
October 2020

13.8
Percent
July 2021

PRICE CLASS B

19.3
Percent
April 2020

25.9
Percent
October 2020

8.2
Percent
July 2021

PRICE CLASS C

14.2
Percent
April 2020

18.2
Percent
October 2020

6.3
Percent
July 2021

PRICE CLASS D

9.3
Percent
April 2020

11.0
Percent
October 2020

4.5
Percent
July 2021

AVERAGE RENT REDUCTION
OFFERED ON 12-MONTH LEASE

PRICE CLASS A

7.0
Percent
April 2020

9.5
Percent
October 2020

6.6
Percent
July 2021

PRICE CLASS B

7.3
Percent
April 2020

8.6
Percent
October 2020

5.8
Percent
July 2021

PRICE CLASS C

5.8
Percent
April 2020

6.5
Percent
October 2020

5.6
Percent
July 2021

PRICE CLASS D

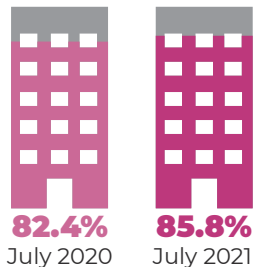
4.9
Percent
April 2020

5.1
Percent
October 2020

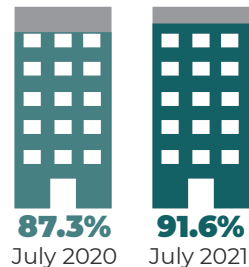
5.0
Percent
July 2021

AVERAGE OCCUPANCY STATEWIDE

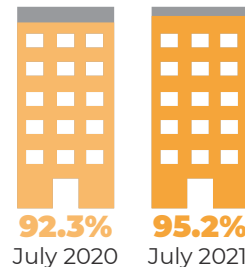
PRICE CLASS A



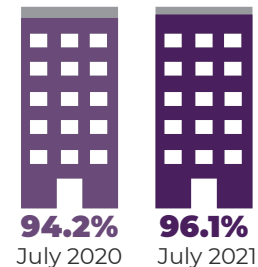
PRICE CLASS B



PRICE CLASS C

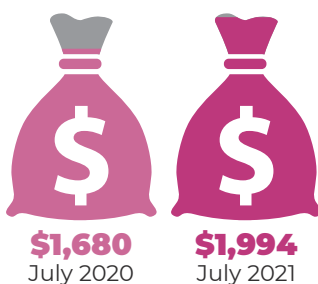


PRICE CLASS D



AVERAGE RENT STATEWIDE*

PRICE CLASS A



PRICE CLASS B



PRICE CLASS C



PRICE CLASS D



Source: ALN Apartment Data

* All unit types

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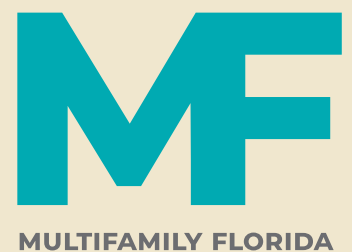
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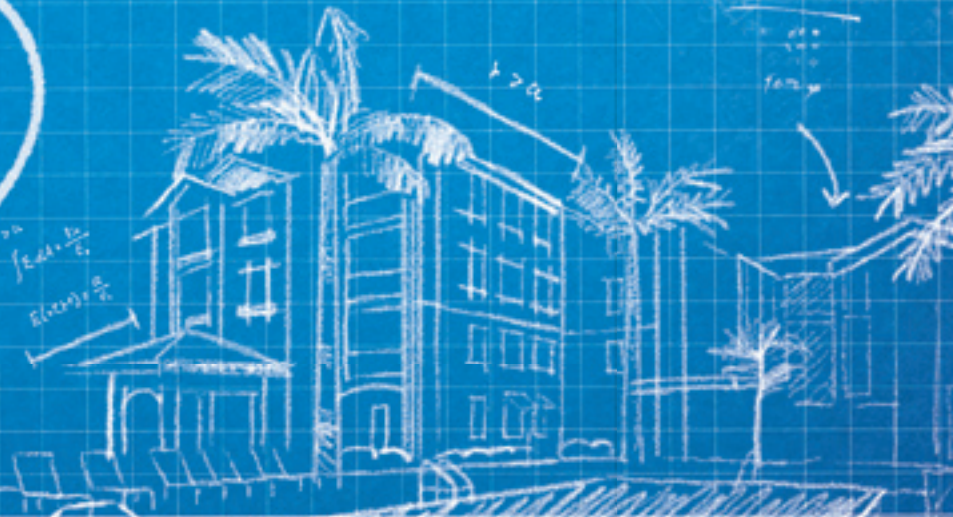
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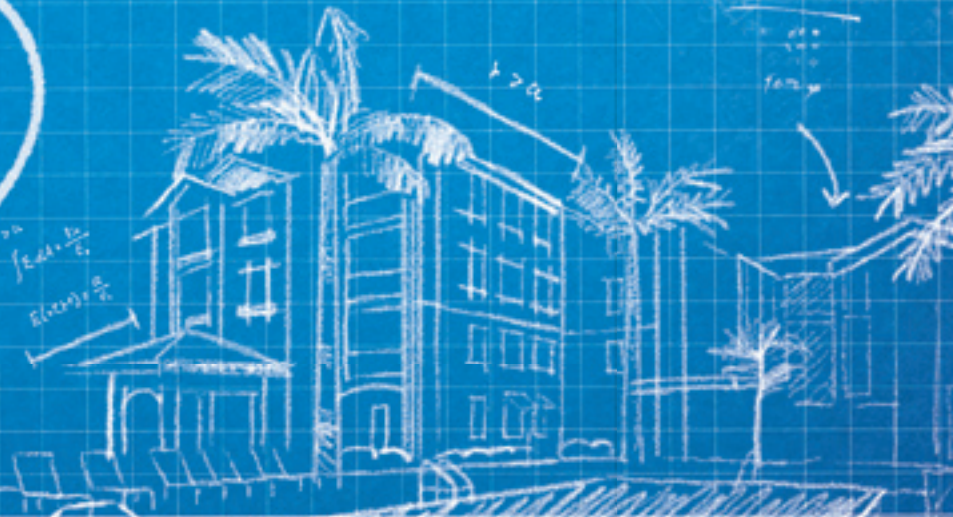
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