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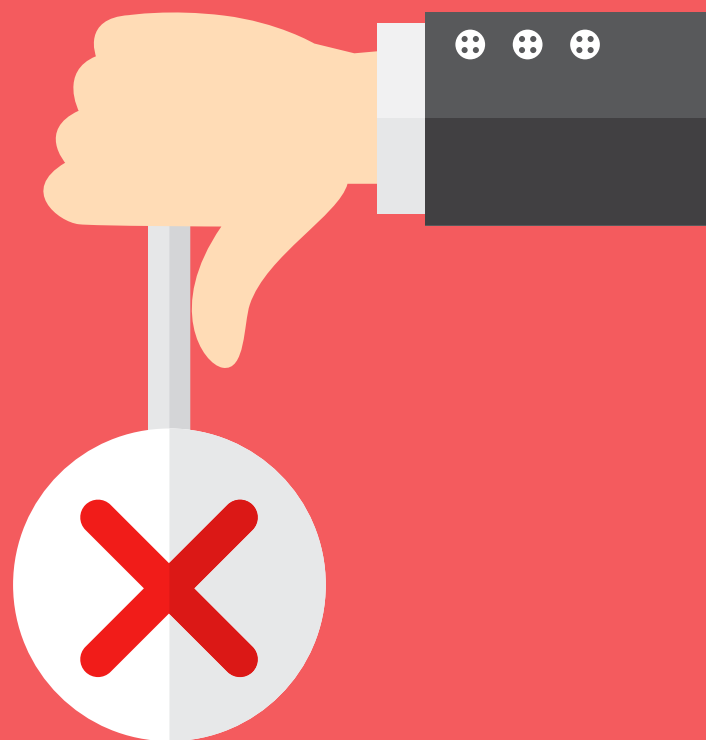
FALL 2014

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DID YOU HEAR WHAT THEY SAID ABOUT YOU?

The importance of
reputation management
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ALSO INSIDE

THE BOTTOM LINE IS ONLINE —
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BUILDING COMMUNITY:
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Published for
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Tel: 352-332-1252
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www.naylor.com

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PUBLISHED OCTOBER 2014/
FAP-Q0314/4193

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Setting the Course

BY **STACEY STUART**, THE BAINBRIDGE COMPANIES

As I approach the end of my term as president of the Florida Apartment Association, I find myself looking back as well as forward. Transitions are always a good time to ask what have we accomplished and where do we go from here?

First and foremost, I feel a tremendous sense of pride in the progress we have made during a year filled with challenges and changes. I'm most proud of how the executive committee came together as one to take the organization to the next level. We didn't have the kinds of difficulties that sometimes arise when a large group of people are working together. We worked together and never lost sight of the best interests of the association.

In some ways, this past year has been the culmination of my career thus far. I started in this industry more than 15 years ago right out of college. I continued in property management and am now a senior manager for the Bainbridge Companies. I became involved in my local apartment association — serving for more than eight years — because I wanted to be part of something greater and to make a difference.

After four years as president on the local level, I took a step down, as I felt the association could benefit from some new blood, a fresh perspective. About that same time, I was approached by some folks on the state executive committee who wanted more participation from the smaller local associations. Until then, my only involvement on the state level was attending some of the board of director meetings. I was a bit taken aback; until then, I hadn't pictured myself participating in what I perceived as the high prestige and importance of the state association.

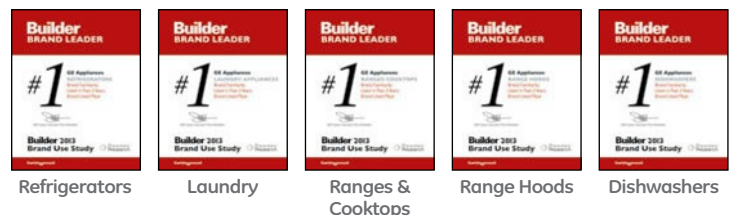
I felt honored, exhilarated, even a little petrified about the idea of it. Mostly, though, I felt inspired: This new challenge got my blood going again. It would be a new ballgame and there were lots of big shoes to fill. The individuals who had recruited me took me under their wings. I took the challenge seriously, and I wanted to make them proud.

I interviewed for the post of secretary/treasurer and was selected. I then served as vice president, and ultimately in my current position as president.





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I'm most proud of how the executive committee came together as one to take the organization to the next level.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

- On Thursday, Dec. 4, the annual Legislative Platform Workshop will be held at the Apartment Association of Greater Orlando's meeting space.
- Legislative Days will take place Feb. 17-18, 2015, at Hotel Duvall, Tallahassee.

It hasn't been an easy year, but it has been a good one. The executive committee made some major decisions, while continuing to keep the association operating as usual. I truly believe the decisions we made, although difficult, began the process of moving the association forward in the direction members wanted the association to go.

Someone recently compared my role to what happens when you set a small boat, maybe a canoe or a small sailboat, into the water and push it off from shore. A slight movement or leaning one way or the other can make a significant difference in the course that boat takes. That resonated with me.

I think the course we have set is one of increased relevance and a larger contribution in the key areas of education and advocacy. We've grown over the years, but we could do so much more. We have the vision, and we're putting the pieces in place.

I'm at the beginning in many ways, but I can see the direction we're taking, and I'm already hearing the feedback that people are happy with the changes.

Of course, many other factors will affect the boat's course over time, and that's true in this case, too. There will be external forces, such as changes in the market and the economy. And unless we're talking about a toy boat or a model boat, there will be someone else's hand paddling, trimming the sails, or turning the till.

In my case, I'm pleased to say I have a great deal of confidence in the people who are guiding the next portion of the course of FAA.

This next year, I will continue to serve on the board of directors as past president, and I'll be looking for opportunities to pay forward the mentorship I received. I'd like to see FAA

continue to recruit and inspire people as I was recruited and inspired, and continue to get more local association leaders involved at the state level.

I'd also like to see our state association increase support to local associations. We can do more in the way of supporting membership growth and educating local associations regarding our advocacy role. I encourage local associations to reach out for help with legal issues and, for that matter, any other areas where you need support or guidance.

At the same time, I encourage all our members to consider getting involved in your state association:

- Attend FAA board of directors meetings
- Serve as a delegate or alternate
- Serve on a committee

I look forward to seeing many of you at the Annual Education Conference on Oct. 22-24 at the Hilton Orlando. I'm really excited about our first-ever **Color Me Green** event, benefiting the Apartment Political Action Committee (APAC).

In closing, I must thank some of those whose contributions were so important:

- Cindy Fredlund, Linda Paolo, and Brenda Pritchard, FAA past presidents
- Peggy Queen, First Coast Apartment Association executive vice president and FAA's Association Executives Council chairman, who was instrumental on so many levels during the transition of hiring our new EVP
- Harry Heist and the staff of Heist, Weiss and Wolk, P.A. for all their tireless efforts on the FAA Legal Guide, as we continue to work toward completion of this important publication
- My employer, The Bainbridge Companies, for being so supportive of my involvement with FAA, especially this past year

I appreciate all of you, and I'm looking forward to seeing what next year brings! ▲



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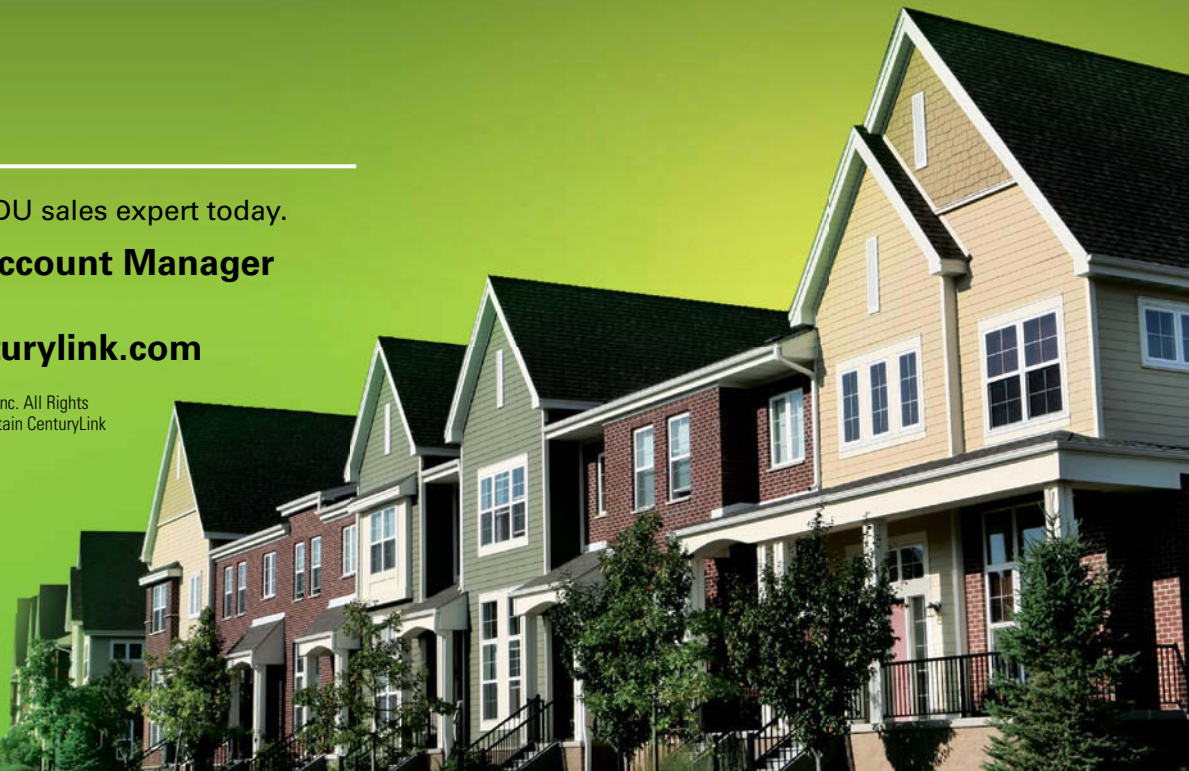
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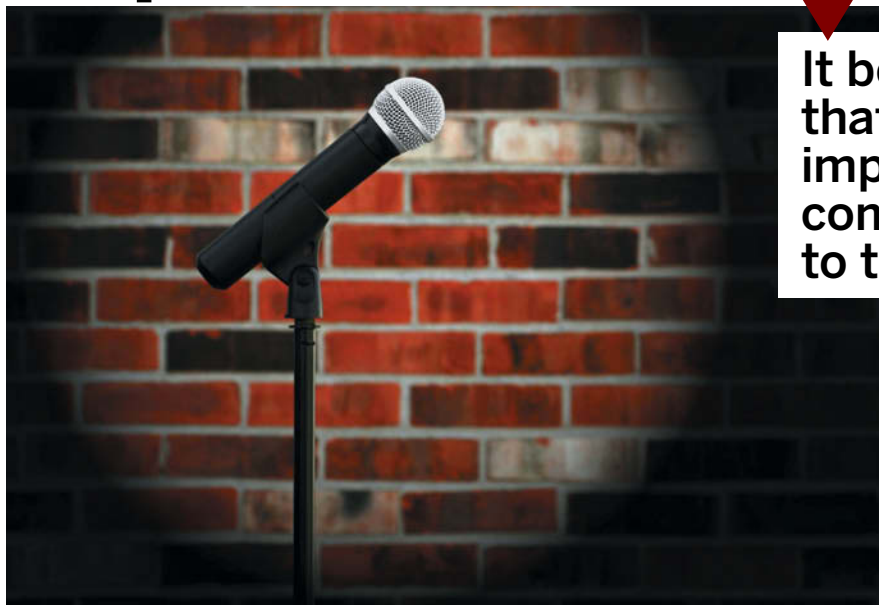
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Improv in the Workplace



It became obvious to me that the basic tenets of improv comedy are completely applicable to the workplace.

When I first moved to Central Florida more than 10 years ago, I didn't know a soul in the entire state. While I'm outgoing in workplace settings, it's not always terribly easy for me to meet friends outside of a business environment. I called a good friend from college and told him about my challenge in finding new buddies in Florida.

"Have you considered registering for improv comedy class?" he asked. "You are naturally funny, you love the spotlight, and I think the teamwork required for improv might help you establish some strong friendships with your classmates."

He was 100 percent correct. I registered for a "Level I" improvisational comedy course at SAK, a nationally recognized improv company based here in Orlando. Alumni include Paula Pell, executive producer of "Saturday Night Live" and Wayne Brady, star of "Whose Line is it Anyway?" with Drew Carey.

From day one, I was totally hooked and continued working my way through the various courses at SAK. Of course I loved making my classmates laugh during our weekly improv exercises — one highlight was playing a "fat cat" record executive

who actually was a feline — but I found I especially enjoyed the camaraderie and single-minded focus I experienced with my classmates. I quickly learned that an improv performer who is out to get a laugh for himself will fail. It is only through collaborative storytelling that the scene comes alive...and hopefully elicits a laugh or two.

It became obvious to me that the basic tenets of improv comedy are completely applicable to the workplace. For all the planning and processes we implement into our business practices, many times we are thrown a curve and our built-in responses just don't fit. At these times, the ability to improvise is paramount. Consider these "rules" of improv the next time you gather with your team to solve a problem or brainstorm a new product or solution:

Create a culture of "Yes...and" — The concept of "Yes...and" is the bedrock of all improvisational performances. When actors do not have a script, they have no preconceived notion of where the scene is going to go, and they have an audience full of people who are expecting them to be interesting and funny. They have to create a trusting and supportive environment for one another. "Yes...and" is the idea that one actor may make an offering ("Isn't this the worst camping trip

ever?") and no matter what the other actor may have had in mind, he will respond to the offer with something that will build on the first actor's offer ("Yes...and I just realized that I built our lean-to out of poison ivy!"). Perhaps the second actor thought they might be on an airplane, or had this great idea that takes place in the bathroom of a French restaurant. He does not have time to consider "what could have been" or stop the scene and say "Camping trip? Are you crazy? I wanted this to be a scene about a hospital!" He takes the first actor's opening offer as a gift. The scene is set and will progress from that point.

The applicability of this rule is very clear — after all, who wouldn't want to work on a team where no idea is a "bad" idea, but rather an idea on which another idea can be shaped? Affirming and building on one another's ideas will always result in a better outcome than working hard to convince others your idea is "best." Consider whether your team is working under a "No...but" atmosphere or a "Yes...and" culture.

Feel no fear — When an improvisational comedic hits the stage, he must be ready to receive all offers that come his way and, most importantly, move forward with no fear. In the trusting environment of an improv troupe, an actor knows he can make choices that will be the building blocks of something great. Can the employees on your team say the same? There is a cost to the collective holdback brought on by fear. It kills innovation. It kills full disclosure and cooperation. It creates a tough environment for people and ideas to succeed. The remedy is simple: Remove the constant undertone of fear in the workplace, and great things will happen. ▲

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FEATURE: **YOUR REP ON THE LINE**
BY LAUREN M. CROWLEY

YOUR REP ON THE LINE

Making ratings and reviews work for you



With virtually all prospective residents searching for apartments online, you can bet they're also checking out ratings and reviews.

Research shows that three-quarters of prospective renters read ratings and reviews. That percentage is even higher among millennials, who as a group tend to be well plugged in online. Those millennials — who make up a significant percentage of apartment residents — also are more likely to trust the opinions of strangers online, unlike earlier generations that were more likely to rely on the opinions of family and friends.

Clearly, your prospective residents are going online to get information. And considering the emotional investment people have in their apartment homes — much more so than other products — it's easy to see why your residents and former residents are also going online to share information.

"You enter a one-year lease, and you're locked into the lease, and now it's your home, but what if you can't get hot water or the landscaping isn't nice or you don't feel safe?" asks Francis Chow, chief strategy officer for Ellis Partners, a multifamily management and marketing consulting service. If owners and property managers don't provide a communication outlet, residents are going to go online to find that outlet, adds Chow, who moderated a panel discussion on reputation management at the National Apartment Association's annual convention in June.

In other words, one of the best ways to manage your reputation online is to encourage residents to talk with you off-line, such as with periodic surveys of residents. When residents feel heard, reviews drop.

▼

One of the best ways to manage your reputation online is to encourage residents to talk with you off-line, such as with periodic surveys of residents. When residents feel heard, reviews drop.

❑ **Connecting to residents in person is where your reputation begins. Learn more on Page 18.**

But what should you do about those reviews that do get posted? Responding quickly and appropriately is key.

"We welcome feedback, positive, negative, constructive criticism. And we respond to every rating that we possibly can respond to appropriately," says Ron Wenzel, incoming president of the Florida Apartment Association and senior regional property manager at Greystar, a nationwide multifamily developer and property management firm.

Responding to good reviews is simple:

- Say thank you. Telling your residents (or former residents) how much you appreciate them sends a positive message to your future residents.
- Be specific, and if it's appropriate, use the opportunity to encourage additional communication. "We're glad you love being part of our community and that you enjoyed Meet Your Neighbor Night. What other activities would you like to see happen?"

Your response to a negative review depends on several factors:

- Even if you have the ability to delete a review, don't be in a rush to do so. You might be missing out on an opportunity to present your community as one that listens, responds, and acts.
- Sometimes it's best to take the discussion off-line. In your response, provide an email address and phone number, and ask the resident to contact you to work out the problem.
- Look for patterns in negative reviews. If there's a common complaint, figure out how to address it. In your response, include what you plan to do about it — but don't make promises you can't keep.
- If it seems the issue is something not within your control, be honest. At the same time, ask yourself whether there is something you *can* do to improve the situation. Chow shared the example of a resident who said she loved her community but wished the pool were bigger. The community's management responded that although the size of the pool couldn't be changed, there was a plan in place to replace and rearrange the poolside furniture to make it more comfortable.
- Ask someone to read your response before you post it to be sure your own emotional reaction isn't coming through, recommends Christie Fleck Struble, For Rent Media Solutions' director of marketing.
- Don't wait for negative reviews to analyze your strengths and weaknesses, Stuble adds. When you have identified problem areas, have responses pre-drafted.
- Be cautious if a review is slanderous, threatens legal action, or refers to possible criminal activity. Consider consulting your attorney before you respond and possibly make the situation worse.

Customer Engagement

Straight Ahead



ENCOURAGE POSITIVE FEEDBACK

“We try to find the reason behind a negative rating or review,” Wenzel says, “whether there’s some validity or the person is just upset because of an increase in the rent or charging fees out of deposits. Unfortunately, some ratings can be from former residents who may be upset for just those reasons.”

Wenzel and others agree that people are often more likely to post negative reviews. “If you have a positive experience, you’re less likely to take the time to give a review,” Wenzel says. “Even if you

Reviews can help you identify strengths. **Look for patterns in positive reviews as well as in the negative ones.** If there’s something that consistently gets high marks, highlight that in your marketing.

have a great experience you might say, ‘I’m going to write a review’ and then you get busy and forget.”

With that in mind, there are ways to increase the number of positive reviews for your community. Look for opportunities to solicit feedback, Struble suggests. For example, when new residents sign their lease, ask “How was your experience?” If the response is positive, ask them to write a review. Other good times are right after you’ve responded to a maintenance request or when a resident stops by the office for some reason.

If the resident is not satisfied with your service, view that as an opportunity to correct a situation before it turns into a negative review.

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TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Several marketing companies and consultants offer services to help you manage your online reputation. For example, Ellis Partners launched a ratings and reviews website called Renter's Voice about three years ago. Their clients can add a "widget" to their property website or blog. The widget looks like a small Renter's Voice icon that when clicked, opens the ratings and reviews page. Renter's Voice moderates postings, and won't allow those that contain profanity, libel or slander, or could lead to legal liability.

RentPath, parent company of Apartment Guide, Rent.com and others, launched Certified Resident Ratings and Reviews on its websites last year. The anonymity of online reviews means they are not always the most accurate, says Scott Asher, vice president of marketing and operations. In fact, reviewers may not actually be residents or former residents, and could even be competitors posting anonymously.

"We try to limit that by only surveying people who live at the property," Asher says. RentPath partnered with Kingsley Associates to develop a survey. Property management provides a list of residents to be surveyed. The rating stars and the reviews are posted as part of the community's Web listing, and property managers have an option to respond to comments.

"Clearly we want to make it a two-sided conversation," Asher says, because research shows that responses increase a business's credibility.

For Rent Media Solutions offers a reputation management service that tracks all reviews online wherever they appear — both for their

client communities and for competitors. Reviews with three or more stars are highlighted on the community's Web listing; clicking a "read more" link takes visitors to all reviews, regardless of rating. The service includes 24/7 access to a reputation management dashboard and email updates, as well.

MAKE THE MOST OF REVIEWS

Ratings and reviews don't just provide useful information to prospective residents. They can be a valuable tool for community owners and managers as well, and not just by pointing out problems that need to be addressed.

They can also help you identify your strengths. Look for patterns in positive reviews as well as in the negative ones. If there's something that consistently gets high marks, highlight that in your marketing.

"Remember your uniqueness and strengths," Chow says. "Focus on the fact that you have an awesome staff, not that your apartments are a little older."

Experts say prospective residents typically narrow down their choices based on other criteria, then read reviews to finalize their decision. Folks who are already leaning toward your community are likely to discount the negative a bit — knowing people are more likely to speak up when they're not happy — and latch onto the positive to confirm their choice.

By that time, you've already impressed the prospect with a warm welcome and great service when they visited your leasing center, and you now have a new resident. When you do, be sure to ask for that positive review. ▲



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A photograph of a modern kitchen. The upper cabinets are made of light-colored wood with silver handles. A stainless steel refrigerator is built into the cabinetry. To the right of the refrigerator, a stainless steel microwave is mounted above a black and stainless steel electric range. The countertop is dark, and a small bowl of lemons sits on it. The lower cabinets are also made of light wood with silver handles.

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Reputation Management: It All Starts **FACE TO FACE**





Negative online reviews are “silent killers.” Clients don’t call you and say, “Hey, I was in your parking lot, but decided to leave and look down the street because I found a couple of reviews on you and they said your service stinks.” They simply cross you off the list and go to a different community.

Does it matter? What does that loss really cost, anyway? A recent *Apartment Guide* report revealed that approximately 81 percent of renters are influenced by online word of mouth. Eighty-one percent is a big number, and the amount of money it may be costing is staggering. If, for example, your monthly rent is \$1,000, and you lease 10 apartments per month, for a total of 120 apartments yearly, the estimated business you stand to lose through negative reviews is more than \$1 million in lost sales alone. Harder to measure is the impact negative reviews have on brand reputation, retention, and even team morale.

Before you implement an entire online review management program, it is important to understand how we as individuals, and as teams, can negatively affect consumer perception. The source of most resident frustration is grounded in communication, or lack of. It’s important to get this in the open with your team, as they may be routinely acting in a way that shuts down dialogue, essentially making the resident go away...straight to a site like Yelp, to vent.

For example, if a member of your team ever responds to a resident with, “*Mr. Jones, have you read your lease?*” the team member is communicating in a condescending, “I win” manner.

Some other impulsive, “shut-em down” statements routinely used to keep residents in line:

- “Your lease clearly states...”
- “It’s not our policy.”
- “I’m sorry, but...”
- “If I did it for you, I would have to do it for everyone, or I would be violating Fair Housing.” (What? Violating Fair Housing? Really?)
- And a maintenance favorite: “Yeah, they’re all like that, and I told them we needed to replace them but it wasn’t in the budget.”

None of these statements leave a positive impact or increase resident value perception.

The exchange with your resident will likely not end positively if your team member’s words and tone can be translated to:

- “You should know better.”
- “I’m really not sorry; I’m just saying that to soften what I am about to tell you.”

- “This place stinks and it isn’t run well because the company is too cheap to fix things.”
- “I am afraid to make a decision, so I am going to hide behind the Fair Housing poster now.”
Why are these statements ever said?
- It’s easy, and humans are inherently lazy. It takes effort to really listen and try to understand another’s perspective. It’s easier to prove the resident wrong and send him or her away.
- We don’t know any better. You heard your manager say it, so you say it too.
- We don’t know what else to say, because we believe the only way to end the discussion is to have won.
- Solving problems is hard and we are afraid we might indeed violate Fair Housing if we make an allowance.
- Jaded pessimism. Give ‘em an inch and they’ll take a mile.
- Black or white is the only way. There is no gray or meeting halfway.

Look for solutions and know there is no standard answer. It’s all about preparation, knowing your market, understanding why and then delivering that message sincerely and truthfully.

At this point you may be thinking, “So give me a better line.”

Here’s the problem. There is no “pat” answer, no wonderful line that will shut people down and leave them with a smile on their face.

But there are things you can do.

Let’s say you have a resident who thinks pet fees are unfair and he shouldn’t have to pay them.

1. See the resident’s perspective and agree, at least partially. “*I can see why this doesn’t seem right to you. You are a responsible dog owner.*”

2. Offer an alternative perspective. (This is where the homework comes in.) Ask yourself, why? Why do you have pet fees in the first place? Pets do leave waste, some damage apartments, they leave dander which could affect other potential residents, they cause additional challenges in the form of barking, etc. We also know some people simply don’t like pets and don’t want anything to do with them.

Do not place this answer to the resident in this context, nor give the standard spiel that doesn’t really answer the objection.

3. Re-context. Keep it truthful and sincere. This is a dialogue and you are not “in it to win it.” This is about having a *conversation* with the individual.

It might go something like this:

“I can see why this doesn’t seem right to you. You are a responsible dog owner.”

“Please understand, we choose to be pet-friendly community, even though many owners are not as responsible. Pets do cause wear and tear in the form of waste, dander and damage, and sometimes they cause a nuisance to other neighbors who don’t have pets. For this reason, we charge pet owners a pet fee, as it simply wouldn’t be right or fair to pass on those costs to residents who choose not to have them.”

To which the resident will likely say, “*My pet never bothers anyone.*”

You might respond, “*Likely not, but have you thought about something as simple as a dog barking in the morning to wake its owner? I’m not saying yours does, but lots of dogs do. If the dog wakes its owner by barking, it might very well wake the guy above him every single day. That’s something they tolerate, and they may choose not to stay at the end of their lease term if it’s bad enough. Of course, that is a hypothetical situation, but pets do impact the overall community, and while we are proud to say we are pet friendly, we have to ensure those that don’t like pets never have to step in waste or have allergies act up from an apartment that had pets in it. All of that comes at a cost. That’s why we charge a pet fee.*”

To which he may say, “*Well, I still don’t think it’s fair. My pet never does anything wrong.*”

“Understandable. And you do have choices. I will tell you that our pet fees are on the low end of the spectrum in comparison to our competitors, and we work hard to ensure we stay competitive in the market. It’s hard, because we love our pets, but they sure can be a bit costly. I hope I have provided you a better understanding as to why we charge the fee. If you would like, you are more than welcome to pay your pet fees for the year all at once, then you don’t have to hassle with it for the rest of the year. Is this something you would like to consider?”

Last, if you believe your pet fees are completely outrageous...find another way. Perhaps you can raise rent or bundle it. Maybe after a certain length of residency with no issues, the pet fee is reduced. Do a competitive analysis. Don’t just assume because it has been the policy, it has to forever be the policy. Find a way to change it up and make it more consumer friendly.

Look for solutions and know there is no standard answer. It’s all about preparation, knowing your market, understanding why and then delivering that message sincerely and truthfully.

Help your team become likable experts and train them to communicate in a way that is friendly and respectful. Teach the difference between dialogue and monologue and look to find solutions through preparation, market knowledge, and understanding why. Practice this exercise with a request or objection you find yourself or your team giving a “half-baked” answer to. Think about the words you say, and what they convey. Look to find a better way.

Effective reputation management always starts face to face. ▲

Lori Snider is a national educator, marketing, service and sales expert. She can be reached at www.lorisnider.com.



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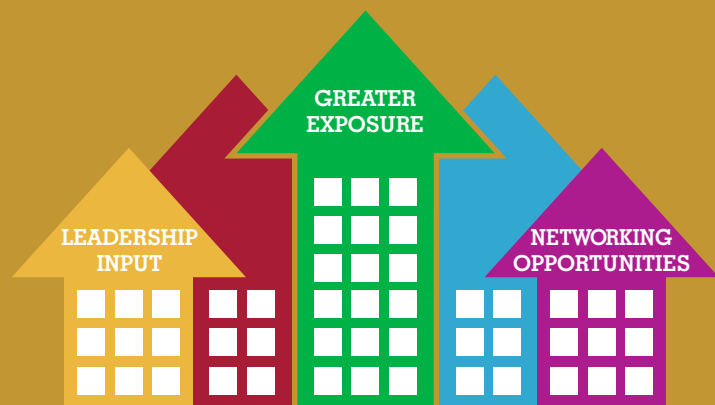
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Suppliers who service the apartment industry play an enormously important role in the association, not only by providing financial support via trade shows, advertising, and sponsorships but by serving on state and local boards and leading FAA's Product/Service Council.



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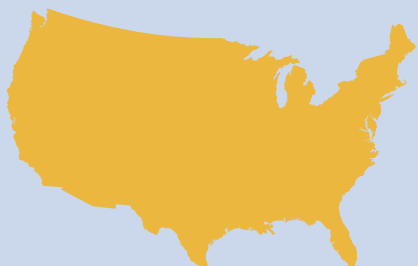
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FEATURE: THE BOTTOM LINE IS ONLINE — BUT DON'T IGNORE THAT PERSONAL TOUCH
BY LAUREN M. CROWLEY

The Bottom Line Is Online — But Don't Ignore that **PERSONAL TOUCH**



Online marketing for apartments has been around in one form or another for more than 15 years, but it's more important now than ever before, as virtually all residents — or potential residents — search for their next apartment home online.

Last year, all but 6 percent of apartment residents searched for their home online, with 68 percent searching “extensively” and an additional 26 percent searching “a little,” revealed a survey conducted by Kingsley Associates in partnership with the National Multi Housing Council (NMHC). Your future residents are using Google, Yahoo, and other search engines; perusing Craigslist, online newspaper classifieds, and Internet listing services; and checking out your apartment community on social media sites and ratings and review sites.

The advantages of marketing your apartment community online are pretty clear. Online listings are much easier to keep current than print ads. A listing “can be uploaded in hours, updated in minutes,” explains Ron Wenzel, incoming president of the Florida Apartment Association and senior regional property manager at Greystar, a nationwide multifamily developer and property management firm.

Information “feeds” ensure that prices, specials, availability, and other details are kept up to date. “If you change the rent today in your operating system, there are feeds that push out overnight or in the early morning hours to update it.”

Print ads today are rare, Wenzel says, and almost all of Greystar's marketing is online, through national Internet listing sites such as apartmentguide.com, apartmentfinder.com, and forrent.com, as well as local and regional sites such as 407apartments, rentJAX.com, rentTally.com, and others.

LOCATION MATTERS — AND SO DO THE DETAILS

Those location-specific websites appeal to residents with a specific target area in mind, says Pete Zimek, founder and president of ILS Network, a collective of six such websites. Only about 5 percent of residents searching for an apartment are looking in a city as a whole, Zimek contends. For example, “they aren't looking for apartments in Orlando; they're looking for apartments near Lake Buena Vista that allow pets.” ILS Network's analysis of online searches finds that specific location is second only to price in most-used search filter, and it's even more important than apartment size.

ILS Network sites and others allow users to search within a specific radius of a particular address — say, a workplace — or a landmark such as a school.

Searching online enables residents to select other specific criteria and filter out properties that don't meet their needs. Searchers filter for a wide variety of criteria, from price and number of bedrooms to in-apartment washers and dryers to availability of high-speed Internet. (See Page 34 for more on what amenities are in demand.) Residents also want to know what they would be getting for their money: Research shows that specific floor plans with pricing top the list of details they want.

KEEP IT PORTABLE

Prospective residents aren't just browsing through apartment listings on their computers at home (or at work). More and more, they're

searching on mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets. That's not surprising, given the percentage of renters who are millennials, who rely extensively on portable connectivity. While they're out visiting apartment communities, they're using their smartphone or tablet to check out their next stop.

Unfortunately, having a website that looks great on a home computer or laptop doesn't always translate to a “mobile-friendly” site.

Experts advise that you must either simplify your website — using clean page designs, large font sizes, and critical information “above the fold” (visible without scrolling), or create a mobile version of your site. Better yet, redesign your site to look good and work smoothly whether it's viewed on a computer, laptop, tablet, or smartphone.



The advantages of marketing your apartment community online are pretty clear. Online listings are much easier to keep current than print ads.



As much as 40 percent of traffic to online apartment listings comes from a mobile device, research shows. That's prompting companies such as RentPath, parent company of Apartment Guide, rent.com, and others, to put more emphasis on helping apartment communities go mobile. “It's important for a site to look good on mobile platforms,” says Scott Asher, RentPath's vice president of marketing and operations. Some of RentPath's clients didn't even have a website; others had websites built years ago, long before mobile devices became part of everyday technology. Earlier this year, RentPath began offering AG Sites, a turnkey website solution at no additional costs to its clients. In the first four months offering the service, 4,000 properties signed up, Asher says. “It's just another doorway for them to attract residents.”

A recent survey by the website Multifamily Insiders found that 85 percent of communities either have their own website or are listed on their corporate websites, but only 65 percent of websites are mobile-friendly — up from 57 percent the year before.

IT'S NOT JUST “SOCIAL” MEDIA ANYMORE

Another major trend in online communication today is social media — except it's far from strictly “social” and now has very real business applications. Two-thirds of apartment communities are using Facebook fan pages and almost half are using Facebook profiles, according to the Multifamily Insiders survey. Google, Twitter, and LinkedIn round out the top five social media sites used by survey respondents.

Some of the ways communities are using Facebook and other social media sites include promoting coming events at or near your community, posting photos of residents enjoying themselves at community events, highlighting photogenic amenities, and sharing reminders such as about routine maintenance.

Pinterest is a very visual site, and its users often search for decorating and style inspiration. That provides a great opportunity to share ideas geared toward apartment living, especially if you link the photos back to your community website. For example, you might post a blog on your website about storage solutions and include a photo of a design idea, then “pin” that photo on your Pinterest “board.” Pinterest users who click on the photo will be directed to your website for more information.

Instagram is a photo-oriented site perhaps best known for enabling users to apply filters and other treatments to make photos look retro or edgy. Experts suggest that while using Instagram filters could be a fun way to share candid photos of residents enjoying events, caution should be the watchword when applying special effects to community features or amenities, to avoid the appearance of doctoring photos to mislead prospective residents.

Keeping up with all the latest social media trends is no small task, and many apartment marketing companies offer social media management services. Apartment Finder, for example, offers Community Sherpa, providing guidance and support for all things social media, including Facebook, Twitter, and creating unique blog content for about 2,000 communities nationwide.

For Rent Media Solutions offers FR Social, which helps property managers set up profiles, create content, and find and respond to comments and reviews across a range of social media platforms.

STILL A PLACE FOR PRINT — AND THE PERSONAL TOUCH

Apartment communities may not be able to escape providing printed materials entirely. While 31 percent of residents preferred

an online brochure, 20 percent want only a printed brochure and 43 percent want both, according to the survey by Kingsley Associates and NMHC.

The survey also found that residents’ preference for online interactions doesn’t end after they move in. The vast majority of residents want to be able to use the community’s website to complete pre-qualification documents (93 percent), lease agreements (71 percent), and apartment selection (70 percent). After they move in, almost 80 percent of residents would rather pay you online than stop by the front office.

On the other hand, there are times residents want to talk with you in person. A whopping 90 percent of survey respondents rated as “important” or “very important” a walk-through with a community representative at move-in time. Many residents also want to talk with you when it’s time to renew their lease. More than half (53 percent) of respondents would prefer a face-to-face renewal process. Only 20 percent would rather complete that process online, and the remaining 27 percent have no preference.

PREDICTIONS FOR 2015

Mobile-friendly websites will continue to grow in importance, and those sites will be expected to have maps and other useful features, predicts Christie Fleck Struble, director of marketing at For Rent Media Solutions. A recent survey by For Rent found that 70 percent of communities will focus marketing efforts and dollars on Internet listing services.

Communities that want to stay competitive may also need to up their social media game by paying for ads on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest.

For all the focus on online marketing, however, some communities are starting to explore “experiential marketing,” which Struble describes as “an in-person experience with a brand.” Apartment communities, for example, will have a presence at fund-raisers and other events in their cities and towns.

There’s still a place, it seems, for face-to-face. ▲

MARKETING CAMPAIGNS

A recent survey by the Multifamily Insiders website and sponsored by SatisFacts and RentLinx asked apartment professionals about their marketing efforts and 161 responded nationwide.

A majority of respondents (58 percent) said their use of print has decreased; 34 percent said it has stayed the same, and the remaining 8 percent said it has increased. A little more than a third of respondents (36 percent) have increased their use of Internet listing services, while 58 percent have kept the same level of use. Similarly, 37 percent of respondents have increased their use of Craigslist, which has stayed the same for 45 percent.

The survey asked which forms of marketing had been most successful:

- Craigslist topped the list of most successful marketing campaigns.
- Website/Internet came in second. The survey report did not distinguish between property websites and Internet listing services, but some respondents did list specific Internet listing services, including affordablesearch.com, Apartment

Finder, ApartmentGuide.com, ApartmentRatings.com, apts.com, ForRent.com, rentlinx, and Trulia. Other respondents mentioned blogs, Facebook, Google Plus, LinkedIn, Pinterest and Twitter, and in at least one instance specified coordinated campaigns using multiple platforms.

- Third and fourth on the list were “word of mouth/referrals” and “sign/drive-by,” indicating there’s still a place for old-fashioned marketing methods.

Other responses included:

- Direct mail postcards to nearby homes
- Events
- Visits to hospitals and other large employers nearby
- Military outreach and discounts
- Customer service leading to referrals
- Networking
- Campus outreach

Full survey results are available at www.multifamilyinsider.com.



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Including, Engaging and Involving Residents **BENEFITS EVERYONE**



In days gone by, people in many parts of the country considered apartment dwelling to be a transitional state on the way to living somewhere else. Often, singles would seek out a roommate to share apartment expenses until they found a good-paying job or decided to enter into a committed relationship with a life partner. In some cases, couples would live in an apartment only until they acquired enough money to fund the down payment on their long-awaited first home. And people without job security would opt for an apartment to avoid the long-term commitment of home ownership.

Today, there are still those who rent because of necessity. For others, however, apartment living is a trendy choice viewed as the best and most carefree way to go.

Among the many obvious benefits apartment dwellers enjoy is turnkey freedom that offers flexibility for them to come and go without the responsibilities and worries that accompany home ownership. A somewhat more subtle benefit that might not always be fully realized or capitalized on is the ready-made community that apartment living provides. Especially in today's fast-paced, high-tech world, it is easy — but not particularly healthy — for people to withdraw into a solitary existence accompanied by little interaction with others. For many, having a community of people living within a stone's throw creates familiarity and encourages involvement, and limits the tendency to withdraw from life and from others.

WHY INVOLVEMENT IS GOOD FOR APARTMENT COMMUNITIES

When resident turnover is high, so are the costs to clean, repair and market apartments. When residents stay longer, the benefits go beyond financial. Residents who are happy in their communities are more likely to tell family and friends. An enhanced reputation for the community is only the beginning.

There is something uniquely special about apartment communities whose residents are involved. Involvement has close ties with excitement, enthusiasm and passion. When it is present, it has the capacity to virtually fill the atmosphere with a magnetic energy that can be felt by all who have an occasion to visit the premises. Involved and engaged people are simply more positive and happier. And that mindset is attractive to others. In fact, potential residents immediately notice it when a community exudes involved participation and friendly camaraderie.

What could possibly be better public relations for an apartment community than that?

BENEFITS OF INVOLVEMENT

- Involvement contributes to good morale and a positive outlook throughout the community.
- Involvement elicits creative thinking and innovative ideas.
- When residents are involved, they have an opportunity to play a role in decision making, and thereby tend to be more engaged in and committed to achieving positive results.
- Involvement is the antithesis of boredom.
- Involvement has a positive psychological component akin to purpose, well-being, and life satisfaction.
- Involvement provides an opportunity to be heard, have fun, learn from others, and even make a difference.

HOW TO CREATE COMMUNITY

Community is all about caring and sharing. And when it's all that it can be, experts agree that a community has the potential to inspire its members to be the very best version of who they are. Building and sustaining such a community has much to do with an apartment manager's desire, willingness, and effort to make it happen. But this does not mean working harder...It's more about working smarter!

Working smarter to create community primarily consists of **including**, **engaging**, and **involving** the residents. When this occurs — in spite of size, resources and budget — any apartment can become a true community.

To be inclusive, management must not only embrace cultural diversity, but also be open to new ideas and adopt a flexible, non-judgmental mindset that welcomes differing views. This requires the manager to listen — **really** listen.

Engaging residents consists of facilitating camaraderie and spreading goodwill. It also includes recognizing and leveraging the



When involvement is present, it has the capacity to virtually fill the atmosphere with a magnetic energy that can be felt by all who have an occasion to visit the premises.

unique gifts and strengths of the residents, and celebrating individual and collective achievements and successes.

We've already discussed what might be viewed as the warm and fuzzy results of involvement, but what specific actions can management take to involve residents? By providing opportunities for involvement, encouraging resident participation, inviting leaders to play a role, challenging everyone to grow and offering ways to give back and make a difference, apartment management can get the ball rolling in the right direction. In many cases, the rest can be done by the residents. Given the right opportunities and impetus for involvement, the community's people will readily become invested in and assume ownership of the process.

INCLUDE. ENGAGE. INVOLVE.

There are many ways apartment owners and managers can be intentional about creating community.

- Be open to new ideas.
- Listen.
- Welcome differing views.
- Be nonjudgmental.
- Embrace cultural diversity.
- Be flexible.
- Facilitate camaraderie.
- Spread goodwill.
- Recognize and leverage strengths.
- Celebrate achievements and success.
- Provide opportunities.
- Invite leadership.
- Encourage participation.
- Challenge residents to grow.
- Offer ways to "give back."



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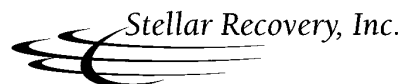
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HOW IT WORKS

Now that we've explained how to lay the foundation, let's consider some specific ways to include, involve and engage apartment residents in pursuit of achieving community:

- Something as inexpensive and easy as having a covered dish "meet and greet" can set the stage for casual and fun interaction among residents. And providing a simple "ice breaker" can help people connect with and learn about their neighbors. **NOTE: Watch for sample ice breakers and detailed instructions in later issues of this magazine.**
- Holding a "town hall" meeting of residents will allow for an open exchange of ideas, expression of interests and identification of leadership roles, as well as the development of a preliminary list of potential regular and periodic activities.
- A community survey of interests and aptitudes can result in a treasure trove of topics to be considered for regular or periodic "lunch and learn" sessions.
- Tapping into "road trip" activities provided by the greater community is a quick and easy way to bring people together with very little effort, planning or expense.
- Posting sign-up sheets for card and board games, lunch and dinner groups, dance lessons, volunteer activities and educational classes allows residents to connect with like-minded neighbors.
- Residents with writing and layout interests and expertise can get involved in the development of an electronic community newsletter. Such a publication can become the source for apartment announcements, activities, and articles of interest about people and happenings.
- Philanthropic-minded residents can easily develop a list of projects in need of helping hands. Interested residents can step forward to help fill a given need as a group.
- The apartment community can host a regular speaker's series with free presentations from experts on myriad topics of interest.

THE SKY IS THE LIMIT

Although the list above includes only a small sampling of ways to help build community, the options are virtually without limit! In future articles, we will delineate more suggestions for including, involving and engaging your residents, along with easy-to-follow instructions for idea implementation.

It is our hope that articles on this topic will prove invaluable in supporting your efforts to create a sought-after apartment community. In addition, we hope to showcase specific tactics that Florida Apartment Association members have put in place and found to be especially effective in practice. If you have a success story that you would like to share with your peers, please send an email description of what you did, how you did it, and the subsequent results. We look forward to hearing from you and celebrating your achievements!

Contact communications@faahq.org. ▲

Trish Harris is a public relations and marketing professional with more than 30 years of experience in both public and private sectors. She also is a business book editor and ghostwriter and previously wrote and produced award-winning television documentaries and children's programming.

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Today's Residents Seek Range of Amenities: **HIGH-TECH,** **HEALTHY,** **HELPFUL**



When it comes to amenities today's residents are looking for, technology leads the way. "People want to know they can connect and get high-speed Internet," says Pete Zimek, founder and president at ILS Network, a collective of six online apartment guides. "I've heard it said that renters would rather move into a place that has no running water" than one without reliable high-speed Internet service.

That demand was initially driven by millennials accustomed to high-speed Internet at home and at college, but today has expanded to renters across the board, added Zimek, who serves on the Florida Apartment Association board of directors.

Typically, only one Internet provider is available in a community, he said, and not all providers are equal. Communities that offer reliable, attractively priced high-speed Internet service get word-of-mouth referrals and positive reviews, which help those communities attract renters. Occasionally, Internet service is included in the rent; in other cases, residents of a community will receive special pricing based on contracts negotiated between the community and the Internet service provider.

High-speed Internet access was the top-rated amenity in a survey conducted by Kingsley Associates in partnership with the National Multi Housing Council (NMHC). More than 14,000 residents at 1,400 communities nationwide were presented with a list of 24 apartment amenities and asked to rank them from one (not interested) to five (very interested). High-speed Internet scored 4.64, with 93 percent of respondents giving it either a four or a five. Cable TV came in at No. 13 and satellite TV was dead last. Residents of "class C" apartment communities had a higher relative interest in cable.

Other highly ranked amenities were more fundamental, including a patio or balcony at No. 2, and a washer and dryer in the apartment (No. 3) — or at least hookups for them (No. 9). Other kitchen features also ranked well, including garbage disposal, microwave, water and ice dispenser in the refrigerator, and stove hood. Those results jive with an analysis of the top 10 most-searched amenities on ForRent.

2013 APARTMENT PREFERENCES SURVEY — NMHC AND KINGSLEY

High-speed Internet is No. 1, with an average score of 4.64 out of a possible 5, and 93 percent of respondents "interested" or "very interested." "Patio or balcony" came in a very close second, with the same percentage of respondents interested or very interested, and a score of 4.59. Other apartment features in the top 10 include in-unit washer and dryer or at least hookups, garbage disposals, microwaves, refrigerator water and ice dispensers, ceiling fans and stove hoods.

The only community amenity in the top 10 is a fitness center, coming in at No. 7. Other important community amenities include a package holding room or delivery area at No. 11, and community-wide wireless Internet at No. 15.

com over 90 days, with washer and dryer coming in at No. 1 and hookups for them coming in at No. 2. Other popular search terms included patio or balcony (No. 5) and dishwasher (No. 7), along with air conditioning, furnished, hardwood floors, walk-in closets, and fireplace. Wireless Internet access just made the list, coming in at No. 10.

That may indicate that searchers want to make sure their basic needs are met first. And air conditioning — especially in certain climates — furniture, and appliances would certainly qualify as basic needs. After they've narrowed their search, residents may then explore "wants" such as Internet access.

At least for some residents, technology "wants" aren't limited to the availability of quality high-speed Internet service in their

▼
High-speed Internet access was the top-rated amenity in a survey conducted by Kingsley Associates in partnership with the National Multi Housing Council (NMHC).

apartments. Residents are also looking for reliable cellphone service throughout the community, wireless Internet access in common areas, keyless door entry, and USB outlets or built-in docks, where they can easily charge their smartphones, tablets, and other devices, reports Linda Beach, Florida regional publisher for Apartment Finders. Community features to support a healthy lifestyle — fitness centers or at least workout rooms — continue to be important to many residents, Beach said, and today's residents want them to include wireless Internet access "so they can use their fitness apps, time themselves, record their workouts — that sort of thing."

SPECIAL-INTEREST AMENITIES

Some amenities don't rank highly in surveys because they aren't universally important. But residents aren't one-size-fits-all, and for some, specific amenities can be very important indeed. If your community chooses to offer these targeted amenities, they can become an important distinction between you and your competition.

Pet amenities. Take pet lovers, for example. Research into pet ownership varies, with some organizations claiming it's at an all-time high and other seeing a dip. But research almost universally shows that Americans are spending more on pet care and pet products than ever before. And that means renters who have pets are concerned about caring for them.

“If you’re going to rent to pet owners, especially dog owners,” Beach said, “they’re going to be looking for amenities for their pets.” Those amenities might include dog parks and walking paths with fresh water and waste disposal stations or designated pet-friendly zones in common areas. They also might include “doggie salons” or grooming areas, where residents can bathe and groom their dogs outside of their apartments. Some apartment communities partner with neighborhood services such as local veterinarians, dog walkers, and doggie daycare providers to offer special deals to residents.

Roommate selection. College-age and folks just starting their careers often need a roommate to share costs but may not have a friend or co-worker willing to move in and split the rent. Some apartment communities, particularly in close proximity to colleges and universities, help residents find roommates. One way to do that is through a social media app such as RoomSync, explains Rob Castellucci, founder and president.

“If price and location about the same,” Castellucci says, “and one property has you fill out a questionnaire and they assign you a roommate, and the other property lets you choose through Facebook or some other means, the property that offers self-selection has a huge advantage in attracting residents.”

Other options are apps that mimic dating websites, such as Roommates. It allows users to peruse profiles of would-be roommates and swipe the image to one side or the other, indicating whether they like the person or not. If both users swipe to the right, the app tells them they have a potential roommate match. They can then follow up and get to know each other better.

Pampering for empty nesters. Older generations downsizing from houses into apartments have different priorities, and often

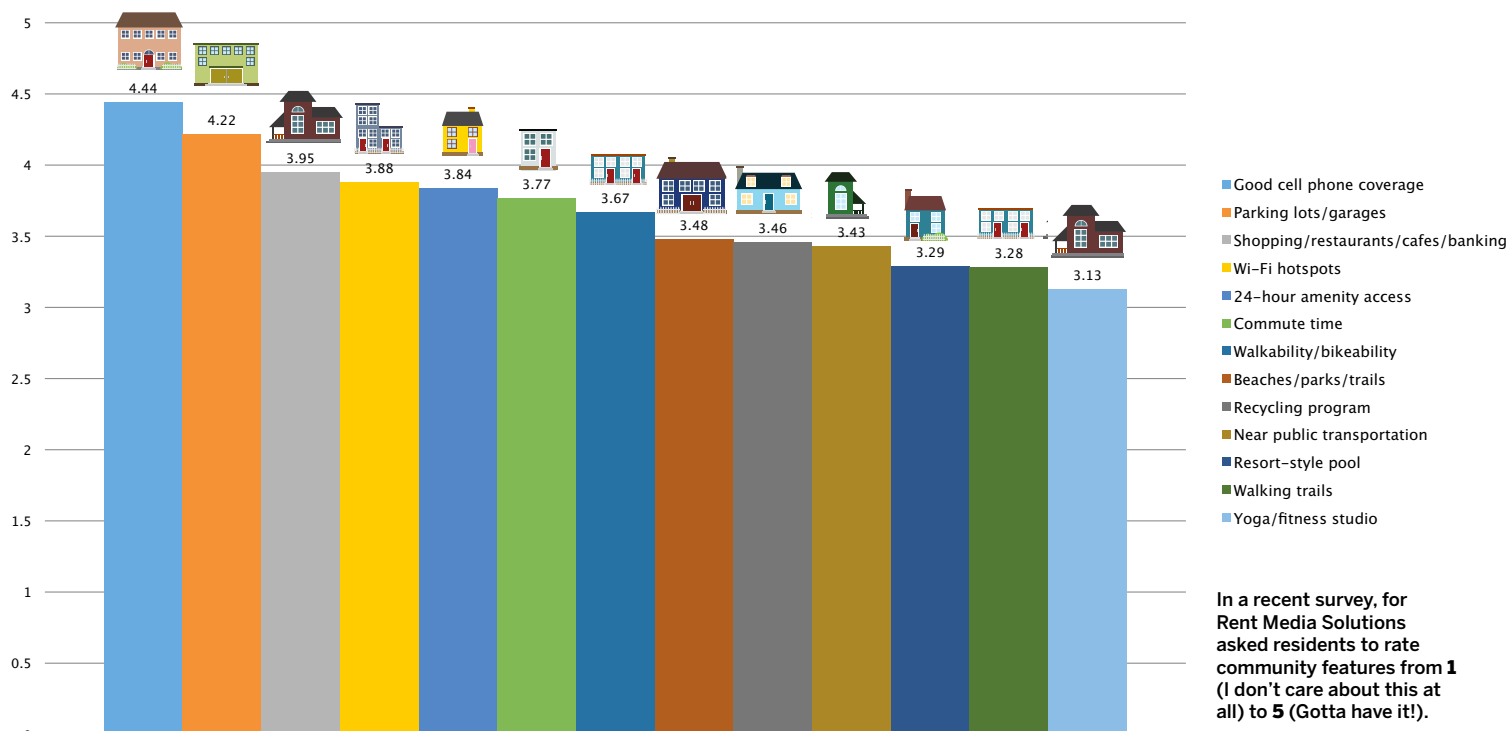


different means, Beach said. “They are going to look for concierge services — someone to take care of the plants and the cats when they’re traveling, maybe someone to help them get their groceries up to their apartments.” They’re likely to want enclosed parking if they’ve been accustomed to parking in a garage, and higher-end finishes with good entertaining space.

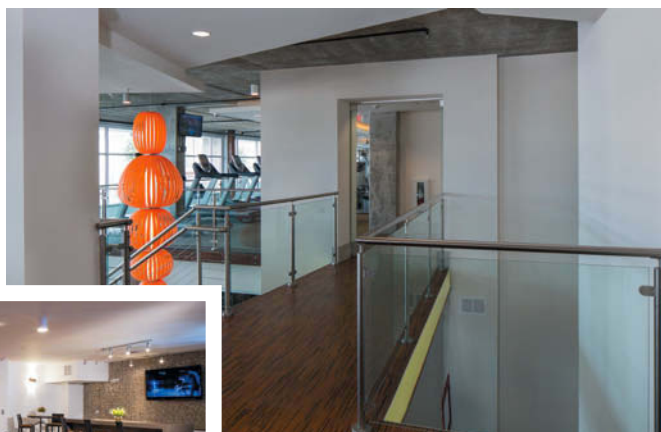
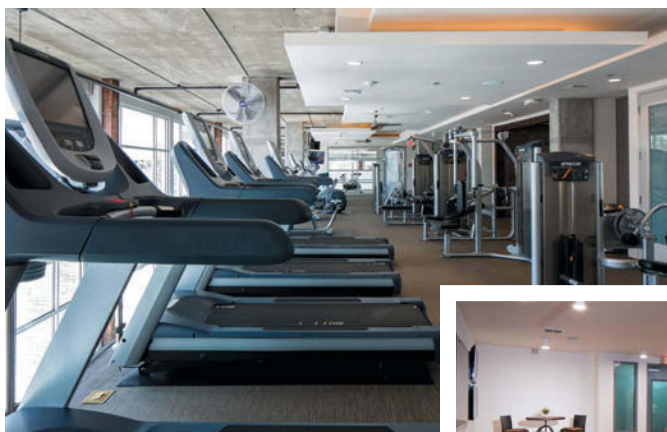
Ron Wenzel, senior regional property manager at Greystar, agrees. “They’re going to want more space, a garage or carport, activities, concierge, social director, convenience to shopping and other places, plus a little pampering — they’ve earned it.”

Keeping it green. Research shows millennials want to help the planet — they just don’t want it to be too much extra trouble or cost. Apartment communities can appeal to this environmental altruism by adding recycling drop-offs or even pickups along with trash valet service. Some residents will be looking for other “green” amenities as well, such as electric car charging stations, composting receptacles, and rainwater collectors for landscape maintenance. ▲

Most-Wanted Community Features



The Gallery at Mills Park: **CHIC APARTMENT LIVING IN ORLANDO**



Chic, upscale urban living in a mid-rise apartment community that matches any luxury condo – that’s The Gallery at Mills Park. Owned by DeBartolo Development LLC and managed by Greystar, The Gallery at Mills Park is a new 310-unit apartment community at 1650 North Mills St. in Orlando. Situated on a 14.5 acre site of a mixed-use development that includes 60,000 square feet of retail anchored by The Fresh Market and planned office space with a parking garage, The Gallery at Mills Park offers a tremendous range of modern amenities for residents.

To celebrate the location’s history, DeBartolo integrated wood from the Mills and Nebraska Lumberyard warehouse that was located at

the property almost 100 years ago into The Gallery’s clubhouse. Art from local artists is also displayed throughout the clubhouse’s space. “We are a new development offering new amenities, but wanted to look familiar to the community like we’ve always been here,” said Jay Adams, vice president of development for DeBartolo.

According to Adams, The Gallery project is like a Central Park mixed-use development, where people can live, toss around a football, grab a bite to eat, or ride their bikes along the nearby Orlando Urban Trail. “Once you park your car here, you don’t have to go anywhere else,” Adams said. “Like other urban communities across the country, The Gallery at Mills Park truly is somewhere you can live, work, and play.”

The Gallery at Mills Park offers a mix of one-, two- and three-bedroom apartment homes ranging in size from 633 to 1,330 square feet. With 10- to 11-foot ceilings, the apartments feature modern, sleek kitchens with islands, two-tone cabinets and quartz countertops, Whirlpool stainless appliance packages (including microwaves), wine coolers, Maytag full-size washer/dryer combos, ceiling fans, garden tubs and curved shower rods, spacious walk-in closets with built-in organization, wood plank style flooring, entertainment packages with built-in speakers, and large patios. Residents also have access to Dura bike lockers, a secure access garage with available reserved parking, car charging stations, and a recycling program.

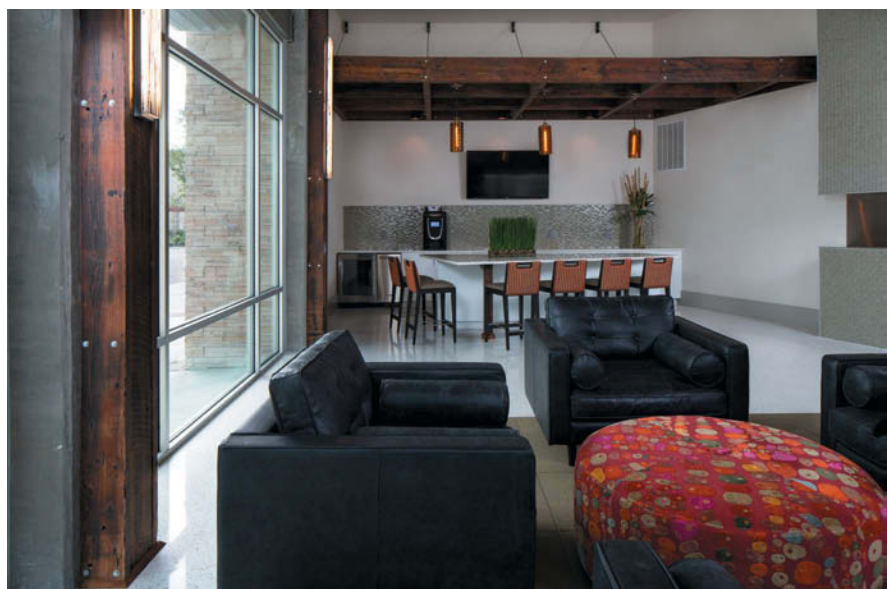
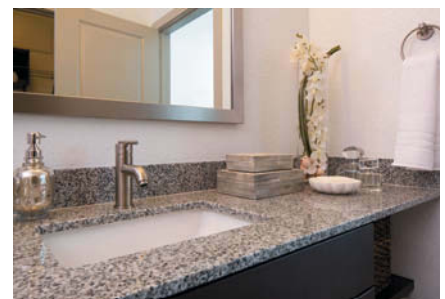
In a nice marketing touch, the floor plans of these suites have rooms labeled with names such as “Splash” (bathroom), “Live” (living room), “Indulge” (dining room), “Dream” (bedroom), “Prepare” (kitchen), “Relax” (outdoor patio), and “Style” (walk-in closet). The renaming enhances the community’s sense of style and character reinforcing The Gallery at Mills Park’s brand at every step.

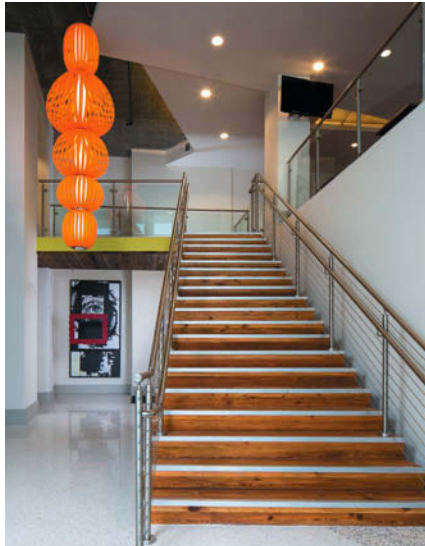
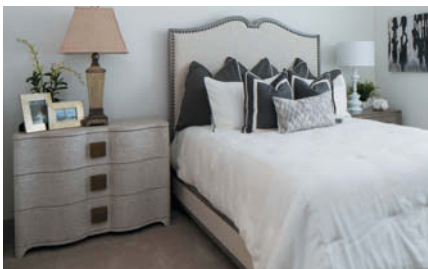
On to the amenities: The Gallery at Mills Park is replete with them, headlined by the community’s two-story clubhouse. Gallery residents have access to two courtyard luxury pools with grills (there are even poolside suites available with kitchens, 60-inch TVs and lounges) an outdoor “Zen Area” for relaxing, a ‘Surf Lounge’ with Mac computers, 24-hour fitness center with core room (featuring Precor equipment), a game/sports lounge, a relaxation lounge; and a spa room and poolside fire pit lounge — all equipped with Wi-Fi. The Gallery at Mills Park is more than just an upscale residence — it is an integrated Florida lifestyle resort.

This is where the adjacent retail center, Market at Mills Park, enhances the overall living experience. Anchored by a 24,000-square-foot Fresh Market, it includes a full range of shops and restaurants such as Marilyn Monroe Nail Lounge, AT&T, Cherry Blow Bar, Pure Barre, Giraffas, First Watch, Firebirds, Segafredos, and the Brass Tap.

As for the neighborhood, it’s where things are happening. The Gallery at Mills Park is close to the Orlando Urban Trail, the Lake Eola Farmers Market & Park, Leu Gardens, and The Orlando Museum of Art.

“Residents at The Gallery at Mills Park will appreciate its prime location and convenient access to the SunRail Train Station,





Lynx Station, and area employers,” said Melanie Verret, Greystar’s regional property manager. “We are also close to recreation, dining, and shopping at Winter Park Village and Colonial Shopping Center.”

The successful execution of Mills Park marks a happy ending for this site, which had been originally earmarked for condominiums and retail space before the Great Recession hit Florida hard. The revised apartment/retail/office mixed-use project, developed by a partnership between DeBartolo Development and Forge Capital Partners LLC, acknowledged that reality, creating a model that works well with today’s economy and market demands.

The bottom line: The Gallery at Mills Park is the entire package when it comes to providing residents with a chic place to live, play, eat, and shop. It is a model of what an enlightened 21st century residential development can achieve and an example that other Florida apartment owners can study for inspiration. ▲

To learn more about The Gallery at Mills Park, please visit www.thegalleryatmillspark.com.



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APARTMENT AMENITIES BY GENERATIONS



High-speed Internet access and patios/balconies tied as the

No. 1

amenities all generations look for in an apartment.

Cable TV's importance ranked higher with older generations

(80-85%)



and lower with younger generations

(64%),

showing the shift toward alternative Internet-delivered TV services.

Growing up with food-related TV is making a difference in the kitchen: Younger generations are looking for a bigger cooking area with a kitchen island

(72%).

While community activities aren't in demand, wine tastings rank the highest

(49%),

with movie nights and cookouts following close behind

(tied at 44%).



Satellite TV was the lowest ranking amenity, with a

33%

interest across the generations.



Across the board, all generations look for a fitness center in their apartment community

(84%),

but fitness classes aren't as needed

(61%).



Information from the 2013 NMHC/Kingsley Apartment Resident Preferences Survey.

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