

They Don't Care About Your Numbers!

When residents experience poor internet service, telling them the network is just fine is not a helpful response.

By Bryan Rader / *Bandwidth Consulting LLC*

Here's a scenario I encounter often: A property owner client has a service-related problem – let's say slow internet or unreliable speeds. The owner calls me, and I contact the service provider.

Then the games begin.

The service provider “looks into the problem” by pulling up data from the network operations center, running through recent trouble ticket histories and maybe taking a few meter readings in the field. “Everything seems OK on our end,” the provider reports. “We don't see a problem with our network. Should be good.”

I send the update back to the property owner. After a brief email exchange with the on-site management staff, the owner responds, “The problem is definitely not resolved, and as of this morning, it has gotten worse. The manager reports that all her residents are in the office nonstop because they can't use the internet.”

Upon going back to the service provider a second time, I reiterate the problem. But the service provider staff digs in. “You don't understand,” staff members tell me. “We examined the numbers. The data are right. The residents should be experiencing great bandwidth without any interruptions.”

“The client doesn't care about your stupid numbers,” I point out. “Look, you have an unhappy property owner and on-site staff. Are you done checking on this problem?”

The engineers now get defensive. “No problem here. We've checked all our diagnostics.” The MDU salesperson doesn't even respond to the first couple of emails. He finally calls with a sense of agitation. “Look, I already received my commission for signing that agreement. I even took time off from my busy sales calendar to visit with the manager once before we launched. I think her residents aren't giving her an accurate picture of the situation.”

Well, he's wrong. They are actually giving her the perfect picture of the situation.

PERCEPTION DEFINES THE PROBLEM

The business of providing broadband service is not just about the network. Too many companies hide behind the quantitative data from their networks.

Suppose the network is performing as it should, but some residents experience poor service quality because they purchased inadequate routers. By not owning the problem on the front end, the provider allows the MDU owner to build a narrative that the company doesn't care about residents and that occupancy is being affected by this internet service issue.

The client perception of the problem is the definition of the problem, regardless of the issue. My advice to the service provider isn't to suddenly become a lab scientist who reviews data from the network operations center or readings from the field. It's not necessary to second-guess your engineers. Rather, attack the problem as if it is the top priority of your day. Own it, communicate quickly and show concern about the issue.

I do recognize that this isn't a one-sided issue. Sometimes a property manager can cry wolf based on one or two complaints. “It's happening to everyone on my property; your company is awful!” can mean, in fact, that two residents in one building have a problem.

Resolving a problem can be difficult without specific information from MDU staff. I always advise service providers to request specifics. How many units are complaining? Do you know whether they have contacted the provider yet? Is this a recent issue or one that occurred in the past?

“Look, I am not running an ISP,” a property manager might say. “I don't have those answers.” But I still suggest an attempt to capture specifics in an effort to define the problem.

The key, however, is how a service provider handles the situation. Do you simply email the manager and then send a report defending your fancy network? Or do you quickly prepare a team to visit the manager in person and create a dialogue and a process to resolve the concern?

Yes, it's all about “perceptions.” But these are the same perceptions that lead to renewal agreements or to early termination notices. A better response will lead to better results.

Best wishes for a successful and prosperous 2017! ❖

Bryan Rader is CEO of Bandwidth Consulting LLC, which assists providers in the multifamily market. You can reach Bryan at bryanjrader@yahoo.com or at 314-540-1114. Learn more at www.bandwidthconsultingllc.com.