

The Next Big Thing Is ... 6G!

Stories in the popular press often fuel clients' concerns about broadband. Multifamily providers should always address these concerns seriously, even if they appear unfounded.

By Bryan J. Rader / *UpStream Network*

At my company, we discuss a lot of media and tech trends during client meetings. Whether the clients are condo board members or property owners, they are often knowledgeable about potential new technologies or mega-mergers, and they're thinking, "How does this affect us?"

In a recent condo board meeting, a participant asked me, "If you put fiber to the unit in my building, won't we miss the transition to 5G in the future?" He made a puzzled face.

In another meeting, I heard a different question. "So, AT&T just acquired Time Warner. Are they starting another Netflix? And isn't everybody merging with each other? How does this affect me?" Several board members had puzzled faces.

Many years ago, I sat in a 49th-floor community room at an evening HOA board meeting when a board member told the group, "We don't need to sign an access agreement. By next year, Apple TV will be the only service that matters."

That time, I was the one who looked puzzled.

Multifamily providers should remember that the perception of changes in technology and media is more important than the reality. Whether 5G, Apple, or a vertical merger has an impact on a provider's business is not for the provider to decide. If customers are thinking and worrying about an event, the event is real to them.

But let's face it. If you've been in the MDU tech space for any amount of time, you've seen a lot of news events and stories affect people's perceptions.

AOL bought Time Warner. Comcast bought NBC. Amazon got into video. YouTube expanded its offerings. 3G arrived, then 4G and LTE. Now comes 5G.

Clients and customers read the same papers we providers do. They hear the news on CNBC. They talk to their friends and peers. The news coverage sometimes feeds a perception that the latest event will create a cataclysmic change in the way service providers do business on their properties.

DON'T DISMISS CLIENT CONCERNS

Providers should deal head-on with these perceptions. It is much smarter to talk about them than to be defensive about

them. We providers should be prepared to explain how new technologies or merger activity might impact our businesses. We should be able to articulate why our business plans are not affected or why our infrastructures support these new services.

I once stood in an open residents meeting with more than 200 attendees to answer questions about my company's program. One resident took the microphone. He began, "I am Microsoft and Cisco certified, and I know more than any of you about this business." He went into a five-minute rant about where the content world was going.

When he was done, the audience was confused and annoyed. But I still chose to address his points one by one, even though his computer education did not, in fact, qualify him to talk about video content. I found out later that he was also an expert in elevators, roofing and pool furniture.

Our reality is shaped by these moments. To expand your business, you need to be ready to handle these "discussions."

That brings us to the next headline-grabber: 5G wireless. No one can follow our industry for long without hearing extensive conversations about 5G. These discussions are quickly creeping into client meetings.

In my view, the discussions are very premature. Technologies that work in a lab, do not have formal standards and require a \$100 billion buildout are not yet capable of disrupting anything. But this is another new reality.

So I've decided to create another new perception around 6G. That's right. You heard it here first. It's even better than 5G. What's the difference? Well, it's even less likely to impact our businesses, but just in case, I am getting a jump on these perceptions to be prepared.

Do you know what 6G can do? Yeah, I am puzzled, too. ❖

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