

The Metrics Advisory Group

Multifamily broadband experts plan to form an industry advisory group to help owners and service providers work together more effectively.

By David Daugherty ■ *Korcett Holdings Inc.*

For the second year, the Broadband Properties Summit hosted a panel on metrics for broadband service delivery in multifamily housing. Panelists included Ian Davis, founding partner, Davis Craig & Taylor; Greg McDonald, director of telecommunications, Camden Property Trust; John LaBelle, project manager for residential technology, Peak Campus; and Scott Casey, vice president of information technology, Education Realty Trust. I served as moderator.

The panel also met separately to discuss the formation of an industry advisory group that would help assemble basic information and, in some cases, standards for the design, delivery and support of voice, video and data services. Based on attendees' responses to the Summit session, the panel thought there was sufficient interest to further explore the formation, organization and operation of such an advisory group.

A byproduct of this column has been the growing interest in establishing better dialogue among developers and service providers. Inconsistent designs and operational philosophies pose problems for builders, especially when they must deal with multiple service providers.

Until recently, problems were manageable because the requirements for delivering quality video services remained fairly consistent from one service provider to the next. The delivery of data services, however, is significantly more complex and must be more rigidly controlled to achieve acceptable standards. Residents make no distinction among voice, data and video. They expect the same quality of service from each, namely fast response time and impeccable reliability.

Internet service providers also face increasing competitive pressure. They become frustrated when MDU owners or their agents select service providers based largely on price and are then disappointed when services do not meet residents' expectations. Moreover, the inherent conflict of business interest in the development of standards is driving owners and service providers farther apart.

The panel, meeting as an exploratory group, agreed that establishing mutually acceptable standards for design, installation, operation and support of (cellular) voice, video and data services could help control costs, manage residents' expectations and improve relations among service providers and owners/operators.

"If service providers and MDU operators cannot develop meaningful metrics to define acceptable service, the industry is doomed to compete on price," says Steve Ross, corporate editor of **BROADBAND COMMUNITIES**. "This effort will take a while to bear fruit and will have to be a living document, constantly revised as technology advances."

Participants in the exploratory discussion all favored beginning with modest goals, including defining the organization, formation and operation of the industry advisory group and developing basic information on such topics as

- Infrastructure design
- Wire installation and maintenance
- Service competitiveness

- Service level standards
- Low-voltage audit checklist for acquisitions.

The consensus at the meeting was that the work product of such an organization would be useful to owners, operators and service providers and could ultimately lead to much better understanding and delivery of acceptable service. Participation in this group will be a valuable networking activity but will require a significant commitment of time and resources from founding members.

NEXT STEPS

At the next conference call for those who participated in the exploratory discussion in Dallas and a few others, we intend to form a working group charged with

- Developing the mission statement and preliminary set of objectives for the advisory group
- Researching available sources of information to avoid duplicating existing resources
- Determining the structure and legal organization of the group
- Deciding on the type, publication and endorsement of group work products.

Although a number of session attendees offered to help with this committee, additional participants are welcome. If you have any comments or would like to contribute, please drop me a note. ❖

About the Author

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