

The Amenities Arms Race

Property developers are outfitting new communities with amenities worthy of five-star hotels. Technology amenities have to meet that standard.

By Bryan Rader / *Bandwidth Consulting LLC*

Have you walked around some of the recently developed apartment communities in your market? The amenities packages are simply incredible. Some of my company's clients, for instance, are adding rock-climbing walls, tanning salons, yoga centers and hot tubs that face large Jumbotron TVs.

Apartment residents are enjoying amenities found historically only in five-star hotels. On a recent property visit, I spotted a wine cellar off the lobby, a fitness center equipped for a professionally trained modern athlete and a rooftop lounge with great city views surrounded by a beautiful organic garden (no, not that kind).

Business centers have had extreme makeovers, too. What used to be a small OfficeMax desk sitting in the corner of an empty storage closet with a dusty PC and a broken printer has become a true cybercafe that one might expect to see in a break area of a top Silicon Valley software company.

Last year, the magazine *Building Design + Construction* called this the "amenities arms race."

Sue Ansel, CEO of Gables Residential, explained during a recent panel discussion why her residents craved (and actually expected) these types of amenities. Some millennials enjoyed country-club features in their student housing communities years earlier. Now, as they move to the city, they still expect them – and they want more.

This effort to ramp up the feature set to attract today's residents affects service providers as well. Many owners and developers see the benefits of making technology the key component of these upscale appointments.

AN IMAGINARY TOUR

Let's take an imaginary tour of one of these recently opened high-end buildings. We begin in the lobby. Residents are at the front desk picking up Amazon packages. One says, "I just received a text notifying me of my delivery." Another resident is sitting across the lobby with her feet up in a lounge chair, using her laptop.

We take the elevator to the fourth floor and stop in the fitness center. An Internet-connected instructor is teaching a spinning class to a group of 20-somethings while others scroll

through Facebook on their tablets as they use the elliptical machines (not easy to do without falling off).

Now we head to the cybercafe on the fifth floor. Wireless printers are on one side. The smell of coffee is everywhere. Some residents quietly watch movies with headphones on; another shops for holiday gifts on her smartphone.

Then we go up to the rooftop, where we see several residents huddled around an open fire pit, looking at the city skyline and enjoying Pandora music on their wireless speaker, while others use Netflix on their iPads. Finally, we see a few people in the hot tub watching a ball game on the big-screen TV nearby. Pretty cool.

Such an array of amenities being enjoyed by so many residents. Of course, when the rent is more than \$2,000 a month, you would maximize these services too, right?

There is one common theme: All these great features require a service provider that offers reliable, top-quality, customizable digital TV services, managed wireless networks with excess bandwidth and, of course, technical support. How can you enjoy a rooftop view without a Wi-Fi connected tablet streaming a movie?

Though many service providers grow their businesses by touting economic incentives such as door fees and revenue-sharing programs, I strongly suggest that you also focus on the amenity needs of developers and apartment owners. As they open more buildings in a competitive marketplace, trying to win the heart and mind of the next \$2,000-a-month renter, keep in mind how important service providers are to their businesses.

By understanding this amenities arms race and aligning their capabilities around clients' needs, service providers are in a better spot to capture greater market share moving forward. Just be sure you don't catch one of your technicians popping into a yoga class or scaling a climbing wall between service calls! ❖

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