

# Reduce Access Friction In Student Housing

Student residents want to access whatever they want, whenever they want, on whichever device they choose with no additional steps between the thought and the result.

By Andrew Marshall / *Campus Technologies Inc.*

**T**he design of a student housing Internet access system, either wired or wireless, often includes the requirement for students to log on to access the Internet or to register the devices they are using to obtain permission to access the network.

The reasoning behind the need for login or registration is sound: The network operator wants to know who is accessing the network using which device so it can take remedial action if something goes wrong.

Unfortunately, this approach has two drawbacks: First, it generates many help desk tickets, especially during the crucial move-in period, and second, residents dislike it because the mechanisms used frequently get in their way. A typical student housing resident is looking for a completely frictionless experience.

In most cases, it is possible to operate a student housing network in a near-frictionless manner. Current network management tools and techniques offer the ability to remove the friction from user access while maintaining

network integrity. The result will be happier residents, and happy residents make for higher levels of satisfaction, which in turn make for better occupancy rates.

In a wired environment, Campus Technologies uses the “Best Buy” test to determine whether an environment is frictionless. In the Best Buy test, a resident can buy any connectable wired device from a store, take it back to the apartment, connect it to any jack – and it just works without the student’s having to take any additional steps because of the network.

In a wireless environment, the Best Buy test has one small caveat: The wireless network, in common with almost all wireless networks, may require entry of a wireless password the first time (and only the first time) a device connects to it.

## CAN YOU REALLY DO THAT?

Property owners and providers accustomed to logon or registration requirements often raise several objections when they first learn about the frictionless approach. Fortunately, there are good answers to all these objections. Following are some of the more common objections:

**Objection #1:** Too many wireless devices connected at once will make the system slow for others.

**Answer #1:** Simply design your network with adequate density, plus some headroom. The network design should allow for at least 10 wireless devices per bed space.

Well-designed student housing networks with good network management tools really don’t have to require device logon or registration.

**Objection #2:** We need residents to register devices that do not have browsers (such as game consoles) as we have no way of making them log on.

**Answer #2:** Don't make anybody log on; then you don't need this at all.

**Objection #3:** We need residents to log on (authenticate) so, if one of them gets a virus, we can tell where they are and take action.

**Answer #3:** Use network management tools that allow a network operator to determine the physical location (apartment number) of any device on the network and isolate it, if needed, without authentication. All Ethernet switches and managed wireless access points can do this; a good network management system can do this automatically.

**Objection #4:** We need to be able to identify rogue (unauthorized) wireless access points to prevent them from interfering with legitimate wireless traffic.

**Answer #4:** Almost all enterprise or carrier-grade wireless management platforms will identify rogues, and most will take over-the-air, automatic remedial action.

**Objection #5:** We want to be able to slow down or turn off someone's Internet access if they don't pay their rent.

**Answer #5:** There are other ways of achieving this, but in reality, you may want to reconsider using this as a sanction. In student housing, in general, Internet access is provided as an amenity. Affecting access to the Internet in the case of late payment makes a direct linkage between rent and the Internet service. That could lead to residents' claiming they can withhold rent if there is an Internet problem.

### ACHIEVING A FRICTIONLESS USER EXPERIENCE

Moving to a frictionless model can be a testing experience. Letting go of familiar controls and procedures is always challenging – but the technology and expectations of student housing residents have moved on, and student housing

networks have to move on as well. Take a good look at how your network is designed, and ask these questions:

1. Are there enough wireless access points to allow 10 or more wireless devices per bed?
2. Can the network operator locate an individual device in the building and isolate it?
3. Are your wireless access points part of a managed system, and can that managed system identify rogue wireless access points and isolate them?

Campus Technologies' recommended best practice is for all new construction to be designed as frictionless right out of the box. Designing for a frictionless user experience should be no more expensive, but it will positively affect resident satisfaction immediately.

When might a frictionless design not be appropriate? There

are some circumstances that call for authentication, although these are relatively unusual in student housing. If Internet is not provided as an amenity, the provider needs to ensure that people using the Internet paid for it. Second, in a very dense urban environment, others might learn the password for the wireless SSID and use it from outside the property.

With these rare exceptions, passing the Best Buy test and going frictionless is a great way of improving resident satisfaction with very little effort. It's a true quick win. ❖

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