Resident Satisfaction 101

Multifamily property owners must provide good, reliable broadband service – and good customer service – to attract and retain residents.

Multifamily housing starts are going up, up, up. At the current dizzying pace, nearly half a million units will be added this year in the United States. Why? Baby boomers are beginning to retire and downsize. Millennials, an equally large cohort (depending on how they're counted), are moving out on their own, but, saddled with student debt, they can't afford houses. Single-family homebuilding is constrained by land and labor shortages, economists say.

To attract desirable residents to all these multifamily units, developers and owners rely on amenities, and technology amenities offer the most bang for the buck. Survey after survey confirms that broadband is a top priority for apartment dwellers.

Not just any broadband, but good broadband. This month, I spent an inordinate amount of time reading reviews on websites such as Yelp and DSLReports.com. I saw dozens of comments like these:

- *Never move into a building where [provider name] is the ISP.*
- *From now on, I'll only live in buildings served by [provider name].*

Exclusive contracts between building owners and poor providers are guaranteed to drive these reviewers into fits of rage.

What makes residents happy with broadband? Speed is important, but absolute speed isn't everything. Consistency is far more important. If a resident counts on being able to work from home (whether that requires 10 Mbps or 100 Mbps), she is upset when she has to work at the coffee shop – or worse, miss a day of work. If a resident invites friends over for a Netflix binge-watching party, he needs to know the movies will stream.

Beyond consistency, residents – at least those who share their opinions online – value prompt setup and installation, prompt problem resolution and knowledgeable tech support staff. They don't like making multiple phone calls to get problems resolved, and they object to waiting at home for technicians who never show up.

Fortunately, good solutions are now available to deliver the kind of broadband service that residents love. Fiber to the building yields solid, reliable bandwidth, and there are several excellent methods to distribute fiber bandwidth within an apartment community. Fiber to the unit is the best and most future proof, but with appropriate inside wiring and equipment, Ethernet, DOCSIS 3.x, G.fast and newer wireless technologies can all provide service that will keep residents happy today.

Proper design, engineering and service management are critical, and back-office software is nearly as important (maybe more important) because it enables fast, error-free provisioning and remote diagnosis and problem resolution.

BROADBAND COMMUNITIES' Top 100 MDU Technology Providers, on page 26 of this issue, lists companies that offer all these products and services. ❖

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