

Broadband in the 5G Era: Why Multifamily Housing Properties are Adopting Communitywide Networks

Communitywide bulk networks can attract and retain new residents by providing instant-on, wall-to-wall coverage, and can provide cost savings, improved security, and a range of other benefits to property owners.

By Doug Lodder / *Boingo*

The rules of the multifamily business are being rewritten as the era of digital disruption reinvents the way people live and work. Cord cutting, endless Amazon shipments, work-from-home careers and smart thermostats are just the beginning. Communities soon will rely on artificial intelligence – “Siri, lock the door” – the internet of things (IoT), cloud computing and more to secure and retain residents. And property developers, owners and managers that want to compete and grow need to embrace this digital age.

It’s clear that this connected future starts with wireless. Internet connectivity, once considered an amenity, is now a utility. For many, it’s the most important one. Just ask the residents: A recent study found that 40 percent of Gen Z-ers prefer Wi-Fi connectivity over a working bathroom. This incredible demand for internet has led to the rise of community network models.

Community networks provide propertywide wireless to fuel every digital touchpoint within a housing community. They’re a sure bet for

digital acceleration in the 5G era and are the way of the future. Let’s review why.

SEAMLESS CONNECTIVITY MODELS

Residents count on great internet to power their mobile lifestyles. They want always-on, seamless connectivity from lobby to living room, making the entire property feel like home. Traditional models can’t meet these needs. They leave residents to fend for themselves with appointment-based installations, bundled packages and contractual commitments. On top of this, the internet service is trapped in the unit without coverage in public areas. There’s also no cohesive strategy to leverage this network for back-of-house operations for property staff.

Unlike the traditional approach to wireless, which places residents, owners and managers at the mercy of cable companies or internet service providers, communitywide bulk networks serve as a property’s central operational hub. Residents benefit from instant-on, wall-to-wall coverage, and owners enjoy operational benefits that include improved security, access to real-time usage insights, lower energy costs and reduced maintenance expenses.

5G, WI-FI 6 AND IOT READY

Revolutionary. Transformative. Game-changer. These are just a few descriptors attached to 5G, the next generation of wireless that will succeed 4G LTE. The new standard is set to vastly improve connectivity between people and things. It dominates press headlines and takes center stage at nearly every broadband conference – all while causing a world of confusion among property owners and residents. Many questions remain. What really is 5G? Why does it matter? And what does that mean for multifamily housing?

Here's what it means for property owners and managers: 5G is the technology that will move analog apartment living to digital, transforming the way residents live and the way multifamily communities operate. With 5G, digital transformation will be amplified via innovations such as connected locks, centralized package delivery lockers, connected thermostats, energy efficiency apps and smart data management.

That's just the beginning, as many 5G innovations have yet to be realized. For example, 4G was built before the app economy really took off with companies such as Uber, Lyft and Netflix. 4G technology enabled a new digital age. Now imagine what we can do with 5G. The possibilities are endless.

To navigate the ever evolving 5G landscape, owners should plan for propertywide wireless coverage that accommodates rapid growth in digitization and rising resident expectations. If they don't already, residents soon will get 5G speeds and coverage at work and on the go. They'll want that same experience at home, raising the bar for fast, dense, low-latency property networks that extend beyond units into common areas such as the pool, gym and lounge.

Remember, if you're not reaping the benefits of 5G and building automation powered by IoT, the competition will be.

But the future of broadband isn't just about 5G. Wi-Fi 6 is also in

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the mix. Recently launched, Wi-Fi 6 is the next generation of Wi-Fi, bringing higher speed and capacity, lower latency and more advanced traffic management. These enhanced capabilities strengthen Wi-Fi's ability to support high traffic loads (from many devices in the same unit), hyperdense deployments, and latency-sensitive services such as online gaming with increased spectrum efficiency, range, reliability and security.

Communitywide wireless is an optimal model for facilitating 5G and Wi-Fi 6 connectivity. Think about it: How can residents work, stream and benefit from a property's smart solutions – locks, security cameras, Amazon lockers and more – if the community doesn't have a broadband mentality focused on providing connectivity propertywide?

NEXT-GEN PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

Self-guided tours and short-term rentals are buzzing across the multifamily housing industry.

By offering self-guided tours, properties can cost-effectively showcase the unique features and amenities of their communities to a larger number of prospective residents. Visitors can use a connected mobile device that's preprogrammed with auto-lock codes to get access to individual spaces. Communitywide wireless makes this option feasible by providing a "connectivity layer" that blankets the entire property with secure Wi-Fi. Imagine what property managers can do with all that extra time – all while ensuring lease-ups.

Then there are shorter-term occupant opportunities. The National Multifamily Housing Council estimates that 65 percent of recent

Airbnb bookings were in multifamily buildings. Meanwhile, 43 percent of property managers report short-term rentals have been booked without their approval. Forward-looking owners are seeking to change that by taking a stake in this market.

How will seamless internet be provided if a community network isn't established? Truck rolls and appointments with a cable provider aren't realistic for short-term guests; the property wins when the wireless network is preinstalled, ready to handle a revolving door of visitors, and can manage the end-to-end experience with digital solutions such as connected door locks and mobile check-in.

COMMUNITY NETWORKS BOOST BOTTOM LINE

Blanketing multifamily communities with a single network can increase net operating income and property value by providing greater, long-term participation in the revenue stream. It allows owners to better balance cost objectives and revenue goals thanks to bulk-billed and wholesale models. Lower energy costs, reduced maintenance costs, and improved security are just a few of the other advantages.

It's an exciting time for the broadband industry. A new era of connectivity brings challenges, but owners who focus on propertywide, convenient internet service will set themselves up for success in the 5G world. ❖

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