

# Here Are Some Chips and Salsa to Get You Started

MDU broadband providers have only one chance to create an excellent first impression during customer onboarding.

By Bryan J. Rader / *Pavlov Media*

**F**irst impressions are everything. When people walk into a hotel, they can tell within seconds what the culture is like by how they're greeted. When a person enters a car dealership, he or she can quickly sense what the buying experience might be like. At some private resorts, servers offer champagne to customers before check-in.

I've always called these "first impression moments," and smart companies seize the opportunity to make the most of them. Consider a good Mexican restaurant where servers bring bowls of chips with a variety of salsas (and maybe even guacamole!) after guests are seated. Free chips and salsa are always a great first impression tactic.

In the broadband business, the "chips and salsa" first impression (also called "onboarding") is defined when a resident tries to use service for the first time. It's often a make-or-break moment for multiple dwelling units (MDUs).

## ONBOARDING DONE RIGHT

At Upstream Network, we took first impressions very seriously. When we prepared to launch a new condominium community, we held several evening events on-site to introduce our products, our team and the launch process to every condo resident. Technicians went to every condo to verify the quality of services, and we always had a team in the lobby to address any questions during the first few days or even weeks.

I remember hearing many compliments from residents about their initial positive experiences. What starts well generally ends well.

Many great companies in the MDU market take the onboarding process seriously. Much work goes into building a relationship with a property owner and designing the right program for the community. When the bulk agreement is finally executed, the real work begins. Property owners remember the first impression from the installation, not the negotiating process.

One challenge the MDU industry has always faced is the inertia that leads property owners to remain with their current providers. Many property owners have shared over the years that the headache of converting to a better solution is so disruptive. Furthermore, they don't have time to enter units, educate staff and sell residents on service.

Yes, but it doesn't have to be a full-on migraine headache if it is managed well. Sometimes, the throbbing pain in the

head comes from reading the negative reviews online from residents about their current provider. Getting it right and onboarding seamlessly can lead to better outcomes.

## PLANNING CUSTOMER TOUCH POINTS

Technology makes the onboarding process more accessible, but it still requires planning for every customer touch point – in person, by phone, via chat, etc. Providers must be ready to meet customers proactively regarding how they want to communicate. For instance, in upscale, high-rise buildings in Miami, customers preferred in-person and in-the-unit onboarding, and the process required bilingual staff.

Some operators leave marketing materials in the apartment next to a router or a modem. Is this enough when installing 200 new households in three days? Successful operators flood the property with communication in advance and maintain team members – including service personnel and technicians – on premises during the launch to ensure every resident is satisfied.

I toured several new properties recently launched by Pavlov Media and heard positive reviews about our onboarding process. Providers must take onboarding seriously when planning for hundreds of thousands of college students nationwide in a two-week window. Onboarding is often the difference between success and failure. For some MDUs, a poor start can never be overcome. Yes, it's possible to try to hit the reset button, but it is often hard to do.

I also have found that several weeks after launch is when a provider should check on customer satisfaction. Post-onboarding matters too, and what happens during the first few weeks will set the tone for the entire term.

I would love to hear your ideas about the successful launches your team has created for your clients. Getting the chips-and-salsa moment right at the beginning is key to the first impression of good service. ❖

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