

Ordering Pizza by Remote

Visions of the future of multifamily technology keep changing.
Are you ready for *today's* future?

By Bryan J. Rader / *UpStream Network*

In the 1990s, telecom providers were suddenly very excited about a new market they had discovered. After focusing for many years on single-family households in large metro areas, they identified apartment residents as their next big frontier.

They loved the growth, scale and geographic clustering in sunbelt cities such as Dallas, Atlanta and Phoenix. Dozens of new service providers popped up to target this newly found market.

At the time, all these companies made their money selling analog cable TV service, but they kept an eye on new, innovative products that would create additional revenue sources and differentiation.

In fact, GE Capital (yes, it was in this business at one time) developed something called Apartment 2000 to show property owners these innovations. It brought a full-scale, 1,150-square-foot apartment display to numerous apartment trade shows, where its salespeople touted the technologies of the future.

At the time, the chairman of GE Capital-ResCom said that “residents will be able to shop for and purchase just about anything from the convenience of their apartment, where they can choose from thousands of movies whenever they want.” GE called Apartment 2000 a “hands-on, walk-through glimpse of the future.”

The most popular idea for this future was the ability to order a pizza directly from the TV remote control. GE brought this up in every sales meeting.

Around the same time, the real estate developer JPI produced a telecom view of the apartment future called Project 2000. JPI’s concept involved the ability to adjust a thermostat by telephone, the inclusion of high-speed internet access in each apartment, surround sound, video on demand and pizza ordering via TV. (What is it with apartment residents and pizza?)

The telecom predictions of the late 1990s imagined a world that brought more conveniences to apartment customers. Developers and providers wanted to make apartments seem more like single-family homes, with smart-home features and in-unit entertainment concepts.

One of my favorite Apartment 2000 dreams was the smart refrigerator, which took inventory of everything residents purchased and printed out a notice when it was time to re-order grocery items such as eggs or cheese.

Over the past 20 years, some of these ideas have become reality in one way or another. On-demand movies, smart thermostats and shopping from home are core parts of today’s digital lifestyle. But it took 20 years for some of these futuristic applications to take hold.

What would you like to see now if you were visiting an Apartment 2030 or Project 2030 trade show booth? It’s an interesting question, and I’m sure there are dozens of opinions about what technologies might be included.

TODAY’S FUTURE: INSTANT GRATIFICATION

Earlier this year, the National Multifamily Housing Council partnered with architecture firm KTGy to conceptualize the apartment of the future (10 years from now). Their conclusions emphasized “instant gratification” and “on-demand access” to goods and services (think Netflix or Amazon Prime).

One idea was a 3D printer in each unit that would allow residents to print their own furniture at the touch of a button. Other concepts included a “co-working space” for telecommuters within a property and a collaboration amphitheater space with a large video screen for residents to work together. Finally, a “wellness spa” offering a digital detox environment with a sauna, steam room and green spaces was included.

Of course, pizza ordering in the future wasn’t addressed. If it had been, I’m sure it would involve delivering locally sourced, organic ingredients to an apartment so a robot could make gluten-free pizza just as the resident’s driverless car dropped him or her off at the end of the day.

How will the future apartment affect your technology business? Being prepared for Apartment 2030 is important for all of us – even those who don’t like pizza. ❖

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