

Communicating With Multifamily Community Members

Technology offers options for communicating with residents and prospective residents efficiently and effectively.

By Jason Watts / *Multifamily Broadband Council and Perfect-10*

Whether you are a leasing agent with an urgent message or a third-party vendor trying to sell your wares, communicating with multifamily residents can be challenging. In my first apartment in Austin, Texas, I had frequent water pressure issues and often came home to find a flyer from the front office taped to my front door, letting me know about a potential shut-off the next day. Sometimes I might get a call from front-office staff. Both of these took property staff time away from their regular positions and were inefficient – plus, there were always flyers blowing around the property. It wasn't a great way to get messages out there. For vendors, door hanging was tough, so most leaned on direct mail, which has a very low response rate.

As internet speeds got faster and computer usage increased, more resident mass communication came in the form of email. Email feels productive, given how quickly a property manager can compose and send a message to multiple recipients. This method is also popular among vendors trying to sell to community members, but properties don't always share resident contact information with third parties. Besides, fewer than 25 percent of emails are even opened, so email may not be the best answer.

OMG, LOL, BRB 🤪

At last, text messaging arrived. Studies have shown that 90 percent of text messages are opened within three minutes! That's an impressive number and a very efficient way to get a message seen. Property management companies can establish their own group text services, but multifamily software companies often include text messaging in their suite of services. It can be tougher for vendors to get access to community members' cell phone numbers, but if they participate in community events, the community might include their messages with the ones they send.

Social media was the next big thing in community engagement. Communities can use social media to communicate with existing residents and with prospective residents. Vendors can drive additional interest in their products by increasing their social media presences as well. They can piggyback off the properties' social media by

following the properties or by liking and commenting on a property's posts.

THINKING OUTSIDE THE POLYGON

Lately, I've worked with customers to get even more creative in our marketing efforts, using geofence marketing, a location-based mobile advertising technology powered by latitude and longitude data.

If you've ever pulled into a store parking lot and gotten a pop-up ad for that store on your phone, you've experienced geofence marketing. A marketing company draws a virtual polygon around a property to create a threshold. When someone crosses that threshold, messaging can be sent directly to the person's phone. The property in question doesn't have to be yours. I can imagine a property manager drawing a polygon around the leasing office of a competitive property and pushing messages to phones in that area to direct prospective tenants to his property.

A student housing property might launch a geofence campaign that targets the football stadium on a Saturday. The University of Texas Darrell K Royal football stadium holds 100,000 people, and I'll bet every one of them carries a cellphone. Or a property manager can simply use geofencing as an additional tool to reach community members. When a resident opens the weather channel app while on the property, a banner ad appears at the bottom of the screen, reminding him or her of the communitywide volleyball tournament the next weekend.

The possibilities are wide open with this new technology.

There are many different ways to communicate with multifamily community members, and there's no one strategy that's right for every situation. If you've got a favorite tactic, drop me a line and let me know. I'd love to hear what others are doing to stay connected with community members. ❖

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