

# Apartment All-Stars Offer Ample Marketing Ideas

Even the most clever and creative ideas for marketing apartment communities can become stale in less than six months. That's why the Apartment All-Stars—Lisa Trosien, Kate Good, Mindy Williams and Tracey Hopkins—provided 90 marketing ideas in 90 minutes during their 2005 NAA Education Conference & Exposition session last month.

The fast-paced seminar kept the overflow audience focused on one suggestion or example after another, each applying to customized customer service, creative marketing pieces, best-uses for community rooms and pool areas, welcome gifts, amenities, pet services and interior design, among other things.

The All-Stars emphasized the importance of promoting a resort-like feel that comes with the community, reminding the audience that home is the No. 1 travel destination. It also reinforced the thought that community managers should identify specific needs and tastes of their residents and act accordingly.

Not all 90 ideas are listed below, but following are some of the high points discussed at the session.

- Because 38 percent of residents participate in a sports league, form a bowling, softball or volleyball team and alert residents on how to participate.
- More than one-third of those who have a pet own a dog. So, host a "Yappy Hour" instead of a "Happy Hour" where dog-owners and their dogs can convene, creating a popular social event. By also providing a dog-grooming center, residents will see how much the community cares about animals.
- Track the type of retail packages

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delivered to the leasing office. If an abundance of them come from Avon, host an Avon party. Or, display the catalogs of online retailers popular among residents.

- Communities should promote many of the basic maintenance duties they already perform. This creates an impression of even more amenities. For example, tell prospects how often the air ducts are cleaned or point out that each apartment passes a 190-point inspection before move-in.

- A community's Web site pages should offer a clickable link that translates the text into Spanish.
- When choosing images for the community's Web site, consider displaying comparison photos such as the size of a hotel room vs. a corporate housing unit. And images of the pool should include happy children and their parents playing in the water, not an empty pool.
- The community room should be used by residents, and not simply designed for aesthetic reasons. Hold a Sunday brunch with made-to-order omelets and the Sunday paper.
- Create a study room for the children of residents to do their homework, considering that most youths attend the same school and have the same assignments.
- Allow residents to paint their walls a color of their choice.
- The most popular welcome gifts

today are computer memory sticks, laptop lights and cell phone covers. Surveys show more than 80 percent of those who receive valuable gifts remember who gave them the gift.

- Valuable coupons and gift cards for things such as free gasoline are a better alternative to rent concessions.
- Invite people who visit the Web site to take a short exit survey. Phrase the invitation, "Before you leave us, we'd like to see if we were of help to you." This creates an opportunity for communication flow and allows communities to capture the e-mail, phone number or other pertinent information about who is logging on to their site.
- Build a mini-model of one of your apartments and display it in the local mall. It can create a buzz about a community and give prospects a better sense of the community's floor plans and grand design.
- Clever and creative words can set an apartment apart. For example, one community's listing said it offered residents a "lobby ambassador," which is a fancy way of describing a doorman.
- In an effort to climb on the eBay bandwagon, one community displayed a designed apartment featuring decorative items purchased exclusively on eBay.
- Don't settle on just promoting the benefits of the community. Do some research and highlight some of the other features that the neighborhood offers, such as parks, shopping and cultural events.
- Senior housing design should include wall outlets that are at waist level, toggle switches for lighting and door handles instead of doorknobs. All are easier for seniors to operate. ■