

# Clean, Clear Communication Keeps Residents Coming Back

BY LISA TROSIEN

When is the last time serious consideration was given to the way you communicate with your residents? Today, everything that is seen or touched by the customer sends a marketing message; and letters, e-mails, forms, newsletters, flyers and signage are not exceptions.

**Form Letters.** Form letters, unless it's a case of extreme urgency to get a notice out, never should be used. With today's software packages, it is simple to send personalized notices to each and every resident. Photocopies that are so over-copied that the printed message literally appears slanted off the page send a strong message to residents: "You're not important now and you really never were. So we don't even take the time to send you an original letter." And worse yet (if there is anything worse than that) are the ones that have the "fill in the blank" after the word "dear" in the greeting on the letter.

**E-mail.** All e-mails should include a salutation at the top of the page, such as "Dear Mr. Smith" and a signature line at the bottom. A correct signature line should be no more than six lines and should include: your name; your title; your property or company; your phone number; your property Web site; your property tag line (if you have one).

No overly fancy fonts or unprofessional colors should be used. Times New Roman or Arial are effective fonts. If you are not sure about what color to choose, black is always a good choice. Do not add any personal information to the tagline; this is your professional e-mail address and should be treated as such.

**Surveys.** Survey and information forms should be crisp, clear and easy to read. The rule about using over-copied

materials applies here as well. If forms that are intended for residents to complete are not self-explanatory, include a set of instructions.

**Newsletters.** Newsletters are another area where properties can either excel or fail miserably. While in-house newsletters designed by onsite staff are wonderful if done well, it is readily apparent to the reader when no time or effort has gone into the production of the newsletter. Quick, thrown-together newsletters appear to be just that—and tell residents that management doesn't care about them. Newsletter services guarantee that the job is done well and done on time. Check into the possibility of producing an e-mailed, virtual newsletter. This will save on delivery time. Offering residents an option for their newsletter indicates that you are sensitive to their needs, as well as being environment-friendly. Content should be interesting. Welcoming new residents, thanking current residents for their renewals, local community information and more should be in a good community newsletter. Not sure what content would be of interest? Ask residents what they would like to see.

**Flyers.** Whether or not the flyers produced by the office are to promote resident activities or to inform residents of an inconvenience (such as parking lot resurfacing, utility shut off, etc.) there is no excuse for sloppy, handwritten signage. Desktop publishing software makes placing the community logo on the flyer easy, which makes the flyer appear more professional and official.

**Performing a spell-check is essential.** If it is not available in the software package, check accuracy by using a dictionary before posting the notice. If

desktop publishing capability is not available or affordable, ask the team member who has the most legible and neat handwriting design the notes. Lastly, do not sign your notices or flyers with "The Management." Use positive phrasing, such as "Your team at XYZ Apartments."

**Signage.** Signage and banners also send strong messages to residents, as well as prospects. Peeling paint, burned out bulbs and dead, overgrown landscaping appearing near a sign all indicate bad maintenance, bad service and bad attitude. Just as hallways and apartment homes need continuous maintenance and touch up, so does signage.

**Hand-written Notes.** Lastly, does communicating with residents only take place when there is something bad to say? Personalized, hand-written notes are always a welcome sight in a resident's mailbox. Thanking residents for their renewal, for keeping their balcony or patio extra nice or congratulating them on some recent success are always great reasons for sending personalized notes. It also is worth dropping one to a resident whom you haven't seen in awhile, just asking them how they are doing. Positive mail is always appreciated, no matter whom it is from.

Remember that everything you do in your job as an onsite professional touches the resident. Keeping that in mind with your communications is essential in maintaining your occupancy and your reputation as a great place to live. ■



*Lisa Trosien has more than 20 years of industry experience, as well as expertise on targeted uses of the Internet. She can be reached via e-mail at [lisa@apartmentexpert.com](mailto:lisa@apartmentexpert.com).*