



Onsite Solutions

Reprinted with permission from the May 2002 issue of UNITS magazine, published by the National Apartment Association (NAA). For more information about NAA, please visit www.naahq.org or call 703/518-6141.

Staying Connected To Your Residents: It's Easier than You Think

BY LISA TROSIEEN

A couple of weeks ago, I cancelled my service with my cellular phone company. I was unhappy with the service and I really didn't feel that they were going to make any changes to improve the service any time soon. So, after three years, we parted company. Now remember, the only time I ever heard from them was when I received my monthly bill. Amazingly, within 48 hours of canceling my account, I received this e-mail from the company:

Ms. Trosien,

I would like to inform you that we have received your e-mail regarding cancellation of your account. You have been a customer since March 1999, and we would like to keep you as a customer because you are a valued customer. We apologize for any inconvenience that you may have experienced with us and would like to make an offer of a free month of service and an additional hour of talk time for next month to keep your services active with us. Please inform us regarding your decision to cancel your services. This will enable us to improve the quality of our services. We appreciate your business and hope that you will keep your services with us. If we do not hear from you by March 6, 2002, your account will cancel. If you would like to resume services please contact us before this date.

If you need additional information or assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Customer Solutions
Contact Center

Needless to say, they were too late. I already had signed a contract with my new cellular phone company. But I saved the e-mail because it reminds me of what we often do wrong in the multifamily industry.

How often do we send a positive note to our customers (residents)? How often do we say, "Thanks for always paying your rent on time" or "Thanks for keeping your balcony (or patio) so neat."? How often do we just stop and talk to our residents? Yes, we have resident activities and we send out community newsletters, but how many of our residents do we really connect with on a regular basis? Not enough.

Here's a simple way to ensure that you are staying in contact with your residents on a regular basis that only takes minutes per day. It's based on a 50-week work year and a five-day work week (250 working days per year). Here's how it works:

Write one note to five different residents per day: 5 notes x 250 days = 1,250 notes/year

Call three residents per day just to check in and be friendly: 3 calls x 250 days = 750 calls/year

Pay a personal visit to five res-

idents per month (chat with them in the office; stop them in the parking lot when you see them; visit with them in the laundry room—you get the idea) 5 visits x 12 months = 60 visits

Total resident contacts per year: 2,060

You may increase or decrease the number of calls, visits or notes sent based on the size of your community. However, each resident should hear from you or your team at least twice per year in a positive fashion.

Clearly, this is a simple, easy-to-implement program that takes little time. Take the time to make a difference in how your team is perceived by your residents; send positive messages each day. Not only will it improve relations with your residents, you'll enjoy contacting residents for a positive reason for a change. ■

Lisa Trosien is an author, educator and consultant with more than 20 years of industry experience, as well as being an expert on targeted uses of the Internet. She is a frequent presenter for NAA and currently serves on the Communications Advisory Board for Units. Trosien can be reached via e-mail at lisa@apartmentexpert.com