



Onsite Solutions

Are Your Print Ads as Effective as They Could Be?

BY LISA TROSIEN

You, like thousands of other apartment professionals across the country, advertise in print publications. And, like thousands of others, you probably don't make the most of that advertising space. If your ad shows either (a) a picture of your pool or (b) a picture of your sign, you've failed. You've also failed if your advertisement doesn't include the following:

- **Your e-mail address**

In this age of the Internet, you need to have your e-mail address clearly listed so your prospective residents can utilize e-mail to contact you for further information. (Don't forget your fax number either.)

- **Your Web site address**

If you haven't already launched a Web site for your community, find out what your unique URL is with one of the online publications where you are advertising and use that.

- **Starting rents**

One of the purposes of your ad is to help pre-qualify residents to your community. Do both them and you a favor and list your starting rents, preferably by style, such as, "One-bedrooms from \$ ____; two-bedrooms from \$ ____" etc.

- **Directions on how to get your community, plus a map** Let's face it: some folks are "directionally impaired" and cannot follow a map of any kind. That's why written directions are also needed in an effective advertisement. Make sure you list your hours of operation as well as any specific instructions about showing, such as "Last apartment shown at dusk."

- **Relevant copy**

Your copy needs to change with your inventory as well as with the seasons. For

example, the first thing on most prospects' minds in January in the Midwest is probably not your pool. But your free gas heat is undoubtedly a huge selling point; so make sure that is listed prominently in your ad. Conversely, your free heat isn't generally at the top of the list on an 85-degree day in July, so make sure you mention that pool early in those summertime advertisements. Adjust your selling features by your region and by the demand.

- **A great headline**

Please, unless you are required to by the publication, DO NOT use the name of your community as your headline. Think about it: prospective residents moving into your municipality have probably never even heard of your community. But they undoubtedly know what they are looking for in a new apartment home. Which headline works best for the family that wants a convenient location? The name of the community, or a headline that says, "Minutes to Everything!" Think about it.

- **A floor plan**

Today's renters are savvy, smart, and quite often, renting by choice. This means that they are very interested in knowing what the floor plan looks like before they even pick up the telephone. Give them a break—put a floor plan in your advertisement. Preferably the floor plan that has the highest availability at your community.

- **A photo of one of your buildings**

Just as today's renter wants to see their potential floor plan, they also would like to see what their building looks like. Now that you've decided to take out the picture of the sign and the pool, you'll have plen-

ty of room for a photo of a building in which your residents reside.

- **Something that makes the ad stand out**

Look through the publication in which you're advertising. Make sure that your ad looks as different as possible from the rest of the ads. If everyone is in color, try black and white (it's cheaper, too). If everyone is using a single page, upgrade to a two-page ad for a while. Try putting people back in your ad again. It's being done in markets across the United States and it's great to see ads that look like people actually live in the apartments. Check with your attorney and the publication ahead of time to discuss any Fair Housing implications before you design your ad.

The purpose of your ad is to compel people to contact you in some way (by phone, fax, e-mail or personal visit). If you aren't sure what makes people contact your community, ask them! Your residents will certainly know why they came to visit the first time. Then, make sure you have all of your contact information clearly listed in your ad.

Lastly, remember that apartment communities are a lot like the people that live in them—they have personalities. Try to make the personality of your apartment community come to life through your advertisement. ■

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Reprinted with permission from the October 2001 issue of UNITS magazine, published by the National Apartment Association (NAA). For more information about NAA, please visit www.naaqh.org or call 703/518-6141.