

# All's Fair in Love and Lease Up. Or Is It?

*BY LISA TROSIEN*

**H**aving entered the fall season, and with traffic winding down at most communities across the country, marketers are being stretched to the limit to come up with new ways to increase rentals. Some ways are creative, innovative and effective. Some are not. Following are some of the methods being used in markets across the country. Judge for yourself: Is it all fair in love and lease up? Or not?

## EMPLOYEE POACHING

While working a lease up at a brand new community, a leading leasing professional came forward with a not-so-surprising revelation: She had been offered a job while showing the models to one of her property's competitors.

Is this an ethical thing to do? Many multifamily professionals are divided on the issue. Is it fair to try to "steal" an employee from a competitor?

One school of thought: If you were taking good care of your employee, they would not take the offer anyway so it is no big deal. The other school of thought: employee poaching never is acceptable; if their employee comes to you, it is one thing; if you shop your competitor with the goal of wooing them to your team, you are wrong.

## MASS MAILERS

Mass mailers (hated by managers across the country) are being used in even greater numbers. If you are planning a mass mailer, do you make the courtesy call and let your competitors know the mailer is on its way, or do you just let them receive it in the mail? Since the mailer is going to land on their desk anyway, a courtesy call may go a long way in preserving friendly competition.

## COMPETITION BOOKS

Some companies put together competition books, which are known by the competitors as the "slam book." In assembling a competition book, a property places unflattering photos of competitors' communities, right down to the views from the windows.



A leasing professional might ask, "Would you like our wonderful view of the forest preserve? Or would you rather look at the dumpsters behind the shopping center while living at XYZ Apartments?"

The competition book is shown to the prospect during this conversation, exposing them to the less-than-attractive attributes of the property's competitors.

### COPYCAT ADS

Apartment advertising also reflects the "all's fair" philosophy. Advertisements for apartment communities are being imitated so much so that in some instances they may actually come close to copyright infringement. Is it worth the potential legal fallout to show your total lack of imagination in advertisement design? If your competitor's print ad is so great that you want to copy it—DON'T. Design your own, more effective ad. Or hire the ad agency that put their ad together to create a new ad for your community.

### FLYERING

Flyering in suburban properties occurs when a community is experiencing a down time in its marketing efforts. Flyers of the community are placed on the windshields of the cars in the parking lots of the competitor. While this may get you a littering violation from the municipality where your competitor is located, is it worth the effort? One community, after seeing the flyers on their residents' cars, removed every sin-

gle flyer from their residents' cars and returned them to the competitor with a polite request that they refrain from flyering again. The competitor complied.

### TELEMARKETING

In what some might call the ultimate in desperate marketing measures, some communities actually tele-market renters in their demographic area. They then ask the residents if they are happy in their current apartment and offer them great incentives to move. With the public outcry against telemarketers, this probably is not a good technique.

"We'll Beat Any Concession." This makes the leasing professional sound like a car salesman. "Get their best offer in writing and we will beat it." Prospective residents are pounding the pavement these days to get their very best deal (in writing) to take back to their community. Managers are then beating the deal, sometimes by only a dollar, in an attempt to keep the resident at their community. Do you like the idea of spending an hour or two with a prospect who has absolutely no intention of moving to your community, but is only using you to get their best deal?

### BANNERS/BANDIT SIGNS

The use of banners and bandit signage always increases with vacancies. And

because many municipalities do not allow temporary signage, some properties have taken it upon themselves to enforce the sign ordinance. They either remove

competitors' signs or actually call the city to complain about them. Bandit signage use has not only increased, it has grown more bold—with some properties placing the signs immediately outside the entrances of their nearest competitor.

Decide for yourself what is fair and what's not about these marketing ideas. But just remember, the marketing

ploy you use on your competitor today could be used on your community tomorrow. ■

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