



Onsite Solutions

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How to Make Branding Work

BY LISA TROSIEN

Is there such a thing as brand loyalty in multifamily management? Ask 10 different people and you'll probably get 10 different answers.

With all the talk about "branding" these days, few companies have discovered the real secret of branding—brand *internally* first.

Today's employees need to know that everything they do and say sends a marketing message.

For example: A maintenance technician leaves a resident's apartment home with the repair completed. However, she/he has tracked mud onto the carpet, left dirty handprints on countertops and signed off on the service request with an illegible signature. *Marketing message:* We don't respect you.

A leasing professional working with the prospect doesn't have adequate knowledge of the local neighborhood or competitive communities. *Marketing message:* We are just here to rent apartments; if you need to know other things, find out for yourself.

A manager is never available for resident problems as she/he only works Monday through Friday, from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m.—hours that are completely inconvenient for the residents of the community. *Marketing message:* Our hours are company convenient, not customer friendly.

While thousands of dollars are spent on signage, media, Web sites, models and more, many companies haven't developed an

orientation program to help instill their company philosophy. This is a crucial step in not only ensuring employee retention, but beginning the critical process of internally branding the company's marketing message as well.

All of your team members must buy in to the marketing message that your company is trying to sell. How? Involve them in the process by asking them for both feedback and suggestions. When you have a finished product, make certain they see it before the public does.

Does your company have a mission statement? Some companies offer payments to staff member who can recite the mission statement on demand. But much more important than being able to recite the mission statement is the ability of an employee to *explain* the mission statement and how they can support it in their daily routine.

The Ritz-Carlton Hotel has embraced the idea of internal branding through their training program, "Line Up." Line Up occurs each day in each department throughout the entire Ritz-Carlton organization. During Line Up, each department manager discusses the same lesson for the day (for example, providing a warm welcome) with their employees. The lesson may be supported by an article, a testimonial letter or perhaps a personal experience an employee has had. Then, each employee describes

how he or she will exemplify the lesson for the day in their work. It's the Ritz-Carlton's way of ensuring that all of their employees are focusing on the same thing on the same day. A perfect example of internal branding.

If your advertising tells a story about your product, make sure your team members know the story. If your company has a service guarantee, make certain everyone not only understands the guarantee, but also understands their role in supporting the guarantee.

While the jury is still out on whether or not branding works with apartment residents, one thing is for certain: until you successfully brand your marketing message with your employees, your prospects and residents will never become "brand loyal." ■

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