



Onsite Solutions

Increasing Your Community's Future Resident Traffic

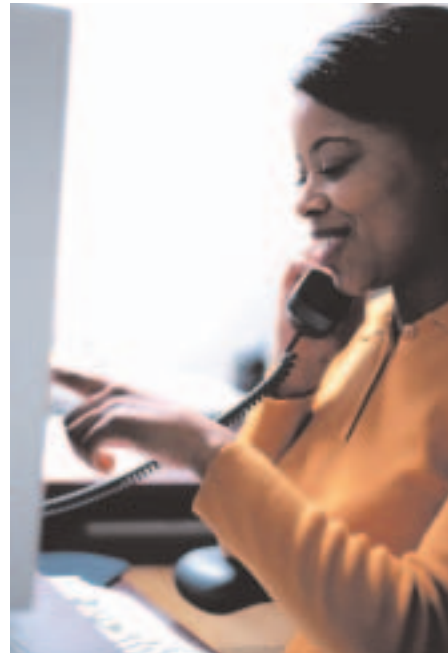
The scenario is all too familiar in the multifamily housing industry; no walk-ins are coming through the doors to view your apartment homes. You start to get a little bit nervous. You call a sister community or your closest competitor and casually ask, "How's your traffic?" "GREAT!" they reply. "We're leasing like crazy." You ask yourself why if they are getting traffic, your community is not getting any.

Phone Techniques

Smart owners and managers know that a drop off in walk-in traffic is often times directly related to less than stellar phone techniques. If you're not sure how well your team is doing on the phone, have someone call them and test them. Notice I didn't say to "shop" them. Oftentimes, hired shoppers try too hard to keep the leasing professional on the telephone as the shopper has a whole sheet of questions that need to be answered in order to "successfully" shop the community. Real prospective residents have no such sheet. They ask a simple question, such as "How much are your two bedrooms?" When the leasing professional responds with the price and price alone, the real apartment prospect doesn't stay on the line asking, such questions as "What does that include?" or "Can you tell me a little bit about your apartments?" The real apartment prospect says, "Thank you" and hangs up. Total time elapsed: usually under ten seconds.

Phone Tips

Here are two ways to help your leasing teams make an immediate impact on their telephone traffic. First, DO NOT allow them to immediately provide a price. Encourage



them to respond with a conversational statement, such as "I can help you with that," immediately followed by a qualifying question, such as "When do you need to move into our apartment community?" In this set of events, the leasing professional has deflected the price issue (at least momentarily), but more importantly, has begun building the relationship with the prospect. Other questions that could be asked of the prospect include: How many persons will be living in the apartment home? Is there anything special you are looking for in your new apartment home such as...(here, the leasing professional inserts two or three features of her own apartment community).

Following the training of that particular skill set, provide each leasing professional with a new, 8 x 11 pad of paper. Across the top of each sheet, have them write, "What

did I really learn about my future resident?" At the end of each telephone call, have them write down what they learned about the caller. Chances are, their first few phone calls recorded in this fashion will have fairly sparse information. But as they learn to really talk to their prospect and determine their needs, their sheets will fill up with information. Correspondingly, their walk-in traffic (as well as their closing percentages) should increase.

At the same time, reassess your community's marketing efforts, as well as your curb appeal. Perhaps the phone callers never make it to the leasing center as something about the community's appearance deters them.

In short, don't be passive about a drop-off in walk in traffic to your community. It often has far greater ramifications than you think. ■

Telephone Presentation is one program in NAA's National Apartment Leasing Professional (NALP) course. Contact your local apartment association for NALP details.

Lisa Troisen is an author, educator and consultant with more than 20 years of industry experience, as well as an expert on targeted uses of the Internet for all facets of the housing industry. She is a frequent presenter for the National Apartment Association and has served on the Units Editorial Advisory Board.

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