



Onsite Solutions

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Marketing Isn't a Department: It's Your Job

By LISA TROSIEEN

Even before the events of Sept. 11, 2001, markets across the United States were seeing downturns in their numbers. Cities were citing traffic slowdowns of up to 40 percent from the same time last year. One-bedrooms, typically a unit type that hints at a slowing economy, were showing higher vacancy numbers as residents “doubled up” into two-bedrooms instead of leasing a one-bedroom on their own. Condominium developers, nervous about turning over a “for sale” product, are actually shifting some developments from for sale to rental.

Even though some economists are predicting that this market should actually start to show an upswing in the second or third quarter of the year, you can't wait that long. You have to get your community going now. Here's a list of ten things you should already be doing:

1. Stop complaining about no traffic. Create traffic. That's your job. Start an outreach marketing program. Visit area merchants. Stop by the local schools. Develop a civic marketing program. Make sure that every person who meets you knows that you work at the best apartment community in town.

2. Treat your telephone like a cash machine. It costs hundreds of dollars to get a prospect to pick up the phone—give that call the respect that it deserves and build

a relationship with the caller.

3. Analyze your advertising sources. Which ones are working? Can they work even better? Will upgrading your online ad or your print ad bring in more prospects?

4. Are you advertising online? Remember, the fastest growing sector of Internet users have an income of \$35,000 and below. Maybe your profile is using the Internet and you just haven't tapped that market yet.

5. If you are advertising online, are you updating your ads regularly? The Internet provides you with the ability to respond immediately to market shifts. Are your photos compelling? Does your copy make the prospect want to contact you?

6. How quickly are you responding to e-mailed requests for information? Most prospects expect an answer within one hour or less.

7. Do you have a referral network in place? Just because you are sitting with vacant one-bedrooms doesn't mean that your toughest competitor is. Swallow your pride, pick up the phone and let your competitor know that you need one-bedroom traffic. Maybe they need two-bedroom traffic and you can cross-refer. You won't know until you try.

8. Hold your next staff meeting in the apartment home that has been vacant the longest. Don't let anyone leave the meet-

ing without coming up with three reasons why that apartment home should be rented that day.

9. Have your maintenance team show you all the great features and benefits of your apartments from a maintenance point of view. You'll be amazed at what you'll learn and they'll appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the sales and marketing effort of the community.

10. Phone shop some other major apartment markets to learn some great new phone techniques. There's usually someone out there who's doing a great job who can teach you a thing or two on the phone.

Don't let a slow-down in traffic slow your community down. These ten tips can help to increase the number of residents in your community and let potential residents know it exists. ■

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 for all facets of the multifamily housing industry. She is a frequent presenter for the National Apartment Association and has served on the Units Editorial Advisory Board.