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# Lease-Ups: Six Ways to Leverage Touch Technology

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by Tom Schek | Aug 06, 2013



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In the last five years, the touch screen interface has become almost omnipresent. Multi-touch, gesture-sensitive screens are found on everything from public kiosks to our personal electronic devices. One of the more recent innovations is the use of large touch panels and touch-surface tables to provide property information and virtual tours at multifamily communities.

Sometimes referred to as “experiential technology” when used in this way, the devices help prospective residents experience the property through floor plan renderings, photos of amenities, details on unit finishes, videos and more, all accessed with swipes, taps and pinches that create a very visceral, and consequently very memorable, experience. Visitors can also gain a better understanding of the surrounding area by reviewing information on restaurants, shopping, transportation, schools, etc.

Sales and leasing agents benefit from the panels as well, especially during lease-up when the interface encourages prospective residents to provide their contact and housing interest information in the form of guest cards, which they can access later from the community’s website or email to themselves.

“Touch panel technology is proven to optimize workflow for employees and simplify the lives of residents,” says Susan Maxwell, director of real estate for award-winning Denver developer Zocalo Community Development. “We use the technology to enhance standard apartment operations.”

Zocalo turned to a pioneer in the new field of immersive virtual property tours for the touch panel software, website and overall branding for their LEED-registered 2020 Lawrence community. Engrain, a Denver company with two decades of marketing and technology experience, including projects for Fortune 500 notables like ESPN and Ford Motor Company, was one of the first to see the potential for touch interfaces in real estate.

“Introducing a self-service element to the sales and leasing process through a virtual tour platform like our TouchTour system has really changed the dynamic for the better,” says Brent Steiner, Engrain president and CEO. “What often used to feel like a pitch presented by the leasing agent is now an *exploration* driven by the visitor. And even though they are empowered to take the conversation in any direction they

choose, they're still receiving a consistent marketing message based on the carefully cultivated information available from the unit."

As engaging and enlightening as experiential technology can be, it is only effective when deployed strategically. Simply mounting the panel on a wall, plugging it in and importing a photo gallery doesn't begin to truly take advantage of this powerful new communication medium.

To fully leverage touch technology during lease-up, keep these thoughts in mind:

**1. Get eyes on the prize** – Your display must be well-designed and visually stimulating. A bland "catalogue" of uninspired photos or lifeless property descriptions will do nothing to entice a visitor to explore further. Craft an eye-catching experience for them, calling on a design firm if appropriate.

**2. Relevance is rewarded** – The more relevant the information you provide, the more satisfying the virtual tour is and the more likely a prospective resident is going to be interested in continuing the conversation with the leasing agent.

**3. Steer to a second screen** – A virtual property tour, followed by a physical one, indicates a certain level of curiosity. A return to the property details on a smartphone or tablet is a sign of serious interest. Be sure that visitors are aware of all access options before they leave your office.

**4. Require team training** – While one of the best features of a touch interface is that it is very intuitive for visitors, teaching your sales and leasing team how, when and why to use the panel can make a big difference in the effectiveness of their interaction.

**5. Don't wait to update** – Prospective residents typically visit a property more than once before making their final decision. Revise your content regularly to ensure that it is current and interesting.

**6. Capitalize on connections** – Integration with the sales and leasing team's property management software streamlines the collection of visitor information, making your team more efficient. Be sure your virtual tour system links to the other programs you use.

Touch technology can give a multifamily community a distinct competitive advantage over other properties. Make sure you get the most out of your investment by fully leveraging its capabilities.

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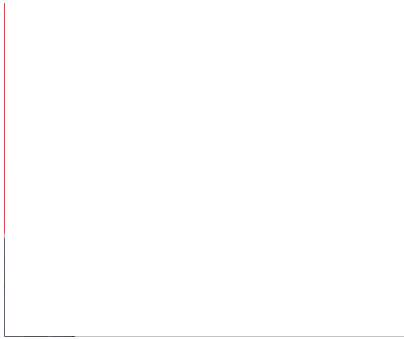
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