



# The wow factor

"We're having a great day at Winding Ridge apartments. This is Mary. How can I help you?" An electronic voice on the other end of the line responds to the greeting, "You have a Website prospect looking for an A2 floor plan on September 1. The name is Jana Smith and the phone number is 214-555-5555, extension 102. Would you like to accept the call? Press 1. To deny, press 2."

LEE O'CONNOR

Welcome the next generation of apartment marketing and leasing where integrated, smart systems merge Internet technologies with telecommunications. Get ready, because our professions will never be the same and its happening right now.

Communities are operating in a fiercely competitive environment attempting to capture their fair share of resident dollars, while controlled expense management assists in coveted asset returns. Cutting edge telecommunications such as this "click-to-call" Website script are bringing qualified prospects to our properties with limited expense and a technological "wow factor" that has not been experienced since 2000. These new telecommunication components create a call to action in the minds of our prospects, eliminating the passive position we operate in today. Thanks to VOIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) products such as click-to-talk, virtual call center, click-to-chat and call reporting/management, our Internet prospect is just a telephone away.

Click-to-call is a very sophisticated communications program wrapped in a simple, automated package which any management company or apartment community can take advantage.

To see this system in action, a person only has to visit the American Airlines' online reservation system, to view a button on the

far right side of the screen inviting Website visitors to fill out a simple contact form and a sales agent will place an outbound telephone call to the phone number entered.

Since the AA.com system is supported by



call center that company is able to use a 24-hour static button, unlike the majority of apartment communities which do not have the operating budget to do so. Those communities can still take advantage of this

action during a prescribed time period.

Website reporting and online traffic analytics enable our communities to track site referrals and average visitor durations, while facilitating us to determine our best marketing strategies for online and offline media. Over the years we have determined that the visitor experience is elevated when information presented online is current, informative and specific for consumer leasing decisions. We know that the larger number of pages and features present in an apartment community Website, the longer the prospect will interact with the site. Using this information, a Webmaster can configure the "click-to-call" script to pre-qualify the Website visitor and triggering the pop up event only when the consumer visit passes an introductory duration. Imagine capturing our Internet visitors when they are in their most attentive state, while they are on our sites looking at our amenities, floor plans or virtual tours. And, to make things even simpler, the leasing team only has to answer the phone and accept the call to get an interested prospect live on the phone.

"Consumers on the Internet sometimes want anonymity so the click-to-chat Website script is perfect for those scenarios. Prepared quick responses can be created in advance allowing standardized communications to be presented with each consumer

type of technology, by applying some simple Web server date and time controls to display the button only when the office hours are active or open the form automatically in a pop up window to encourage prospect inter-



dent base informed and outbound field communications with contact tracking. "Our corporate call center is staffed 24-hours a day for leasing and resident services and this application is powerful in opening a dialog with our consumer base on demand. It has allowed us to be more effective in capturing Website visitors in their leasing decisions." Lynd represents a growing trend for management companies to operate specialized call center programs within their own management structures, many experiencing immediate success upon implementation. Alfredo is impressed with the click-to-talk services operating on their corporate Website, while currently reviewing options on implementing click-to-chat services also.

Now comes the question "How will we handle calls when our leasing team is preoccupied and we can't afford call center services?" comes to mind. Fair enough. The "virtual leasing office" service supported by VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) can address this issue. With smart call "busy-no answer" call forwarding services, a sister property's leasing staff can handle that active Internet consumer session. VoIP has some promising applications for the multi-family industry and we have only begun to envision its call management efficiencies and incredible cost savings. Communities can begin enjoying free long distance calling, reduced expense on marketing source tracking; management teams can complete call recording and auditing, along with robust incorporated call reporting and expense management tools. Some larger management companies such as Alliance Residential of Chicago already deployed such services. "This is a great way for us to manage and control telecom expenses" says Chris Finnetto, VP Operations, "With VoIP we have realized a 30 percent expense savings already this year." VoIP service providers typically support a Web-based console for the advanced, self administered management tools and operations. A solidly applied initial configuration will deliver the most effective results, taking into consideration time, talent, accessibility and staffing. Telecom providers want their clients to be successful and they are willing to provide guidance on system configuration and call route optimization. The best way to implement a new telecommunications system such as these presented is to do the research and determine what fits corporate needs. ■

interaction, while delivering time saving leasing results. Our site level teams who are trained to successfully answer the phone but often overlook a sound emitted from desktop computer, can have text to voice recognition deliver a phone call advising of a prospect that wishes to open a chat session. Best of all, Website traffic analytics can give the leasing team insight on their highest business day visitor traffic hours and the team can be online inviting a Website prospect to engage a live chat session. Envision an apartment prospect reviewing an apartment Website for unit information when a live message from the leasing center invites them to engage in a chat—there's that wow factor. Click-to-chat was created with call centers in mind, as call agents resident at a computer console can interact with a consumer with no distractions. "Click-to-chat" is an impressive, limited expense tool which our industry has not yet realized the convenience and business value." Says Boyer Taylor of ProVista Solutions, their call center service provides this system. "Both the click-to-chat and click-to-call applications can be used by the property leasing agents only, backed up by regional or corporate staff, or by our call center agents allowing each owner/manager

maximum control over their responses."

Alfredo Lopez, director of call center services at the Lynd Company, manages the



team at their corporate call center, in addition to working with the communities on keeping their Website content current, resi-

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