



**The power of
leasing remains with
integrated media**

battery or WiFi, and it's a simple way to compare information: rental rates, amenities, location."

"Print media is fully portable and that's the ultimate 'stickiness' to use a Web term," she continues. "Prospects use it while at home or on the go. It's useful when shopping communities as they tear out pages of interest, or mark pages as they go property to property. Many still use magazines for their entire search."

Bollinger points to recent research that indicates 70 percent of consumers use print publications to gather information, while 80 percent use the Web, a statistic she considers a strong argument when it comes to keeping print budgets in place.

Print seems unavoidable as marketers seek effective tools to reach qualified

renters. And just like any underdog, perceived or otherwise, print providers have done double-duty to maximize the accessibility and distribution outlets of their product, as well as integrate their brand cross-platform.

The print industry remains in play because of one hard cold fact: It works. And like the brick-and-mortar industry it serves, some institutions remain appropriate and effective in the human experience. The print industry has been around long enough to know that real trends don't happen overnight. They have built long-term business by tracking and responding to genuine consumer trends, rather than exuberantly following on the next big thing without analysis. Marketing is analytics, not a lemming line to Twitter.

"We are constantly reinventing the way the consumers find a place to live at *Apartment Guide*," explains Arlene Mayfield, president. "Our focus is connecting consumers and advertisers." Mayfield says that her company is constantly updating services and consumer platforms to capture renters' attention.

"Product life cycles are tightening. Consumers can be overwhelmed with choices. We encourage clients to keep their information tight and fresh with regard to their marketing message." She adds, "Our mobile platform provides a natural progression from our print and Internet programs, and keeps consumers dedicated to a single provider during their search."

Vying for ad dollars is a blood sport. Print providers have become top in the analytics game and in justifying their line item across a property's budget. It is, after all, about delivering leads for the dollar, and print media has become keen in showing value.

Even with the capricious cry for a brave new world without print, consider the unintended consequences of such a sweeping purge from a property owners' perspective. Over the years, the print industry's growth has been organic and shoulder-to-shoulder with the apartment industry, and certainly one of partnership. Its contribution to education, research and capital funding for local and national associations is significant and valuable to multifamily's economic health.

Today, the three interactive media companies provide fiscal sponsorships to local, state and national education programs.

"I am amazed at the professionalism shown by the *Apartment Finder* team and their tire-

less commitment to our industry," states Frank Barefield, president of Abbey Residential in Birmingham, Ala. "They provide Abbey with great training, seminars and leasing tools. They are one of the most active vendors supporting our local and national associations."

Such wide sweeping support comes from girth. Each of the major three media companies are divisions of larger communications enterprises: *Apartment Guide* is part of Consumer Source Inc., a PRIMEDIA company; For Rent Media Solutions is a division of Dominion Enterprises; and *Apartment Finder* belongs to Network Communications, Inc. All three share a stake in high level research, and demographic consumer data which they regularly publish to advertisers and the industry as a whole, at no cost.

Across the nation, these publishers deliver 5.5 million books each month to nearly 88 million prospective renters. The method of distribution varies: *Apartment Guide* and *For Rent* deliver to high-profile, consumer outlets such as grocers, video and convenience stores. *Apartment Guide* has an exclusive agreement with Blockbuster, while *For Rent* channels through Hollywood Video. *For Rent* is also exclusive with Safeway and Publix, while Albertsons and Kroger is cornered by *Apartment Guide*.

"We are successful in reaching consumers because we target high-traffic outlets," states Terry Slattery, president of *For Rent Media Solutions*. "We average a 96 percent pick-up rate on 2 million books monthly."

Each book offers unique distribution: *Apartment Finder* is the more grassroots or prospect-centric as it delivers to non-compensated locations such as nail salons, gas stations, coffee houses and oil changing stations. Each company continually reviews and re-tools their distribution sites, redirecting as much as 10 percent of their racks to enhance pick up rates.

Based on 30 percent of all Internet apartment searches originating from print, today's integrated media companies are responding in kind. And while their value propositions display a variety of strategy, they quickly align on the single point, deliver more leads per dollar.

To this end, *Apartment Finder* provides print, Web site and promotional products, such as community branded post cards, flyers, brochures, and marketing cards as their consumer engagement package.

Apartment Guide offers print, Web and mobile platforms. Since its initial availability in October 2008, its iPhone application has delivered 200,000 downloads and is listed as a "top free utility app" on the Apple



Marcia Bollinger is president of Apartment Finder. The company was acquired by Court Square Capital Partners in January of 2005. Its magazines are read by over 12 million readers and deliver more than one million leads to advertisers each month.

store Web site. Mayfield remarks, "Apartment Guide is moving heavily into the mobile marketplace with our cell phone-compatible browser, texting and tools."

For Rent features a social media strategy starting with print and followed by its online presence complete with online video, text messaging, iPhone application, mobile capabilities and content management. Slattery elaborates on this concept as a tie-in to consumer search patterns. "Consumers are changing the way they look for apartments. Where they once used newspapers for home searches, today, there is no single way to engage prospects. They have choices and we must respond. *For Rent* meets consumers where they are, helping them find apartments any time, any place and in the formats they are seeking."

Slattery says his organization emphasizes online apartment video, and that consumers are viewing thousands of these videos through the company's online distribution network. As consumers seek information, he believes it the responsibility of the media company to provide content. He adds that he relies on the community team to keep it accurate.

Information accessibility and usability is critical, adds Bollinger. "We just launched a 4.0 version of ApartmentFinder.com. Our new browser helps prospects narrow their search by letting them choose what features they seek in their next apartment." All three firms continue to optimize their Web sites' searchability to be more consumer-centric, adding features and time-saving controls.

It is said that print catalogs get a 15-second free spin on the consumer's attention, similar to a Web page. Then the reader must be engaged to continue. Ensuring advertising is successful, content is critical. Most agree that the way to make print and online advertising more effective is content. Said content might include:

Accurate pricing

Eliminate the fear of rejection

Recent rental specials

Accurate, engaging photography

Seasonal photography is a plus
Lifestyle-oriented material is engaging

Crisp floor plan images

Other strategies proposed by this knowledgeable executive team included managing editorial deadlines, adding social media, carrying the community brand through all platforms, and taking full advantage of their

resources such as research, marketing and training programs.

Print editions cycle every 30 to 60 days, so missing deadlines will result in outdated messaging. On the other hand, stale content is even worse, leaving consumers dismissive of your community, and resulting in poor lead-to-lease conversion.

Consider memory point marketing. "Drive-in closets" will engage readers, prompting a call for clarification. Include social media from within the neighborhood, such as events or community hot spots. Include exclusive specials available only through this outlet, which will also provide great tracking data when justifying purchasing decisions. Take advantage of the wealth of market information and research data available from these providers; it's a value-added feature for their clients. Such information is especially valuable to communities in diversified neighborhoods, or those experiencing changing demographics. It can offer insight into the purchasing ideologies of targeted consumers.

"Whether traditional lead sources, search engine marketing, or the immerging social media, we've found success in an integrated approach," states Kevin Thompson, VP of marketing for AvalonBay Communities. "Just as one shouldn't skip directly to social Web sites until they've maximized their SEO and SEM programs, the same goes for traditional advertising. Community-by-community, you must find balance. Look for an integration of print, ILS, banners, and virtual tours that provide quality leads, and then convert them to leases."

Thompson believes that in a difficult economy, forward-thinking companies investing in innovative lead generation tools, such as *For Rent's* YouTube and Flickr postings, or *Apartment Guide's* I-Phone app, have the greatest viability. Owners and operators should target consumers with methods and offerings that follow the market. Powerful print messaging will result in improved online results, followed by higher quantities of pre-qualified on-site consumer visits and more leases.

Says Kate Good, "Don't you want more than your fair share of traffic?" Thanks to such forward-thinking organizations, it is possible. ■■



Terry Slattery is president of For Rent Media Solutions with more than 2 million publications distributed monthly nationwide, 2.4 million visitors each month to its Web sites, over 13,000 text messaging customers, and more than 2,000 customers using its online video.



Arlene Mayfield is president of Apartment Guide, the flagship product of Consumer Source Inc., a subsidiary of PRIME-DIA Inc. It is a primary apartment search resource offering potential renters apartment listings and information. Apartments for rent are displayed and distributed in 77 publications in 74 markets and nationwide online. *Apartment Guide* circulated more than 20 million publications in 2008. Its iPhone app is currently listed as a top, free utility app by Apple and has been downloaded 200,000 times.