

Delivering Cutting-Edge Technology

Webster defines the word "amenity" as "something that conduces to comfort, convenience, or enjoyment." For those of us in property management, it most often springs to mind all the little extras that we use to entice potential residents to our properties. From crown molding and granite countertops to lavish swimming pools and fitness centers, everyone is looking for the amenity that will attract and keep future residents, and - more importantly - provide a quick and stable return on the investment.

Once a property is up and running, everyone is trying to answer the same question, "What can I add to bring in and retain residents?"

Some property managers are beginning to answer this question by evaluating the technology offered on their property. While network quality may not be the first thing that comes to mind as a way to attract residents, it has a tremendous impact on the daily life of residents now, and especially in years to come. Consider the change in Internet use in the past 10 years. The service that once simply brought us text-based messages, we now use for sharing pictures, watching movies, and video-conferencing.

Users are exponentially more demanding on their networks. Voice over IP, Web 2.0, movie and music downloads, teleconferencing, video on demand and about 500 channels are all available, and travel across a single network. The lines among the classic three services of triple play, video, voice and data are beginning to blur, as residents rely more and more heavily on these network services working together to be entertained, communicate, work, share, and generally relate to the world around them. Unfortunately, traditional cable based networks installed throughout the 80's and 90's are not made to accommodate demand today.

Internet traffic increases dramatically each year, and more online movie, music, and gaming options promise to drive demand for bandwidth ever higher for some time to come. Internet traffic in the U.S. today is typically measured in "Exabyte." An Exabyte contains approximately 50,000 times the amount of all the information contained in the Library of Congress, the largest library in the world, with more than 120 million items on approximately 530 miles of bookshelves.

In 2001, U.S. Internet traffic totaled

8.4 Exabyte. Analysts at Nemesis Research expect traffic to reach more than 600 Exabyte by the year 2012. From YouTube, IPTV, iTunes, and high-definition images, to 3D games and virtual worlds, a new wave of technology is swelling into a flood of Internet traffic.

Unfortunately, the cable and DSL available to most U.S. homes simply will not be able to handle these demands. No matter how hard they try, traditional Internet solutions cannot support future bandwidth demand the way fiber optics wiring can.

Unlike copper wiring, which has many limitations, fiber-optic wiring offers virtually unlimited bandwidth within tiny strands of glass. Optical electronics transmit data through each strand at the speed of light, and advances in these electronics continue to push more information through the same strands of glass. This means that as future applications drive more and more bandwidth demands, the capacity of fiber-optic networks is readily available to accommodate them.

Fiber does not conduct electricity, so it is more reliable than coaxial and copper cable. This means fewer service interruptions during storms and power outages. With the growth of

bandwidth-hungry technologies, the demand for more powerful networks has risen dramatically.

One property that recently upgraded to fiber optics is The Mandolin, an apartment community in Houston, Texas. Thanks to new technological breakthroughs, its network was installed quickly, with limited disruption to the property.

"The residents don't have to go on a wireless card on their laptop. They don't have to go to a friend's place," said says David Lynd, of the Lynd Company, owners of The Mandolin.

Lynd says the biggest takeaway for him has been the value the network has added to his property. Because Lynd buys bulk services from its service provider, Primecast, the company can turn around and market those services directly to its residents. That includes a comprehensive television package with more than 200 channels and true IP capability.

Residents pay a flat fee of \$45 for the service with their rent each month, an amount that's competitive with similar offerings in the area. HD channels, Internet and phone service are available at an additional, tiered pricing structure from its service provider, which

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also provides installation, administrative and support services to residents.

"They can do everything they need to right there in their unit. That's significant, because people live in their units, and they want the upgrades in their units more than they want other improvements in other parts of the properties."

Ultimately, the Mandolin's choice to add a fiber-optic network as its newest property amenity was a smart one. Unlike other common property amenities, fiber optics add to the experience of every resident, not just the ones who use specific services at the property like the fitness center or a conference room.

Not only does almost every resident use the services that fiber optics enable, but they also count on the quality and functionality of those services to perform everyday tasks, making it a truly valuable amenity.

"We looked at this as an opportunity to include cable in rent and give them a better service for a cheaper

price," says Lynd. "Any time you're in a position in life where you're selling something that's better, for a lower price, you have a powerful advantage."

