

# Wiring for Today and Tomorrow

Experts sound off on the services and infrastructure needed in telephone, cable and Internet

By Keat Foong, Executive Editor

Residents are expecting more in terms of telephone, cable and Internet services and capabilities in their apartment communities. For this reason, it is critical that apartment property managers and owners prepare for the infrastructure that is needed not only for today, but also for tomorrow.

"The short answer is that apartment owners will need a lot more bandwidth than they have ever thought," says Brian Gullette, national vice president of business development at Connexion Technologies. Technology is changing very rapidly, explains Gullette. And there is an entire host of new video capabilities coming down the pike that

tor of national sales at Time Warner Cable Community Services.

Lin Atkinson, general manager-National Accounts at AT&T Connected Communities, points out that apartment owners and managers should take into account renter demographics. For instance, for a property with a high demand for broadband services, planning a money-saving bulk deal makes sense for the owner/manager, explains Atkinson. On the other hand, at a property with young, entertainment-oriented renters, planning for multiple video service providers will make the property more attractive.

Camden currently supplies expanded basic video service to the majority of its residents through the "Perfect Connection" cable program. The program is provided as an amenity, so that residents do not have to deal with installation fees, installing cable service or paying for them every month, says Greg McDonald, director of telecommunications at Camden. Camden residents may also select additional bundled features or services, such as HDTV and digital and premium services at a

modest prorated monthly rate. Residents may also order high-speed data and voice services through the local cable or telephone company.

McDonald says Camden's cable amenity is highly popular. And the company is currently exploring options to add a high-speed Internet service amenity to its current cable program. In this regard, Camden provides Wi-Fi Hotspots as a free service to residents. "Wi-Fi Hotspot services have become

increasingly popular over the past few years, so we have been busily adding Hotspot service to a number of Camden communities," says McDonald.

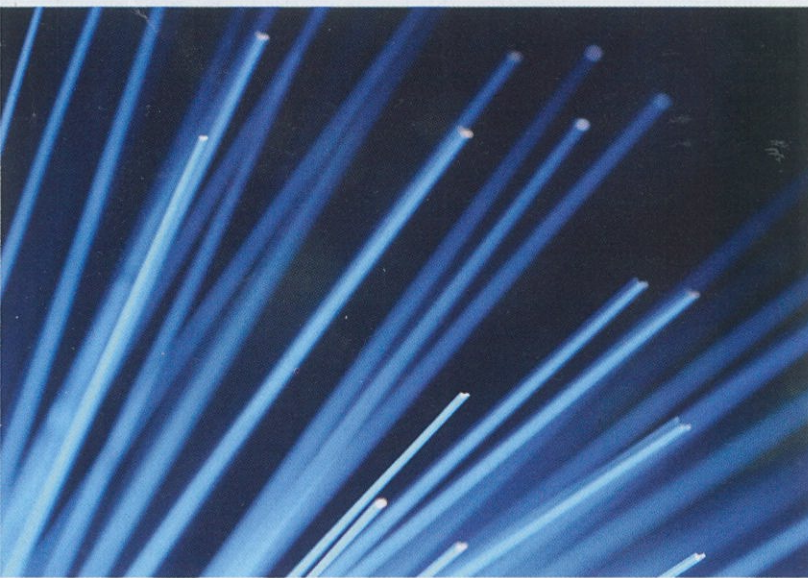
In order to provide renters what they want in telecommunications, apartment companies also need to install appropriate networks and wiring. Telecom wiring is routinely overlooked in retrofits and often ignored or underfunded in new construction, says AT&T's Atkinson. "An owner who wants to upgrade the property to compete with the new properties in the neighborhood can find that he can't deliver competitive telecommunication services because the old wires in the building won't support it," he notes. "Spending a couple of hundred dollars on wiring during a renovation can yield tremendous gain in attracting and keeping tenants."

Property owners should also make sure that the wirings will allow for use by multiple telecommunications companies and give companies equal access, says Time Warner's Schwehm. Apartment owners can prepare for the future by installing spare wires and conduits in their networks, adds Schwehm. Additionally, they need to ensure that the communication spaces or closets are large enough to accommodate equipment and are well ventilated.

In order to stay ahead of the technology curve, Camden builds its telecommunications systems to support technology improvements for at least three to five years into the future, says McDonald. Camden, which is a customer of Time Warner, is currently installing CAT 5E network wiring and RG-6 quad-shield coaxial cable in all new units, he says. In addition, the REIT installs a certain technology that will allow it to quickly and economically install additional telecommunications infrastructure in future. This technology is a spare "shadow" conduit system.

McDonald adds, "We maintain a very detailed set of telecommunications specifications for our communities that is constantly being updated and changed." MHN

*Photo courtesy of Connexion Technologies*



renters may one day take for granted and demand.

Even today, what residents are expecting may be pretty advanced. "Apartment residents have come to expect the highest level of service and technology when it comes to the communication and entertainment providers and products. This includes robust, reliable, high-speed Internet services and state-of-the-art video services with clear and crisp picture quality," says Dave Schwehm, senior direc-