

You had them until the e-mail
**Don't lose an interested prospect because of
your un-interested response**

It is staggering figure, about half of leads generated by Internet apartment search sites, like Apartments.com or ForRent.com are never responded to! But just as often, the response comes in the form of an ineffective e-mail reply. Remember, these are first impressions and a prospect won't forget them. Writing a good e-mail in response to an Internet lead is crucial to converting the lead into a signed lease. Are you using this valuable tool effectively?

One thing to be very careful of is your use of e-mail auto-responders. Over the past few years, these horrible ideas have become the norm. When a prospect inquires about a community, within a second an automatically generated e-mail is sent that confirms the submission request. The problem is that at the majority of communities, this is the only reply the prospect ever receives. I did e-mail shopping on high-end communities in the Washington D.C. area not too long ago, and I got a ridiculous auto-responder. The subject line said "thank you for your interest in..." and used the management company name, not the name of the community. The text of the e-mail then mentioned a different property, because someone quickly cut and paste to create this generic e-mail, and then said I "may contact the community at..." and listed the telephone number. Not the e-mail address, not the property address, just the telephone number. I have this e-mail responder framed in my office as one of the worst marketing offenses in property management. Why even bother? A prospect contacted you through the website because they prefer e-mail contact. They don't know, or care, about the name of the management company. And saying they "may" contact the community? Wow! Thanks so much! I appreciate the permission to pick up my telephone and spend money with your organization.

But this doesn't mean that e-mail is an ineffective tool, to the contrary. E-mail can be very effective, quick and impactful. There are certain rules to follow whenever sending out an e-mail on behalf of your property or management company. The following are some guidelines to help your on-site communities communicate more effectively via e-mail.

Be conversational: E-mail is more like conversation than it is like paper mail – because you can receive nearly instantaneous response. You should be informal, like you would be in a conversation – without being sloppy or unprofessional. You can even use phrases you wouldn't include in a letter such as “You've just gotta come see us” or “You won't believe the specials we have”. These are action phrases but are conversational and engaging and get the prospect interested in what you have to say.

Properly Identify Yourself: The average Internet prospect only sends out three or four leads, but with some of the sites using prompts to send out leads to other communities in an area, the prospect may contact many more. For this reason it is imperative that you have a proper signature line at the bottom of your e-mail so they know who they are dealing with. If you were sending a follow-up letter to the prospect, you would send it on property stationary with your address, phone, fax and e-mail. This is what you need to include at the bottom of each e-mail you send. Also include a slogan or catch-phrase, perhaps something you are incorporating in your advertising. Something as simple as “We look forward to welcoming you home” can be a great way to close an e-mail. Also be sure to include a link to your corporate website, or the “direct address” for your advertisement on one of the major apartment search sites. Four of the six major apartment search sites offer you an address that goes directly to your page within their site, bypassing competitors. This way the prospect can jump right back to your advertisement, putting your name with the “face”. Ask your sales representative if you do not know your direct address.

Be colorful: Being colorful goes with being conversational. It helps if you have a distinctive tone or “voice” to your e-mail. There are a few ways to do this – you can use colorful images, word pictures, that convey your message quickly and vibrantly. Or, inject some humor and whimsy in to your e-mail. If it is fun to read it will likely be remembered. But beware – some humor that would work face-to-face, or with someone you already know well, can backfire in an e-mail. If in doubt, ask one of your co-workers what they think before hitting the send button. A good rule of thumb is that if you need a facial expression to convey the intent of a joke or comment, it probably won’t translate well in to an e-mail. Also, try not to use “emoticons” or smiley’s. These are the little pictures that so many of us use when chatting online. They are fine for casual conversation with friends but not professional for use with a prospect.

Be informative: This is a selling opportunity, use it! A prospect may ask you a few specific questions in their lead to you, but go above and beyond just answering those questions. Tell them about other exciting developments at your property, upcoming social events, how great the new tennis courts look, etc. If the lead is merely a request for a brochure, respond that you would be happy to mail them out a brochure, but let them know that by visiting your company website or by looking more closely at one of your on-line ads, they may be able to get the information they need more quickly. If you have virtual tours on any of your advertisements, be sure to mention to the prospect that they can get a great view of their new two bedroom apartment home by taking the virtual tour. Don’t overdo it, but offer them useful information to help them in their decision. Don’t be afraid to send an attachment or two – especially a great digital photo of the available unit you have to sell or those newly refinished tennis courts. Avoid the tendency to write too much in your e-mail. Nothing bores a prospect more than reading what they just read in your advertisement. Focus on amenities that may not be described well in your online ad or website, paint word pictures and leave impressions.

E-mail is one of the greatest tools that property managers and leasing professionals have at their disposal! Properly using e-mail to paint a picture, entice interest and answer questions is the best way to convert a hot Internet prospect in to a signed lease for you. Don't rely on a lazy auto-responder when you can create and craft a well written e-mail that will get results.



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