

and now for something thoroughly modern...
The lost art of the sales letter

Bringing back the sales letter to the field of property management is a long-overdue idea. Replaced in the late 70's and early 80's with increasingly sophisticated property brochures, the sales letter has almost completely lost its way in our industry. This is still an essential tool for introducing your community succinctly and professionally to locators, corporate relocation departments and future residents. Mastering the art of the sales letter can help your community rise to the top of the heap when these busy professionals look through a stack of property brochures with little or no introduction.

For inspiration in this area, you may want to take a look in the trash. No, seriously – some of those mass mailings you threw away may have some great writing tips in them. Read through a few and you will see – some of them are bound to be concise, clear, colorful and compelling. These are all the traits an introductory letter about your community, your “sales letter”, should have. In writing a good sales letter, it is important to keep in mind 6 lessons that make you act on a good sales pitch in the first place.

Lesson 1 – Get over the idea that this is junk, not to be read by your prospects. As you write, recite the rhyme that junk is bunk. Sales letters are not junk and serve a valid purpose. They are a business-like way to get your message across in a short period of time and make an impact on the reader. If the sales letter is junk, then so is the in-person sales presentation, or the entire leasing tour. That isn't true, is it?

Lesson 2 – Keep focused on your reader. Make sure the reader fully understands “what does this community have in store for me.” Start with a strong benefit statement, close with another and sprinkle other strong benefit statements throughout. So many leasing professionals focus on the features, but not the benefits. When incorporating strong benefit statements, be sure to write your them in the second person ; use “You” again and again. For instance, a statement like “you will appreciate the convenience of our 24-hour fitness center to work out when you want too.” Don't just talk about the community, talk about the reader – your prospect. Dramatize it, make the reader the central figure in your story. Don't say something like “our attached garages will keep the rain and snow

off your car.” Instead, write something like “if you are tired of scraping snow off your car, or dashing through the rain with your groceries, you’ll want to make Park Forest your new home – because your apartment home comes with an attached garage!”

Lesson 3 – Support every claim you make with evidence. The next time you get a letter from a credit card company offering you a Uranium-Plutonium Visa, notice how much evidence is included with the letter. The company doesn’t just tell you can use the card everywhere – they talk about places, restaurants, movie theatres, stores, etc – proving the value and usefulness of the card. They offer you evidence in the way it will be useful when you get married, go on a trip, all the little curves life can throw your way. The rule is simple – if you make claims in a sales letter, prove them. If you don’t, you look like a BS artist or someone who just doesn’t believe in their product.

Lesson 4 – Stay away from hackneyed words. Too many sales letters are loaded with cheap and tired words. Stale, warmed over, low-rent words that don’t conjure up much of anything anymore. Eliminate them, crack open a thesaurus. Words like new, state-of-the-art, special, complimentary are boring – more likely to evoke a good yawn than a buying action. But action is what you are striving for, so use action-inducing words in your letter. Examine your sales letters, and your advertising for that matter. Analyze each descriptive word. Ask yourself “would I take that word seriously? Would that word make me interested in the item being described?” If the answer is no, dump the word and pick one that works. This is the most challenging part of writing an effective sales letter – coming up with novel and unfamiliar words to paint your picture.

Lesson 5 – Reinforce your other marketing initiatives. A good sales letter is the perfect place to drop some names. Mention your corporate or property website, mention a billboard campaign or your ad in a local magazine. Reinforcing your advertising campaign in a sales letter is an easy way to build credibility and recognition with your audience. This also opens the door to provide more information to your reader. Remember that this letter needs to grab the reader and make them want more. Providing them links and information on how to get more just gets them more involved and activates their buying impulses.

Lesson 6 – Find a USP and hit it hard. A USP is a “Universal Selling Proposition” – a statement that says your community is better than your competition. Make it plain that what you offer at your community is head and shoulders above everyone else out there. You can do this without even mentioning your competitors. Some companies in our industry employ this technique with lots of success. For instance, Post Properties uses the phrase “quality shows at Post” in their advertising. This implies that it doesn’t show elsewhere, only Post apartment homes are quality apartment homes. So the reader thinks that if I am looking for a quality apartment home, I need to go to Post. Korman Communities has another good one “Live Better”. Simple, gets the point across that life at a Korman property is better than life down the street. Think of a bold and forceful USP for your community and use it in all of your marketing, but especially in your sales letter.

Consider other tools as sales letters too – how many times have you received a fax cover sheet from a property or management company that only says the name of the business and the fax number? How useless is that? Use this space to sell! Drop in a couple of lines about your property, remind people of your corporate website or one of your advertisements online – always be marketing your community. Writing good sales letters is always hard work. But you make it easier by studying and learning from that junk mail in the trash. Turn something valueless in to something invaluable – use those ideas and phrases in a well crafted sales letter of your own and your community won’t ever fall on to that trash heap.

*Christopher Higgins is **The Apartment Guy**, a professional speaker, industry educator and marketing consultant based in Montana. Speaking from 15 years of knowledge in the industry, Christopher’s experiences include market development director and national accounts manager for two Internet apartment search sites, owning his own print apartment publications and starting at age 23, work as the national marketing and training director for a Top-50 NAHB multi-family developer. He has leased, renovated, marketed and managed rental housing. Performing seminars across the US and Canada, his topics include Fair Housing, closing and phone skills, resident retention, Internet and outreach marketing, advertising and collateral materials workshops and more. To arrange a seminar, or if you have any comments or questions, contact Christopher at christopher@theapartmentguy.net or visit www.theapartmentguy.net.*

Word Count: 1235