

# *Make Mine Mobile*

BY KIMBERLY LANG

**Say hello to  
the new face of  
apartment  
marketing engagement.**







**T**here were 968 million smartphones just like yours purchased by consumers in 2013. These devices, indispensable in navigating the modern area, are quickly becoming ubiquitous: According to Forrester Research Inc., the number of consumers with smartphones will eclipse the 1 billion mark by the end of 2016. The driving force behind this growth is consumers' dependence on mobile devices to manage their day-to-day lives—communicating, paying bills, shopping, scheduling appointments, finding information, etc. This has caused a shift in power, from institutions to individuals, more so than the personal computer or the Internet ever did among consumers.

And while consumers' mobile use has increased dramatically, adoption by businesses is still relatively low. As of 2012, just 21 percent of businesses were using mobile as part of their marketing suites, according to a recent IBM study.

## Why Mobile, Why Now

Business leaders now prioritize mobile investments to better engage consumers and their need for an "always-on" environment. So much so that Forrester Research reports businesses are allocating

84 percent of their marketing spend toward mobile investment.

"Over the past couple of years, we have invested in mobile optimization for our websites and resident portals," says Brad Marson, Executive Vice President and COO at Vantage Management.

"Our demographic is moving in this [mobile] direction. In fact, mobile and tablet devices make up 30 percent to 40 percent of our traffic and we expect that to grow exponentially."

And while offering services that are

highly mobile friendly is important, businesses are also focusing on usability.

Says Craig Maness, Vice President, Technology at Prometheus, "We are focused on an effortless experience—one that is simple and easy to navigate and that has all of the information to make an informed decision. Our goal is for the interface to be visually stunning, simple and in sync with our brand. The retail industry and many others do a great job in this regard. It's really surprising there are still many firms in the multifamily housing industry that have yet to consider a mobile strategy."

## Consumer Power Shift

As the power starts to move away from institutions, consumer influence now shapes the mobile market from types of devices to accessibility to applications options. They want real-time information and an always-on ecosystem.

Context-rich applications and smart products help consumers decide and immediately act in their moments of need: Can I see photos of floor plans of the community to give me a sense of living here? Can I sign and execute my lease online? Can I pay my rent online, from a tablet or my mobile device? What do other people say about living at this community?

Mobile engagement helps property managers better understand prospective residents: Why and what brought them to the community, their purchasing habits and their wants and needs. By having multiple touch points—mobile apps, kiosks and websites boasting responsive design—community managers can capture data that is in-depth, emotional and habitual to provide a more holistic, personable view of the consumer.

Prospects and residents reveal a lot about their needs and wants by how they engage online. Do they pay their bills online? Like your Facebook page? Request information from your mobile website or app? Take note of this engagement through mobile and use it to seek out a solution that answers their needs and heightens your service.

## Prospect/Resident Needs

Marcellus Mosley, Vice President,

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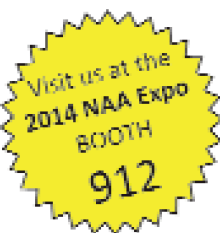
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Director of Operations at CWS Apartment Homes, says mobile is something that his company has paid attention to for years.

"We've made mobile a priority to better reach customers," Mosley says. "Several years ago, with the expanding number of Millennials and Gen Yers entering the multifamily housing market, we realized that mobile is going to be critical to our success, particularly within our marketing platform. We embarked on the redesign of our websites for mobile and tablet applications so we could be responsive to that demand."

Mosley also expressed the importance of not only having an online leasing platform, but also a marketing website that is mobile friendly, uses real-time data to provide pricing and availability and fully integrates the leasing experience for the customer.

Mosley says he has reduced his advertising costs from \$400 per lease to \$188 per lease by using this combination of online leasing and mobile platform rollout.

At the same time, residents want an online community where they can transact with their management team, as well as engage socially with neighbors and friends, Mosley says.

"Consumers want to see your Facebook page, communicate with you via tweets and other forms of resident engagement," Mosley says. "We train our team on all aspects of our mobile platforms and across all avenues in order to reach more residents and improve and enhance reputation management with all of our customer engagements."

By putting mobile at the forefront, for both prospects and resident engagement, possibilities open for authentic interaction and increased resident satisfaction and retention, Mosley says.

"The physical and mobile experience, whether the Web or social media, needs to engage at these levels to provide a holistic and consistent experience," Prometheus' Maness says.

One way that communities keep satisfaction high is by offering a package management system accessible through apartment portal tools, Maness explains.

"With the success of Amazon and online shopping, package management is becoming an increasingly important need. We are also testing 24/7 lockers at our communities to make it easier for everyone." Services, such as the one Maness describes, help the staff manage and communicate deliveries and provide notification alerts that packages are ready for pick up at their convenience.

## Immediate and Personal Interaction

CWS realized the importance of immediate, engaging and personal interaction, so they now provide a 100 percent response ratio for phone, email or chat.

"This was a critical rollout for us. We now have 73 of our 80 properties [doing this. The system we use] offers us relevant information, allowing our property managers to provide a comprehensive leasing experience because they can share pricing and availability, set appointments, answer questions about



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“Rather than leave a voicemail or send an email to the community, the system takes care of prospects with an immediate response. This service also ensures that every prospect gets a response from a real person rather than leaving a voice message. We think this differentiates us from most of our competition out in the market. Coupled with our online leasing platform, we provide our prospects everything they need to make a decision to lease.”

CWS is one of many communities laser-focused on integrating products to further enhance their communities and make them more competitive. By providing engaging forms of communication, CWS allows its residents and prospects to interact directly with communities in their moments of decision. With mobile technology, residents and prospects can have their questions answered at any time, 24/7/365.

And it's not only prospects and residents who benefit from mobile engagement. Leasing agents can track, collaborate and make key decisions anywhere on any device.

“The most important aspect of communicating with prospects is still having great people on our end,” Marson says. “We achieve this in two key ways: First, we hire and train great staff to understand that every prospect needs to feel important and, second, we use quality contact centers to ensure that a call is never missed.

Our prospects comment that they had no idea they were talking to a call center because the staff [at the other end of the line] is so professional.”

Mobile apps and smart products extend the value of a community's offering to prospects and residents to help build strong rapport. Mobility empowers them to be more in control of their living experience through social collaboration, online conversation, and an always-on environment.

Prometheus uses its mobile website to take advantage of technology such as click-to-call or the mapping features to locate the property and start navigation directions.

“Our system's add-on allows for communication via text messaging, making the process easier for our site staff and keeping it paperless,” says Maness. “With so many individuals using social media via their mobile device, it's important that we are communicating and engaging them through the same channels—be it Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, Facebook or Twitter. While the communication vehicle is important, we are also focused deeply on the quality of communication, ensuring consistency with our standards and brand experience.”

## Better Engagement, Greater Revenue

“As residents and prospects move toward higher mobile consumption, we have to keep pace,” Marson says. “We cannot afford to be at a competitive disadvantage by not meeting the needs of our primary target market. This means we need a culture that is innovative, so we always look for better ways to serve our customer and we leverage our technology partners who are also vested in staying ahead of the competition.”

As mobile becomes a larger piece of consumers' lives, it will continue to play a vital role in the path to purchase. Mobile provides access to information about products and services during the research phase and allows your community to remain engaged with consumers throughout the decision-making process, thus tethering them to your community. Communities that act on this demand will create a sustainable competitive advantage as a leader in using technology to drive their business. ■

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