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You've Got Mail

Apartment communities using package-management systems improve efficiency and reduce clutter.

BY LAUREN BOSTON

With the average, 250-unit apartment community receiving over 50 packages per day, onsite employees were in danger of going postal. To properly manage the influx of daily deliveries, many apartment management companies are now hiring a third-party to provide package concierge services for residents.

Maya Liepa, Senior Property Manager at ParcGrove Apartment Homes, says her Riverstone Residential property eliminated the concierge desk during a renovation phase. However, the leasing office soon had to stop accepting packages for the 402-unit luxury apartment community because the volume was too high to manage.

Enter a package-management system.

"In property management, the most important aspect of our job is providing exceptional customer service," Liepa says. "A package management system allows us to provide a service to our residents that essentially makes life easier for both the resident and the onsite associates. While the resident is able to retrieve their package at their convenience, the onsite associate can focus on providing exceptional customer service rather than mediocre customer service to one resident while another one waits for their package."

ParcGrove now has two banks of modular lockers located in each of its two buildings, and provides each resident with a username and password. Once residents register with the package management system, their username and password is given to each delivery carrier. When a package is delivered, it's scanned and an email or text message is sent to the resident alerting them that they have a package. Residents can then go to the locker, use a touchscreen kiosk and retrieve their package.

"The benefits are endless," Liepa says. "I have watched prospective residents walk away from leasing an apartment home just because we did not have a package system. In this market,

you're talking about potentially losing \$30,000. Additionally, eliminating a concierge who really only accepts packages and dry cleaning is saving us well over \$100,000. In the 17 years I have worked in property management, the package concierge service is by far the best amenity that I have seen implemented. Not only is it cutting edge, it is incredibly easy to install, implement and manage. Residents have only raved about the new amenity."

Students Shop Til You Drop

All those care packages from Mom and Dad start to add up.

According to one package-management software provider, college students receive an average of 21 packages per year. Furthermore, eMarketer estimates that online shopping is up 17 percent, and is expected to jump by 45 percent in 2016 versus 2012 rates.

With online shopping programs such as Amazon Prime offering free shipping for college students, student housing leasing offices are overwhelmed with daily deliveries.

Rob Myers, General Manager for Asset Campus' Knights Circle in Orlando, says his community houses more than 2,500 residents. That means as many as 100 packages on a normal day. During busy times, such as the start of the semester when students are buying their books online or during the holidays when care packages are frequent, Myers says Knights Circle could "easily" receive 1,000 packages per week.

"We used to manually write down every package that came in and manually log them out on pieces of paper on a clipboard," Myers says. "Every day was a new piece of paper—more if you had a lot of packages that day. Then we had to handwrite notices so residents would know they had a package and have someone post them on their door. All of this was incredibly labor intensive."

Add to that packages that were never picked up and just took up space in the mail center and you've got one big mess—literally.

Did You Know...?

According to one survey, onsite apartment community staff—either the full-time concierge or leasing staff—often spend 20+ hours a week managing residents' packages.

- 2** Rank “package access” amenity earned, according to 2013 NMHC resident survey.
- 20K** Number of packages delivered on average each year to a 250-unit community.
- 50** Packages per day delivered on average to a 250-unit community.
- 73** Percent of people who do at least half of their shopping online.

Source: *Package Concierge*

In 2012, Myers found a solution, using cloud-based software that enables staff to enter packages into an online system that then takes care of the rest. From there, residents are alerted by email and text message that a package has arrived and is awaiting pick-up in the mail center—a repurposed maintenance office that Myers acknowledges is a “great luxury” to have.

“At a community I managed in Gainesville, Fla., we had a small closet and would get 30 to 50 packages per day from USPS and another 50 to 100 per day from UPS and FedEx,” Myers says. “It got so bad that I’d typically have a team member spending five to six hours per day logging in the packages, posting notices

on residents’ doors and rearranging the tiny space we had to house them. Eventually we had to stop accepting UPS and FedEx for our residents because we simply didn’t have the room.”

Thanks to both the new software system and Knights Circle’s designated mail center, such challenges are a thing of the past. Today, residents can go online and view their packages waiting for pick-up, as well as those previously delivered. The “Mail is Ready/Not Ready” feature limits unnecessary calls to office staff, and the software tracks the length of time packages are held onsite. If a package isn’t picked up after a certain number of days, the software will automatically mark it “returned to sender” or forward it to the correct address.

“It saves us an insane amount of time,” Myers says. “Packages get scanned and logged within moments and we can set an alert to remind residents every couple days if they haven’t picked up their package. Not to be overlooked, each notification can also include a small message from us at the bottom where we can write things such as, ‘Don’t forget to renew your lease by the 31st.’” ■

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Thank you to The US Postal Solutions Company and Package Concierge for contributing to this article.

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