

Tools of the Trade

BY LAUREN BOSTON

Apps designed to increase efficiency and productivity are proving useful in apartment community maintenance.

Mobile is mainstream in the apartment industry, revolutionizing leasing offices nationwide. However, technology also has a place in maintenance, with service teams now integrating the use of tools, software and apps on smart devices into their daily routines.

According to a study conducted with Camden Property Trust, the company's maintenance technicians experienced a 45 percent increase in productivity with the use of mobile devices. Additionally, there was a 44 percent increase in

on-the-job efficiency. The majority of Camden's maintenance technicians also found that mobile technology improved communication and collaboration among team members, rapidly delivered actionable information to decision-makers and increased customer interaction through the use of mobile software.

There is no doubt that going "mobile" is of great benefit to most maintenance technicians and supervisors. The question is how to do so.

During the session "Maintenance Mobile" at NAA's Student Housing Conference & Exposition in February, presenters Dawn Ford and Megan Orser, Managing Member and Director of Professional Development, respectively, for Smart Apartment Solutions, shared with attendees several apps beyond those included in traditional property management software systems that are enabling maintenance teams to improve their productivity and efficiency.

Following are six apps maintenance technicians may not be aware of:

1 iMAINTAIN Work Order Application.

A stand-alone application available in the iOS (Apple platform), this app allows service technicians to record and track work orders via their smart devices.

Service technicians gain the ability to stay on top of open requests, supplies used and time spent on requests. iMAINTAIN allows users to upload photos and voice notes to open work orders for seamless communication from one task to another.

The app retails for \$29 and has the capability to share completed work orders via email/Dropbox and Evernote. Plus, it includes a handy—and functional—level.





2 Mpengo Service Call. This is one of many Mpengo business solution apps for the iOS platform. It works much like the other featured work-order apps with its ability to enter, review and edit work orders throughout the service process.

The difference is its ability to handle multiple functions and steps on one screen, unlike other similar applications that only have the capability to display one step at a time. Mpengo also allows service technicians to capture a signature from the resident at the completion of the service call and has the capability to share completed work orders with other team members.

Mpengo is \$19.99 and can easily be integrated with their other applications, such as supply orders and snow logs.

3 Gilson Work Order App. Available on iOS and designed with Affordable Housing in mind, this HUD-compliant app has the capability to work outside of a Wi-Fi network and then sync with the management software once it re-enters an Internet connection.

Managers are able to assign specific work orders to specific technicians, as well as set the priority level from “low” to “emergency.” The Gilson app is free to all Gilson clients who already have the management software and works as an extension to the software.

4 Go Canvas. This is a platform that allows the user to create any template from Word, Excel and similar programs to smartphone applications. Go Canvas has a large community of applications populated by their users, from rental applications to time records and the Smart Apartment Solutions Punchlist application.

The Smart Apartment Solutions Punchlist application was designed to help streamline the turn process by breaking down the tasks by room with a click-through function that allows the technician to report if the specified area is in good condition, in need of repair or in need of a contractor.

When the punch list is complete, the Go Canvas application captures a signature from the technician and then allows them to either upload the completed punch list to the Go Canvas website, where it can be stored and available to all who are given permission to review, or they can opt to send the punch list via email.

This multi-functional app is available for the iOS, Android and BlackBerry markets. The Go Canvas application is free

for a 30-day trial, after which there is a monthly charge of around \$30.

5 Measure Map. This app is perfect for those who are completing and gathering bids for capital improvements such as roofing and parking-lot replacement. Before Measure Map, industry standards required a three-bid minimum that could take several weeks to coordinate. Now with the Measure Map app, maintenance technicians can simply put in the desired address and location of the area that needs measuring. With the satellite view that Measure Map provides, they can place the pins over the location to be measured—such as the parking lot or roof—and find the exact measurements within seconds.

Measure Map also provides users with the capabilities to email the measurements to contractors of their choice or upload them to Dropbox.

The app is available for iOS and retails for \$1.99. Users can also use the lite version as a free trial before deciding to purchase the full app.

6 Find My Friend. This is a free app available on iOS that allows users to track their friends’ whereabouts based on the GPS location of their Apple device.

The days of managers being unaware of their service technicians’ locations are now a thing of the past. A supervisor can assign a work order by proximity of a technician’s location or see if an employee has left the property. The app enables users to effortlessly locate an employee’s whereabouts, as well as call, email, text or even FaceTime with them right from the application. 

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Want more? Check out 10 Multifamily Tech Trends to Watch in 2013 at bit.ly/MFTechTrends



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