

Marketing Your Community

Bonnie Gravitte, Asset Manager, CAHEC

Competition among housing communities is at an all-time high and is often stated as the No. 1 reason for low occupancy. Because of this, learning to properly market your community is one of the most valuable resources available.

Social Media & the Internet

It is no secret that most people are turning to the internet for information when planning for a move. Above all other types of publishing, social media has had a growing impact on advertising and will continue to grow in the years ahead. There are many platforms available, so understanding how to use each one will increase exposure for your community.

- **Facebook:** Facebook is the largest social networking site, and probably one of the most widely used across generations. It is important to keep the content current and update your page frequently. One helpful tip is to create a catchy slogan or hashtag for your community and use it often.
- **Instagram:** Instagram is primarily used to share photos and videos. Use this platform to focus on your residents and events at your community.
- **Twitter:** Twitter enables you to post short messages (called tweets) with a 240-character limit. Spend time creating the perfect Twitter profile, and be sure to tweet frequently. Using hashtags and photos will also increase engagement.
- **LinkedIn:** LinkedIn is one of the most popular professional social networking sites. Use this platform to connect with different businesses in your market area that may help connect you to potential residents.
- **Craigslist:** Craigslist is not technically a social media platform, but it should still be used to market your community! Make sure the title of your ad is engaging, so that potential residents want to click on your ad.

Community Engagement

Advertising is not done only online! One of the best ways to bring in potential renters is to become active in your community, whether that's through traditional marketing techniques or some that may be considered a little more unique.

- Join business networking groups and attend your local Chamber of Commerce events. Be seen around the neighborhood and talk about how great your community is!

- Use local newspapers, TV and radio for traditional advertising. Showcase your amenities such as a computer room, exercise room, split floor plan, energy-efficient appliances, etc. Do not forget: location, location, location! This is one of the deciding factors for residents.
- Talk to local pharmacies or restaurants about advertising on the prescription bags or placing a flyer on the pizza or take-out boxes. Tip: Offer to put the boxes together for them — they will be much more likely to say “yes” to you!
- Host a community yard sale. These events can pull in traffic from people who may have no idea you are even there.
- When advertising in the community, be sure to focus on where your target renter is most likely to visit, such as local schools, employers, parks, movie theaters, grocery stores, banks, local restaurants, etc. — and then host designated tours for them.

Perfect the Potential Resident Visit

Marketing might bring potential residents to your community, but if you do not spend time perfecting the experience they get when they visit, you are setting yourself up for failure.

- Be sure to offer evening and weekend hours to ensure you’re providing opportunities for those with varying work schedules to come by. More importantly, be sure to advertise those extended hours as well.
- Know your competition and how your community compares to them. Be sure to establish your community’s uniqueness and strengths during visits (i.e., spacious bedrooms, large closets, etc.).
- Do not forget about curb appeal! Above all, make sure your signage is visible. Your parking lot and walkways should be clean, and your landscape should be well maintained.
- Have a model unit available to tour. Some renters are not comfortable moving into a unit if they cannot see a model of the unit first.
- Focus on any promotional avenues you can — are you offering washers and dryers, discounted rent, or free or reduced application fees? These little things often make all the difference.
- Place a test call to your community. How long did it take for someone to answer? What was the tone of the person answering the phone? Do you have a script to ensure certain questions are asked? Can the person answering the phone give precise directions to your community? Grade/evaluate the experience and use it as a learning tool. It might also be helpful to place test calls to your competitors — are they doing something that you are not to get potential residents in the door?

- Focus on creating amazing brochures to hand out to potential residents. Be sure to use real photos, and try to capture the uniqueness about your community.
- Finally, always capture basic information from everyone who visits your community. Afterwards, send a personal handwritten postcard highlighting something specific about their visit. Be sure to ask a lot of questions to find out what they are looking for and what they need. Also, do not forget to ask how they found out about your community. This information will let you know what marketing is working for you and what isn't.

Each community is different, and what works for one community will not necessarily work for the other. Stay focused on keeping your marketing efforts up-to-date, staying present in the community, and perfecting the potential resident visit. Once you find out which tools work for you, let go of some of the ones that do not. Above all, do not forget that your current residents are the strongest marketing tool you have. Ensure those residents are happy, and encourage them to share their positive experience with others.