

Applications as Amenities



Mike Whaling (left) moderating amenities panel. Others (left to right) are Neil Olshansky of Steeplechase Networks, Kurt Scherf of Parks Associates, and Brent Williams of APT Connect.

Property owners often enhance the value and appeal of their properties with high-bandwidth networks that offer advanced video services and high-speed Internet access. But beyond providing basic telecommunications services, how else can property owners leverage these networks? One way is to use network applications to make their properties more attractive places to live.

“Services are the amenity, not broadband,” said Neil Olshansky, a panelist

“Personal Emergency Service,” a telehealth system that helps elderly residents live independently for longer. At an annual cost of \$3,000, the service compares favorably with assisted living, which may cost 25 times more. Steeplechase also offers services such as remote data backup, videocamera-based remote security monitoring, and energy conservation.

Brent Williams, president of APT Connect, said that broadband applications could help create the sense of com-

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in the “Applications as Amenities in the Digital Home” panel at the Broadband Summit. Olshansky, an executive with broadband service provider Steeplechase Networks, introduced his company’s

community that retains residents in rental properties. In addition to facilitating online rent payments and maintenance requests, APT Connect’s Web site provides forums for online social network-

ing. “This is what young people do now,” Williams said, citing the phenomenal success of Web sites like MySpace and Facebook. He pointed out that online networking bridged the gaps between scheduled physical events like pool parties, that it was less intimidating than mingling with strangers, and that it was

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a low-cost way for MDU owners to promote a sense of community.

Williams said that some owners he spoke to were wary of giving tenants opportunities to talk about their rents and complain about their apartments, but he noted that the vast majority of tenants really preferred to talk about other subjects, and that any problem could be dealt with by simply removing chronic complainers from the forums. Owners should encourage, rather than discourage, communication, Williams said: “When there’s no community, people don’t have an emotional attachment, and then there’s no reason to stay.”

Kurt Scherf, a VP with analyst firm Parks Associates, said the digital home had created new opportunities to offer tech support. When asked, consumers usually say they want to install and troubleshoot their own equipment. Their actual behavior, however, is quite different. In reality, not everyone has the



Backplane of C9 Networks C4400, the first 4Dx4DS CMTS for high downstream applications like video.

time or ability to do their own technical support, and many consumers are willing to pay for service.

Network service providers and property owners are beginning to enter this field, providing professional installation and configuration of their customers' in-home networked equipment – which helps reduce later complaints – followed by ongoing technical support. Some of them offer automated diagnostics and troubleshooting for free, and charge for service only when personal support is required. Some network service providers are outsourcing tech support, receiving revenue shares or referral fees from the companies that actually perform the service.

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