

Using High-Speed Services to Assist Property Operations

High-speed Internet access has become an increasingly important amenity for MDU owners to offer. How can property owners and managers leverage the high-speed networks they install in order to enhance communications with their residents? Experts at the Broadband Summit's MDU Provider Panel, "Beyond High-speed Internet Access," suggested several ways.

David Cardwell of the National Multi Housing Council, a trade group, said that many of the owners he spoke to were looking for more transparent



Left to right: Moderator Chris Acker, Director of Building Technology at Forest City Residential, David Daugherty of Korcett Holdings, Mark Scifres of Pavlov Media, Michael Fortinberry of RealPage, David Cardwell of the National Multi Housing Council.

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connections to their tenants, which they felt would add value by streamlining the leasing and payment processes. He characterized owners' attitudes as: "If we never see the tenant in the leasing office, we're really happy." Tenants – especially students, who are most comfortable with Internet use – were just as happy to transact business online, he said. For example, when given the opportunity, many residents submit maintenance requests online.

David Daugherty of Korcett Holdings spoke about the messaging technology that Korcett uses to help MDU owners communicate with tenants. Unlike e-mail messaging, which is easily ignored, Korcett's messaging system can

interrupt the tenant's Internet session with important communications such as urgent warnings or overdue rent notices. (This system was featured in the August 2007 issue of *Broadband Properties*.) The system can also be used for revenue-generating purposes – for example, to send advertising messages or market new services to tenants.

While the Korcett messaging system facilitates one-way communication, RealPage's CrossFire, which was introduced by panelist Michael Fortinberry, supports a broader range of communications. The CrossFire resident portal is a platform where residents, owners, managers, and providers can all communicate with one another. Property

managers can post newsletters and announcements, while tenants can submit service requests and check on their status. The system makes leasing staff members more effective by enabling them to focus on exceptions rather than handling routine requests, Fortinberry said.

Mark Scifres of Pavlov Media, a private cable operator, agreed that messaging systems help property owners communicate with their tenants. Some owners, he said, even allow access to their portals to tenants who are not subscribing to their Internet service, because it enhances communications and gives them an opportunity to upsell services. Pavlov also uses a 24/7 call center—generally outsourced to places in other time zones, like India – to respond to tenants' questions and requests during the hours that leasing offices are closed.

Scifres also recommended installing redundant Internet connectivity in MDUs. Having two routes to the Internet makes for a more reliable system, with more uptime and better connections. This not only helps owners communicate with their tenants but is also a selling point for the units themselves. Especially in student apartments, Scifres said, reliable bandwidth is regarded as a necessity of life.