

## Find Opportunity in a Tough Economy

By Amy Kosnikowski, Quintessential Marketing & Training

President John Kennedy once said, “The Chinese use two brush strokes to write the word “crisis”. One stroke stands for danger, the other for opportunity. In a crisis, be aware of danger but recognize the opportunity.” As the downfall of the housing market continues to have a ripple effect into the lives of every consumer, this philosophy brings two useful questions to mind. How do we prevent danger? And, where might we find opportunity? Whether it’s proven or not that our economy will continue to plummet due to the weakness of our financial markets, America’s perception of that threat is real. We must consider this mindset wisely.

Apartment communities across the nation are feeling the positive and negative effects of this trend. Some are seeing higher occupancy flow while others remain stable. Now is the time to be proactive, to find strength in this crisis and create an opportunity to gain back qualified residents who were lost during the housing boom. Here are some suggestions on how to get started:

**Be knowledgeable.** Understand the economic status locally as well as what is occurring in the national and global market. Have open discussions with your teams about current events and possible direct consequences to your community such as high gas prices or rising unemployment rates. Although one cannot control the economy we however can be proactive to brainstorm on how negative effects can be minimized or reversed by devising early solutions to common challenges. Strategize helpful methods and effective responses to successfully manage these concerns.

**Assess Effectiveness.** When was the last time a full detailed audit occurred on-site to determine effectiveness in the sales and marketing process? It would be beneficial to look closely to verify that all the pieces of the process are working together for the biggest ROI for every marketing dollar. Zero in to assure that all marketing sources and leasing approaches are achieving optimal outcomes and make immediate changes to improve results. Build on the proven practices that are not typically affected by market conditions such as expanding leads from a core referral network, smart marketing outreach, and outstanding customer service. Also keep in mind that leasing at this unstable period may require additional time to develop customer rapport and trust. Leasing superstars realize that a number of apartment seekers may be hesitant due to uncertain external factors. By utilizing an extra empathetic sales technique, targeted qualifying questions paired with solid listening skills and superior follow up are just a few of the many ways of adapting to the current economic climate.

**Adjust.** After evaluating the effectiveness to gain and maintain quality residents review current qualifying standards to ensure alignment with present market conditions. Consider making slight adjustments to reflect the reality of foreclosures and short sales occurring in the market. It is not suggested to dramatically lower company standards, which could result in decreasing the overall value of the real estate asset. However, fine-tuning a set of well-thought-out regulations, along with training on-site teams on credit score analysis and screening policies, would have positive outcomes in the short and long-term.

**Differential Factor.** Welcome future residents with a newly revived message filled with benefits of apartment living, along with the advantages of a residing in a professionally managed community. Have ‘think tanks’ with your team to create the community’s unique selling points highlighting the numerous conveniences and services that are a luxury for most homeowners. This is the chance to prove value and worth of a true carefree lifestyle, not only to new residents but also to those who are presently enjoying the rewards of your community. By extending these key messages to existing and potential residents while on the telephone, in the newsletter or during a service visit, you’re giving them constant reminders of the benefits they reap everyday by being a prized resident.

**Market Smarter.** Are you communicating what is significant and unique about your community to potential residents? Utilize the differential factors, newly created by the on-site team, to set the community apart from the competition. Review and update all online and print advertisements, promotional material, and collateral to assure that you are capitalizing on the best opportunity with a crystal clear and consistent message.

By staying aware, working efficiently as a team and marketing smart are the keys to a steady success during these uncertain times. You will see that the greatest opportunity exists even in the toughest of times. Good luck!

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