Technology

Digital applications can improve mgmt. efficiency

Summer is the busiest season in residential real estate, for both the purchase and rental market. Students are moving out of post-secondary residence, parents are looking to move their families after the school year ends, and many others are looking to move during the sunny months rather than deal with cold and snow.

Apartment List Rentonomics states that rental search volumes peak in June and July, and property managers and leasing agents are receiving more leads than any other time of the year. Additionally, for renters who start their search in July, 25 percent more of them will move in the next 30 days as compared to renters who start in January.

Property management organizations understandably want to make the most out of this busy time, which means ensuring that the maximum number of properties are available to meet market demand. Summer can go by quickly, and so the quicker these units are turned over, the quicker tenants can move in, providing a higher return on investment per property. A major challenge with turnovers is effectively managing the move-in and move-out process, which typically includes conducting efficient walk-throughs, vendor work and listings.

Historically, property management companies have used paper documents, spreadsheets, printed files and other archaic systems distributed across computers and throughout offices. American workers spend 26 hours per week working in spreadsheets, with up to eight hours of this work being spent repeating efforts, according to a survey conducted by International Data Corp. Luckily, modern technologies are available

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to provide a better way. New digital applications are emerging that provide all-in-one solutions for property managers looking to streamline their systems and improve their efficiency by managing all aspects of their business.

• Adapting to change. The biggest challenge we all face when implementing a new digital system isn't the technology itself, but rather preparing for the change. There are reasonable fears and questions about the uncertainty of the outcome and very real risks associated with the digital transformation journey; transforming from a manual to a digital system. According to the National Association of Realtors, 48% of all real estate firms surveyed in 2018 cited that keeping up with technology was one of the biggest challenges facing their firm in the next two years. Using a digital software tool, combined with choosing the right initial project, can help ease the transition and make the project seem less daunting.

The move-in and move-out inspection process is a great example of a process that can be easily automated. It's relatively easy to put the inspection checklist form on a mobile device or tablet so inspection forms can be completed on site, without having to manually input the data at a later time.

• Reducing manual intervention. With growing advances in technology, property management companies face the need to transform their traditional operating methods into digital systems to help them become more efficient and effective. Digital applications provide easy-to-use systems that give complete operational oversight and control while keeping the focus on quickly and accurately completing onboarding and offboarding for tenants. Rather than completing a task in a spreadsheet or printed document and then manually inputting the information into another system, these applications provide a system where task completion and data input are done simultaneously.

By providing workflow management in one easy-to-use system, property managers are able to download their work into an online system, streamline their processes and ultimately improve efficiency. Overall, this helps them do what they do best – manage!

• Marrying management and maintenance. Property managers tend to use one system for managing properties and another for managing vendors – contractors, landscapers, plumbers, electricians, maintenance, etc. Digital applications, however, have the ability to combine management and maintenance, marrying the two aspects of property management that have traditionally been kept separate, saving managers time and effort.

Private portals for vendor work orders and tasks allows property managers to effectively plan and complete maintenance tasks. These portals allow them to schedule maintenance projects, create and manage work orders, automate approvals, and notify affected parties around important deadlines and requests.

Digital property management applications provide a one-stop-shop for planning, implementing and tracking maintenance projects with their associated vendors. Housing all this essential work in one place ensures fewer mistakes and rework by allowing both parties access, and ultimately lets vendors get their work done efficiently and effectively. With the capability to work offline when cellular service is low or unavailable, these applications also can be used in areas where other systems might not work.

For property managers already using some form of software, many digital applications also offer the capability to integrate with popular property management software and systems like Yardi and AppFolio, making the transition smooth and seamless.

• Return on investment. The quicker spaces are turned over, the quicker tenants can move in, giving property managers a higher return on their investment. Digital applications have been shown to help increase the number of units that can be turned over in a day, while also decreasing the amount of rework required, saving property managers time and, ultimately, increasing profit. From an operational perspective, leveraging digital technology can drive cost reductions, leading to a 36% improvement in profits after five years, according to a multi-industry McKinsey study quoted in the Financial Post.

Overall, digital applications help property managers become more effective, efficient and responsive, while being able to provide better tenant and owner services in their properties. ▲