

A message from Joanna Ellis, CEO and Founder, Edge2Learn:

COVID-19 is a pandemic that has affected everyone in our industry both in business and personal life. In my 35+ years in the multifamily industry, this is certainly something that I did not anticipate. On the other hand, we have technology that allows us to continue business interactions until things return to normal. With this in mind, we've created resources to assist you with adjusting and taking precautions as needed. Together, we'll keep the multi-family industry moving forward and ready to handle what comes next.



COVID-19

IN THE KNOW SIGHT-UNSEEN LEASING

Leasing an apartment home without an in-person tour is not new. Some prospective residents, such as those moving from out-of-state, have traditionally rented based on nothing more than phone conversations and online information. Due to COVID-19, however, more leasing will happen without the usual types of tours or visits.

The good news is that the key elements of leasing stay the same, whether you're working with a customer in person or remotely. You'll still create a positive, memorable experience for anyone who contacts the community. You'll still practice effective questioning and listening skills, even when using technology for tours or meetings. And you'll still explore customer needs and show how your community's features will best fit those needs.

So, what changes? Let's look at some considerations.

First Contact – Phone and Email

It is more important than ever to hone your response skills and create a great conversation about a future resident's needs via phone and email. Practice your warm greeting, open-ended questions and personalized responses.

Be sensitive to the other person's tone of voice on the phone. Looking for a new home at this time will be more stressful than usual, which means it's especially important to have empathy for their situation. Your patience and reassurance will go a long way toward making the process easier for prospective residents.

You will want to do **even more** information-gathering as part of a customer's initial phone call or email, because overall contact can be reduced in sight-unseen leasing.

- Ask open-ended, qualifying questions to help you learn what's important to them.
- Try to build these questions into the conversation.
- Create a connection and build rapport through shared interests or by showing interest in what a prospective resident shares with you.
- Use the customer's name in a natural, conversational way.

Be sure you ask enough questions to really understand your future resident's timeline and decision-making process. Do others need to be included in the decision? What will they need to know to be ready to make a decision?

The Office is Open – Walk-Ins

What if the office is still open to the public, but regular tours are suspended?



- Stand up when guests enter with a smile and a welcome. Be polite and avoid close contact, if possible.
- Follow your company's specific protocols for social distance. If none exist, use CDC guidelines to sit at least six feet apart in the office, clubhouse, or outside if weather permits. You may want to prearrange furniture ahead of time to allow a six-foot seating distance. These recommendations may change, so visit [CDC](#) for the most current guidelines or sign up for email updates.
- Gather information and understand needs with the same focus on building rapport as always. Use your conversational skills to connect and inquire about everything that will be important in making this decision.
- Offer to demonstrate apartment homes and community features using whatever options your community has established. These can include anything from recorded videos to live, streaming video tours.
- If your community is set up for and allowing self-guided tours, explain how the prospective resident can participate.



Show and Tell – Tour Alternatives

Normally you would wrap up a first call, email exchange or walk-in visit by inviting a customer to take a tour. Instead of tours, understand what your community can offer for next steps and propose the solution that best serves your customer. If you need to explain why you are not currently offering in-person tours, you'll want a standard prepared statement that every staff member can use to explain your community's COVID-19 policies.

Tour alternatives might include:

- Email information, including links to your social media or website.
- Schedule an online video chat.
- Schedule a live, streaming video tour.
- Arrange to send custom photos or a video.
- Use video conferencing to walk through the website together.
- Offer a self-guided tour if your community allows them.



If you are sending photos, links or videos, avoid the temptation to flood your customers with everything you have. Send information that actually addresses what they are looking for. Tie what you send to benefits that are important to them. Sending too many things is like data-dumping your features and amenities during a tour, instead of customizing the experience.

Remember your goal is to learn more about the customer's needs and create a connection, while moving the process toward asking them to become a resident.



Don't Leave 'Em Hanging – Follow Up

Follow-up is essential, especially during unusual circumstances such as the current pandemic when things feel more uncertain. Follow-up speaks volumes about the level of service at your community and the stability of that service. Plus, you'll need follow-up conversations even more when using alternatives to traditional tours so you can continue the leasing process. It doesn't simply end with the tour.

If your community is offering alternatives to touring, such as recorded videos or links to additional information, set up a time while the customer is on the phone with you to reconnect after the tour. After the future resident has seen what you have to offer on their own, touch base at the prearranged time to get their thoughts on what they saw and how well they think it will work for them.

Ask the kinds of questions you would normally use at the close of a tour, like:

- What do you think of this home?
- How would this apartment home work for you (and your family)?
- What are the things you liked most?
- How does this compare with where you're living now (or other places you've seen)?
- What are you hoping to find that you haven't seen yet?
- Where are you in the process of finding your next home?

Unless your customer needs more information or more time to make a decision, this is the time to ask for the application and deposit. **Explain what is involved in making the community their new home:**

- Holding deposit amount
- Completing an application
- Arrangements to prepare for the move

They Said Yes! – Applications and Deposits

For communities that use online applications, sight-unseen leasing will likely bring little change to your procedure. As usual, you'll want to be thoroughly familiar with the process and offer to guide prospective residents through it as needed.

If online applications are not a part of your process, consider scanning and emailing applications for customers to print, complete and return. Given that applications will include personal and financial information, you'll want to consider the most secure method for submission. Applications should not be sent to a leasing professional's private email address.

If your office is closed to the public, or closed, period, your community may need alternate methods to accept deposits and application fees. Consider these options:



- Have checks sent to a corporate or owner's office, which may be partially staffed.
- Set up an option to pay through the community website.
- Take credit card payments over the phone.
- Explore the possibility of using electronic funds transfers or payment apps like Square, PayPal, Venmo, etc.

Not Ready to Commit – Additional Follow Up

Your follow-up practices should not vary much from what are considered best industry practices. Ensure the entire team has established solid strategies for staying in touch with everyone who inquires about a new apartment home.

In a time of uncertainty, people need the feeling of safety and comfort that a home provides. Helping customers find that anchor in the midst of disruption can be an especially satisfying and worthwhile experience. Just remember to put yourself in their shoes, focus on what you **can do, instead of what you can't, and provide the kind of considerate, thoughtful service that we all want and need.**

Edge2Learn is an e-learning company that specializes in providing training solutions to the multifamily industry. With over 35+ years of experience to increase industry performance and in alignment with well-respected industry leader, Ellis, Partners in Management Solutions, the Edge2Learn training platform provides a turnkey solution for your training needs. For more information you can reach us at **844.206.6742** or **edge2learn.com**.

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