

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 VIRTUAL TOURS

Being closed to outside visitors or operating with limited leasing staff doesn't necessarily mean no leasing and no tours. There are many ways to create a first-class and, yes, even a personalized presentation for prospective residents.

How do video tours fit into the leasing process? When speaking with customers via phone or email, follow business-as-usual practices: get to know them better, connect with them and discover their needs. Then, instead of scheduling an in-person tour, offer one or more of the following options to "walk" them through the community, apartment home and your website.

Chat it Up in Real Time – Live Video Tours

Show an apartment home and talk with customers in real time using video chat on a tablet, smartphone or even a laptop with a built-in camera. Does your community already use video conferencing like GoToMeeting or Webex? Put these tools to use giving tours. If you're starting from scratch, the following video chat apps are likely the most user-friendly and well-known:

[Skype](#)

[Google Hangout](#)

[Apple FaceTime](#)

Set up a shared account for the community or for each leasing professional using their community email addresses. Then, schedule video chat tours as you would an in-person tour.



Consider these tips to help you create a professional and personal experience:

Test

Take your tablet, phone or laptop to the model or clean, vacant apartment and initiate a video chat with a colleague to make sure you have a strong signal and you are familiar with the app.

Practice

Walk through a tour with the device in record mode. Give your tour as if a customer is watching, and then review the recording to see what changes you need to make. Rinse and repeat until the process feels natural.

Setup

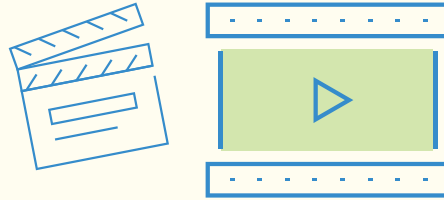
Before it's tour time, turn on all the apartment lights, open blinds and add lamps as needed to create a well-lighted and welcoming visual experience. More light will also give you a better video quality. Open all interior doors, including closets, so your tour will flow smoothly. Make sure the toilet seat lid is closed.

Tour Time

- Ask questions and engage with the customer as much or more than you would on a face-to-face tour.
- Even if your live chat app lets you see your customer's face, you may miss their reactions due to focusing on what the camera is showing. Find ways to ask for their feedback often.
- Before leaving each room, ask if the customer is ready for you to move on, or if they would like a closer look at something. This also helps you pinpoint needs.
- At the end of the tour, turn the camera on yourself so you can make a personal connection and speak directly with your customer.

Go Boutique – Custom Recorded Videos

- A custom video is one that you record and send to meet one specific customer's needs. A custom video works well if you're not able to connect by video in real time, or perhaps a prospective resident really only wants to see specific features of the apartment or community, and a photo won't capture them well.
- Making and sending custom videos might take more time. But the tradeoff is a recorded tour that connects to that customer. For this to work, spend the effort up front really getting to know them and their specific needs. That way, you can truly speak to how your features meet those needs.
- To record, simply use a device like a smartphone or tablet with a video record function. Personalize the tour as if the customer is there with you. Speak to the camera, use their name(s), link features to the needs you discovered in your earlier phone call, highlight the benefits, and ask their thoughts, even though they can't respond in real time.



Curate a Library – Recorded Video Tours

If you prioritize creating a couple of one-size-fits-all video tours, you'll have something available for customers right away while putting other options into place. Start by recording one tour of your model or a clean, vacant apartment and one tour showcasing other community amenities. Post these to your website, YouTube or other social media, then point customers to them.

As time allows, or as requests come in, build your video tour library to include some or all of these, but remember your role as a consultant and refer customers to specific videos that fit their needs best. Avoid sending out links to all the videos at once and overwhelming your customer.



Apartment Homes

- Model homes
- Mini-models
- Vacant virtual tours - something for every floor plan
- Clean and nicely decorated occupied homes (with permission)

Amenities

- Pool
- Hot tub
- Sports courts
- Fitness centers
- Business centers
- Mailbox areas
- Parking lots/garages
- Storage areas
- Playground
- Clubhouse
- Rentable items

Community

- Walking paths
- Landscaping features
- Curb appeal

Neighborhood

- Parks
- Shopping
- Libraries

Take a Walk on the Website – Website Video Chat

Instead of simply referring customers to your community website, offer to walk them through it using live chat and screen share. Help them explore floor plans, benefits and availability, while you make a personal connection and match features to their needs.

Depending on what online services you have available, you could also show the ease of applying online and how they can use your resident portal to stay in touch, pay rent, place service requests, or conduct other business with your team.

To get started, you will need an app for video conferencing and screen sharing such as you might use for remote meetings. Popular choices include:



Cisco Webex
Google Hangout
GoToMeeting
Skype
Zoom

The Oscar for Best Cinematography Goes To... – Video Tips



To improve your video-making skills, try these tips:

- Avoid making your videos so long that the customer loses interest. Several shorter videos are better.
 - If possible, edit your video to show only the best of a feature and eliminate any recording of walking between locations.
 - Editing also allows you to record larger spaces with the camera held horizontally, and small spaces like bathrooms and closets with the camera held vertically.
 - If one team member holds the camera while another demonstrates the apartment, it may be easier to create a more natural experience.
 - Move your device very slowly when panning across an entire room or when turning to move in a different direction. You don't want your customers to get dizzy!
 - Use long static shots to show a feature or room. It takes longer for someone to take in the details when they are watching a flat screen as opposed to standing in the actual space.
- Hold your recording device steady or use a tripod to avoid shakes and wobbles.
 - Size and scale can be hard to judge in a video. Help your customers by giving room sizes and comparisons such as, "This bedroom will fit a king-size bed with side tables and a dresser."
 - Anticipate the types of common questions often asked on tours and provide the information in your video.
 - Look at professional apartment tour videos on YouTube or competitor sites. Video tour vendors also post examples of their work. You may not have the equipment to make those high-end videos, but you can watch how they use the camera to capture each space and imitate their moves wherever possible.
 - There will be a learning curve, but you got this! Keep working to improve your techniques, and save some bloopers to play when you need a laugh.

The Finale – Ending the Tour

At the end of the tour, do you say thanks and cut the connection? No way! As with any phone call or tour, it's time to encourage your customer to commit to a next step.

Close each tour with questions 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?

Explain what is involved in making this their new home:

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

Set a plan for when and how you will follow up.

These discussions are easier in a live conversation when streaming a tour or a live website show-and-tell. In a recorded video, go ahead and ask for a commitment, and include general information on next steps that are unlikely to change with the COVID-19 situation. This could include, for example, directing them to your website to complete an online application. Always follow up to answer questions and provide guidance.



Moving to video tours may feel like a major shakeup, but remember that the key elements of leasing stay the same. Create a positive, memorable experience for your customer and make it your goal to help them find the best fit for their new home.

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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