



Benefits of Wireless Capabilities

Offering wireless Internet access in your properties is a huge selling point for many tenants. Here's how you can implement wireless access and how it will help boost leases and rents.

by Chad Preston



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As more rental properties have begun to offer amenities that once were considered luxuries, competition to fill vacancies has grown fierce. Now, wireless Internet may be becoming one of the deciding factors for tenants when they choose between competing properties with empty units.

"When you're in a market with a high vacancy rate, [offering wireless Internet] can draw tenants away from other properties," says Sylvia Hill, president-elect of the [National Association of Residential Property Managers](#) (NARPM).

"If you're not providing wireless capabilities, are you really staying at the forefront of the industry?" Hill asks. "It's like going green with buildings. If you're interested in keeping up your investment, you're going to invest in those technologies that increase the value of the property."

Hill says that if a potential tenant likes two properties, he will be swayed toward the one with wireless. However, she notes that the technology is not widespread enough to be at the point where someone would say, "I'm only going to rent from someone with wireless."

Hill sees wireless Internet, also known as Wi-Fi (wireless fidelity), capabilities as just another step in the "wireless" direction society already is headed in, citing how many are using cell phones instead of land lines. "Newer apartments in the future may not even have land lines for phones," she says. "With cell phone and laptops now, you don't need a phone line. This could cut down on actual building costs."

Implementing wireless Internet is relatively easy. Matt Wade, founder and owner of DC Access, a Washington, D.C.-based wireless Internet service provider, says a service provider would bring high-speed Internet "pipe" into the building and set up a wireless connection to the building. The installer also would set up in a utility closet in the basement the other equipment needed, which would include a router and a switch. From there, remote wireless devices, or "access points" are positioned throughout the building. Depending on the size and structure of the building, coverage would be possible from installing access points on every other floor. The access points are 4 x 4 x 1-inch devices, mounted in stairwells or on ceilings in external hallways. Wade says the devices can be painted so they're unobtrusive. Cable is run from all access points to the switch in the basement that ties everything together. Tenants simply would need wireless capabilities on their laptop or desktop computer.

With the growing use of Wi-Fi, privacy and security issues have arisen as wireless hot spots in commercial and residential buildings make it possible for others to piggyback on a neighbor's connection, free of charge. While your apartment building would provide wireless access to all tenants who want to use it, it is difficult to keep the Wi-Fi range solely inside the building. There are security measures available though to combat any unauthorized use of your access.

Hill says you would experience problems if you were using Internet on an unsecured network. On a secured network, you could keep track of who is logging in, she says.

"You would put an encryption code on the access points and give out the code to tenants for security," Wade says. The tenants then would enter the code on a portal site when starting up before they could access the wireless service.

Wade adds that some property owners set up the service themselves, but he recommends you find someone that has technical expertise to get it up and running, or at least consult on the installation.

Hill describes offering Wi-Fi as a value-add to your tenants—it's a way of showing you value their tenancy and that you, like them, put great stock in being Internet-savvy and in being current with the technological advantages available.

Also, "it expands the ability you have to communicate with tenants, so it benefits both tenants and the property's management office," she says. With your renters being more Internet-connected, it creates more opportunities for you to send them notifications and announcements directly instead of posting new building policies or alerts on a bulletin board in a common area or other locations. You might do that still, but the more direct the line of communication to renters is, the more effective it can be.