

**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  
FOLLOW-UPS  
MAKE THE DIFFERENCE**

While the COVID-19 pandemic has our routines turned upside-down, details such as following up with customers may get missed or be given minimal effort. But did you know that about 80% of sales are made between the 5th through 12th contact?

No matter what kind of tour experience you are using, your efforts to create a connection, sustain it with ongoing follow-up conversations, and successfully close the process will impact how well your community recovers once the pandemic is past. Will leases and revenues be down? Or will you have helped to keep apartments full? Small changes now in your follow-up quality will lead to big results.

To make sure that you "wow" every customer from inquiry to application and lease, use these guidelines for creating great follow-ups for your virtual tours.

**Follow-up Mojo – Get the Most from Follow-ups**

Whether you are offering photos, pre-recorded tour videos, custom live virtual tours, or self-guided tours, you get about one-third as much time with customers in these tour substitute experiences than you would in a standard face-to-face tour. You'll have less opportunity to create a personal connection, observe their reactions, connect their needs to the benefits/solutions you offer, and build a relationship. Great follow-ups compensate for that loss of time.

Following up is a way to keep the conversation going and build rapport during the leasing process. In following up, what you say and the quality of the exchange truly matters. Let's review some suggestions.

**Fully Engage**

The follow-up call and/or email is your chance to listen and engage. By keeping the conversation going through follow-ups, you'll learn more about who your customers are and create a genuine connection with them. This sort of approach sends a strong message to your customers—they matter. It shows that you want to do more than just find them a place to call home. You want to get to know them and their story and to help meet their needs. The rich conversations you can develop through a simple touch-base phone call lead to the relationships that turn prospective residents into long-term residents.



## Identify Needs and Ask Questions

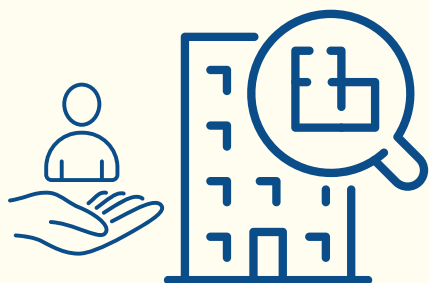
Identifying what your customers prefer and the needs they have for their next home should start with the first conversation, but it doesn't end there. In virtual touring, much of that conversation will continue during the follow-up process. For example, you can ask:

- "What was your favorite thing you saw in the (video/photos/self-guided tour)?"
- "How does the layout compare to other places you've looked?"
- "What did you think of the walk-in closets?"
- "What else are you looking for that perhaps you didn't see?"
- "Did you get a chance to explore the surrounding neighborhood? What did you think?"

## Connect Needs to Features

Follow-ups are also the time to point out how a feature of the community or an apartment home meets a specific need your customer has revealed. For example:

- A customer expressed a need for lots of storage space: "Were you able to get a good look at the size of the closets in the video I sent? Those might be the perfect solution for your extra storage needs. What do you think?"
- If being close to the playground is a stated need: "On your self-guided tour, you might have noticed your patio overlooks the playground, which I know was important to you. Does that seem like a good fit?"
- The customer has said they eat out often: "Were you able to take a look at the area map I sent? Since you like to eat out, you'll see that we are within an easy walk to a number of restaurants in the area."



## Use Trial-Closing Techniques

When you use trial-closing techniques in your follow-ups, you smooth the way toward asking for the lease, while testing the waters to see how invested your customer is. Trial-closing techniques include:

- **AGREEMENT:** Ask questions about things the customer liked that will get a "yes" response, so the customer is encouraged to lease. For example, "The oversized master bedroom is a perfect fit for your California king bed, right?"
- **ASSUMPTION:** Speak about the apartment in a way that assumes the customer will lease, such as, "Your kitchen comes with a built-in microwave."
- **INVITATION:** Offer a sincere invitation to the prospective resident to join the community. For example, "We would love to have you and Jeremy make The Pines your home."
- **SUMMARY:** Summarize the features the customer said they liked about the apartment and community. For example, "You really liked the second-floor apartment with the city view, plus the extra den space and pantry closet, right?"
- **URGENCY:** Point out that the apartment may not be available for long, such as, "We're getting a lot of requests for more information on that apartment. I don't want you to miss out on it."

## Customize the Experience

Each customer is unique. Treat them that way.

- Ensure you never make assumptions. Instead, clarify customer needs and concerns.
- Speak to how the benefits of your community meet their specific needs.
- Gain agreement for follow-up actions, such as scheduling the next touch-base call or email.
- Personalize your exchanges so it doesn't seem like you are following a script or going through the same process with them as everyone else.

## Do What You Say You'll Do

Want to know how to squash the positive vibes created by a great follow-up conversation? Simply forget to take action or follow through on the things you said you would do, whether that's sending additional materials or calling back to touch base. It's crucial to demonstrate the exceptional level of service customers can expect as a resident. Actions speak louder and are often more memorable than words.

## What Ifs – Considerations for Specific Tour Experiences

### Leasing Professional Not Present (video recordings, self-guided tours, emailed information)

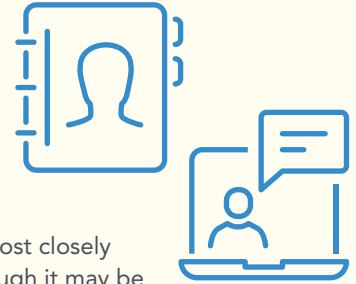
If you're not there when the customer sees the apartment or community for the first time, you lose out on their body language cues, such as pausing to soak in the view or smiling and sighing when they see something they like. Verbal cues are also lost, such as a customer saying, "This living room size is perfect for our furniture," or "I like how close the parking is."

To get that important information, you'll need to ask even more questions in follow-ups to encourage them to remember the experience of seeing things they liked—or didn't like. You can do this by reviewing the different rooms or features systematically and discussing each in turn. ("What did you like about the entryway?...How about the living room?") You can also use information you gather about their needs, lifestyle, etc. ("What did you think about the living room as a place to have your friends over?")

In situations where you're not present during the tour experience, your trial-closing techniques will need to be used during follow-up conversations and emails. For example, "I would love to have you join our community. The apartment that caught your eye is one of our most popular layouts and won't last long. I don't want you to miss out!"

And what about timing for the follow-up? If you talked with a customer and offered to send a video or other information, or they were on a self-guided tour, make a plan with them for a follow-up time and/or date.

And make sure to confirm the phone number or email address you'll need. Then, keep the appointment!



### Live Video Tour

Luckily, the live video tour most closely imitates a standard tour, though it may be shorter, and you may not be able to see your customers onscreen to watch for non-verbal clues to their opinions. Overcome that challenge by asking more often what your customers think about specific features or rooms during the tour and get their verbal feedback. That information will help your follow-up efforts tremendously. If possible, have a coworker hold the camera or take notes during the tour so you don't forget what was said. Then, use those notes in follow-ups to continue the conversation.

Live tours also mean you can use trial-closing techniques during the tour, just as you would in a face-to-face situation, but you can also use those techniques in follow-ups to check your customer's readiness to lease and to build the momentum to a natural close.



## Check it Off – Making Sure Follow-ups Get Done

Sometimes the tasks involved with following up, or following through, simply get lost in the shuffle. One or more of these tips should help no matter what your virtual leasing or altered work arrangements.

- When you schedule a virtual tour, also schedule reminders on your calendar to touch base after the tour. You can always delete them if you don't need them.
- Whoever checks phone messages should immediately list or assign items that need follow-up.
- Don't put it off. Make follow-ups your first task of the day for calls that came in after hours.
- Create a friendly team competition using a leaderboard, whether that's a physical chart in an area away from the public or a shared spreadsheet. Record follow-ups done each day by person.
- Create a checklist of all the materials your community has available for sending to prospective residents. When talking with a customer, check those things you need to send to your customer, and use it when following up so you don't forget anything.
- Send items directly after the virtual tour or call. That kind of immediate follow-up will impress a customer, and you will be reinforcing the positive energy you created in the call.
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- If possible, take turns with a coworker to cover any incoming calls, traffic, emails or other inquiries while each of you completes your follow-up tasks.
- Set up tracking measures to ensure follow-up is occurring, especially when the initial contact may have been with the call center or someone in another location.
- Use templates that can be personalized to help you provide follow-up more quickly.
- Any time you think to yourself, "I'll just remember to do that," you likely won't. Write it down.
- Celebrate successes from following up. Earning commitment from a new resident is a really big deal!

## Use Whatcha Got – Your Property Management System

If your community uses property management software, put it to work helping to track follow-ups.

### Sharing Information

- Ensure the method of contact (phone, email, call-center, walk-in) and preferred response method (phone, email, text) is being recorded.

- Use the property management system to record a scheduled follow-up so it is linked to the prospective resident's information.
- Pull reports daily to ensure all scheduled follow-ups are being completed.



## Reel 'Em In – Timing and Process

What do customers think when they leave an inquiry message and no one calls back? Or they are promised information, but it never arrives? They are likely thinking that if a salesperson doesn't make much of an effort to earn the business now, how much of an effort will they make once they already have it?

- Ask and follow your customer's preference for communicating by email, phone, text message or some other way, as your community allows.
  - Ask to schedule a follow-up call with your customer before you end a conversation, then **keep the appointment**.
  - Always leave a message if nobody answers. Let the prospective resident know you are available to answer any questions, and you look forward to hearing from them.
  - For customers who have applied, stay in **close contact** in the days to come so you can answer questions, keep them updated on their application and build a stronger personal connection. Don't let them wonder and worry what's going on with their paperwork.
- If they did not apply, follow up **within 24 hours**. If you don't hear from a prospective resident after you've done an initial follow-up, reach out again between 24 to 48 hours after the tour experience, then again in a few days and regularly as their apartment search continues. Let them know you are there for them until they have found the right home.
  - Don't let a customer's slow response time dictate or dampen your efforts to stay connected. They have a lot going on, too. Be patient and keep trying.



Lack of follow-up tells a customer you don't really care what decision they make. Good follow-up shows customers you are invested in them. It also provides insight into what type of service customers can expect if they join the community. During this time when people's lives are unpredictable, be the steady, dependable and caring professional your customers can count on.

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