



The Myth of Technology in Property Management

Upon meeting with the company owner I did not fully grasp what I had just volunteered for in writing this article.

To be honest, my first thought was that this article would be about the benefits of technology in property management. I have often dreamed of a totally automated office. My residents would send their payments by electronic fund transfer, when I received a complaint about the unauthorized four legged guest I could just send an e-mailed form letter and they would immediately do what was asked of them. This of course would all be verified with a security camera network and sound sensors. After all, my role model is George Jetson.

After two weeks of pondering my assignment and interacting with residents I have a few solid arguments that undermine the necessity of using excessive amounts of technology in successful property management.

Being the first week of the month, I was having my usual visitations from residents stopping by to pay their monthly carrying charges. There is the usual exchange of how is your family and work etc., and the occasional one way exchange of neighborhood news (gossip). One regular visitor came in short of breath and holding her chest. Unfortunately this occurs very frequently seeing she is nearly 92 and won't take her medicine "because it makes her feel goofy". After several minutes of conversation I make up a somewhat believable excuse to escort her home.

Just today a resident came in to make his monthly payment and share his neighborhood news. After nearly three years of knowing him I learned more about him in 15 minutes, than was learned in the past three years. This fortunately also cleared up some misconceptions planted in my memory from other residents.

From these two individuals and many more encounters it is clear to me that property management is a people business. Sure you can use a computer to keep the books and keep track of work orders. You can even use it to publish a newsletter. Computers, faxes, voicemail and most other technological gadgets have been proven to be useful in property management; however one thing cannot be overlooked, residential property management requires a personal touch that most people universally desire. This is difficult at best to do through the use of technology. Fortunately computer geeks are finally catching on and designing technology that is better suited to overcome some of its previous limitations.

We all have been caught up in voicemail jail, or have had the funeral homes' automated call system interrupt our shower or other intimate moments. Some of us have even accidentally emailed things to the wrong group of people that we would rather not had; such as the mother-in-law joke to your wife's entire family, including her mother.

Technology in modern property management is essential to competing successfully in today's business environment. It can also enhance client satisfaction and increase profits to boot. But, as my mother-in-law has reminded me on several occasions, do everything in moderation and remember when you come up to the pearly gates Saint Peter is not going to ask you how much you know, but how much you cared.

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5215 JOLLY-CEDAR COURT
LANSING, MICHIGAN 48911-3748



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THE INSIDER

Divisional Offices:

Milford, MI	Lansing, MI	Cincinnati, OH	Chicago, IL	Grand Rapids, MI
950 Corporate Drive, Suite 100 Milford, MI 48381 248-529-2020 248-529-2001 fax	5215 Jolly Cedar Court Lansing, MI 48911 517-887-0940 517-887-6700 fax	7148 Vailsgate Hamilton, OH 45011 513-889-0123 513-889-0505 fax	1525 E. 55th Street #203 Chicago, IL 60615 773-324-9025 773-324-9082 fax	1486 44th Street SE, Suite A Kentwood, MI 49508 616-257-8934 616-257-8947 fax