



When you get down to it, there's no task more important for apartment operators than communicating with their residents.

When renters are kept in the loop about what's happening at their communities and know they can easily reach onsite associates with their concerns, an indispensable component of resident satisfaction is established.

A few years ago, The Franklin Johnston Group decided it was time to up its resident communication game. The Virginia Beach, Va.-based developer and operator has more than 85 properties (totaling about 14,000 apartment homes) under management in seven states along the East Coast.

According to Chris Beckwith-Taylor, vice president of marketing for the company, Franklin Johnston communities were relying on direct emails and flyers to get communications to residents. These methods were not reaching renters and were inefficient uses of onsite associates' time.

"A portion of the properties had some type of web-based system where they could do some mass messaging, but that wasn't always the case," Beckwith-Taylor says. "We really were looking to create a better, easier experience for both the residents and our team members."

Franklin Johnston's search for that better experience led it to Mobile Doorman.

The company was sold by the ability of Mobile Doorman's customized community apps to more directly reach residents. Franklin Johnston was also impressed by the apps' ability to transform the management of package deliveries and amenity reservations, as well as by how easy the apps made it to promote partnerships with local businesses.

"We know how much time we all spend looking at our phones each day," Beckwith-Taylor says. "Being able to communicate with residents on their mobile devices and giving them the ability to control so much of their living experience through an app is very attractive to us. And these apps have vastly improved the experience of our onsite teams."



ABOUT TFJG:

- Headquartered in Virginia Beach, VA
- Oversees 14K+ apartment homes, 17 properties utilize Mobile Doorman
- Utilizes MRI Property Management Software



A Smooth Implementation

Franklin Johnston began implementing community apps from Mobile Doorman in 2016.

The implementation process has been a seamless one overall, according to Beckwith-Taylor. "Anytime there is a change in the way that internal policies or procedures go, there are always going to be some hiccups," he says. "Overall, the introduction of the app to our internal organization was very well received and proceeded smoothly."

Furthermore, Mobile Doorman integrates easily with MRI, the property management software used by Franklin Johnston. "Mobile Doorman has invested a significant amount of time and resources to partner with MRI. The integration allows residential data to be released into the Mobile Doorman platform and any activity that's going on in the Mobile Doorman app is pushed and syndicated into MRI," Beckwith-Taylor noted.

This thorough and seamless integration eliminates any duplicative efforts for the onsite team while ensuring the most accurate resident data is available in MRI. For instance, when a resident makes a maintenance service request through the app, that request shows up in the community's property management system.

As for the residents, the apps allow them to pay their rent online, place work orders, securely communicate with each other on virtual bulletin boards and RSVP for community events.



A Transformative Impact

When asked about the ways in which Mobile Doorman's customized apps have most impacted Franklin Johnston communities, Beckwith-Taylor and his team cite multiple benefits.

First, there is the improved communication between onsite associates and residents. The apps allow communities to send residents push notifications on their phone. Additionally, associates can be highly targeted in their outreach and communication.

"What we love is that we can be very selective for which residents we want to include in a certain distribution – whether that's an urgent notice about the water being shut off temporarily in a certain building, whether that is sending out a message about an event or whether it's just sending a reminder to pet owners about picking up after their pets," Beckwith-Taylor says.

The app promotes comfortable, informal direct messaging between residents and associates, notes Gabrielle Baldwin, community manager at Southern Pines in Virginia Beach, the first Franklin Johnston community to implement an app from Mobile Doorman.

"We're messaging back and forth with residents, and it's definitely a friendlier approach," Baldwin says. "If a resident is making a complaint, communicating with them this way can be less intense or formal than an email conversation would be."

A Better Way to Manage Packages

Mobile Doorman apps have also revamped the package delivery management process for Franklin Johnston.

"With Mobile Doorman, our onsite teams just scan a package when it arrives, and the resident instantly gets a notification that it's available for pick up," Beckwith-Taylor said. "When the resident comes in, they can just sign off electronically. So now, we've eliminated a considerable amount of time as well as the potential for error and confusion that comes when you rely on Excel spreadsheets or manual package logs."

Similarly, Franklin Johnston praises how the apps allow residents to reserve common-area amenities for events like private parties. Again, this capability removes the potential for mistakes and double bookings inherent when onsite personnel manually log reservations.

Additionally, Franklin Johnston residents have benefitted from the apps' custom tiles that promote each community's partnerships with local businesses.

"We're now able to go to business owners and say, 'Hey, my property has a custom-branded mobile app, and I would love to have a feature tile showcasing your business,'" Beckwith-Taylor says. "All I'm asking in return is that you offer my residents an exclusive discount. Give them a reason why they should come see you."

Baldwin says it's hard to overstate the impact of Mobile Doorman. "It's definitely made our job 100 percent easier," she says. "We can log on to one website here and we can do everything. We can message through the app. We can check out amenity reservations – it's really a breeze for us."

Beckwith-Taylor points to one stat in particular to demonstrate the impact of Mobile Doorman apps. At the time this case study was written, the resident portal for Southern Pines had a 3 percent usage rate among residents. By contrast, the usage rate for the community's customized app was 64 percent.

"It's an app world out there," he says. "So that's where as operators we have to be."

AUTHOR



Chris Beckwith-Taylor

Vice President of Marketing