



Paperless Trail

Apartment firms swap print advertising for an increased online presence.

Tree huggers rejoice. MetroPartners has virtually eliminated all paper marketing materials at two of its apartment communities in Yonkers, N.Y. That means no 10-page glossy brochures filled with photos of beautiful people; no ads in print apartment guidebooks; and no fancy folders overflowing with pages and pages of floorplans. Prospects do, however, walk away with one, maybe two, sheets of paper—a customized print-out with pricing information for desired units and property highlights. But don't worry—the eco-friendly paper is made of rice, and the ink is, of course, biodegradable.

The green marketing campaign is a win/win for Mother Nature and for MetroPartners, a Teaneck, N.J.-based development and management firm with 4,500 units from Philadelphia to New York. Sure, paperless marketing helps save millions of trees, but it's also the best way to target an urban Gen Xer or Yer and even a growing number of active adults, says Alan Litt, the firm's president. To reach the younger demographic, MetroPartners advertises on hot Web sites such as Craigslist, Facebook, and MySpace. The company even used YouTube to set up a contest where prospects submit a short video explaining why they can't live in their current homes and need to move. The lucky winner gets \$3,366 toward rent at 66main, a 143-unit property in Yonkers.

"Creating a YouTube video about why you need to move gets to our core audience in a much more meaningful way than a paper brochure," says Nancy A. Shenker, principal of theONswitch, the Westchester, N.Y.-based marketing firm behind the 66main campaign.

Though few multifamily firms have boldly gone 100 percent paperless like MetroPartners, the trend toward less print and increased Internet advertising is indisputable. All stats point to the power of the Internet: 54 percent to 72 percent of renters recently surveyed started their apartment search online, according to a white paper by MyNewPlace, an online rental marketplace. At Associated Estates Realty, a Richmond Heights, Ohio-based apartment owner and operator, the number of prospects starting their apartment search at the company's Web site jumped 50 percent in the last six months. As a result, companies are reevaluating marketing budgets and searching for the ideal balance between print and electronic media to best capture prospects, almost always using print to draw prospects to their Web sites.

CUTTING BACK

The paperless campaign works flawlessly at MetroPartners' urban properties, yet Litt recognizes that the strategy won't fly everywhere. "Print will never die out," he says. "There is always going to be that need to supplement with print ads given the demographic niche you are trying to hit."