How mobile adoption will enhance the resident experience

By Robert Gaulden, Allegion's director of technology alliances, multifamily

Staying competitive in the multifamily market requires differentiating a property to potential residents. People gravitate to properties because of the experiences they will receive. Property managers must stay ahead of market demands so their buildings are equipped to meet their customers' expectations. As those in the industry know, what's a differentiator today will be customary tomorrow.

Today, much of this is being driven by services. Anything can be requested through an app. Groceries can be ordered and delivered, dogs can be walked and repairs can take place almost immediately. Properties don't have to offer these services, but they will need to make sure they are possible through the right technology and products.

Barriers to services

All of these services can be initiated by a mobile device, but the barrier is getting through the resident's door. How will the dog walker get in while a resident is out? How does a resident know the plumber has arrived—and left—when he said he would?

The attraction to many of these services is the convenience they offer residents, freeing up their time to do more enjoyable things. But without a means to allow the services into the apartment that doesn't require manual participation, these can quickly become an inconvenience. When the service provider needs buzzed in, the resident must react upon their arrival. Otherwise, if the resident isn't going to be home, he or she must leave a key, which presents security risks. It comes down to a decision between convenience and security.

Package delivery is an example that has been a big topic for multifamily properties. Many have turned to the use of delivery lockers. These give residents peace of mind knowing that their packages are delivered in a secure location when they're not home. On the positive side, delivery lockers are more secure than a package sitting in the lobby, and they beat sitting home all day waiting for the delivery man to pull up. But it's not always an ideal solution. If someone orders a dresser, it might not fit in the locker. And when people don't pick up their packages right away, lockers begin to pile up—especially during heavy shopping seasons. Gaining direct access to the apartment is optimal. Of course, this comes with risk if the right technology isn't in place.

Mobile access

It's clear that residents want these services, but they need the technology to make them happen. Research presented during the National Multifamily Housing Council OPTECH conference examined how comfortable residents were letting strangers into their apartments with their current hardware. Depending on the services, many identified themselves as hesitant to very uncomfortable granting strangers access. But, when they were asked if they would let strangers in with smart technology in place, everyone grew more comfortable with the idea.

For this to happen, residents need to be able to issue temporary credentials. The easiest way for this to happen is with mobile technology. Whether the best way for this to occur is through an email, mobile app, cloud-based platform or some other solution continues to be discussed. For example, if the resident emails a dog walker the temporary credential to download, the walker needs to check her email at 3 p.m., when she is supposed to be there to walk the dog. It will only stay active during the time of the walk, then deactivate. The resident receives peace of mind knowing that the dog walker cannot get into the apartment at a later time, and the technology tracks exactly when the person arrived and left.

While email works for that scenario, managing hundreds of UPS drivers and thousands of emails would be a challenge. A mobile application would simplify this, though coordination would need to take place to ensure the lock and the UPS driver's application communicate. Despite how the credential is issued, the goal is the same: temporary mobile access.

Path to a solution

Technology evolves to increase customer satisfaction. New features and devices are created to meet expectations—the most successful of which satisfy needs consumers don't realize they need until it becomes part of their routines. There was a time when a mobile phone was a luxury. Today, people cannot remember the last time they left home without it. Smart phones are means of entertainment, GPS and our source of knowledge. More importantly, they're convenient. We don't have to use separate devices because everything is efficiently packed into pocket-sized computers.

However, convenience isn't enough because these devices must also be secure. There has to be a balance between the two. The same is true for mobile access in multifamily. If residents are going to use their mobile device to coordinate these services to occur, they need a solution that is proven secure and accountable. Otherwise the convenience-aspect of it won't be achievable.

Allegion recognizes the need to deliver an experience that balances security, convenience and compatibility. We're not looking to develop one piece of your puzzle; we strive to be your ecosystem partner. Allegion is taking a deliberate approach to ensure we understand exactly the problems that need solved and the experience that the

market ultimately wants to deliver to the resident. It must be a holistic solution. Yes, it will improve convenience, but that's just part of the need. It also will be secure, accountable, safe and compatible to integrate with the services that end users want.

Allegion's brands have been trusted by the industry for more than 100 years. Just like consumers have trusted us to protect their homes on the mechanical side, multifamily residents will be able to trust that we will devote the same attention to developing software that is secure, reliable and convenient.

There are a lot of systems in motion in a big building, and property managers shouldn't have to worry about the compatibility or reliability. While there are many point solutions available that achieve pieces of the market need, the industry needs to look at the experience as whole. It must be intentional, balancing a deep understanding of security models and best practices with innovative ideas to deliver a better resident experience.