

## **Online Bill Pay Offers Residents a Unique Amenity**

*By Patti Maass*

The property management industry has seen a great amount of technological innovation and development in recent years in areas such as accounting, marketing, leasing, and most recently in payment processing – more specifically, online payment processing.

Online bill payment programs have begun to set communities apart from their competitors while enhancing resident loyalty, retention and acquisition. A successful program can even streamline the rent collections process by reducing the time and cost associated with manual check processing and lock-box operations, improving cash flow control and reducing costs associated with collections, late payments and NSF checks.

In 2005, SatisFacts Research, a leading multifamily research firm focused on resident satisfaction and retention, surveyed 951 residents across 71 properties in 16 states to determine resident preferences regarding online rent payment services. The objective was to assess the impact of such a program on resident behaviors such as retention, leasing and satisfaction.

SatisFacts' research results showed that the ability to pay rent with a credit card would have a significant impact on resident retention, future leasing behavior and resident satisfaction.

- 36.3% of surveyed residents reported that the service would positively impact their decision to renew, ranking second among all amenities only behind recreational facilities;
- 35.3% stated it would positively impact where they decided to rent next; and
- 30.1% of all residents stated that offering an automatic credit card rent payment program would positively impact their feelings toward their apartment community

The popularity of the online bill payment program stems from the numerous benefits that it provides – particularly convenience and peace of mind.

With online bill pay, apartment managers can accept payments for rent, utilities, application fees or deposits via electronic check or credit card. Online rent payment allows managers to lower delinquent rent and reduce float and transaction expense; it allows for quicker response time to bounced checks and fewer trips to the bank (which means site staff will be spending more time on the property); and because online rent payment can reduce the expenses and hassle related to rent collections, payroll expenses can be utilized more efficiently. The result is a process that is more convenient for residents while drastically reducing the time and cost of rent collections.

At Sunrise Management, we feel that the online bill payment program is a unique amenity that strengthens our position as a service oriented company, while also allowing us to attract new residents and enhance loyalty and retention among our existing residents.

### **SatisFacts Research – Overall Resident Profile**

A broad and varied sample was included in the research study conducted by SatisFacts to ensure the results represented diverse resident opinions.

<b>General Demographic Information</b>	
Average Age	<b>34</b>
Average Rent	<b>\$1,002</b>
Average Household Income	<b>\$57,854</b>
<b>Internet Usage</b>	
% Using the Internet at home	<b>80%</b>
% Using the Internet at work	<b>73%</b>
% Using the Internet for online banking and bill paying	<b>64%</b>
<b>Rent Payment Methods</b>	
% Using handwritten checks	<b>82%</b>
% Using cashier's checks or money orders	<b>9%</b>
% Using online banking or automated payment	<b>6%</b>
% Using other payment methods	<b>3%</b>
% Using credit cards	<b>&lt;1%</b>
No answer	<b>&lt;1%</b>

*Patti Maass is Communications Director for Sunrise Management. Located in San Diego, CA, Sunrise Management is an Accredited Management Organization<sup>®</sup>, managing properties in San Diego, Orange and Riverside counties and in Phoenix, Arizona. For more information regarding professional property management or to receive a complimentary property evaluation, contact Joe Greenblatt at 858.751.6321, or e-mail [jgreenblatt@sunrisemgmt.com](mailto:jgreenblatt@sunrisemgmt.com).*

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