

## Six Things You can Do to Improve Call Conversions

By Kate Good

I started leasing in an office where there were 10 leasing consultants. In addition to being a very competitive environment, the new gal in the office was always subjected to a bit of property management initiation.

In August of 1988, it was my turn. With 838 apartments in three phases – one of which was in lease up – the phones seemed to ring every time someone blinked. Members of the leasing team would answer the phone, place the caller on hold, and tell me I had a call. Of course, this was not the case. The caller did not ask for me, but they now got stuck with me thanks to my joking co-workers.

Within no time at all, I was the number one leasing consultant in the office. Others were not happy and started to complain that I was taking all the leasing calls. How quickly they forgot that I had just graduated from my initiation period. The truth is, the joke the others played on me actually made me pretty good on the phone. It did not take long for me to discover prospects that originated from phone calls were easier to close than people walking in off the street.

I made phone skills my passion, and I credit this to my high closing ratio. I guess I should also credit the initiation of a new leasing consultant named Kate years ago. Here are some of my techniques that have increased my call conversion ratio to over 80 percent:

‡ **Ask questions in a conversational manner.** We have all been trained to ask the basic qualifying questions such as date of need, size of apartment, number of occupants and pets. These questions are often asked in a manner close to an interrogation. Questions such as, “What brings you to the area?” and “What type of furniture will you be bringing with you?”, produce hot buttons that you will need to entice the caller to visit.

‡ **Proper hold techniques.** I have been in enough leasing offices to know that the hold button is going to get some use. If you must place someone on hold, please use proper etiquette: Always ask the caller for permission prior to placing him or her on hold. Check back with the caller after 20 seconds. At this point, you may need to call him or her back or ask for some additional time. Either way, you are showing respect for the caller’s time. Never forget about the caller. Always thank him or her for holding when you return to the call.

‡ **Avoid premature price dropping.** Every caller seems to start the conversation by asking how much your apartments are renting for. At this point, if you give them the price, it really does not mean much. Their next response may be “thank you” and a dial tone. Avoid this by asking a question such as, “How soon are you moving?,” in an effort to take control of the call to discover individual needs that you will need to build value before you give the price.

‡ **Don’t just give information – sell.** In this age of heavy competition and concerns over price, you must sell to convert the call and build value to overcome the price issue. This is how you can really stand out from the competition. Too many leasing consultants simply list information about the apartments and amenities. Telling someone you have a fitness room is not enough. Talk about the equipment, hours, TVs and location of the room. This will help to paint a mental picture for the caller. Be certain to be descriptive for every item you mention.

‡ **Square footage is just a number.** Square footage does not build value and is an empty number. What sells value is to explain the functionality of the apartment and discuss all feature and benefits to the caller. When this “value sell” happens, people ask for appointments and keep them. Telling the caller your two-bedroom apartment is 1,200 square feet does not really say a thing. Spend time describing how the rooms are designed, where residents can place furniture, and how the room feels. This is also the best technique to overcome an apartment that is smaller than most in the market.

‡ **Take action during each call.** Just as we would ask for a commitment during a visit, you want to do the same thing on the leasing call. Ask for a specific appointment. Offer to e-mail floor plans, and e-brochure or a map. Get the caller involved right away and ask them to take action.

Every leasing consultant has the ability to generate his or her own traffic by converting sales calls to property visits. Based on the fact that most apartment shoppers will call three to five apartment communities, prior to their visit, your phone skill need to stand out and be geared towards converting call to visits.

*Kate Good is a professional speaker and marketing solutions expert. She may be reached at (404) 805-7370 or email [kate@apartmentmarketing.com](mailto:kate@apartmentmarketing.com). Reprinted with permission of the Arizona Multihousing Association.*