

THE 3-D EXPERIENCE

BY JEFFREY LEE

Leasing agents rely on colorful three-dimensional floor plans to overcome objections and close sales.

Prospective residents at the Hamilton Court and Kingsbury Plaza apartment communities are getting the 3-D experience—and they don't even need to wear funky glasses.

Leasing consultants at The Habitat Company, the full-service management and development company that manages Hamilton Court and Kingsbury Plaza, are using three-dimensional (3-D) apartment floor plans during the leasing process to engage prospects, help them visualize their future apartments and allow them to view the apartments again online after seeing them in person.

In turn, prospective residents are reacting well to the tool that helps them envision themselves and their belongings in their future apartments much more easily than with traditional two-dimensional floor plans, according to Sheila Byrne,

Senior Vice President of Market-Rate Management for The Habitat Company.

"It's hard to look at a traditional floor plan and see how furniture is going to fit," says Byrne, who oversees 12 market-rate communities among The Habitat Company's more than 5,000 market-rate units. "When they look at the floor plan in 3-D format, they can get a better sense of what can fit in the space. They can say, 'My bed is going to fit on that wall.'"

Painting the Picture

These more realistic floor plans are useful leasing tools when communicating with prospects unable to visit communities, says Christine Weber, Leasing Consultant at Hamilton Court Apartments, a Habitat-managed property located in Elk Grove Village, Ill., a northwest Chicago suburb.

"One prospect was transferring from California and unable to visit the property, so he

logged on to view the 3-D plans and I called to give him a virtual tour—which resulted in him renting with us," Weber says.

Weber also notes that the 3-D plans provide busy spouses or roommates with opportunities to "sign off" on an apartment that their roommates have physically toured. Furthermore, the 3-D plans give prospects the opportunity to view the layouts again after seeing the units in person, helping them to make informed decisions. "After a long day of seeing many different properties, the 3-D floor plans stand out and have the most lasting impression on the prospect," Weber says.

Leasing consultants at Kingsbury Plaza begin using the 3-D floor plans from the inception of the first leasing call with the prospect, says Sheila Coss-Stanko, Property Manager for the 420-unit, 46-floor community located in the River North neighborhood of downtown Chicago.







The consultant asks for the prospect's e-mail to send a link to the floor plan (the e-mail can then be used later for follow-ups and resident functions). Prospective residents can use the 3-D floor plan to paint mental pictures in their heads, and the leasing consultants can use it as a soft closing tool, Coss-Stanko explains.

"The 3-D floor plan helps the prospect engage in further dialogue with the leasing consultant," she says. "The leasing consultant can say, 'We're offering three accent walls as a move-in special. Which one do you want?' They could even put it on the floor plan: 'Put red on this wall.'"

Attention Grabbers

The detailed 3-D floor plans are a useful way to close a property tour and overcome potential objections, says Jaquetta Elias, who uses 3-D plans as Assistant Property Manager at Darby Development's Brackenbrook Apartments.

"I have the 3-D floor plan on my desk under a piece of glass," says Elias, whose 168-unit community is based in North Charleston, S.C. "At the end of the tour, we'll come back to the office and the [prospects] will have questions. A lot of people would say, 'I don't think my bed would fit.' I can go step by step and show them different ways to set up each room and how much furniture they can fit. It does help with overcoming a lot of objections."

At Kingsbury Plaza, the advanced floor plans have even made a convincing closing tool when the leasing consultant has no model or vacant unit to show. "We've been able to close the

prospect successfully, sight unseen, just using the floor plan tool," Coss-Stanko says.

That flexibility is becoming an important factor as prospective residents demand more online leasing capabilities, Byrne notes. "People can look at the floor plan at midnight. They can see if it'll work and then actually rent an apartment then and there. They don't have to go out and tour properties. So it's a competitive advantage over companies that don't offer it."

Choosing the Details

Creating the floor plans is a fairly detailed process, according to Maureen Vaughn, Habitat's Vice President of Marketing and Communications. The marketing department worked closely with an industry partner to design each floor plan, often going through several rounds of revisions. The company chose paint colors for the walls in each floor plan, as well as default furniture selection and placement. Once the company approved the floor plans, they were uploaded to the company website. Each floor plan cost \$99.

The standard cost for a marketing communications firm to design and develop a community's standard (2-D) floor plans with all the trappings—logos, community information, colors, average price and square footage—is about \$3,500, Vaughn estimates. Simply upgrading the floor plans to 3-D through an industry partner would bump up the price by \$99 per floor plan, or no more than \$600 to \$1,200 at most communities. Printing large batches of floor plans alone can cost \$7,000 or more.

But with the rise of print-on-demand marketing materials,

LEASING IN **3D**

THREE-DIMENSIONAL FLOOR PLANS can be beneficial throughout the leasing process, according to Darby Development's Victoria Cowart.

- **During the initial telephone call.** Leasing professionals can take prospective residents on a "virtual tour" of the community by pointing them to a 3-D floor plan on a community's web site. This can help convince prospects who might have to rent sight unseen, or it can be used as a soft-selling tool: "This looks great, doesn't it?"
- **During a tour.** The floor plans can be useful during a tour if a community does not have a vacant unit or model of the right size to show the prospect.
- **After a tour.** Use 3-D floor plans during the post-tour conversation to overcome objections. If the prospect is concerned about where their furniture will fit, show them on the 3-D floor plan.
- **Follow up.** After a call or tour, 3-D floor plans can help aid a prospect's memory after visiting numerous properties or allow them to show the floor plan to a roommate or spouse. They'll also help a community stand out from the crowd.

the days of keeping stacks of printed floor plans in the closet may be over, Vaughn says. "Going forward on new developments, we would figure out a way to just do 3-D floor plans," she says. "We would have them on the website and print them on demand." Such a solution could be significantly less expensive.

The cost of upgrading the floor plans to 3-D is already showing returns for Habitat. According to the company's website statistics, the 3-D floor plans are among the top three most visited pages on their property websites, ranking right behind the home page and photos. Habitat, which says it is the only property management company in Chicago currently using the 3-D floor plans, also has seen an increase in rentals through its online service since introducing the technology.

While the floor plans can be displayed on some of the Internet Listing Services (ILS), they display better on some than others, Vaughn notes.

Realpage, a provider of 3-D floor plans, says its data indicates prospective residents spend two to three times longer

on a website that offers 3-D floor plans. The company has created 6,000 3-D floor plans for 120 companies since it began offering them in January 2009.

While Darby Development already uses 3-D floor plans in many of its materials—in print, in brochures, on display in leasing offices, on property websites and ILSs, and, soon, in digital frames in offices or models—Vice President of Property Management Victoria Cowart, CPM, envisions an even more interactive use for the technology.

"I look forward to a time when we are showing these on iPads and smart-phones," Cowart says. "Imagine while touring a two bedroom, a client asks about another floor plan. The consultant pulls up the 3-D floor plan right there and zooms in on the plan, taking them on a virtual tour, room-by-(furnished-and-attractive)-room." ■■

Jeffrey Lee is NAA's Manager of Communications. He can be reached at jeffreylee@naahq.org or call 703/797-0647.



The advertisement features the LG logo at the top left, with the text "Life's Good" to its right. Below this is a photograph of a silver LG Commercial Front Load Washer. The washer has a control panel with a digital display and several buttons. The door is open, showing the drum. Below the photo is a red arrow pointing down to the text "Resident Pleasing LG Commercial Laundry Equipment Exclusively from Coinmach". Underneath that is the slogan "Only LG delivers the greatest water savings and energy efficiencies." followed by "Available only from" and the Coinmach and ASI logos. At the bottom is the website "www.coinmach.com".

**Resident Pleasing
LG Commercial
Laundry Equipment
Exclusively from
Coinmach**

**Only LG delivers the
greatest water savings
and energy efficiencies.**

Available only from

Coinmach ASI

www.coinmach.com