



GrandMarc at The Corner

Best Vendor/Operator Solution — Off Campus; University of Virginia



2011 Mobile Upgrade

Background and objective: The city of Charlottesville has a major problem with AT&T cell coverage as a whole because the major carriers have not invested in the proper infrastructure within the city to provide proper cell coverage. Throughout our entire property—GrandMarc at The Corner, we were unable to pick up a single bar of coverage.



2012

Parents of residents were understandably concerned with the potential safety issues and cited many "what-ifs."

- What if my son/daughter were in need of help inside their apartment and could not make a phone call to the proper authorities?
- What if my son/daughter were walking through the parking garage from their car to the apartment and could not reach out to anyone if they felt uncomfortable?
- What if we have a family emergency and I can't get the news to my son/daughter?

Residents of GrandMarc at The Corner were also concerned with safety and being able to make a call in the event of an emergency; however, they were much more concerned with the impact on their social lives. The ability to text or make phone calls to plan social events and gatherings is part of nearly every college student's life and when taken away, they notice! Countless residents voiced opinions on missing "important" social opportunities because friends simply could not reach them. This not only proved to be frustrating to the residents, but also created a negative buzz about the property amongst non-residents. GrandMarc at The Corner leasing and renewals suffered due to poor cell coverage especially for the two major providers—AT&T and T-Mobile. EdR decided the cell providers were simply taking too long to fix the situation— so we acted!

Implementation and execution

Through numerous meetings with cell tower vendors, cell service providers and consultants, it was determined that the only solution was to install a Distributive Antenna System (DAS) at the property. This system receives a cell signal from a donor tower and amplifies it throughout the property via radio transmitters. We contracted with a vendor to install the DAS which included fiber, hardline coax cable and over 100 radio transmitters throughout the site. EdR managed and coordination efforts between our vendor, AT&T and T-Mobile. Both AT&T and T-Mobile needed to sign off on the design and give us access to their donor tower. Installation start to finish took 6 weeks. We worked with property staff to market the solution to the residents along with informing them of our progress. We also held a mini-town meeting with residents allowing them to ask questions as well as meet with representatives with AT&T.

How the vendor (and product/service) solved a unique need for the operator/university and its project(s)

Students' use of iPhones has grown dramatically over the past 18-24 months and they want to live somewhere and be able to communicate. This solution solved not only that problem, but addressed our safety concern. We also installed the proper cable to be able to handle 4G service as it becomes available in the market.

Summary of the result

We are now one of the few if not the only property in the market that has "five bars" for the four major carriers (AT&T, T-Mobile, Sprint and Verizon). This is one of the main marketing efforts at the GrandMarc this year and has created a positive buzz about our property which has helped leasing efforts for 2012/2013. This has also relieved our safety concerns knowing that if an emergency happens, our residents have the ability to call the appropriate person.

How the solution saved the operator money and time

Installing a DAS requires a significant capital investment. Had we not done this, it was conceivable that could have dipped by 10 or more points resulting in a major valuation loss. The investment has created a long-term solution for cell coverage at our property resulting in positive leasing results.

Return on investment of the solution

Providing a long-term solution to the cell service issues helped to maintain customer satisfaction and create a positive buzz for the community in the market. The DAS system installed to improve cell service at GrandMarc at The Corner provided residents the ability to stay socially connected with friends and family, gave parents peace of mind knowing their child be reached at nearly any moment, limited losses from those residents who planned on vacating if the problem was not corrected and ultimately attracted new residents because our cell service exceeded that of other properties in the area. Had these issues not been corrected — and corrected quickly — we estimate GrandMarc at The Corner would have lost approximately 10% of our residents.