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Tech helped property managers during pandemic: Here to stay - Stacy Holden

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The sudden arrival of COVID-19 brought about many changes that most couldn't have imagined taking place just a few months earlier. Traditionally in-person and in-office industries were forced to take the day-to-day operations of their businesses online in just a matter of days – several months later, we now think of online remote work as simply “normal.”

Despite reopening progress across New England, many organizations and entire industries continue to work remotely, conducting their meetings, conferences and business operations in the digital world. Property management, an industry built on in-person interactions, has been able to make the dramatic leap to online a long-term reality due, in large part, to technology innovation that made it easy for teams to operate online and virtually.

The pandemic dramatically accelerated the adoption of new and innovative technologies that helped property managers in their remote work efforts, as the industry reorganized and prepared itself for a new reality. However, the industry is now finding that some of the technology it has been relying upon most heavily during the pandemic is likely to stay here for the long-run, well after the pandemic subsides.

With the new efficiencies brought on by technology innovations and the opportunity it presents for better communication and collaboration, the function of property management has been forever changed – but for the better. Property management teams realize the incredible benefit of digital transformation in their industries and see real value for it beyond a COVID-19 world.

Here is a look at some of the most prevalent technologies that helped them through the crisis and are here to stay for good.

Streamlining and automating business processes: Perhaps one of the most natural adjustments to the way property management professionals work that came out of this pandemic was streamlining and automating business processes across the board. The online shift brought to light smaller challenges that, while not impossible to deal with under normal circumstances, made working remotely quite difficult.

Our recent survey, by AppFolio, of 1,000 property management professionals revealed that, 48% of companies had some sort of plan to work towards a more efficient business process and 46% of those who responded noted that they would be relying on technology to help them achieve their goals of moving towards a more efficient company. So, moving forward, it makes sense that the technological tools and systems that have been put in place, whether they be in accounting departments, administrative efforts or filing systems, are the ones that are now in place for the long haul.

Bulk texting and email: One of the more surprising, long-lasting technologies to emerge as an essential tool post-pandemic is bulk texting and email. We found that 87% of property managers see this as a tool they'll continue using as they adapt to an ever-changing work life. Customer service is

essential in the property management profession and keeping in continual communication with residents is one way to ensure the quality of property managers' customer service never slips.

Sending text messages to check in with residents or sharing a weekly newsletter containing building and community updates has proven to be an excellent way to stay in touch while keeping safe social distance. Looking past the pandemic, continuing the use of bulk text and email messages will be essential for maintaining communication, resident engagement and more personal connections, all of which contribute to a top-notch resident living experience.

Virtual showings: By far, one of the most popular technologies for property managers that has been highlighted during the pandemic is virtual showings. A winning situation for both the prospective resident and the property manager, virtual showings are an excellent alternative to an in-person tour.

In fact, according to the AppFolio survey, "71% of property management companies said their priority of virtual showings has increased," and "64% believe they're here to stay."

Going far beyond the 2-D online listing photographs, video conferencing tools, interactive 3D models and live walkthroughs are just a few of the tools that have made the COVID-19 showing process a success that no one could have predicted.

However, while a savior during the pandemic, virtual showings have value that extends far beyond this current climate. It provides prospects with more flexibility in their apartment hunts – a convenience that no one will want to give up in the future. Difficult schedules, trying find apartments in far-away locations – these are just a few examples that contribute to challenges in the apartment hunt and in-person showings. The level of convenience afforded by going virtual is too great to throw away.

The digital transformation wave is in full motion in the property management sector. While the pandemic certainly sparked more rapid tech adoption, it also shed light on the inherent value in moving the entire industry into a digital-first reality. Pain points that occurred pre-pandemic and during the pandemic spike suddenly have solutions as teams continue to leverage new and innovative technologies.

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