



Client Budget or Client Expectation

By Erica Williams

With condominiums representing over half of the new homes built today, it comes as no surprise that companies, both large and small, are adjusting their service models to capture a piece of the business in this ever-growing sector. With so many choices available, property managers and board members are under increasing pressure to find the right service providers that not only meet the high expectations of their owners and residents but also fall within the corporation's (sometimes tight) budgets.

In the current market, security has become an increasingly popular feature for most condo buyers, and corporations are allocating huge portions of their operational budgets to accommodate this option. It is here where client budget versus client expectation problems are regularly encountered. Security is not only

about security anymore; it's about customer service and fulfilling the resident's needs and requirements.

As an owner of a security company, I can honestly say it comes down to two key factors. The budget cannot accommodate what the client expects, or the service provider cannot deliver the exceptional service that the client is generously paying for. Sure, they sound like two simple issues, but time and time again, security companies are failing because of them. If they really are simple issues, why does it happen?

Lets Look at the Budget

The budget is the cornerstone of any condominium's financial health and boards have to diligently look for the best value for the best possible cost. Unfortunately, most budgets have very little to no flexibility, and sometimes what a board expects far exceeds what

they can pay. To understand where your budget falls in the high-to-low spectrum, reach out to similar security serviced buildings in the area and find out what they pay, how that money is allocated by the company and what type of service they receive. Being able to compare apples to apples should help determine what a realistic expectation of the service should be. When a board is educated in this way, they very rarely make a wrong decision when it comes to picking a service provider.

Finding the Right Provider

When your budget is on the low end of the spectrum, having unrealistic expectations isn't the real problem. The problem occurs when a company knows you have unrealistic expectations but promises to fulfill them anyway. Underpricing and overpromising is a business model that fails



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every time. You will never get a Ferrari if your budget is for a Ford, and it comes down to the age-old saying: "If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is." However, don't be deterred; a good service provider will always try to work with the corporation to show that you can have honest value for your money. Doing something better doesn't necessarily mean it has to cost more; but there will have to be some compromise involved. For example, you cannot pay the guards minimum wage and expect no staff turnover; the

references, lots of references, and keep in mind what service you require and make sure the references reflect them. If existing site staff are important to you, look at the way the company treats their employees. The HR policies will outline what incentives they offer, if loyalty is rewarded and how they expect to balance work and their well-being. Most importantly, always make sure your guards are being paid what you have stipulated in the contract. Dishonest companies are guilty of offering low probation rates to new guards, constantly filling the empty

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company cannot have a minimal profit margin but still offer free uniform and company benefits; you cannot expect a guard to remain stationed constantly at the desk but still demand several patrols of the building complex. Define your expectations early and get them in writing, even if it's impossible to get them all, discuss what aspects of the service you really want and ensure the provider tailors a solution to encompass the most important ones. With that being said, your client service manager should always be available to you, communication should be open and constant, problems should be attended to immediately, solutions should always be offered and always be effective. These are qualities in a company's service that are not dependent on cost; they should be standard and never compromised.

When your budget is in the mid-to-high end of the spectrum, sifting through the fluff and sales spiel of a company's proposal can be daunting. How do you know you are really going to get the value you are paying for? First, look at who is doing the selling. If their only job is to sell you the service, then they are going to offer the world because they won't be the ones delivering it. An honest representation of the quality of the service can only come from the people who will be directly handling your site. Don't be afraid to ask for

shifts with cheaper stand-in bodies and increasing the service price year after year without passing a portion of that increase onto the staff. It's your right to request this information, and a good company will always provide it.

As difficult as deciding what your budget may be, nothing compares to the complexity of meeting expectations. These can differ vastly between corporations, property management firms and their managers, right down to the individual board members themselves. However, what should always be remembered is that it's not the sole responsibility of the service provider to do this. Expectations should be defined, modified, documented, nurtured, delivered and maintained, and it takes effort on everyone's part to do it. If everybody endeavours to build an honest, open and respectful working relationship, client budget versus client expectation should never be a problem.

...But if you're promised a unicorn, then it's entirely their fault. ■



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