



Ease with Fees Customer-focused payment systems pay off

by Pamela V. Rothenberg

As the Internet revolution progresses, companies continue to transform the way they interact with customers. The use of automated payment systems is one example of new customer-focused Web strategies having a positive impact on companies' bottom lines.

Automated payment systems permit payment of rent through electronic check payment programs, automatic account debits, credit cards, direct deposits and smart cards. Typically, electronic check programs use a check, or information gathered from a check, to generate an electronic payment from the consumer to the merchant that is cleared through the automated clearinghouse (ACH) or electronic funds transfer (EFT) networks.

Automated payment systems offer many concrete benefits to real estate companies. They can save time by eliminating the ongoing practice of accepting and processing payments through traditional paper methods. The use of automated receivables eliminates the time and hard costs required to print and mail statements and receive and deposit payments. They also save companies money by decreasing the need for late notices and follow-up phone calls to delinquent tenants. On the most highly visible level, use of an electronic check or automatic recurring debit program increases personnel efficiencies by

eliminating the need for staff to make frequent trips to the bank to deposit rent checks.

Automated payment systems also increase property revenue by reducing the number of late rental payments faced by companies and offering companies faster access to their money. They provide for a later depository

to write a check each month to remain in good standing with his landlord. A company's use of electronic money and Internet payment systems also demonstrates to its tech-savvy customers its commitment to the implementation of state-of-the-art "breakthrough" solutions directed to enhance the quality of service to customers.

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deadline at their financial institutions and next day credit. They also expedite a company's awareness about tenant accounts that have insufficient funds, thereby permitting companies to address tenant delinquencies more expeditiously. Most critically, automated recurring debit systems increase a company's chances of getting paid because they permit a company to schedule the payment transaction to occur on strategic dates, such as logical pay dates, increasing the possibility funds will be available in the customer's account.

Automated payment systems are extremely convenient for tenants to implement and rely upon. These systems eliminate the need for the tenant

The conduct of financial transactions with tenants through the Internet is unlikely to totally displace other more traditional approaches anytime soon. However, real estate companies that assess, test and ultimately implement Web-based solutions will be the leaders in the emerging digital marketplace and will reap associated benefits, including increased efficiencies and accuracies, cost savings, streamlined processes, enhanced control of cash and improved relationships with their customers. □

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