



An Internet café at the Archstone Westbury, a 21-building luxury apartment community in Westbury, N.Y.

Wired for the Next Generation

Internet cafés, video-gaming rooms, and iPod docks rise in popularity—even BBQ areas are going high-tech—to appeal to the coming wave of young renters. By Jerry Ascierio

The iPod generation has arrived: Will you answer the text message?

Tomorrow's wave of renters, the echo boom and millennial generations, are already having a big impact on the technology amenities offered by apartment communities.

The standard business center is morphing into an Internet café, and many clubhouses now include wireless access, flat-panel televisions, and iPod docks. Some communities are starting to offer video-gaming rooms, an amenity that grew out of the student housing industry. And even barbecue areas are getting a tech makeover.

Technology amenities are a great attraction and retention tool, and they can boost rents in accordance with their

sophistication. A 2007 study by the National Multi Housing Council (NMHC) shows that factors such as the reliability of high-speed Internet service and the availability of wireless connectivity are important to younger residents when choosing where to live.

"They're really the laptop generation," said David Cardwell, NMHC's vice president of technology. "Renters already expect high-speed Internet to be there, but today they want to have

mobility in their Internet access."

More than half of the 1,000 survey respondents were less than 34 years old, suggesting that technology amenities will grow in importance over the foreseeable future. These younger renters are more likely to play online games, download large amounts of data, and watch streaming video. "Today's college students are tomorrow's bandwidth hogs," Cardwell said.

And apartment owners are responding in kind, giving the most tried-and-true amenities a tech makeover to capture and retain this demographic.

Internet cafés

The term in community planning is "the third place," a space distinct from work and home that offers an informal, social setting. These community