CaseStudy: AHRN.com Automated Housing Referral Network

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Government Information:

Socio-Economic: Small Business

Cage Code: 71X69

DUNS#: 136271041

NAICS Codes:
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DoD Funded Military Housing Site Privatized in 2014

In 2004, in partnership with Runzheimer International, R&B Communications architected and helped launch the Automated Housing Referral Network (AHRN.com) for the Department of Defense (DoD).

SUMMARY – AHRN.com

Launched: 2004
Market: Active Duty Military

Annual Traffic:
· 7 million visits
· 2 million unique visitors
· 300 million page views

Key Benefits:
· Housing Office efficiencies
· High Military Adoption Rates
· Privatized in 2014

Prior to the development of AHRN.com, every branch of the military had a separate housing information system that stored community housing information. At many installations, no system was being used. Historically, the landlords in the local installation area who wanted to rent to the military would either call or fax in their information to the local housing office(s). The housing office would either put the information in a binder or in their proprietary system that was only accessible to them or military personnel on-base. In high density areas, there were multiple housing offices duplicating this same process with the same landlords.

The SOP required service members to wait until they arrived at their new duty station, show up to the housing office and either peruse the binders or receive a list of available housing options - many of which were no longer available. This business model was frustrating to all parties involved, wasting precious time, government dollars and increasing stress in the move process for the service member and their family. Many service members ended up moving into temporary lodging for extended periods of time increasing their out of pocket expense. All of these factors lead to an increased dissatisfaction with the move process for the service member and their family.

Our Solution

R&B Communications developed an easy to use website that was not .MIL restricted (.COM), that was free to use, that allowed landlords to input and manage their available rental listings and photos.

This, in turn, allowed service members the ability to search for fresh, available, homes that matched their preferences far in advance of their move date, ensuring that they would move directly into permanent housing. The system automatically expires the listings to keep the information fresh while the local housing office personnel oversee the data to enforce data integrity and maintain high touch service with inbound military personnel.

In 2009, AHRN.com was completely deployed to every U.S. installation and was beta launched in Europe for the Air Force. From 2010- 2013, AHRN continued to expand its' global coverage by adding numerous overseas installations. In 2014, the DoD stopped providing funding for AHRN and Runzheimer and R&B continued to work together to maintain and extend the world's leading housing site for the US Military. By 2015, AHRN.com had developed a sustaining revenue stream supported by the subscriptions and listing fees paid by property managers. R&B had developed and adapted as necessary the site offerings and underlying code base such that the site traffic could be monetized. Moving into 2016, the commercial prospects for AHRN.com are very bright.

Outcomes

There are 1.5 million active duty military members and on average, they move every two-three years. One-third of the total military moves every year.

- Housing offices decreased man hours associated with data entry, phone calls, emails and customer service saving the government $1.7 million in 2009. They were able to offer more personalized services such as home/area tours, home inspections and content management for their local area housing data.
- Duplication in system development across all military branches was consolidated into one housing referral system vs. the four that had been maintained previously.
- By making the move process easier and faster, AHRN.com increases move morale and gets military back to work and mission readiness faster.
- A DoD funded site with no revenue was transitioned in 2014-15 into a commercially viable entity generating new revenue streams to sustain and propel future growth.