

Is There A Correlation Between Shopping Report Scores, Occupancy and NOI? Does an Ongoing Shopping Program Truly Enhance the Cultivation and Growth of Leasing Professionals?

Long-term Ellis customers ask an important question when considering the direction of their leasing efforts. “Does shopping make a difference?” “Is the shopping report score and benchmarking the averages truly a reflection of overall performance?”

Not surprising, the companies that consistently score high on their shopping report and benchmarking results no longer ponder these kinds of questions. They have tackled these issues, addressed them, and moved on. Just recently, Ellis asked Gables, Lincoln Property Company and JPI their opinions and conclusions about the overall value of an ongoing shopping program ~ companies that have a proven track record for consistent and high shopping report benchmarking scores. Please listen to what these three major players in apartment development and management have to say about the connection between shopping scores, occupancy and NOI!

Shop to Train and Provide Accountability! That is the unanimous opinion of all three companies. “JPI has been shopping our leasing professionals consistently for more than 15 years. We utilize the shopping experience to assist us in training for ‘superior’ performance, associate recognition and reward, and to ensure accountability of our leasing professionals,” says **JoAnn Blaylock**, JPI Divisional President and Managing Partner. “But ultimately, we shop our associates to gauge the level of customer service being extended to the *incoming* Resident.” Shopping as a training tool and to create accountability is also the foundation of conducting on-site evaluations for Gables Residential. “We use the shopping report feedback to tailor and customize our training programs. Gables sets high standards, and shopping helps us hold our people accountable,” says **Jana Muma**, Gables Residential.

Scores Matter! Are shopping scores important? “Absolutely! And scores parallel actual performance. No question!” says Blaylock. “Our leasing superstars consistently score high on their shops. It is definitely an indicator of leasing skill and effectiveness.” JPI not only benchmarks leasing through their shopping program, they also benchmark actual closing ratios, lease production, resident interaction/customer service, NOI, and even employee satisfaction. Then Benchmark averages are used to measure both internal performance and JPI’s relative position in the industry. Blaylock indicated, “If you do not measure and benchmark, both internally and externally, you do not have a clear understanding of what is working and what is a waste of time.”

At Lincoln Property Company, the shopping report is a partial reflection of the company sales training program. “Our LPC shopping report includes the 10 Benchmark questions as well as many other sales and service performance indicators. The shop has a definite positive influence on the actual presentation which is reflected in a higher score,” explains **Maria Lawson**, LPC Vice President of Training and Marketing. Shopping scores and leasing performance are also seen as synonymous at Gables. “We view the closing ratio and the shopping scores equally important. You can’t have one without the other,” reports Muma.

Yes, We Train to the Shopping Report Questions! Why not? The questions reflect the fundamentals of an effective leasing presentation. “Our shopping report has a number of *soft* questions that reveal the quality of the relationship that is created between the leasing professional and the incoming resident,” explains Blaylock. “We train to all the shopping report questions! Learning and training to the questions clearly has a positive impact at LPC,” Lawson tells us, “We train employees to ask key questions in every presentation. Leasing is all about sales and these are basic sales questions.” LPC believes **consistency** is the key to their successful training programs and leasing efforts. All leasing professionals know these questions and are consistently coached to apply them to their sales presentation. Other companies often ask how LPC maintains the top position on the **Ellis Quarterly Shopping Report Performance Comparison** quarter after quarter. Lawson says it again, “Consistency! Consistency in training, consistency in accountability, and consistency in reward and recognition equals **consistency in results.**” Do not miss the obvious here. There is no secret formula to high shopping report scores. It is simply focus and hard work!

How Do You Stay on Top? “It is all about focus. If you want to be at the top, spend the time, money, and effort to get there,” says Blaylock. “We worked our tails off this quarter and accomplished in the Benchmark what we wanted. More important, we leased a lot of apartment homes!” Training to the Ellis Benchmark and other shopping report questions will create better scores. ALL the top ranking participating companies practice this policy. The more important result is the enhanced sales. Muma explains, “Training to the questions keeps our Gables sales force focused and on their toes. It gives us a goal for which to strive and a reason to celebrate when achieved.” But if a leasing professional is simply programmed to cover only certain questions will their presentation have any impact? Our panel tells us that covering ONLY a few of the questions would not be effective and that their leasing professionals are trained to cover all the shopping report questions. This training, combined with competency-based hiring models, produces top-notch sales professionals who have the desire and skills to perform at high levels. And yes, these employees score very high on a shop!



Expect a Shopper! Each company is upfront with their leasing professionals; expect to be shopped! But the training culture teaches these frontline associates to be more concerned that each property visitor is a prospect...not that they might be a shopper. “Leasing Professionals must assume that every person they greet is the most important person that day. Provide each visitor with your best and don’t fret about who might be a shopper,” says Blaylock. “Shoppers are prospects and prospects are shoppers,” adds Lawson, “We have had shoppers who actually lease from us. And all prospects are *shoppers* in the sense they will report to friends and family what they experience on their visit to our LPC community.”

Regular shopping creates accountability and trained leasing professionals respond by with energized performance and measurably better results; more leases! They know the shopper is coming they are clear about the high expectations. Yet these highest ranking companies get top results by training frontline associates to greet each property visitor as a customer first, a possible shopper second!

See the complete Ellis **Shopping Report Performance Comparison** including the top three ranking management companies at www.epmsonline.com or call Joanna Ellis at (972) 256-3767.