

Playing It Smart

Techcierge Connects Condo Residents with Cutting-Edge Service

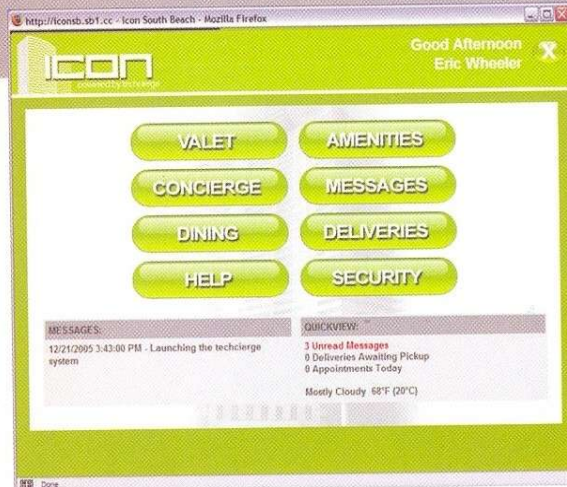
BY MARGERY GORDON

Amenities and convenience are main attractions for condo owners. Now the Continental Group, the South Florida-based company that manages 600 condominiums, is linking residents with their buildings' amenities for enhanced convenience and efficiency. Its technology affiliate, Simplikate, has designed a new computer program called Techcierge that enables condo owners to make dinner reservations, book spa services and call up their cars from valet without leaving their apartments or even picking up the phone.

Residents can send requests via email from their offices or vacation spots to limit their visitors' access to certain floors or dates and arrange for their cars to be out front at a set time each morning. The system will notify them when the valet is pulling up their cars so they don't have to wait downstairs. Front desk attendants can track packages and residents' specifications about when and how they prefer to receive deliveries. Property managers can notify hundreds of condo owners in one fell swoop about building maintenance or evacuations with the "Resident Alert" feature.

Techcierge works hand-in-hand with Continental Connect, the software used to manage about 1,400 condominiums around the country by First Service Company, the corporate parent of Continental and Simplikate. The full range of tools on Continental Connect is reserved for the property managers, accounting offices and association boards of condos within the Continental family. "It's a differentiator," says Richard Strunin, Continental's president and co-founder. "It enables us to provide a product that our competition doesn't have available to them."

Yet Techcierge is being marketed to outside firms with



properties in New York, Las Vegas, San Diego and Vancouver, B.C. Techcierge is already in half a dozen South Florida buildings – including the Jade Residences at Brickell Bay, Aqua on Allison Island, and the Murano Grande and ICON on South Beach – with plans for rolling it out to nine more by this spring. Simplikate also is in talks to bring Connect and Techcierge to new developments in Shanghai and Dubai.

"Each market has its own feature set that it defines as more important," says Michael Tolva, Simplikate's director of smart community services. "Already new buildings like Decoplage on South Beach wanted eight cameras to be able to promote a higher level of security," a trend that seems to be even more pronounced abroad.

Simplikate customizes each building's version of the software to not only emphasize the features most desired by residents, but also to work on their choice of platforms, from special touch-screen panels manufactured by AMX to the Internet connections on residents' own computers. "We're not trying to push hardware onto people," Tolva adds. "If a building doesn't want everything high-tech, they still get the added value and benefits of the system."

Indeed, the ease of this proprietary technology has helped lure buyers to Continental's affiliated developments. Jessie Boudwin, property manager for Aquazul, a new 79-unit complex in Lauderdale-by-the-Sea, says the smart building set-up "was a great selling tool." Her staff is already using Continental Connect to organize data on buyers before they move in and start accessing the Techcierge system through portable web tablets that also function as small plasma TVs. "It's like a new toy; we're playing with it, and as we figure out what it can do, we'll know better what we want it to do."

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