

TEMP HOUSING TEAMWORK

THE BENEFITS OF LEAVING HOUSING PROCUREMENT TO THE PROFESSIONALS

By Karen Schuster

A partner is described as “a person who shares or partakes, or a player on the same side or team as another.” Earning loyalty and building long-lasting partnerships are integral parts of any business, but especially essential to the temporary housing industry.

Temporary housing companies have been important partners to insurance companies since the late 1980s. Evolution

occurs with the passing of time, and sometimes that change may not always be the best. Most recently, there’s been a shift in the expectations and involvement of temporary housing companies assigned to claims.

In an effort by insurers to keep costs down, claims professionals are being burdened with the task of securing housing for their policyholders without the assistance of a temporary housing company. It’s understandable why some would form this conclusion because of the added fee from a third party for locating housing, but in an effort to save money, insurers are losing the most important part of using temporary housing providers: the overall customer service.

If locating a house was the only

job of temporary housing providers, the housing industry would have long been forgotten years ago. However, temporary housing companies are an invaluable asset and partner to those adjusters on the front lines initially working a loss, or the field staff closing files out.

Most adjusters have never worked a relocation from start to finish, due in part to files being transferred to different adjusters throughout the claim. It looks deceptively easy—like the balance beam at the summer Olympics—but we all know the time, effort, and energy that goes into producing an end result like winning a gold medal in gymnastics. Relocations may not be something at which we train for years and years, but it's certainly not an easy task that everyone could do from start to finish and produce an end result that involves a very happy policyholder.

Adjusters are busy enough as it is. Imagine if they were asked not only to coordinate the loss, but also to rebuild the house itself instead of hiring a contractor? Why not have them restore the contents and dry-clean the policyholder's clothes?

The service temporary housing contractors provide begins with the first phone call and our responsibility to guide policyholders throughout the relocation process. Policyholders are given a contact who is available 24 hours

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a day to provide assistance in their most important time of need. Many temporary housing providers have agreements with insurance partners to find like, kind, and quality property options within 24 hours. This results in policyholders spending less time in a cramped hotel room, and more time in a spacious apartment or home surrounded by normalcy until their permanent home is ready to move back into.

Temporary housing isn't just about finding or searching for a property. It's about the negotiation of a short-term lease and protection of policyholders against the economy and unscrupulous landlords. Most homeowners or landlords require a year lease to start. Housing providers are

experienced in finding like, kind, and quality options and negotiating with landlords without inflating your costs exorbitantly.

For instance, we recently worked with one of our contract partners and went head-to-head with another insurance company to secure the same lease for different policyholders. Their offer to the landlord was double our bid. That's not saving the insurance company money. That's an overworked adjuster trying to make things happen without the experience and the knowledge of negotiation tactics.

After a property is found, there are numerous items to consider, coordinate, and, most importantly, protect our policyholders against. Who will be paying the application fee to run the policyholder's credit? What if they don't qualify for the home they've chosen? In today's economy, many homeowners are struggling with the loss of a job and income, which can result in late mortgage payments and credit issues.

Temporary housing companies are able to assist in those types of situations. We front the funds for application fees, rent, property administrative fees, and assist in establishing credit with the requested temporary home. This means the policyholder isn't experiencing out-of-pocket costs while waiting for reimbursement, and they are able to secure the home they desire as opposed to the one on the other side of town because that property is the only one for which they qualify.

Will insurance professionals read through leases to be sure the terms and conditions are fair to all parties? Will they coordinate viewings, accompany policyholders on viewings, lease signings, and walkthroughs when needed, and ensure a property is not in pre-foreclosure or foreclosure status?

Utilizing housing companies will not only save insurers and adjusters time, but also it will save money. Longevity and claim volume in the temporary housing business guarantees lucrative vendor partnerships that benefit the carriers with which we work. The discounts we receive from vendors are passed on to insurers, so any service fee charged for coordination is not only cancelled out, but also is nominal compared to what we can save companies.

Individual adjusters will sometimes

call our vendors directly to receive a quote, which is something everyone should try. If you compare apples to apples, the complete packages that temporary housing contractors provide, as opposed to the bare-bones packages put together for students or employees traveling intermittently, are much more cost-effective and all-inclusive.

No one recognizes how often they utilize a vegetable peeler, cutting board, shower curtain, or bottle opener—until you are in dire need of opening a beer after work. Temporary housing providers mind these kinds of details as part of their job.

Also, when a displaced policyholder visits a furniture showroom, they are more likely to select high-end display pieces that can heavily inflate your cost. The established discounts for temporary housing providers come in handy when this occurs. However, the rates for an adjuster or office that may only see a few claims a week

claims, they have the experience of knowing when—or when not—to involve you. Communication is the key and is handled with the utmost sense of responsibility, discretion, and concern.

Temporary housing providers can suggest ideas in out-of-the-ordinary situations, or better yet, solve them without added phone calls or repercussions. Will they make a mistake? Of course, but they know that being forthright and taking

responsibility is what will build trust while creating those unbreakable, lasting relationships. The only thing they will ask for in return is the same. After all, what are friends for? **CM**

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that require housing won't compare to a housing company working with nationally contracted vendors that may be coordinating 35-50 long-term stays per week.

Last but not least, when you do utilize a temporary housing vendor, remember they are a partner and a teammate, and they should be considered an extension of your business. Housing company employees certainly don't represent themselves as insurance carrier employees, but they can certainly make your phone ring less. While handling various and unique