

What Is Your Approval Rating?

Poll your constituents frequently. Make war on bad service. Private cable operators can't cut back and allow bad service to save money. You can't afford to lose any customers, especially when the economy turns sour.

By Bryan Rader ■ *Bandwidth Consulting LLC*

I have always been enamored of presidential approval ratings. I find it interesting to see how events, the national mood, or an economic disaster can impact our nation's attitudes toward our president.

George Gallup introduced job approval ratings in the 1930s to gauge public support for the president. These subjective findings measure approval levels for the president at a single moment. George W. Bush was at 91 percent right after 9/11. More recently, he has hovered in the 25 percent approval range. In politics, it doesn't always make sense to monitor your approval ratings. For private cable operators, it does. How else would we know where we stand?

Monitoring our ratings on each of our properties is critical. And watching the "disapproval" scores is key, too. When dissatisfaction exceeds satisfaction (as it does with many one-term Presidents), you might get voted out of office.

That's why we have to watch the polls. Property owners call their on-site managers regularly to get "approval ratings" on their cable operators. These snapshot levels can have a big impact on whether or not they sign your next contract.

Can you imagine if approval ratings were measured on each of our companies once a week? What if you could call your clients and find out the "job approval" rating of your company? ABC News and CBS/New York Times do it on our sitting President – what if they did it on us?

"Good morning, Mrs. Manager, this is Carol from ABC News completing a brief approval survey about your current PCO, your private cable operator. How satisfied would say that you are?"

Oops, our approval is down. But we can go do things to move it back up in a few weeks' time.

We actually can get job approval ratings on a weekly basis in our business. Just pick up the phone and call any of your on-site managers. You will quickly find out about your approval level. And it may be with the same passion and intensity that they speak about our President.

"Not so good this week – I've had three residents come in my leasing office to complain about your rate increase."

EXPECT FLUCTUATIONS

Just as the polls move up and down for our national leader, they also fluctuate for PCOs. Think about it – we sign up a property for an 8- to 10-year agreement (kind of like a president getting an original 4-year term with a 4-year renewal option). And during that time, his ratings (and ours) will swing all over the place.

Bill Clinton's approval ratings reached their low point (36 percent) in 1993 shortly after he started his first term, and peaked five years later, during January 1998 (73 percent).

Maybe the property manager expected things to get better right away, just as they hope presidents can improve employment levels. "I thought my residents would like your pricing better, but you're still expensive."

What happens to move this approval level up or down so frequently?

Call your property manager and find out. "Your Internet speeds are too slow." "Your techs don't show up on time." "Oops, our approval is down. But we can improve it. We can go do things to move it back up in a few weeks' time. "Love

your new tech, and your broadband connection is super fast!" Nice to hear.

Sometimes we can't control all of the factors that impact our ratings. Your competition may lower his rates and add more HD channels. This might cause your scores to dip.

It also matters whom you poll. Have you ever noticed that approval ratings for Bush varied by several points based on whether the poll came from Fox News or CNN/USA Today? How could that be?

It's the same with PCOs. If you ask the on-site manager, she may tell you the service is great. But if you speak with a leasing agent, you might get a completely different rating.

It's important that PCOs take these readings frequently, and respond to them when they dip. Let's be more like Truman in 1945 (87 percent approval rating) than like Nixon in 1974 (24 percent approval). Sure, we are not going to have high scores on all properties. We must focus on the lower ones aggressively to move them back up.

Good luck making 2009 a "high approval" year! In uncertain economic times especially, every customer counts. **BBP**

About the Author

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