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Moving Into a New Apartment? There's an App for That

Updater Inc., a New York-based startup, has raised nearly \$100 million for a service designed to simplify relocating



Updater Inc.'s cellphone app is designed to simplify the process of moving to a new location.

By Josh Barbanel March 14, 2018 8:02 a.m. ET

After the exhilaration of signing a deal on a new apartment comes the panicky next step: moving one's life and belongings, not to mention cable and internet service, to a new address.

But when Meg Winslow, a life sciences researcher, moved to a studio on the West Side of Manhattan after relocating from California, she was able to set up her utilities and change her address by pressing a few buttons on her cellphone.

"There were a lot of moving parts to moving here, and I did not want to lose track" of anything, she said.

Ms. Winslow used a service by Updater Inc., UPD 1.14% a New York-based startup that has raised nearly \$100 million for a service designed to simplify the experience of relocating.

On Wednesday, New York-based brokerage Citi Habitats was expected to announce it had signed up to provide Updater to its 900 agents in Manhattan and Brooklyn, who in turn could invite as many as 20,000 of their buyers, sellers and renters to use the app.

Updater, which is listed on the Australian Securities Exchange, said the Citi Habitats deal is part of a rapid expansion of its services. They are available without charge to people who are moving by invitation from participating building owners, managers, brokerage firms and moving companies.

Updater sent invitations to 15% of people who moved in the U.S. last year, including 18% of movers in the fourth quarter, it said. Between 30% and 40% of those invited used it for their move, the company said.

When a mover responds to an email invitation, key details of their move are already filled out. They can submit a change of address notification to the post office, as well as update accounts at thousands of businesses, from magazine publishers to banks and brokerage firms.

The service is integrated with many cable companies and pay-TV services, as well as electric and gas utilities, enabling people to sign up for service on the same website. It will, for example, automatically show the services active in a particular area.

Last fall, Updater acquired two software companies serving the moving industry, and plans to roll out a way for people on the move to select a moving company from multiple price quotes. It also will offer competitive renter and homeowners insurance products.

Gary Malin, the president of Citi Habitats, said buyers and renters often turn to brokers for advice on how to complete their move. Updater would simplify a “pain point” in the process, he said, and help brokers maintain relationships with customers after a deal is signed.

“This shows them we are thinking of them, before, during and after the sale,” he said.

Caroline Bass, a broker at the Corcoran Group, said she had used Updater herself, and integrated it into a series of automated emails she sends to clients to maintain relationships and offer future services, for example, when a lease is about to expire.

While the service is free to consumers, brokerage firms and building operators pay to be included, said David Greenberg, founder and chief executive of Updater.

Updater also charges fees to cable and moving companies to customize the moving experience, he said.

Ms. Winslow received an invitation to use Updater from Josh Sarnell, her agent at Citi Habitats, who has been offering Updater for several years and used it for his own move between buildings on the West Side. Some customers are so worried about getting internet services on time that he said they ask him to verify it is working before moving day. For Ms. Winslow, 59 years old, the app simplified a complicated moment in her life. She was retiring from her research position at Stanford University and renting out her house nearby and moved to New York to be near her baby granddaughter. In January, she found a studio with a separate kitchen on the eighth floor of La Rochelle, a prewar building on West 75th Street and Columbus Avenue.

“It was a whirlwind,” she said of the move. “There was a lot of paperwork I didn’t want to miss.”