

binaryfountain



2019 Renter Insight and Digital Engagement Survey

Renters Look to Reviews, Ratings and Value When It Comes to Choosing a Home



Introduction: **Renters Look to Reviews and Ratings Now More than Ever**

When it comes to finding an apartment, where do consumers look for information, and who do they trust to give them good advice? Binary Fountain surveyed more than 1,100 U.S. adults who searched for a rental property to live in within the previous two years to find out.

What did we discover?

Today's renter expects to have digital access to accurate and detailed information about the properties they are considering, including an ample supply of up-to-date reviews.

Further, when searching online, consumers consider both information provided by property owners and other consumers.

Among the most significant findings of our survey are the following:



These and other findings point to the ever-increasing importance of a robust online presence and an active reputation management strategy for multifamily residential property managers and owners.

Within our 2019 Renter Insight & Digital Engagement Survey, we'll explore how today's renter searches for and shares information about housing and what factors influence their purchasing decisions.

Online Reviews Are More Influential Than Personal Recommendations

In the past, consumers had to seek out recommendations from family and friends or rely on word of mouth when seeking a place to rent.

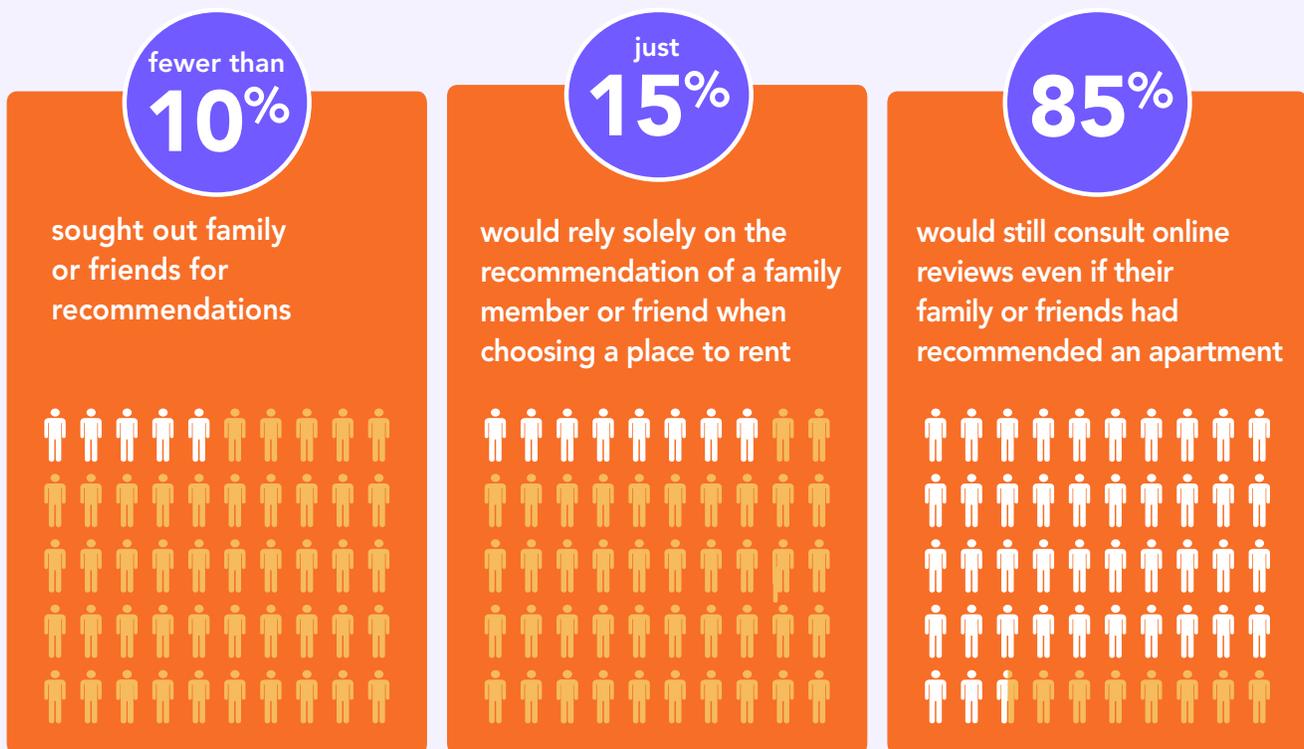
Today, more consumers are going online to guide their search and help them make their final housing choice. Without a doubt, the most influential online resources that renters turn to are review platforms.



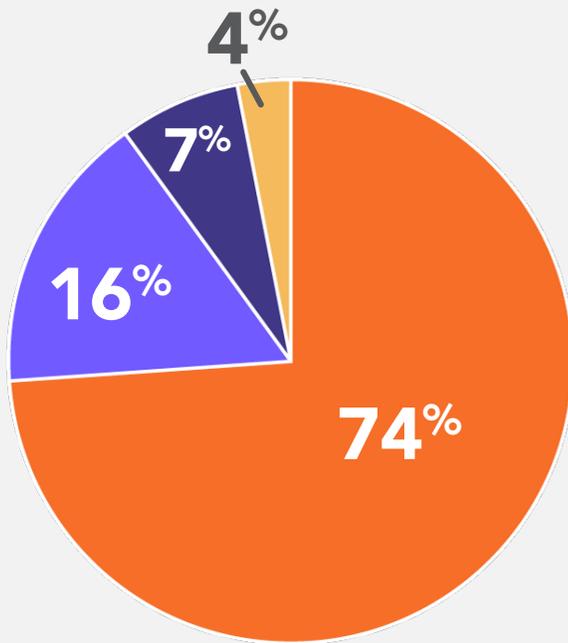
Looking beyond family and friends for advice

For many of our respondents, online reviews from current and previous residents now have more influence on renters' decisions than the opinions of their family or friends.

When we asked respondents to identify the sources they used to look for a house, condo, apartment or other property to rent:



The majority of respondents said they looked at six or more reviews before choosing an apartment to visit in person.



Before deciding to visit an apartment,

74% of respondents looked at between 1 and 10 reviews

16% of respondents looked at 11 to 20 reviews

7% of respondents looked at more than 20 reviews of a property

Only 4% of respondents did not look at online reviews before deciding to visit an apartment building.

Renters feel comfortable with paying more for a property with a positive perception

Encouraging potential renters to visit your property isn't the only reason to encourage residents to write reviews for your multifamily dwelling. Today's consumers evaluate an apartment's online reputation when deciding its value.

Our survey found that two-thirds of consumers would consider paying higher rent for a property with a high number of positive reviews and a high overall online rating.



What does this mean for multifamily property owners?

Monitoring each property's online reputation, keeping current residents satisfied and encouraging positive reviews should be considered positive activities for impacting revenue.

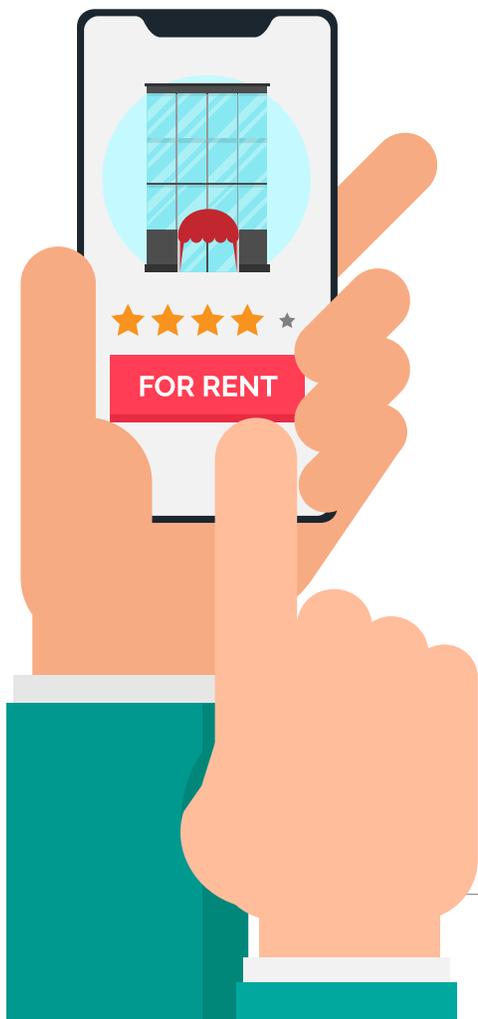
While word-of-mouth and referral programs may play a part in their marketing strategy, property owners need to maintain a steady stream of online reviews to ensure that prospective residents have the information they need to make a decision.

Online Ratings and Reviews Are Crucial to Attract New Residents

Positive online ratings and reviews are not just a nice-to-have for today's multifamily properties--they are essential for maintaining a healthy resident acquisition pipeline.

Our survey respondents told us that online ratings and reviews are among the first factors they consider when looking for a place to rent.

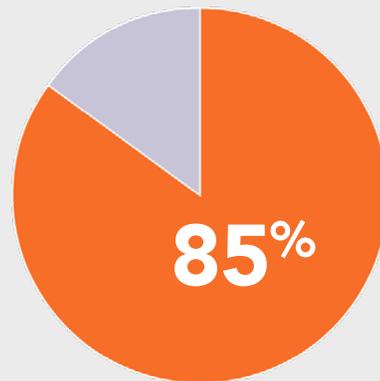
Very few consumers waited until after visiting an apartment to look at its reviews. Instead, they are using online ratings and reviews to help them determine if an in-person visit is worth their effort.



When In The Buyer's Journey Do Renters Seek Out Online Ratings and Reviews?

- 64%** look at online ratings and reviews at the beginning of their search
- 21%** look at online ratings and reviews before touring an apartment
- 5%** look at online ratings and reviews after touring an apartment
- 3%** look at online ratings and reviews before signing a lease or putting down a deposit
- 7%** of the survey respondents said that they do not look at online ratings and reviews

Altogether, **85% of survey respondents** indicated that they looked at online ratings and reviews at the beginning of their search or before choosing which apartments to visit.



Where are consumers going to find information about residential rental properties when they search online?

Today's tech-savvy apartment shoppers consider more than one source when seeking information about their available options.

More than half of our respondents used online search engines for their search.

Sixteen percent said they used an apartment listing site, while others also consulted social media, ratings and review sites, and property websites in their search strategy.

Most significantly, the numbers from our survey reveal that many consumers look at several different listing and review sites when evaluating potential rental properties.

Take the following [review sites](#)* into consideration when deciding where to focus your marketing and reputation management resources.

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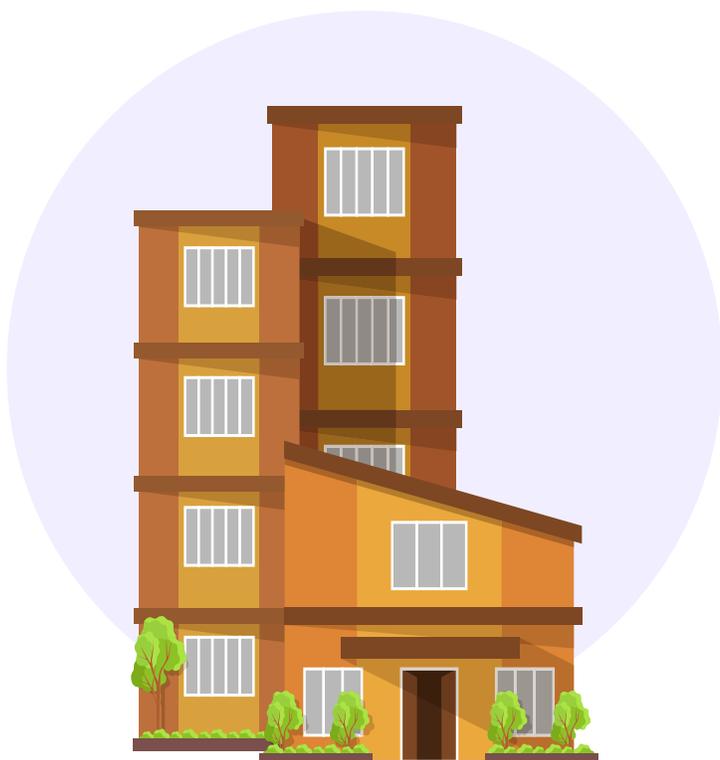


*Binary Fountain, *How to Respond to Negative Reviews*

Which Sites Do Consumers Use to Find Apartments?

Multifamily residential property owners who want to maximize their reach should ensure that their properties are well represented on Zillow, Apartments.com and Google My Business.

Once you have established a foothold on the top ranking platforms, focus on expanding your reach to Realtor.com, Craigslist and Rent.com. Also, don't overlook the growing importance of Facebook as a source for resident reviews. Regularly monitor your Facebook business page for consumer comments and reviews.



	58%
	51%
	48%
	29%
	25%
	24%
	24%
	21%
	15%
	14%
	11%
	7%

Cost and Value Are Top Priorities For Choosing and Evaluating a Property

Before moving into a new apartment, most renters have a list of desires that they are seeking to fulfill. These include factors such as a suitable location, good value, a safe environment or certain amenities.

To gain a better understanding of what today's renters want in a rental property, we asked respondents to tell us the three most important factors they consider when renting an apartment. Additionally, we asked respondents which factors are most important to them when evaluating their current or past residence.

We compared the most important evaluation factors of those seeking a new apartment against those of current residents leaving a review of their rental:

Evaluation factor	Apartment seekers	Apartment reviewers
Value and cost	80%	73%
Location	77%	61%
Safety and security	65%	61%
Amenities	28%	19%
Office staff/management	21%	27%

Whether they were searching for or rating a property, the value and cost of the rental property was the number one concern for renters.

A property's location was second in importance to both apartment seekers and reviewers, followed by safety and security. In fourth place on both searcher and reviewers' priority list, was the quality of the location's service and maintenance.



Renters are very clear about what matters most to them. While many property owners like to market their high-end amenities or exclusive services, our survey results show that people are prioritizing value more than any other factor when it comes to renting. Although location, safety and security are still key considerations, renters are increasingly cost-conscious and seek out ways to make their money go further.

However, when it comes to amenities and customer service, renters and property reviewers interests diverged.

Reviewers placed a higher priority on the quality of their property's office staff and management than its amenities, while searchers valued the location's amenities over its management service. It makes sense that someone leaving a review of a property would place a greater emphasis on staff and maintenance as these are the people they would interact with the most on a daily basis, as opposed to amenities which may be nice to have but are not something they interact with often.

Delivering accurate information to prospective residents and value plus quality customer service to existing ones is a winning combination for your multifamily property marketing funnel.



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How Does Review Sentiment Influence Renters' Decisions?

According to our results, most renters look at online ratings and reviews before deciding to tour a property. But what are they looking for?

To find out how a property's reviews and ratings influence renters, we asked our survey respondents to select the top three review factors that mattered the most to them.

Here is what they said.

Negatives outweigh positives

Consumers are looking for both the good and bad when evaluating a particular property. But among our survey respondents, negative reviews had slightly more influence than positive ones.

Outdated reviews may be less influential

Recent reviews, whether positive or negative, are likely to have a greater influence on prospective residents than older reviews. Recency ranked as the third most important factor influencing how renters perceive a property's reviews.

Ongoing reputation management is necessary to maintain market share

Managing your property's online reputation should be an integral part of your marketing strategy. It is not enough to gather a few positive reviews in a one-time push and then hope that they will keep performing.

What Aspects of a Review Are the Most Influential?

57% were influenced by a property's negative reviews

55% were influenced by a property's positive reviews

42% weighed the recency of a property's reviews

39% were influenced by the property's star ratings

Additional factors that our respondents said influenced them included the quality or length of the reviews, who authored the review, and the frequency of reviews.

Only 5% of survey respondents answered this question by stating that online ratings and reviews didn't influence their decisions.

Most renters begin their search by looking at various properties' online ratings and reviews. And, the majority of renters prefer to look at 6 or more reviews before deciding to visit a property.

Maintaining a steady supply of recent reviews gives renters the information they need to decide to take the next step and book a tour.

What Frustrates Renters?

Listing Accuracy and Completion Are Critical to Winning Business

When it comes to marketing to prospective residents, we wanted to know where property owners fell short. We asked our respondents to choose which tasks they found most frustrating about searching for a rental property.

Many respondents identified issues related to customer service and the logistics of visiting properties as frustrating. **However, the most frequent pain point for our survey respondents was finding accurate information online about the property.**

What frustrates renters the most when searching for an apartment?



These numbers indicate that despite the ability to provide consumers with information via company pages on social media, websites, listing sites and a customized Google My Business page, some property owners are still failing to meet consumers' demands for accurate information.

As more renters look first to online sources to find a place to live, property owners must be prepared to present all of the information those renters seek.



Images are vital to your marketing success

Additionally, our survey informed us that renters care about appearances. Apartment shoppers with limited time find browsing online images to be a convenient solution.

Exactly how much do photos matter to apartment seekers? Ninety-six percent of renters told us that property photos were “extremely” or “somewhat” important to them.

How Important Are Photos When Considering A Rental Property?

60% said **extremely important**

25% said images were **very important**

11% said images were **somewhat important**

12% said photos were **not important**



In addition to seeking accurate and up to date information about unit availability, features and amenities, locations and office hours, your target audience is looking for images of your property online well before they contact a property manager to arrange a tour.

What Do These Results Mean for Property Owners?

Today's apartment seekers are cost-conscious and care what other renters have said about a particular location. More importantly, they are using local search to find their next rental property, making local search optimization a priority for property owners.

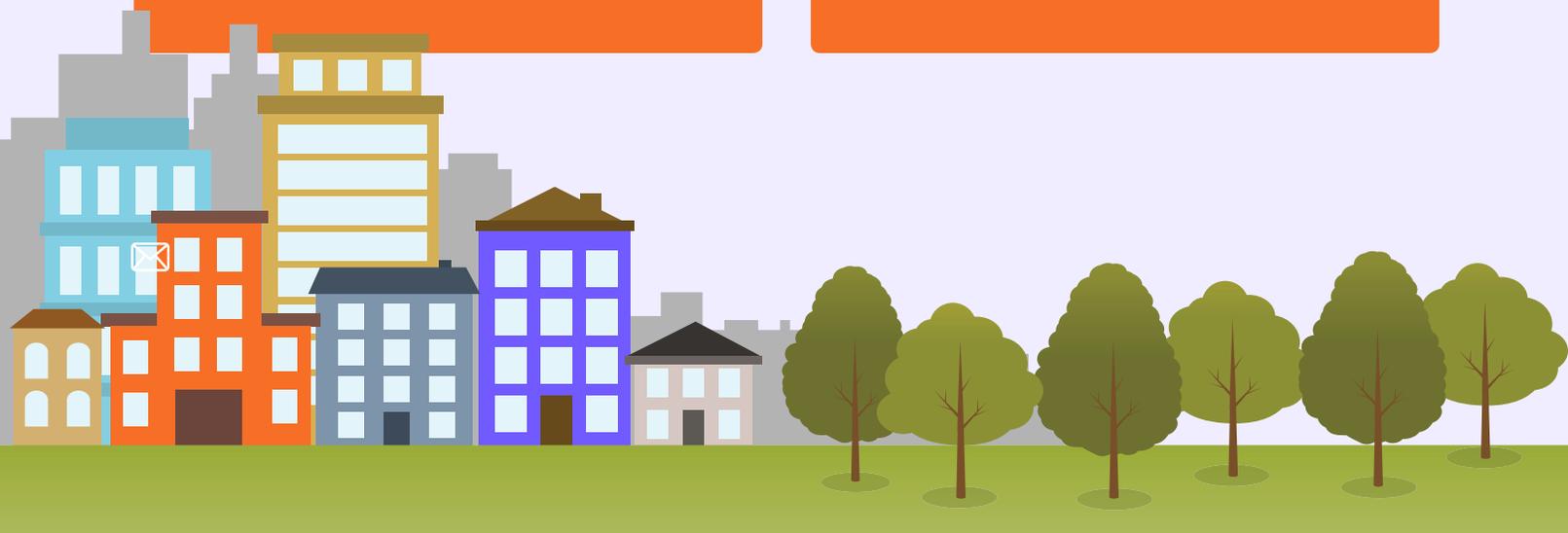
Here are our recommendations for rental property owners who want to stand out to potential renters.

Provide relevant information to prospective residents by:

- Maintaining complete, detailed and accurate listings across all the major apartment listing and rating websites
- Ensuring that your Google My Business and other NAP (name, address, phone number) citations are correct and up to date
- Uploading a variety of images of the interiors and exteriors of individual units and common areas for your properties

Deliver the features and benefits that today's renters want including:

- Value for cost that helps renters afford to live in high cost-of-living areas
- Safety features that allow them to feel secure
- Well-maintained properties and quick responses to residents' maintenance concerns
- Quality customer service to both current and prospective residents



Managing Your Property's Online Reputation

The first step in managing your online reputation is to take control of your information.

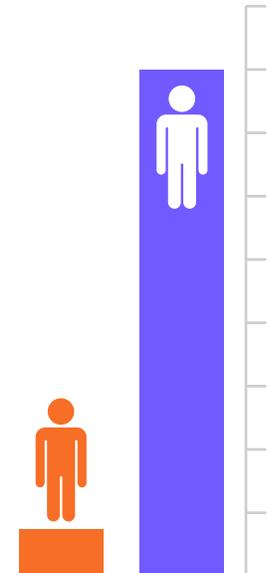
Claim your listing on each of the major real estate listing websites and your Google My Business page.

Then, review the information about your business on each of these sites and make any necessary corrections.

Next, engage in social listing to determine where your brand is being mentioned or rated.

More than 90% of renters told us that reading property managers' responses to reviews helped them evaluate a property.

Only 8% did not find property managers' responses to be helpful.

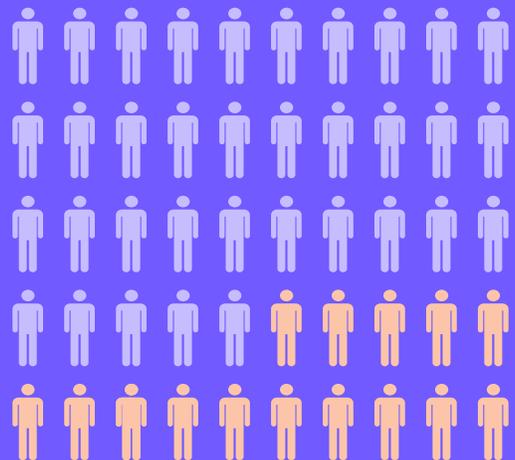


A crucial next step is to take control of the conversation as it relates to your properties.

Don't just gather information from your property's online reviews, use these reviews as an opportunity to communicate with current and prospective residents.

Additionally, renters want to see responses to both positive and negative reviews.

70% of survey respondents indicated that responses to either type of review were helpful to them.



Follow best practices when responding to negative reviews:

- 1 Keep calm** and don't respond in haste
- 2 Evaluate the review** and confirm relevant details
- 3 Thank the reviewer** for their feedback before briefly addressing their complaint
- 4 Apologize** for any poor experience the reviewer had and assure them that you are taking steps to correct the problem

Use the information you gather from reviews and consumer feedback to adjust your property management strategies. Identify any service failures or other issues and take steps to improve.

Finally, develop a system to regularly gain new reviews about your properties.

When seeking a new rental, consumers value timely and relevant reviews. Make sure your review pool is up-to-date and accurately reflects your property's current quality and level of service.

How can you get more reviews?

Sixty-four percent of respondents said that they would leave a rating or review if asked. But many property managers have difficulty taking that first step--simply making the ask.

Luckily, there are several ways to ask residents and potential renters for reviews:

- In-person:** Whether it is a front desk concierge or a leasing agent, have the person who has the most contact with the customer ask for the review. They usually are the people on the front lines who have had the easiest time having the deepest relationship with your customer.
- E-mail** is a great way to ask for resident reviews. Chances are, your residents provided their email address on their rental application. This means you probably have all the information you need to ask them to post a review.
- Text Message:** Companies can now use automated text messages to expand their influence directly to their audiences' mobile devices. Text messages also have an open rate of [98 percent*](#), all but ensuring that someone will see your review request pop up on their phone.

Binary Fountain is the Platform for Managing Online Reputation



Keeping track of all of the places your property is listed and reviewed may seem like an overwhelming task. But you do not have to do it on your own. Binary Fountain's reputation management system offers you a comprehensive solution to all of your listing and reputation management needs.

Our Natural Language Processing (NLP) technology allows you to monitor what renters are saying about your brand at scale. Plus, everything you need to monitor and respond to consumer review is available on a centralized platform. Know what apartment seekers see when they look for your property with the help of Binary Fountain.

We make it simple to monitor the online conversation surrounding your brand, dial into your strengths and weaknesses, benchmark your property against competitors, engage with reviewers and current residents, and bolster resident satisfaction.



Our Survey Methodology: Sponsored by Binary Fountain, the "2019 Renter Insight and Digital Engagement Survey" survey was conducted by SurveyMonkey between May 2-5, 2019. Feedback was obtained from more than 1,100 U.S. adults who searched for a rental property to live (i.e. house, condo, apartment, duplex, townhome, etc.) in the last two years.

Ready to take control and change the paradigm?
Ready to build a better business? Get in touch with us.

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