



# Multifamily Rentals Conversion Playbook

Best practices for effective lead conversion



# Foreword

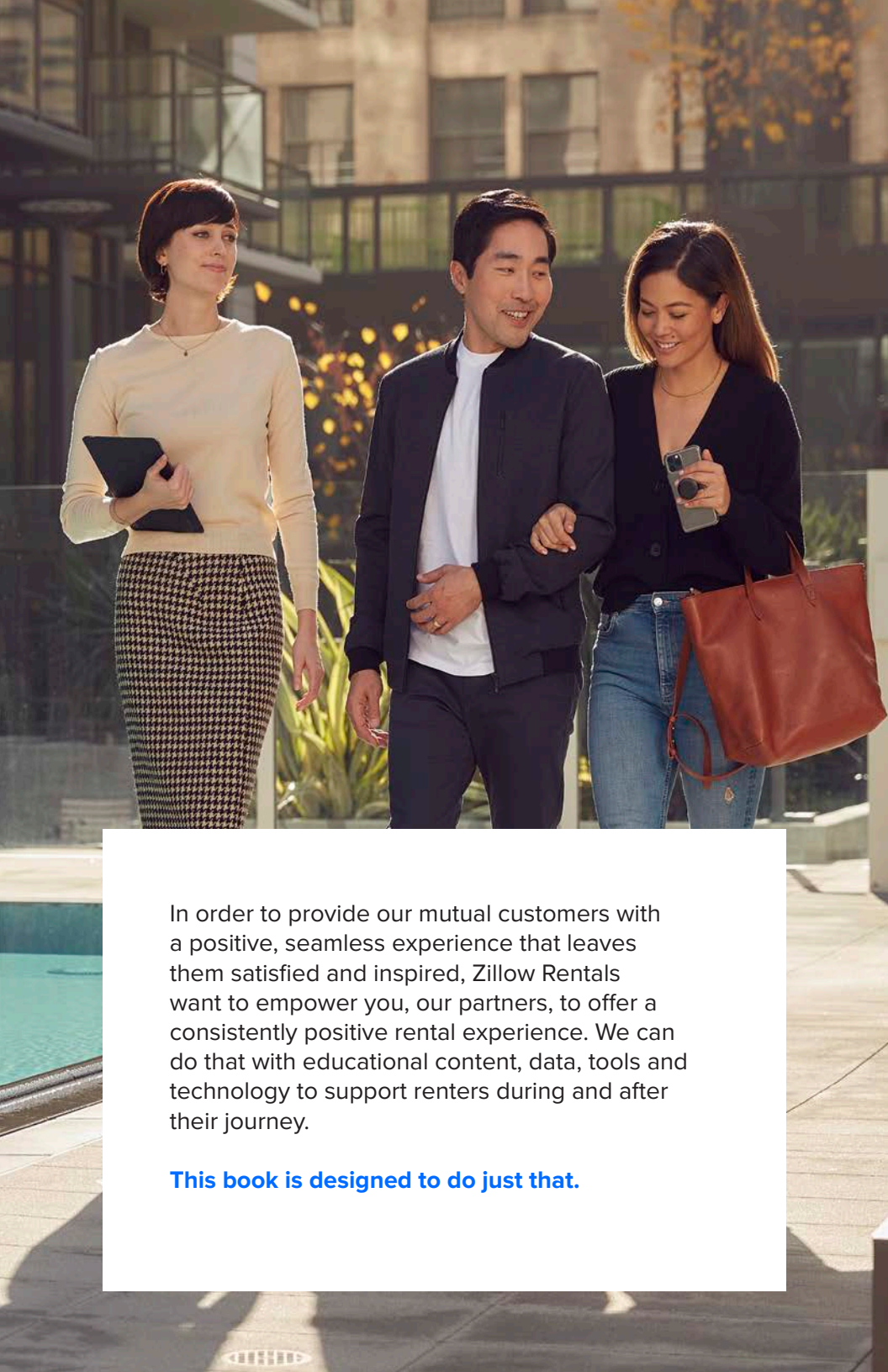
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When people begin their search for a rental home on Zillow, they're likely to be at a high-stress moment in life. They have a deadline for finding a new home. Deadlines for packing and arranging the move. Deadlines for switching utilities, changing their mailing address and cleaning up their old rental to get the security deposit back. And then there's moving day.

The intensity of the rental move — both in terms of the timeline and the number of moving parts — presents a unique set of problems that Zillow Rentals and its partners can solve by working together to create a seamless end-to-end experience for renters.

Zillow Rentals is working to empower renters through a mix of technology and human touch that includes partners as trusted allies. A renter's engagement with Zillow is, by design, also an engagement with our partners. As rental shoppers move from submitting an inquiry to touring, applying, leasing and ultimately paying rent, they should encounter the best of both in terms of technology and human connection.

Friction that detracts from any part of that experience ultimately has a negative effect on the renter.



In order to provide our mutual customers with a positive, seamless experience that leaves them satisfied and inspired, Zillow Rentals want to empower you, our partners, to offer a consistently positive rental experience. We can do that with educational content, data, tools and technology to support renters during and after their journey.

**This book is designed to do just that.**



# Introduction

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Multifamily marketers and property managers have many tech tools to measure and monitor performance of effective leasing conversation, but the **secret sauce for success involves people, process and product all working together.**

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Your people are the best asset for lead conversion: Keep them knowledgeable and accountable for lead acquisition. Know you have the *right people* in the *right roles*.

## Chapter 2: Process

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Once your people are accountable, you can *maximize* your lead conversion through consistent processes and tools.

## Chapter 3: Product

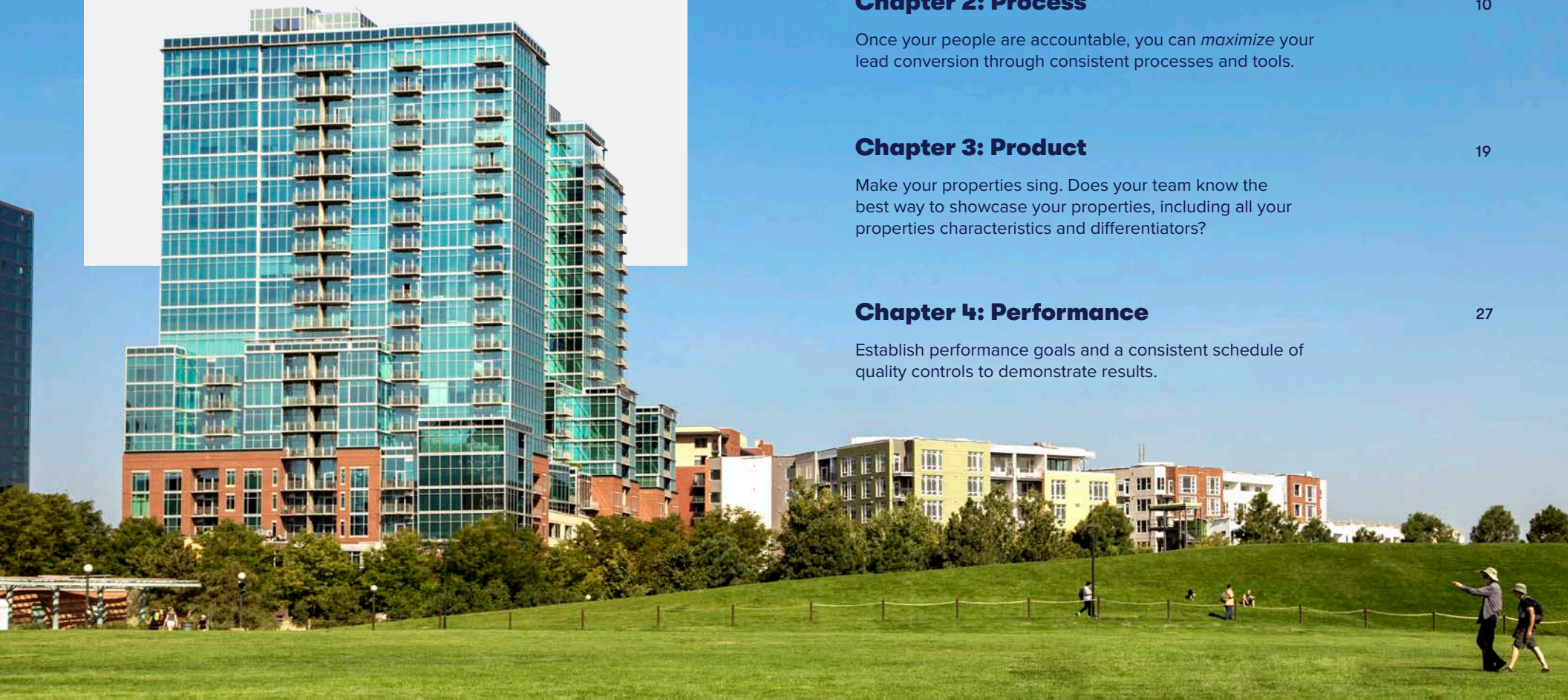
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Make your properties sing. Does your team know the best way to showcase your properties, including all your properties characteristics and differentiators?

## Chapter 4: Performance

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Establish performance goals and a consistent schedule of quality controls to demonstrate results.







# People

Automated response platforms — like chat bots or drip email systems — can bring greater predictability and productivity to your lead conversion activities. But few parts of your operation will make as much of a difference as your people. Developing a leasing team that is clear on their responsibilities — and accountable for executing on their piece of the sales pipeline — can help you identify, track and eliminate inconsistencies that are standing in the way of business growth.

You can build greater accountability into your systems by establishing performance goals and the key performance indicators (KPIs) you'll use to track those goals. Taking those steps before you begin marketing can increase your lead-to-lease ratio.

One way to establish goals and KPIs is to think about the bigger picture and the kinds of things you can measure to develop a more nuanced view of what is contributing or detracting from your success. Do some reverse engineering: Think about what's important to know and what tools you can use to get that information.



To get the most out of that effort, develop a consistent quality control schedule.

Check in regularly to identify early on what is and isn't working, and make changes to get the most from your people and your processes.

## Adopting KPIs can help you identify top performers

**Primary KPIs** typically focus on pipeline development — things such as lead-to-appointment and appointment-to-close ratios. Which KPIs are most relevant to ultimately signed leases?

**Secondary KPIs** for leasing consultants often revolve around effort — things such as average follow-ups per lead, new appointments per week and pipeline development. Looking at data that reflects effort can help pinpoint opportunities for improvement or approaches that can be copied and scaled for team-wide success.



### Primary KPIs:

- Pipeline development
- Lead-to-appointment ratio
- Appointment-to-close ratio (signed leases)



### Secondary KPIs:

- Effort benchmarks
- Average attempts per lead
- New appointments per week
- Pipeline development

**Use these KPIs as benchmarks for all your leasing consultants.**

## Quality control cadence

As you establish a methodical approach to increasing your lead conversion rate, you also should establish a schedule for reviewing and evaluating your leasing staff performance. Schedule recurring reviews for each leasing professional, and keep a simple scorecard to easily track and view how your people are doing.

### Example scorecard

Agent Name	Active Leads	C Leads	B Leads	A Leads	Applied/Moved In
Belinda Forrest	6	0	0	1	1
Mohammed Ennis	11	2	2	6	0
Charles Manley	9	1	2	3	0
Yesenia Rios	14	0	5	4	0
Mike Taylor	2	0	1	0	0
William Smith	7	0	0	1	0

Data-based decisions are more likely to result in improved leasing and marketing strategies that increase occupancy rates and bottom-line ROI.

The numbers from your evaluations and reviews offer the most accurate measure of what's actually happening, so you don't have to guess or rely on gut feelings that might provide a distorted or inaccurate picture of what's actually happening.



The best way to improve efficiencies and opportunities at your apartment community is to think like your customer. Stand in a renter's shoes and see if the processes you have in place meet their needs at any given point in their journey.

Multifamily marketers juggle many competing priorities, and are often forced to tend to the most pressing matter. That can lead to a focus on the day-to-day business tasks at the expense of maximizing lead conversation, which can deliver high returns.

How you maximize lead conversion impacts your marketing, tours and management — and can make each more effective. The good news: How and when you respond to leads is entirely under your control.

The lead response, follow-up, and rapport building process is key to engaging with a prospective resident. Everyone on



# Process

## Six steps that can maximize leads

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**1** Respond immediately

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**2** Mirror communication styles to build rapport

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**3** Qualify the renter

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**4** Segment warm vs. cool

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**5** Daily engagement

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**6** Follow up

the leasing team should be trained on the talking points and the philosophy behind standardizing lead engagement. They also should have a deep appreciation for the renter's need for human connection as they move from looking to finding to moving into a new home.

Developing a consistent process for your leasing consultants that starts at the initial point of contact and extends through the following process can make staff management more efficient, provide greater visibility into your leasing funnel and increase your lead-to-lease ratio.

Research conducted by Zillow Group and MAC Properties identified five steps that can maximize leads. Following these steps can improve all areas of your business.

### 1. Respond immediately

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Among renters who contacted at least one landlord or property manager in the past year, 45% say they expect a response within a few hours or less, and 77% say they want to hear back within a day.\*

According to the research, properties that respond to leads in the first 1–2 minutes of receiving an inquiry are 40% more likely to engage with them than those that wait a day or longer to reply.

## 2. Mirror communication styles to build rapport

Offer multiple ways for customers to contact you — text message, phone call or email. If the customer is expecting a reply, respond quickly using the same form of communication they used to contact you. Research shows that responding to a lead with a form of communication that is different than the one they used to contact you — for instance responding to a text with an email or phone call — cuts the value of that lead in half.

When you connect with the lead, ask simple and consistent questions during the initial conversation or on a tour to learn more about what's important to them. The more you understand what's important to a renter, the better you can better connect your property's value proposition to their



### Some key questions to ask include:

- What are their housing needs?
- Does their commute determine where they live?
- What are their move timelines?
- Do they plan to work from home?

needs and wants. If the renter isn't ready to move forward when the initial conversation took place, you can use that information to re-engage the prospective resident later.

## 3. Qualify the renter

While the goal of the qualifying discussion is to schedule a face-to-face appointment, you should approach it as an opportunity to build rapport with the renter.

Find out each prospective resident's basic preferences for **LPMA — Location, Price, Motivation, Appointment.**



Get the information you need to qualify the renter, but also give the prospective resident the information they need.



Avoid questions that could be interpreted as discriminatory under the federal [Fair Housing Act](#) or any local or state anti-discrimination laws that apply in your locale.

Your conversation with the renter should focus on the property and the amenities — not on who you think an ideal renter would be. To avoid potential discrimination, consider using a documented and consistent method to [screen and accept applicants](#), and accept or deny renters based on criteria that are applied consistently and meet the standards of the anti-discrimination laws.

## 4. Segment warm vs cool

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Lead segmentation shows you where you should be spending your time and money for the biggest return on investment. When you understand a renter's motivations, you can better determine their timeline for leasing and then categorize them appropriately as a warm or cool lead. The organized data in your customer relationship management (CRM) system should allow you to



predict renter behavior more accurately to streamline your operations.

## 5. Daily engagement

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Train your leasing professionals in time management to help them increase their lead-to-appointment ratio. For instance, have them take 30 minutes every morning to dissect the leasing sheet and the hottest leads to better connect the dots. Spend time every day nurturing the pipeline and examining it for actionable insights.

## 6. Follow up

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Lead nurturing is perhaps one of the best ways to produce high quality leads. Make follow-up part of your daily engagement. About half of rental marketers don't have or use a CRM to follow up with leads, and only about 30% follow up



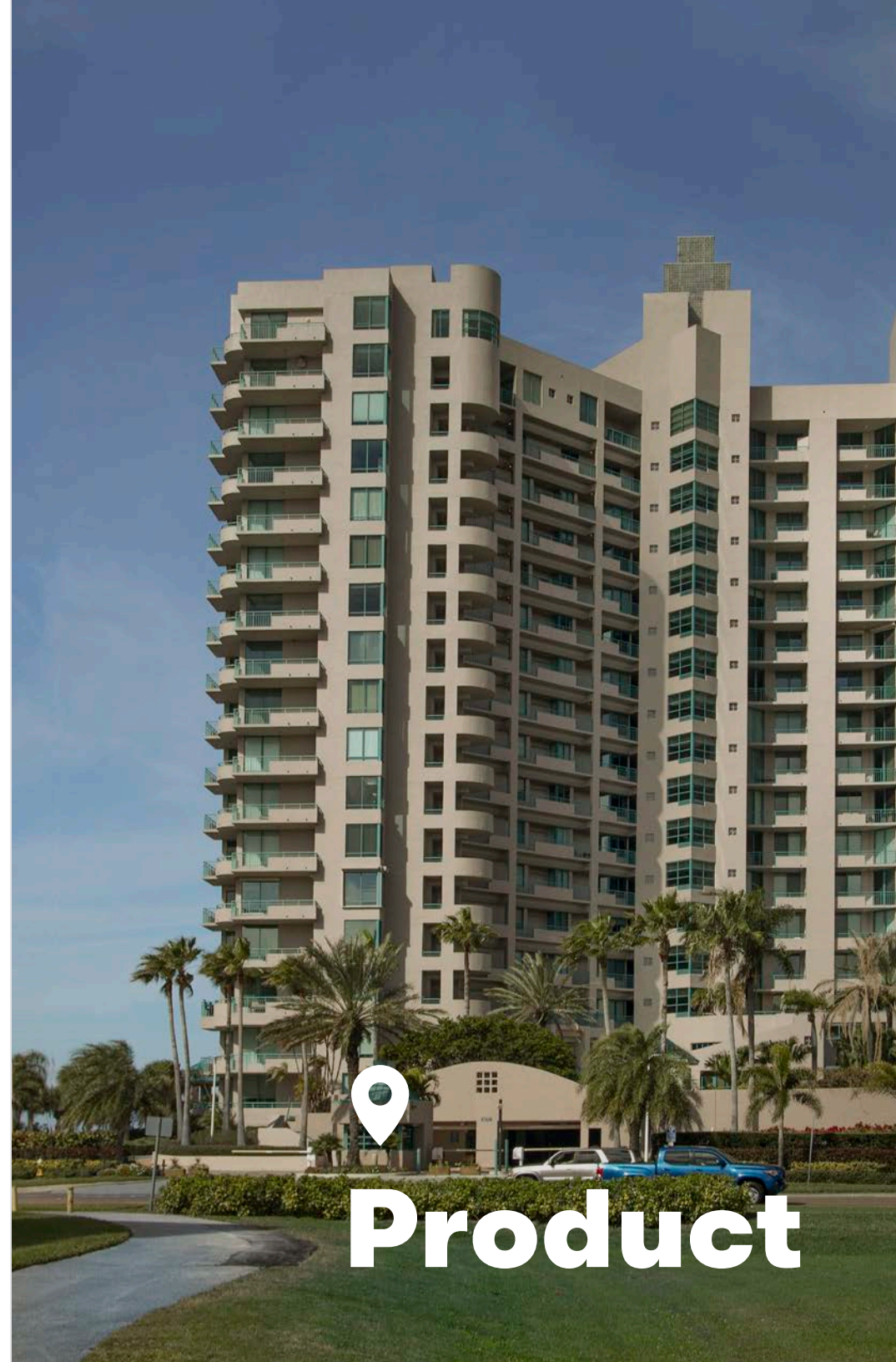
a single time. To get the most effective results with prospective tenants, make five contacts over four days. Data shows that this frequency returns the most value for your marketing dollars. Developing an effective follow-up strategy can help pull you ahead of your competitors, especially if they have no strategy.

## Summary

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In the race for tours and signed leases, recognize that you'll be operating at different speeds at different times. Respond quickly when leads contact you and be methodical in your follow-up. Communicate with prospective renters through the channels they prefer to be contacted.

Reaping the highest value of your marketing investment starts with adopting best practices that show renters you value their time and their business.



# Product



Your properties can sell themselves, but only if they are being communicated properly and consistently.



### Ask yourself

- Do renters view your properties the same way your leasing professionals do?
- Do they know all that your properties have to offer and where you stand out from the competition?

Know your properties inside and out. Examine what's being sold and its key marketing characteristics, including pricing, packaging, sizing and targeting.

Take a few minutes to think about your properties, what makes them unique and how you can make them stand out. Are you highlighting the right things and showcasing those things in your listing?

## Relay your unique value proposition

Make sure everyone on your leasing staff understands your company's unique value proposition (UVP). It's essential to align your leasing consultants on your property's differentiators, especially in competitive rental markets.

Make a list of the differentiators. Develop scripts for how you will discuss each one with apartment shoppers and practice them with your leasing staff.



## Exercise

What do your properties offer that no one else does?  
Below is a template showing how to create a sample UVP  
for a property:

For \_\_\_\_\_ who need to  
(TARGET CUSTOMER)

\_\_\_\_\_ our property's  
(THE PROBLEM WE SOLVE)

\_\_\_\_\_ provides \_\_\_\_\_.  
(SOLUTIONS) (QUALIFIED BENEFITS)

Unlike \_\_\_\_\_ we do this by  
(COMPETITION)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(HOW WE DO IT)

What is the unique value proposition for each of  
your properties?

Here's an example:

For rental shoppers who need to  
find and rent a home our property's  
location, variety of floor plans and amenities  
provides long-term rental options. Unlike  
XYZ Properties we do this by combining  
our extensive number of rental units with a  
deep understanding of our residents' needs  
and concerns.





## Price it right and interest renters

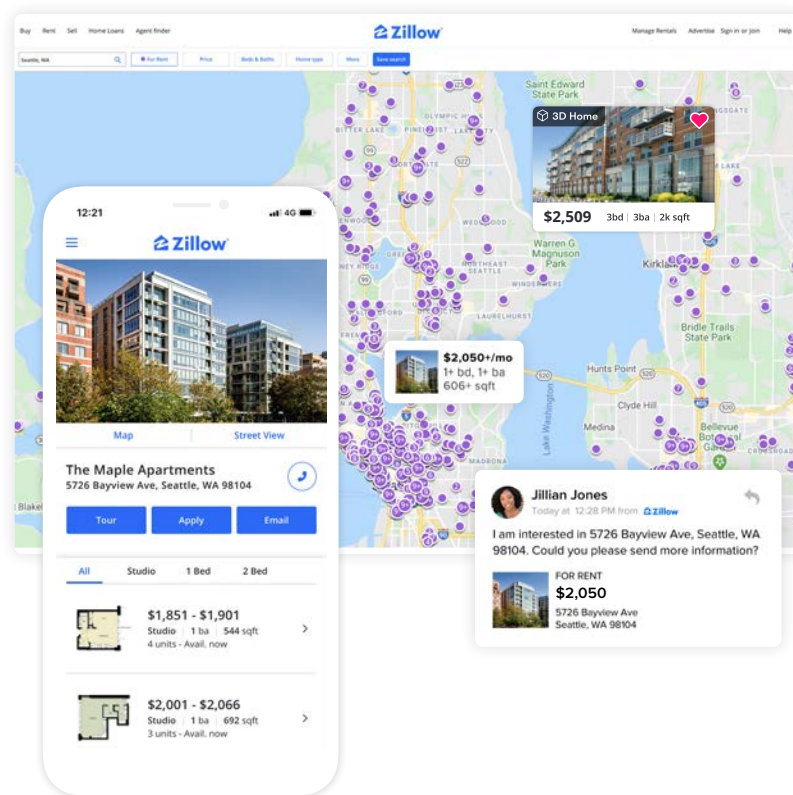
Understanding your market can help you set a competitive rent price. To save time, use the right tools to research other properties and suss out that perfect price point.

The [Zillow Observed Rent Index](#) uses machine learning to track monthly median rent rates based on geographic area. You can [dig into local market data](#) to look at various metros and uncover what's happening in a particular region. You also can get a more in-depth view of market pricing comparisons via the rentals dashboard available to Zillow partners.

The rentals market is fiercely competitive, but if you're armed with the right analytics tools and insights, you can confidently navigate the market and maintain occupancy rates with ease.

## Ensuring Zillow listing quality

Your listing is likely to be the first point of contact with a prospective tenant. They're looking for their next home and want all their questions answered. Also on the list of desires: lots of good photos, accurate information that digs into the details, and the ability to tour it remotely to get a feel for the apartment before investing in an in-person tour. They want a deal, but also to feel excited, like they've found The One.



**Get the most from your listings by giving renters the information they want and need**

FOCUS ON	RENTER PERSPECTIVE
PRICING FRESHNESS	Provide competitive prices with the Zillow Observed Rent Index (ZORI)
SPECIAL OFFERS	Renters want a deal! Renters in 2021 are slightly more likely to report getting at least one perk or concession as a part of their rental agreement than those in 2020
RICH MEDIA AND 3D TOURS	A majority of renters (58%) say 3D tours would give them a better feel for the space than static photos, and half wish more listings had 3D tours available.

**Use this checklist to see if you're giving renters the data-rich listings they want**

- ☐ At least 10 good quality photos
- ☐ A hero image
- ☐ At least three floor plans with unit-level availability
- ☐ At least one virtual tour
- ☐ Has a special offer
- ☐ Has a description
- ☐ Has 5+ amenities, especially pet info, parking, and community amenities



How do you know you've identified the right audience for your marketing efforts? How can you measure which of your efforts are working and which ones aren't?



It all comes down to marketing attribution — the act of determining which of your marketing channels are driving results.

If you're relying solely on form submits and phone calls from online sources or your own website to determine whether your

people and processes are successfully selling your product, you're missing out on some powerful tools. Management companies often rely on qualitative information and anecdotal feedback to inform their marketing efforts when they could also be using the processes or performance systems designed to help them.

The most effective way to standardize a leasing conversation is to identify specific goals based on data that shows which factors will influence a lead to engage and do business with your company.

Establish performance goals and a consistent schedule of quality control to demonstrate results. Most of all, know what you want from your funnel.



# Performance

## Measurement tools

To develop a sophisticated marketing funnel, consider adopting tools that represent the three pillars of measuring: Metrics, Tech Stack and Analytics.

### Map each row back to your marketing funnel:

MARKETING FUNNEL	ACTION	METRICS	TECH STACK	ANALYTICS
AWARENESS	Seeing website/ad	Impressions	Web analytics, social media	Entry source
CONSIDERATION	Visiting site/taking a tour	Clicks	CRM/call tracking	Content engagement
CONVERSION	Application to rent	Guest card	CRM	Attribution
LOYALTY	Signing the lease	Cost per lease	CRM	CRM
RETENTION	Renewal of lease	Length of lease	Marketing automation	Churn prediction

## Metrics

**A quantitative measurement that counts or tracks an event, i.e. web visits or click-throughs.**

Most marketers track click through rates, open rates, delivery rates for email, and social reach, traffic referrals and leads for social.

Still, despite the importance of monitoring your engagement metrics, the bottom line for most rental property marketers is signed leases. Are you ensuring the channels and tactics in your marketing approach are ultimately driving signed leases?



### Considerations

- **What metrics are the most important to you?**
- **How will those metrics drive into your funnel?**
- **Which channels ultimately drive signed leases?**



## Analytics

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Analytics make sense of a large set of data. Examples of data analytics include the collection, analysis and reporting of web data, or looking at existing data to see if they provide insights on processes or customers or trends. Tools such as dashboards and Google Analytics can help you see results to guide investments.



### Considerations

- **How do you translate metrics into action?**
- **Which channels need better tracking to understand their return?**
- **Which channel is limited by the resources available?**
- **Which channels return the most engaged prospective renters?**
- **Which efforts are resulting in growth?**
- **Which channels are affecting other channels' growth?**

## Tech stack

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These are the tools to measure both metrics and analytics.

ACCORDING TO RADIUS

### **The average marketing team has more than 17 tools in their stack.**

Consider what tools you might need to accomplish your leasing or occupancy goals. Work backwards by first identifying the things you want and need to know, and then choose the tools that can best provide that information in a form you can understand and use. It could be your website, analytics software, call tracking, CRM, property management software, or all of them working together.

The options are endless, but you can narrow them by being crystal clear about the information you need for success.





## CRM

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A CRM is the backbone of any marketing and lead-generation strategy because it manages the customer lifecycle. A CRM automates several tasks and workflows, saving you time and money and providing rental shoppers consistent interactions with you. Adopting a CRM can be one of the most important and beneficial decisions you make. There are many choices, so research your options for the right fit.

## Web analytics

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A collection, analyses and reporting of web data that can be used to extract insights, optimize performance, and predict trends.

To better understand if your advertising is performing on platforms like Zillow, Trulia, and HotPads, Apartments.com, ApartmentGuide, and Craigslist, you can track those visitors from source to lease.

## Essential Tools for Marketing and Lead Generation

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The best, most efficient way to track your leads is through:

- An efficient web analytics platform
- A website that accepts UTM or other codes for source tracking
- Dynamic number insertion on your website/mobile for your various sources
- A CRM that records the initial entry (phone or form submit) in order to match it to the lease record



## Up-level your marketing with these tools and tactics

**Marketing automation:** Effectively market on multiple channels online by automating repetitive tasks. Marketing automation can also be deployed through your CRM to align with key renter touchpoints.

**Web content management:** Create and manage website content, with attention to keywords and SEO value.

**Click management:** Manage marketing tags, also known as tracking pixels

**Call tracking:** Track phone calls to performance-based advertising.

If you already use analytics software, get in the habit of regularly reviewing traffic to inform your marketing decisions. You'll be able to see where your leads come from, as well as how they found your website, how long they spent on your pages, which pages they visited — all of which can give you a better understanding of the entire marketing funnel and help maximize your marketing dollars.



## Considerations

- Does any software or advertising solutions you're considering integrate with your existing data and tools?
- How does the technology meet your needs?
- What technology do you currently have to track and measure online marketing?
- Do you have the staff to support and utilize the new tool?
- What is your budget?

# Conclusion

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Orchestrating your People, Processes, Product and Performance to work together will set you up to have the most effective and informed lead management process with more conversions.

Best of all, when you improve how you do business, you make the journey easier for your renters. And that's why we're all here.

