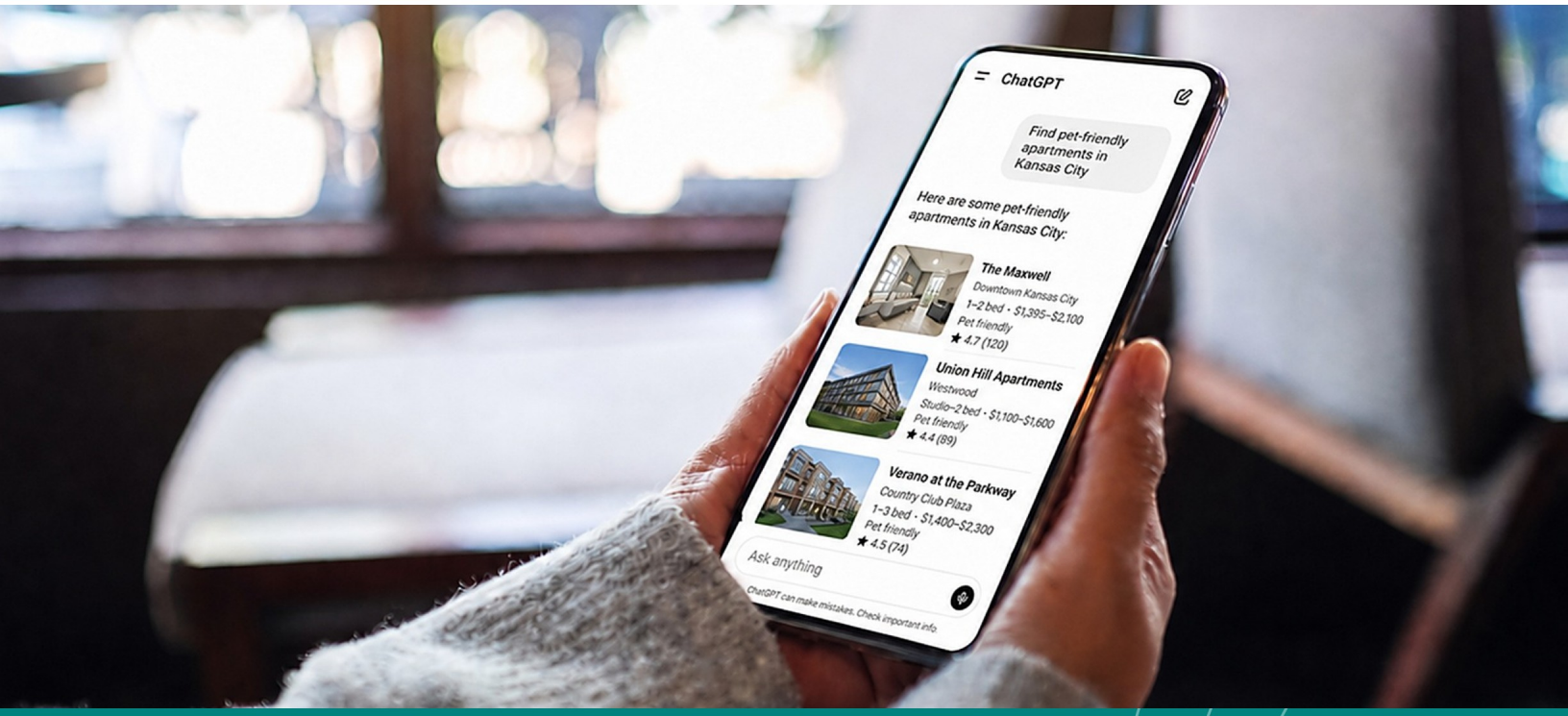
RentVision



THE 2026 AI TRAFFIC STUDY | RENTVISION

HOW APARTMENT COMMUNITIES GET *FOUND BY AI*

We tracked AI-referred website traffic across 311 apartment communities at 19 management companies in 23 states, October 2025 to September 2026. Here's what drives it, what doesn't, and what operators can do about it.

READ THE FULL STUDY →

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AI is becoming a new *front door* to the apartment search.

To understand how apartment communities get found by AI, RentVision analyzed 12 months of AI referral data across 311 apartment communities, 19 management companies and 23 states.

The short version: AI traffic is growing fast, it follows reputation more than volume, and it is concentrating in the communities that get the fundamentals right.

KEY FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

01

AI referral traffic grew 6.8x.

Monthly AI-referred sessions rose from 1,264 to 8,631 across 311 communities between October 2025 and September 2026.

02

Rating is the strongest signal.

Communities rated 4.4 stars or higher drew about twice the AI traffic of communities rated below 4.0, on any website platform.

03

The top quarter earns 60%.

AI traffic is winners-take-most. Higher-rated communities started the year ahead and stayed ahead.

04

Volume isn't the lever.

Page count, word count, review count and llms.txt files did not meaningfully predict AI traffic.

05

Completeness is where the evidence points.

Some of the deepest sites in the study drew far less AI traffic than lean ones. AI tools appear to reward sites that answer renters' questions clearly, not the ones that say the most.

06

RentVision websites grew 8x.

Versus 5.5x on other website platforms running the same advertising. By year end, they matched the best performers in the study.

ABOUT THE STUDY

12 months of real traffic from *311 communities*

This study is built on measured website analytics of RentVision client communities, from October 2025 through September 2026.

311
Communities

19
Management companies

23
States

74,916
Apartment units

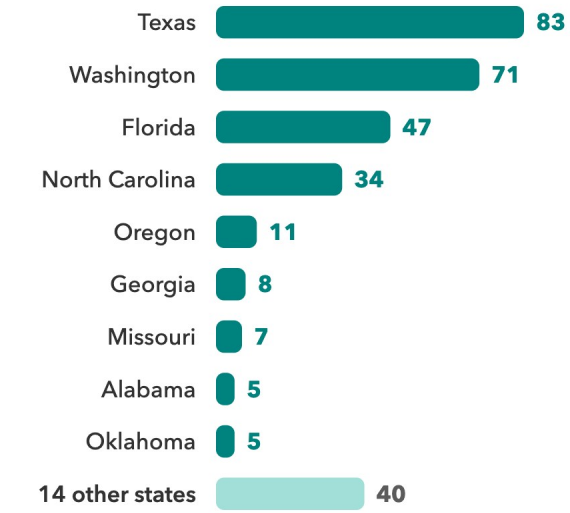
47,611
AI-referred sessions

14.2M
Website visits

3.0M
Organic search visits

190
Websites crawled for content

WHERE THE COMMUNITIES ARE



Communities by state. Lease-ups, new launches and communities with under a year of data were excluded.

WHAT WE MEASURED

AI-referred sessions
Website visits referred by ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity, Copilot and other AI platforms, by community and by month.

AI traffic rate
AI sessions per 1,000 organic search visits. It compares communities of different sizes fairly, and ad spend can't skew it.

Community traits
Google Business Profile rating and review count, units, rent, occupancy, management company, and website content (pages, unique words, custom pages and links).

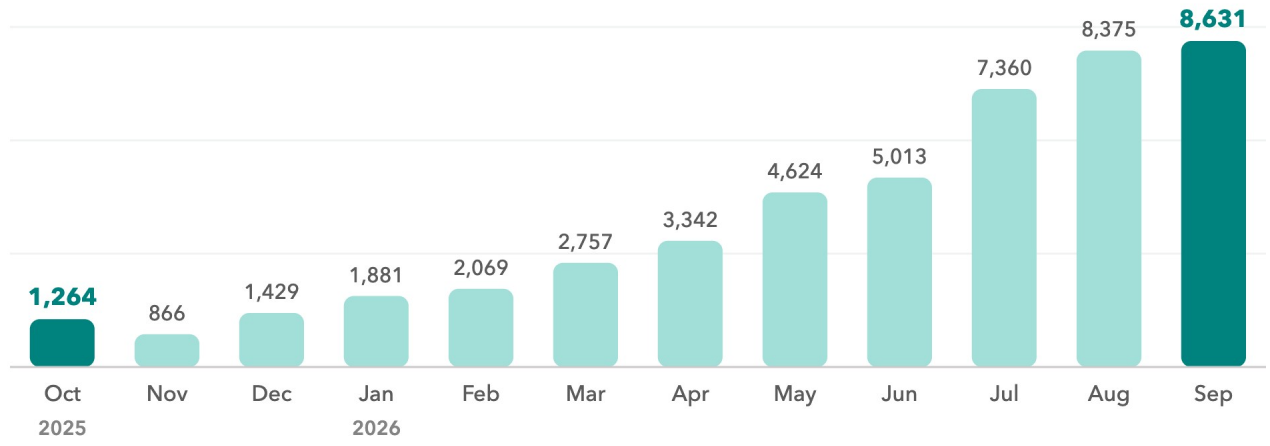
Full methodology on page 12.

FINDING 01

AI referral traffic grew *6.8x* in 12 months

Across all 311 communities, AI-referred website sessions rose from 1,264 in October 2025 to 8,631 in September 2026. The quarterly view tells the same story: 3,559 sessions in Q4 2025, 24,366 in Q3 2026.

MONTHLY AI-REFERRED SESSIONS, ALL 311 COMMUNITIES



6.8x
Growth, October 2025 to September 2026

47,611
AI-referred sessions over the 12 months

1 in 300
Share of AI referrals to website visits

Small share, steep curve

Over the full year, AI referrals were about 1 in every 300 website visits. That's small today. But the channel grew nearly sevenfold in one year, and it rose across the market, not in a handful of outliers.

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

45.9% of renters now use AI tools in their apartment search, and **5.7%** say an AI tool was the first place they started.

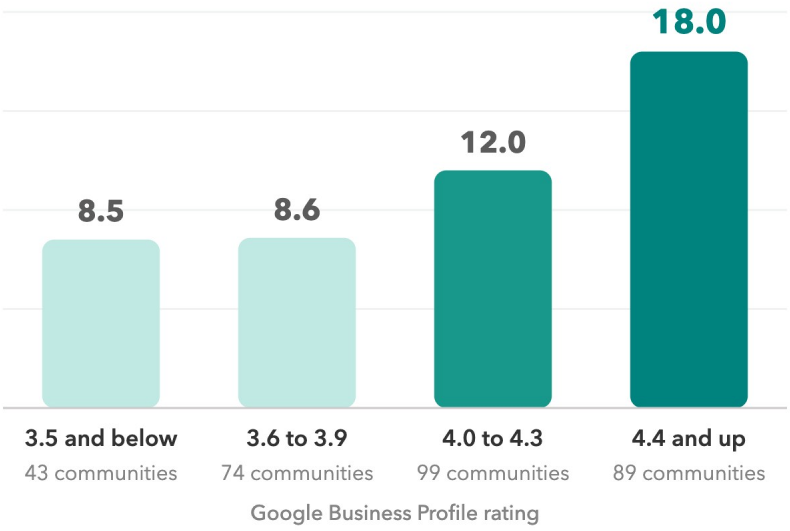
J Turner Research, Internet Adventure Study VI, August 2026 (survey of 1,060 renters).

FINDING 02

Higher-rated communities draw *twice the AI traffic*

Google Business Profile rating was the strongest and most consistent predictor of AI referral traffic in the study. Communities rated 4.4 or higher drew a median of 18.0 AI sessions per 1,000 organic visits, versus 8.5 for communities rated below 4.0.

MEDIAN AI SESSIONS PER 1,000 ORGANIC VISITS



+23%

More AI traffic per organic visit for each additional half star, after accounting for reviews, size, rent, occupancy and management company

100%

Management companies large enough to test showed the same direction

47%

Of communities rated 4.4+ ranked in the top quarter for AI traffic, vs. 7 to 9% of those below 4.0

Community ratings are a dial, not a gate

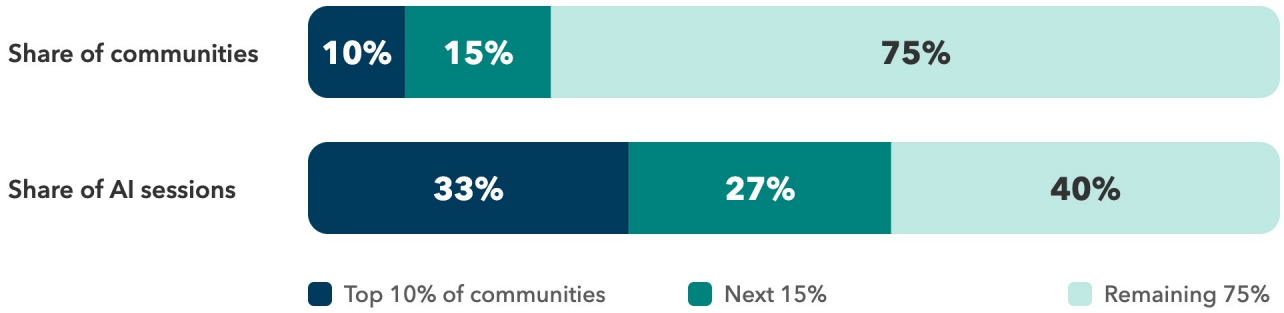
Communities rated 4.0 to 4.3 drew about 40% more AI traffic than those below 4.0, and communities rated 4.4 and up drew 50% more again. The pattern held on RentVision websites and on other website platforms, and inside every management company we could test. It held after controlling for review count, size, rent, occupancy and operator.

FINDING 03

The top quarter of communities earns *60% of AI traffic*

AI referral traffic is a winners-take-most channel. The top 10% of communities earned a third of all AI sessions in the study. The top 25% earned 60%. And most of the communities at the top share one trait.

WHERE THE AI TRAFFIC WENT



4.4

Median rating of the top 10%. 23 of the 31 highest-traffic communities are rated 4.3 or higher.

3.9

Median rating of the bottom 10%. The lowest-traffic communities sit just below the 4.0 line.

0.03

Correlation between rating and growth. Effectively none: the whole market rose together.

The gap doesn't close on its own

Rating predicted where a community started, not how fast it grew. Growth was unrelated to rating, so higher-rated communities started ahead and stayed ahead. As the channel grows, the same gap means more lost visits.

Rating isn't the whole story

Rating is the strongest community-level signal we found, but not the only one. Three of the lowest-traffic communities are rated 4.4 or higher.

FINDING 04

What *doesn't* drive AI traffic

Several common assumptions about AI visibility didn't hold up against 12 months of traffic data.

ASSUMPTION

More pages and more words earn more AI traffic.

WHAT WE FOUND

Not in our data. Across 190 crawled websites, page count and word count did not predict AI traffic once rating and management company were accounted for.

ASSUMPTION

More reviews earn more AI traffic.

WHAT WE FOUND

Weak at best. Review count had no raw relationship with AI traffic and only a small, statistically insignificant one after controls. The rating matters. The count barely does.

ASSUMPTION

An llms.txt file boosts AI traffic.

WHAT WE FOUND

No evidence. Where we could compare like for like, sites with an llms.txt file did no better than sites without one.

ASSUMPTION

Bigger communities get proportionally more.

WHAT WE FOUND

Bigger communities get more AI sessions, but not proportionally more. A 300-unit community doesn't get three times the AI traffic of a 100-unit one.

ASSUMPTION

Fuller communities draw more AI traffic.

WHAT WE FOUND

Slightly the opposite. Occupancy had a weak negative relationship with AI traffic, likely because communities with vacancies are marketed harder. It isn't a lever.

ASSUMPTION

Premium communities draw more AI traffic.

WHAT WE FOUND

Not on rent alone. Rent on its own showed no meaningful relationship with AI traffic, and higher-rent communities actually grew slightly slower over the year.

The takeaway: AI traffic doesn't reward volume. It follows reputation, and the evidence points toward clear, complete answers. More on that next.

FINDING 05

Complete answers beat *more content*

If volume isn't the lever, what is? The extremes of the content data are telling. Some of the deepest websites in the study drew a fraction of the median AI traffic, while some of the leanest drew three to four times the median.

THE DEEPEST SITES

2 to 5

AI sessions per 1,000 organic visits

Four sites with **7,000 to 9,000 unique words** each and active blogs.

LEAN SITES

31 to 44

AI sessions per 1,000 organic visits

Three sites with **about 1,500 unique words** across six pages each.

Median across 190 crawled sites: 11 AI sessions per 1,000 organic visits.

What we think is going on

Renters ask AI tools specific questions. To recommend a community, the tool needs specific answers: what it costs all-in, what the fees are, whether a large dog is allowed, how far it is to work. A site that states those plainly gives AI something to work with. More words don't help if the answer isn't there.

Our working view. We measured content volume directly. Completeness is where the evidence points, and it's what we recommend optimizing for.

2 bed under $1,800, dogs OK?

Renters use AI to build a list of matching apartments (42.3%), compare communities side by side (40.0%) and understand lease terms (32.0%). And 49% expect the advertised rent to be the all-in price.

J Turner Research, Internet Adventure Study VI, August 2026.

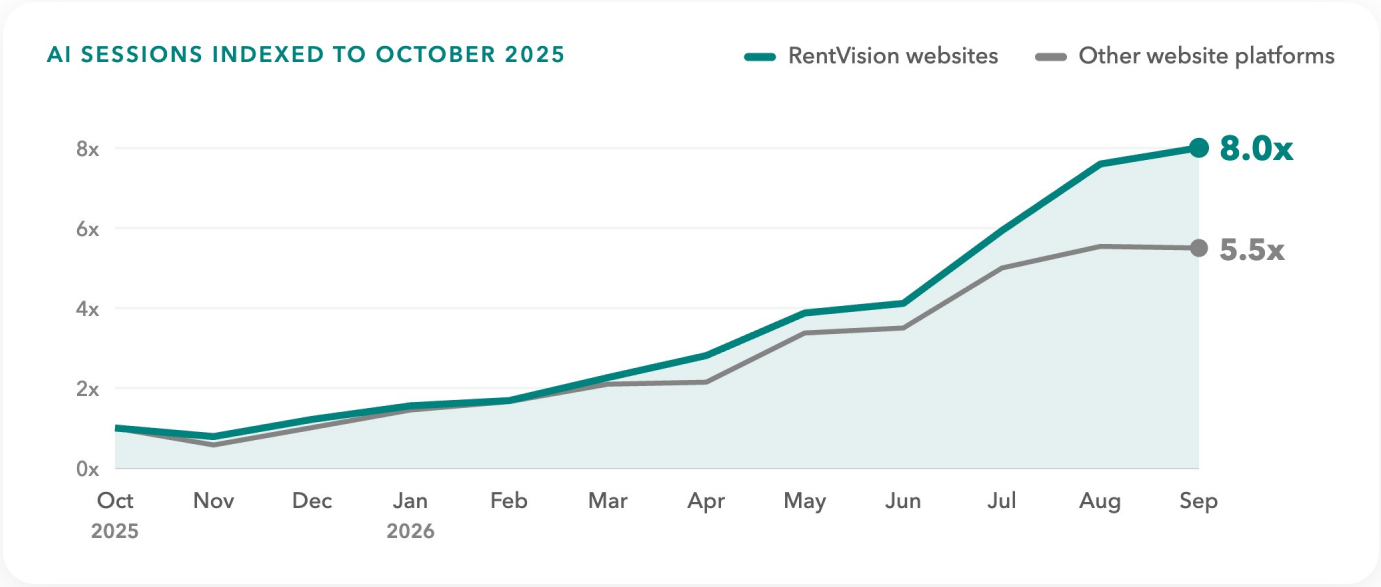
The complete-answer checklist

- All-in monthly pricing
- Lease terms and current specials
- Floorplans with current availability
- Pet policy: breeds, weights, deposits, pet rent
- Every fee, spelled out
- Parking, utilities and amenities
- Neighborhood: commute, schools, attractions, and employers
- The questions your leasing team hears every day

FINDING 06

RentVision websites grew AI traffic 8x

Versus 5.5x for communities on other website platforms running our Predictive Advertising solution. AI sessions on RentVision websites rose from 446 a month to 3,571; on other platforms, from 401 to 2,205.



6.9x vs 4.3x

Growth of the median community, October to September

96% vs 86%

Of communities had more AI traffic in September than in October

7.2x vs 6.2x

Growth, Q4 2025 to Q3 2026, the steadier quarterly check

Kept pace with the best. Outgrew the rest.

The comparison group's growth was held back by its largest operator. Against the strongest operators on other platforms, RentVision websites finished the year drawing just as much AI traffic per organic visit. The direction held every way we measured it: month, quarter and half year.

HOW WE COMPARED

115 communities on RentVision websites without add-on SEO services, vs. 125 communities on other platforms. All run RentVision Predictive Advertising. Each management company uses one website platform, so platform and operator effects can't be fully separated.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR PORTFOLIO

Five moves to *get found by AI*

AI referral traffic is still early, but the patterns are already clear. Here is where the data says to focus.

1. **Treat your rating as a traffic lever.**
   Your Google rating is the strongest predictor of AI referral traffic we found, and every half star counts. The operational basics that earn strong reviews now earn AI traffic too.

2. **Answer the questions renters actually ask.**
   All-in pricing, fees, pets, parking, utilities, neighborhood and lease terms. Put clear, current answers on every community website.

3. **Skip the shortcuts.**
   More pages, more words, more reviews and an llms.txt file didn't predict more AI traffic. Put the effort into clarity instead.

4. **Track AI referrals by community, every month.**
   AI traffic concentrates. Know which communities AI tools are sending renters to, and which they aren't, before the gap widens.

5. **Build on a website that keeps pace.**
   RentVision websites grew AI referral traffic 8x in 12 months and matched the best performers in the study by year end.

HOW RENTVISION HELPS

Complete answers, *without the extra work*

Your team knows what renters ask. Few teams have the time to write it all down for every community, then keep it current. Advanced SEO + GEO closes that gap.

Advanced SEO + GEO

A fast path to complete answers

We build out the content renters look for on your community websites: FAQ content, neighborhood pages and clear fee information.

Less work for your team

Our team does the heavy lifting on research and writing, so your onsite and marketing teams can stay focused on leasing.

A 12-month program

Keyword strategy and organic search management, run for a full year rather than as a one-time content drop.

Measured on what it's built to do

We report on content, keyword rankings and organic search. Built-in AI Visibility Reporting shows any impact on AI traffic.

COMMUNITY WEBSITES

Built to keep pace

Communities on RentVision websites grew AI referral traffic 8x in 12 months, versus 5.5x on other website platforms running the same advertising.



Start with the fundamentals. Your rating is earned onsite, and it's the strongest signal in this study. Pair it with complete answers on your website, so renters find what they need wherever their search starts.

METHODOLOGY

How we ran *the study*

Data sources

- AI-referred sessions by community and month, October 2025 to September 2026. AI-referred means sessions from ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity, Copilot and other AI platforms combined.
- Website visits, organic search visits, units, rent, occupancy and services from RentVision's monthly community performance data.
- Google Business Profile rating and review count for each community.
- Website content from an automated crawl of 190 community websites in October 2026: pages, unique content words, custom pages and external links.

Population

- 311 established communities across 19 management companies, 23 states and 74,916 units, drawn from RentVision's client portfolio. Lease-ups, new launches and communities with under a year of data were excluded.
- 186 communities are on RentVision websites and 125 are on other website platforms.

Website platform groups

- RentVision websites without add-on SEO services: 115 communities, 5 management companies, 13 states.
- RentVision websites with Advanced SEO + GEO: 71 communities, 12 management companies. Included in market-wide findings, excluded from the platform comparison to isolate the website.
- Other website platforms: 125 communities in 10 states.

Metrics

- AI sessions (raw count) are used for growth.
- AI sessions per 1,000 organic search visits are used to compare levels. Organic visits keep paid traffic out of the denominator.
- Growth is measured October 2025 to September 2026 and checked against Q4 2025 to Q3 2026 and first half to second half. All three point the same way.
- Relationships are tested with rank correlations, group comparisons and regression models that control for review count, units, rent, occupancy and management company.

Limits of the study

- It is observational, not a controlled experiment. It shows strong relationships, not proof of cause.
- Each management company uses one website platform, so platform and operator effects overlap.
- AI sessions count click-throughs. Renters who read an AI answer and never click aren't counted.
- Content volume was measured directly. Content completeness was not.
- All results are anonymized and reported in aggregate. No client or community is identified.

Third-party context. Renter behavior figures cited on pages 4 and 8 come from J Turner Research, Internet Adventure Study VI (August 2026), a survey of 1,060 renters conducted in June 2026. They are not part of RentVision's data.

WHAT'S NEXT

Book a consult with a RentVision rep.

See where your communities stand. We'll walk your team through this study and what it means for your portfolio: your ratings, your website content and the renter questions that may be going unanswered.

NEXT STEPS

1. Book a time with a RentVision rep at rentvision.com/schedule-demo.
2. Bring your community list.
3. Walk away knowing which communities to focus on first.

Let's make your communities *easy to recommend*.

Questions about the study?
Contact: Joe Bromen, President & COO
joe.bromen@rentvision.com

RentVision