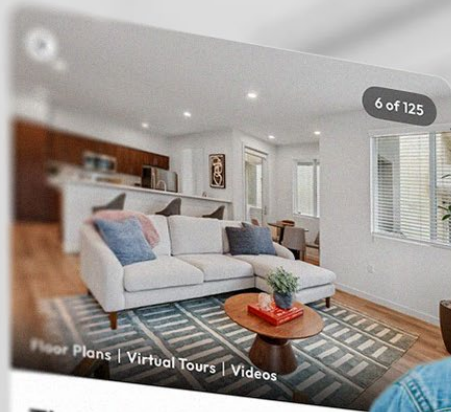




The Certainty Economy

How multifamily properties can turn transparency, authenticity and human connection into renter confidence

BASED ON AN APARTMENTS.COM SURVEY OF NEARLY 27,000 U.S. RENTERS CONDUCTED IN APRIL AND MAY 2026.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The emerging Certainty Economy

Consumers are making high-stakes choices against a backdrop of economic strain, falling confidence, job-market pessimism, rapid technology, advancements social isolation, and a diminished sense of control. In this environment, people do not simply seek more information. They seek confidence that the information is complete, accurate and trustworthy.

Few decisions carry more everyday consequence than where to live. A rental residence can provide stability in an unpredictable world, but only if the search experience reduces rather than compounds uncertainty. For multifamily operators and marketers, that changes the standard for winning: the strongest property is not only the one with the right price, location or amenities. It is the one renters can believe and trust.

Turn certainty into a competitive advantage

Apartments.com research shows that renter confidence is built through specific, tangible signals: unit-level proof, total price clarity, neighborhood context, responsive human

communication, and credible resident validation. Together, these signals help prospects answer the questions underneath every search: Is this real? Is this right for me? Can I trust the people behind it?



99%
say unit detail
is important



81%
prefer to see total
monthly price



96%
consider ratings
and reviews

The mandate for multifamily

- ✓ Replace broad promises with **verifiable proof** about the community and availabilities.
- ✓ Present the **total monthly price** clearly and early.
- ✓ Give renters a view of the **neighborhood** so they can picture themselves living there.
- ✓ Use **technology** to accelerate access, while preserving trusted human connection.
- ✓ Treat **resident reviews** as essential decision infrastructure, not optional reputation content.



The rise of the Certainty Economy

Certainty is becoming a form of value

The Certainty Economy describes a marketplace in which consumers place a premium on clarity, proof and predictability. When the wider environment feels unstable, ambiguity becomes more costly. Consumers are more sensitive to incomplete prices, generic claims, inconsistent information, and experiences that require a leap of faith.

For renters, certainty does not mean a guarantee that every outcome will be perfect. It means having enough reliable evidence to understand what they are choosing, what it will cost, and what life there is likely to be like. The properties that remove hidden variables make it easier for prospects to move forward.

“ I want to feel confident about the place where I’m going to live.”

– Male renter, Nashville, Tennessee

The pressure behind the shift

More than half of renters are Gen Z and millennials. Younger generations have faced heightened anxiety and uncertainty tied to rising costs, job stability, and an unpredictable future.



Consumer sentiment fell **11%** year over year and has trended down since 2022.¹



Only **28%** of workers said it was a good time to find a job, down from 70% in mid-2022.²



1 in 3 Americans often feel their lives are out of their control.³

The implication for multifamily is direct: every unclear price, generic image, unanswered question, or delayed response asks the renter to absorb more risk. Every specific detail, transparent disclosure, and credible proof point gives some control back.

The 5 signals of renter certainty

Confidence is built, not claimed

Renters gather clues throughout the search journey, from the first listing view to the first contact with your leasing team. Multifamily properties can support renters by delivering five reinforcing signals.

WHAT RENTERS NEED

THE PROPERTY RESPONSE

- 1 Exact-unit proof** Show the unit the renter is actually evaluating, not a model.
- 2 Total price clarity** Disclose the full cost including all fees visible before surprise becomes distrust.
- 3 Lifestyle context** Translate location into a clear view of everyday life.
- 4 Human reliability** Demonstrate that helpful, timely support will be there after move-in.
- 5 Resident validation** Let real experiences close the gap between property claims and lived reality.

The five signals work as a system. Strong photography cannot compensate for hidden fees. Fast follow-up cannot fully recover trust lost through inaccurate listing details. Certainty is created when the same promise of clarity carries across the entire renter experience.



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Your listing is the first tour

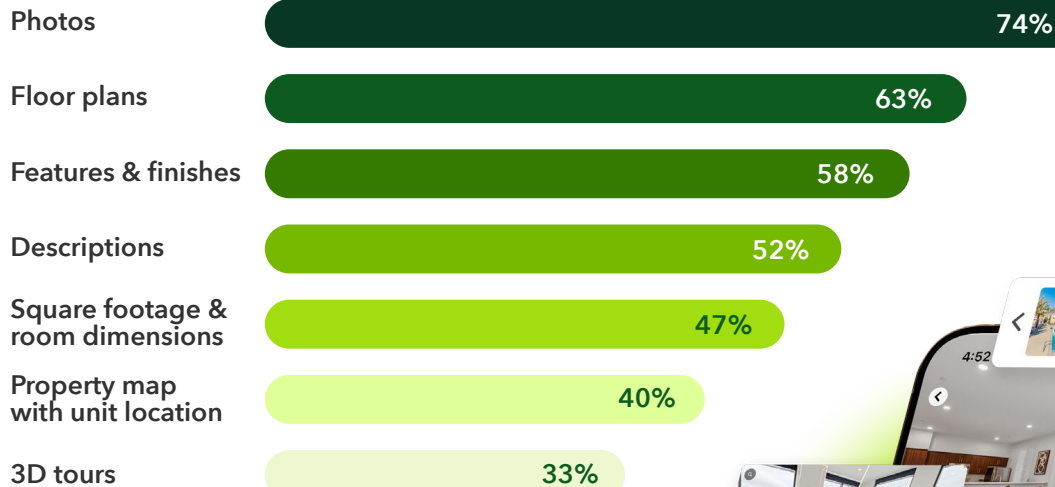
Virtual tours are the new in-person visit

Today's renters begin touring from the moment they open an online listing. They expect detailed, accurate information about the community and the individual availability. That expectation becomes even more important for the **43% of renters likely to rent sight unseen.**

“I don't want any surprises. I want every detail to be laid out honestly and nothing sugar-coated.”

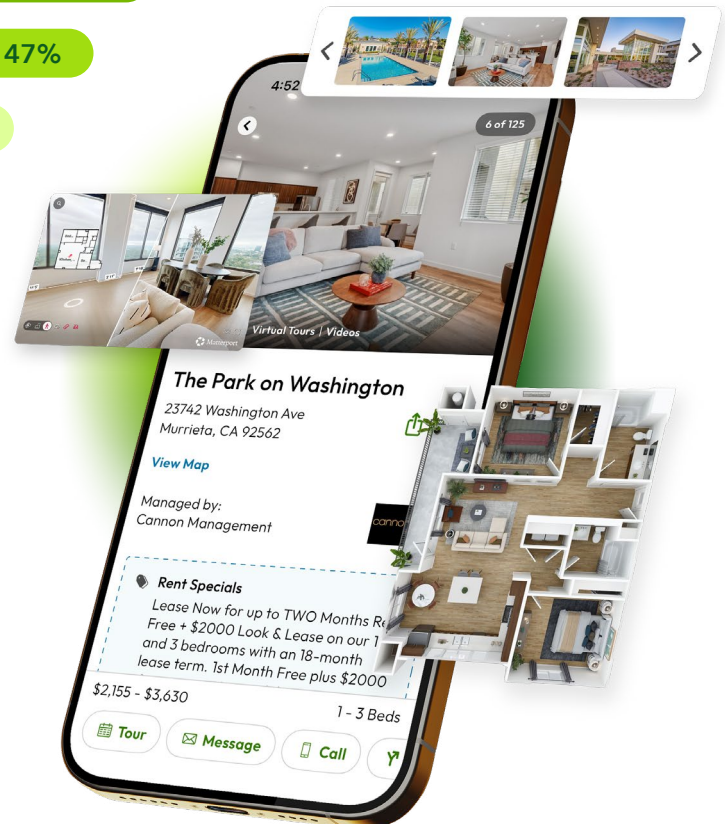
– Female renter, Woodstock, Illinois

What renters want to see about the exact unit



How to win

- ✓ **Lead with the specific unit you're advertising.**
Prioritize current photos, floor plans, finishes, dimensions, and unit location.
- ✓ **Make visual verification standard.**
Use photos, video, and 3D Tours for renters to view before they contact you.
- ✓ **Audit for accuracy.**
Ensure pricing, descriptions, imagery, maps, and availability reflect what renters will encounter.



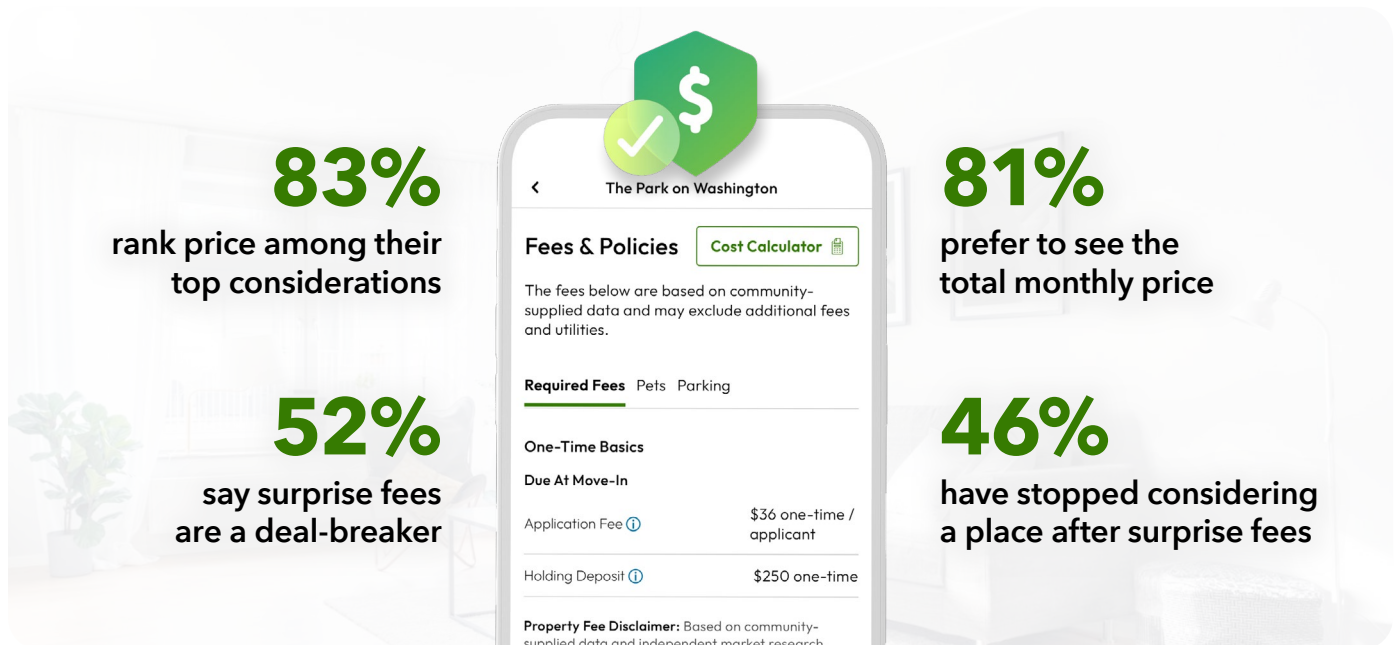
Price certainty is the foundation of affordability

It's about more than price. It is whether the price can be trusted.

Price is the most important consideration in rental selection. Eighty-three percent of renters rank it among their top considerations, and 73% say going over budget is a deal-breaker. Yet renters are focused on more than just price in the search results. They want to know whether the advertised amount reflects the total monthly cost.

“*Transparency is a must! No games and no hidden fees!*”

– Female renter, Laughlin, Nevada



Surprise fees do more than create a budget problem. They create a credibility problem. Once a prospect questions the price, they may begin to question what else has not been disclosed.

How to win

- ✓ Advertise the **total monthly price**, including all fees.
- ✓ Disclose **situation-based costs** clearly, such as pet rent, parking fees and usage-based utilities.
- ✓ Use **consistent pricing** across listings, property websites and leasing conversations.
- ✓ Treat **transparent pricing** as a trust signal, not merely a compliance or merchandising task.

Make the neighborhood a preview of everyday life

Location converts from an address into a lived experience

After price, location and safety are renters' next-highest priorities. Location is a top priority for 57%, while safety and security are a top priority for 47%.

Renters use neighborhood information to picture the routines, access and trade-offs that will shape daily life.

Renters want to live near...



How to win

- ✓ Feature **neighborhood highlights** in your property description to give renters a picture of what life is like around your community.
- ✓ Provide **objective, sourced information** and avoid subjective claims about who belongs in a neighborhood.
- ✓ Connect **location attributes** to everyday convenience without overstating the experience.

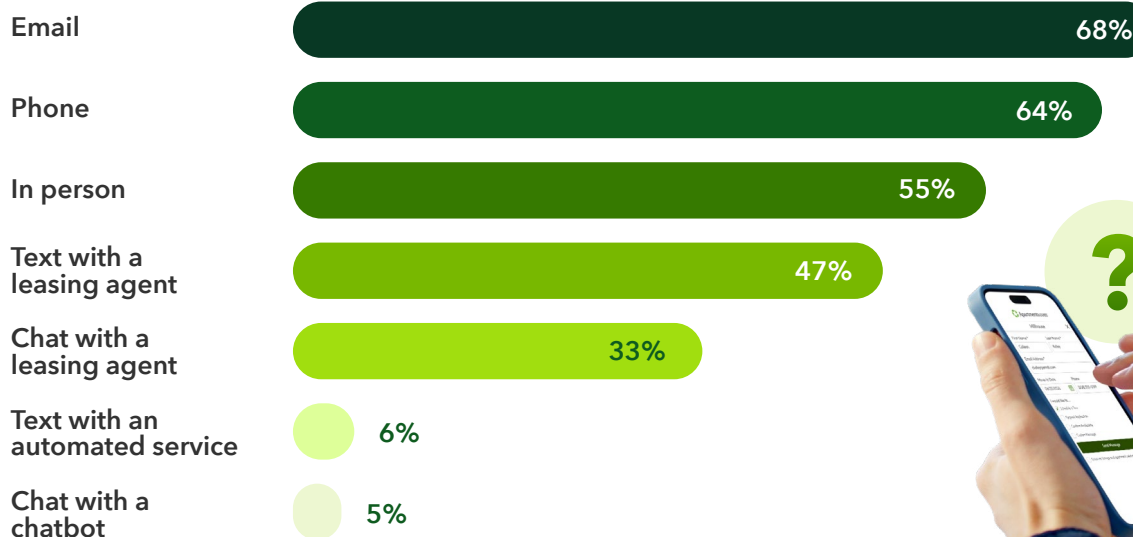
Human reliability is more important than ever

Every response is evidence of what living there may feel like

When prospects contact a property, they are evaluating more than the answer to a question. They are also asking whether the onsite team will be dependable after move-in. Forty-six percent say a

negative experience with a leasing agent, landlord or property management would stop them from considering a property. Forty-five percent want a response no later than the same day they reach out.

How renters want to communicate



This preference holds across generations. Fifty-five percent of Gen Z renters still want to communicate in person. Gen Z is more open to chat than renters

overall, but no more interested than renters overall in chatting with a chatbot.

How to win

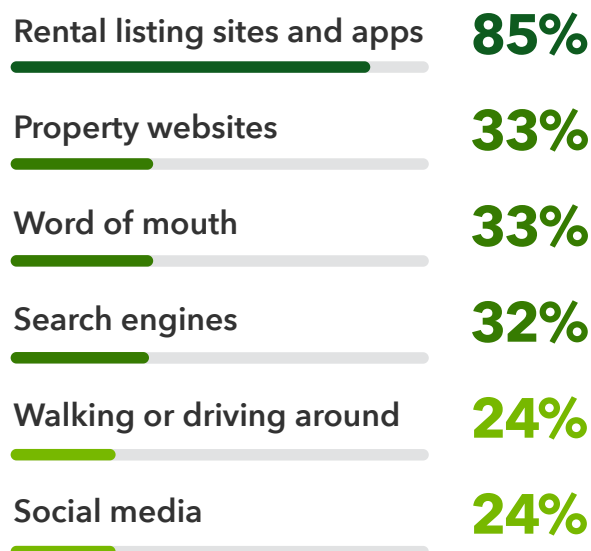
- ✓ Make **same-day response** to inquiries a service standard for inquiries.
- ✓ Offer **email, phone, in-person and text** access so renters can choose the channel that builds confidence for them.
- ✓ Use **automation** to speed routing and access, but make a real person easy to reach.
- ✓ Train **leasing teams** to make friendliness, empathy, honesty and helpfulness visible in every interaction.

AI alone hasn't earned renters' trust

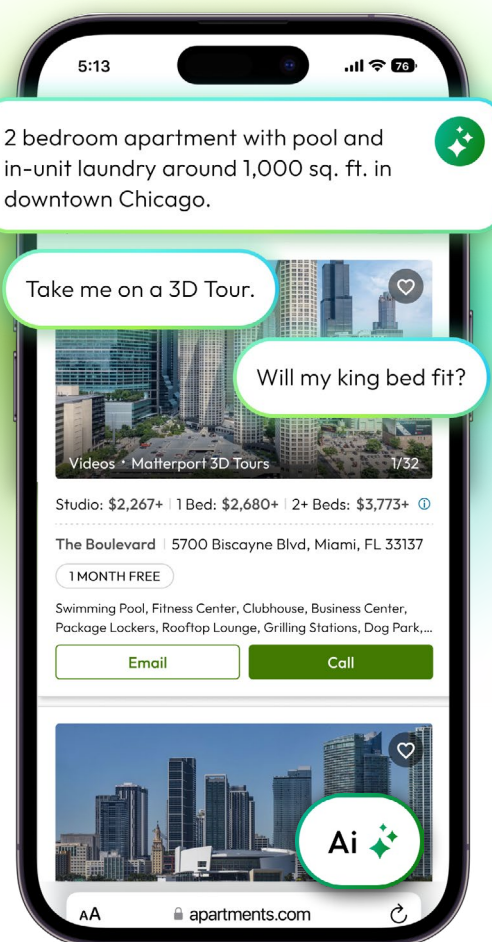
Interest is emerging, but trusted rental sources still lead

Rental listing sites and apps remain renters' leading search source: 85% use or plan to use them. Only 4% currently use generative AI chatbots such as ChatGPT in their rental search. At the same time, 30% use ChatGPT or similar AI tools at least weekly in other areas of life, and 41% say they would be likely to rely on an AI chatbot's rental recommendations.

Top sources renters rely on for their search



The strategic takeaway is not that renters reject AI. It is that AI recommendations must be grounded in sources renters already trust. For multifamily marketers, the priority is accurate, complete and structured property information that can travel into both today's search experiences and tomorrow's AI-assisted journeys.



How to win

- ✓ **Follow the same formula** for AI search success as for traditional search.
- ✓ Add **details** about availabilities, complete price transparency, fully immersive media, and neighborhood details that AI search can pull from to make recommendations.
- ✓ Rely on **integration partners** to ensure consistency across all your marketing sources, another key to getting found in AI search.

Resident truth closes the certainty gap

Facts narrow the field. Lived experience builds belief.

Photos, prices, and property details help renters compare options, but objective facts alone cannot fully answer what it is like to live in a community. Ratings and reviews provide the perspective of current and former residents, giving prospects another source of evidence.



How to win

- ✓ Make **review solicitation** continuous rather than episodic.
- ✓ Give residents simple ways to respond, including **direct links and QR codes**.
- ✓ Respond with **specific, genuine language** that shows feedback is heard.
- ✓ Use **reviews** alongside accurate visuals and unit information to support sight-unseen decisions.

“If the property had positive reviews, and plenty of photos/videos, I would comfortably apply without seeing it in person.”

– Female renter, Chandler, Arizona

The certainty playbook

Turn the research into an operating standard at every stage of the renter journey

PHASE	CERTAINTY STANDARD	HOW TO WIN
Discover	Accurate listing basics	Price, availability, descriptions, and location information align across channels.
Verify	Exact-unit evidence	Current unit photos, floor plans, dimensions, finishes, maps, and 3D tours reduce guesswork.
Afford	Total-price clarity	Required recurring fees are visible, with conditional costs clearly explained.
Imagine	Lifestyle context	Neighborhood content helps renters picture commute, errands, relationships, and recreation.
Connect	Human access	Prospects can reach a person through preferred channels and receive a timely response.
Validate	Resident proof	Ratings and reviews reveal lived experience, supported by genuine property responses.

Key questions to consider

- Can a renter understand the **exact apartment** unit without contacting us?
- Can a renter reach a **real person** in the channel they prefer?
- Can a renter see the **total monthly cost** before they invest more time?
- Does our **review presence** provide enough current resident evidence?
- Do our **location** claims translate into specific, useful context?
- Does the **experience** remain consistent from listing to leasing conversation?

CONCLUSION

Make confidence your conversion strategy

In the Certainty Economy, renters don't want to be persuaded past their doubts. They want those doubts resolved.

That creates a decisive opportunity for multifamily properties. Confidence can be designed into the renter journey through exact-unit proof, transparent pricing, useful neighborhood context, reliable human communication and credible resident voices. None of these signals is abstract. Each can be seen, measured and improved.

The winning property will not ask renters to imagine away missing information. It will make the choice easier to trust. When multifamily leaders treat certainty as an operating discipline, they do more than improve a listing or response process. They create a market advantage rooted in what today's renters value most: knowing what they are choosing, knowing what it will cost, and knowing the experience is real.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

APARTMENTS.COM RENTER SURVEY

The online survey was conducted in April and May 2026 with nearly 27,000 U.S. renters. Participants included 16,000 adults planning to rent their next place and nearly 11,000 renters who had recently completed their rental search. Percentages and renter quotations in this paper are drawn from that research unless otherwise noted.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES

¹ Dani Romero, "Consumer confidence slips on gloomier economic outlook," CoStar News, August 25, 2026. <https://www.costar.com/article/468684811/consumer-confidence-slips-on-gloomier-economic-outlook>

² Sarah Fioroni, "U.S. Worker Thriving Declines as Job Market Pessimism Grows," Gallup Workplace, March 23, 2026. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/703280/worker-thriving-declines-job-market-pessimism-grows.aspx>

³ Walton Family Foundation, "Most Americans Believe They Can Shape Their Future: New Gallup Study Shows Communities Help Determine Whether They Can," May 18, 2026. <https://www.waltonfamilyfoundation.org/about-us/newsroom/most-americans-believe-they-can-shape-their-future-new-gallup-study-shows-communities-help-determine-whether-they-can>

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