



INTERNET ADVENTURE STUDY V:

# The Great **Online** Apartment Adventure

WHAT RENTERS REALLY WANT

FEBRUARY 2025

 **J TURNER**  
RESEARCH

# About J Turner Research

J Turner Research is an independent research company focused exclusively on the multifamily industry for two decades. It is the only company to monitor the online reviews and ratings of 145,000+ properties nationwide. J Turner pioneered the Online Reputation Assessment (ORA®) score, which serves as the multifamily industry standard to measure, benchmark, and compare a property/company's online reputation. J Turner is the national leader in enhancing resident satisfaction through intelligent resident and prospect survey programs, AI-driven data analysis, quantifiable action plans, customized training, social media and listings management, and review response service. <http://www.jturnerresearch.com>.



J Turner Research has produced several groundbreaking national research studies highlighting emerging trends, shifting demographics, industry best practices, and new market opportunities in the multifamily industry. To download our research, please visit <https://jturnerresearch.com/research>.



## Executive Summary

The landscape of apartment hunting is evolving, increasingly driven by digital experiences. Our ongoing "Internet Adventure" studies track this evolution, providing vital insights into prospective renter behavior. This year's study dives deeper, acknowledging the constant changes in technology and renter expectations, revealing significant shifts in what makes a good apartment in the eyes of today's prospect.

## Why This Study Matters Now

The rental market is constantly changing. Technology continues to redefine how renters search, compare, and choose their next home. While our past studies laid a strong foundation, the current environment – marked by increased competition, the rise of AI, and intense online reputation scrutiny – requires new strategies. Renters, especially across generations, interact with this landscape differently. This report will explore those unique user experiences from Boomers to Gen Z, providing insights to meet the distinct needs of each renter segment.

## What's New This Year

Building upon our previous research, this year's study focuses on:

- **The Power of Reviews:** We're moving beyond simply proving the value of reviews to understand which platforms (e.g., Google, Yelp, niche sites) and types of feedback (maintenance, management responsiveness) have the greatest impact on renter decisions. We'll also assess how management responses impact renter perception.
- **The Impact of Technology:** We'll explore the growing role of AI and centralization within the rental search process, analyzing both their potential benefits and drawbacks for renters.
- **Generational Insights:** Instead of treating all renters the same, we continue our focus on how Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z navigate the rental process, revealing how to effectively target each generation with tailored experiences.

## Our Approach

Our research uses a quantitative survey of prospective renters across the US. This rigorous data analysis, compared against historical findings and supplementary industry data, reveals the current landscape and emerging trends.

## What This Report Delivers

This year's report offers a crucial understanding of evolving renter expectations and how these differ across generations. It equips owners and operators with actionable strategies to optimize the rental journey and drive success. This includes:

- Identifying the most impactful online platforms for attracting renters.
- Understanding which features matter most in a digital search.
- Revealing the real factors that drive renter decisions.
- Mastering online reviews and leveraging them to enhance your reputation.
- Tailoring your marketing to connect with different generational segments.
- Effectively integrating emerging technology to meet the evolving expectations of renters.

In an industry facing pressure to cut costs, this report emphasizes our commitment to the "people-first" approach: building a more efficient and responsive rental process that prioritizes the needs of renters, while also improving the bottom line. By understanding and adapting to the shifts in renter behavior revealed in this report, you can confidently position your communities for success and meet the needs of all renters. This report is essential for owners, operators, and marketers seeking to remain competitive in an increasingly complex and tech-forward market.

## Demographics

This national study on the state of renting in America included input from a substantial sample of over 1000 renters. Slightly more than a tenth of the respondents (12%) identified as a student. The average age of participants was 46 years, which suggests a significant segment of the survey participants are likely to be established in their careers and potentially experiencing a mix of life stages. These demographics provide a valuable lens through which to understand the diverse range of challenges, priorities, and aspirations within the US renting landscape.



# Key Findings: The Great Online Apartment Adventure

## The Hunt: What Today's Renters Really Want

- **Apartment Oasis: Still the Reigning Champ:** Across all generations, the desire for apartments remains the top choice (Boomers 88%, Gen X 86%, Millennials 86%, Gen Z 92%) among rental options. Though, single-family rentals are the next in line and still an area of competition.
- **The Happiness Factor: Resident Vibes are Key:** An overwhelming majority (70%) care if other residents enjoy living there. Millennials are most invested (74%), followed closely by Gen Z (72%), Boomers (67%), and Gen X (65%). Happiness is contagious, it seems.
- **Detective Renters: The Search for Good Vibes:** Prospects are using a mix of tactics to gauge resident satisfaction. They're not just asking "Do you like it here?" but using direct conversations, friendly hellos, observing resident interactions, physical property assessments, and online reviews for clues to see if residents love their place. It seems like everyone is becoming a super sleuth for good vibes.
- **The Digital Echo Chamber: Online Reviews Rule:** Potential renters are scouring the internet for intel. Zillow, Apartments.com and Google are the most known spots, and online reviews have become a cornerstone for the modern-day apartment search.

## Decoding the Starry Sky: How Reviews Rule

- **Digital Astrolabe: Where Prospects Are Looking:** While people are familiar with many review sites, when it comes to actively using them, Google (68%), Apartments.com (39%), Facebook (36%) and Zillow (36%) are the top four used.
- **Star Gazing: How Different Generations See the Stars:** Younger generations place more importance on online reviews, with Google consistently coming out on top. There is a significant difference between their usage of Google and the next tier of Facebook, Zillow, and Apartments.com.
- **The True North: Where to Look:** On average, a rating of 3.75 is the minimum for a prospect to consider, while 4.44 is the ideal. A community's digital footprint is make-or-break.
- **Naming the Stars:** Asking residents for reviews is effective; two thirds (67%) of residents who are asked are likely to provide one. Properties should follow the latest FTC guidelines when doing so.

## Leap of Faith: The Apartment Hunt Reimagined

- **The Digital Dig: Paving the Way for the Walkthrough:** Prospects actively research an average of 5.1 properties before hitting the road for in-person tours. They then physically tour an average of 3.4 locations.
- **The Land of Red Flags: What Makes Renters Run:** Pest control issues, poor unit condition, hidden fees, lackluster maintenance, and security concerns are the biggest red flags for renters when reading reviews.
- **Words Matter: The Power of a Thoughtful Response:** Responding to negative reviews matters. People (77%) are looking for resolution rather than speed when it comes to management responses to reviews.
- **The Real Reveal: Beyond the Virtual Curtain:** When touring, most renters would prefer to see a vacant unit over a model unit (61%). However, the younger generations are more accepting of a model unit. Additionally, a clear majority of people (81%) prefer an in-person tour over any other kind. While, 63% of people prefer not to see virtual furniture, there is more acceptance amongst the younger generations.

## AI Adventures & the Chatbot Chronicles

- **Bots Welcome...To a Point:** Renters are comfortable using chatbots for pricing (67%) and availability (64%). Younger generations are much more likely to use the bot before reaching out to a leasing agent. However, for detailed inquiries, it is preferred to get a real person (85%).
- **Bots as Tools, Not Friends:** Renters are moderately comfortable (45%) with chatbots scheduling tours or initiating applications. However, they do not want to deal with the limitations of chatbots when encountering a problem and want a more detailed human approach.
- **The Human Touch Matters:** When issues are complex, people overwhelmingly (85%) want to speak with someone who works onsite. They also do not want to be frustrated by not being able to get in contact with a real person as soon as possible for issues that bots can not solve. 59% of renters said it is very or extremely important to connect with a person onsite quickly.
- **Providing a Pulse:** Complex needs, finances, security and any sense of urgency is the main reason people want to talk to a live human.

The internet is both a help and a hindrance. Prospects want the ease of use of the internet, but they crave real people who can get them the answers they need, and they place high importance on peer reviews. These are the keys to unlocking the hearts of potential renters.

# The Great Apartment Adventure: What Today's Renters Really Want

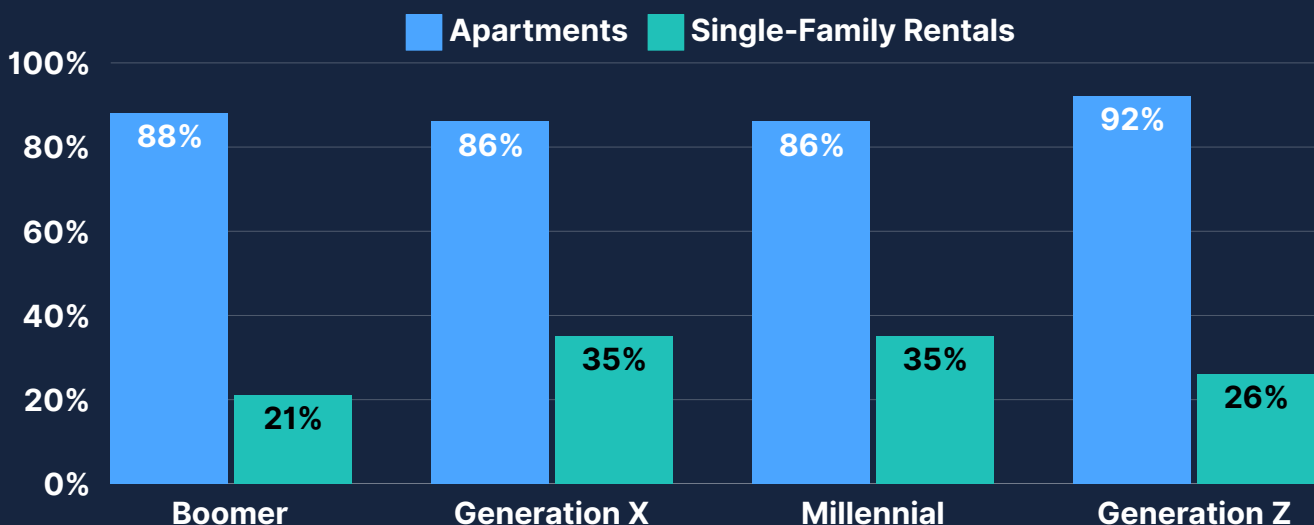
It's a brave new world out there in the rental market, isn't it? Is having happy residents really a crucial piece of the puzzle? And do those "good vibes" resonate equally across different generations? These are the big questions worth tackling because finding the perfect apartment is like embarking on an epic quest for happiness. With a treasure trove of options available and every renter group having unique needs, knowing what drives their decisions is the secret map to success. This section explores how the digital world plays a pivotal role in their search and what exactly they're looking for in a community, turning that building into a true home. This info is crucial for owners, operators, and marketers, who are looking to not only attract renters, but create happy communities.

## Apartment Oasis: Still the Reigning Champ

Across all generations, apartment living maintains its crown as the preferred choice for renters. The latest survey shows that apartments are the go-to for the majority, with a whopping 88% of Baby Boomers, 86% of Gen X, 86% of Millennials, and a standout 92% of Gen Z choosing this lifestyle. While this preference for apartments is strong, we can't ignore that single-family rentals (SFR) are still a contender, especially within Gen X and Millennials (35% preference each). However, compared to last year's report, we see a slight drop in the appeal of SFRs across the board, confirming that while it's still an important choice for some, the desire for apartments as a whole has actually grown.

This enduring preference for apartments underscores their importance in the current rental landscape. While last year's findings pointed towards a potential surge in the SFR market, this year, our data shows a cooling of that interest. This indicates that while the SFR option is still notable, particularly within Gen X and Millennials, it is not gaining the same traction predicted in our previous report.

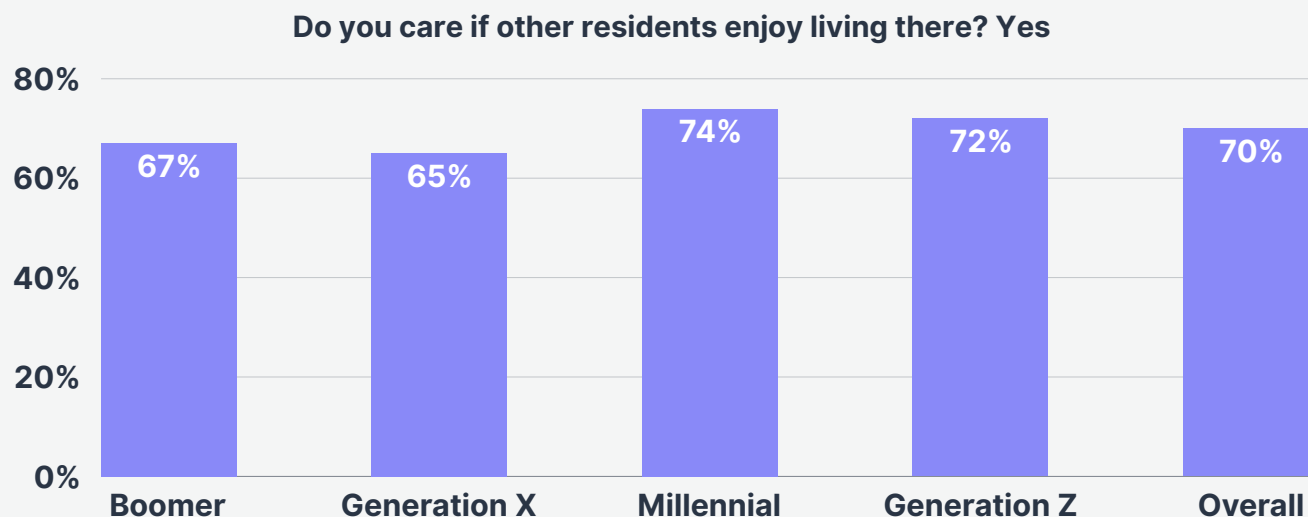
What type of rental are you looking for?





## The Happiness Factor: Resident Vibes are Key

More than just bricks and mortar, renters are incredibly focused on a community's social feel. A resounding 70% of respondents say they care whether residents are happy. Millennials take the lead on this at 74%, followed by Generation Z at 72%, Baby Boomers at 67%, and Generation X at 65%. This truly drives home the idea that "happiness is contagious" and renters are attracted to places where the existing community is happy.



This focus on social elements underscores the importance of fostering an environment where people feel like they belong. A thriving community can be the ultimate draw for potential residents, which then brings us to a key question: how are potential renters gauging the happiness and satisfaction of current residents?

## Detective Renters: The Search for Good Vibes

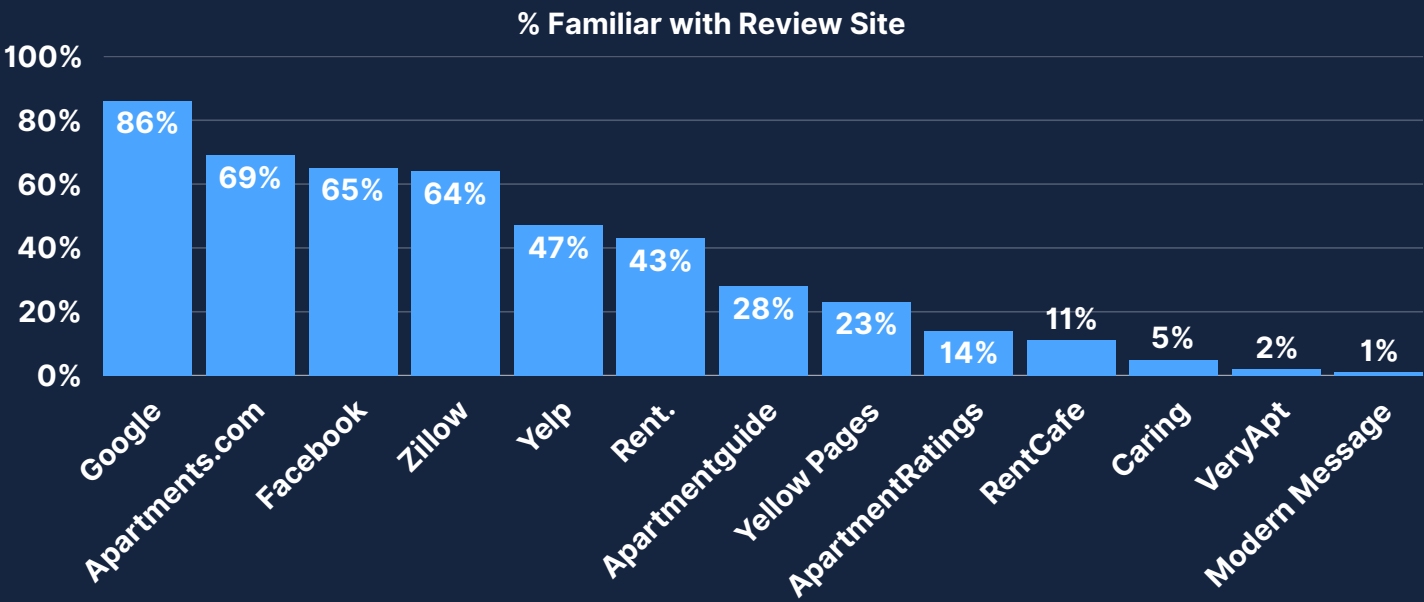
Renters aren't just casually asking current residents "do you like living here?" They're turning into savvy detectives, using all sorts of tactics to assess resident satisfaction. This includes direct conversations, observing how residents interact, and physical inspections of the community. They are looking for active use of amenities like pools, gyms, and common rooms. They're also on the lookout for cleanliness, good maintenance, well-kept landscaping, and quiet communities. And in a more passive approach, they're combing through online reviews, viewing them as a critical piece of the community's puzzle. Many also consider lease renewal rates, complaints, and the timeliness of rent payments as indicators of the living environment. They are taking a comprehensive approach, understanding that this is a big decision.

This thorough evaluation process underscores the need for a holistically positive living environment. It is not enough to have a good looking building, there needs to be active cultivation of social connections and communal spirit. The data shows potential renters are using many tools to get a true sense of a community's vibe before making a decision.

Could you describe your search process for finding a new home?
I search online extensively. Then I send out my questions about my top 10. Then I weed out the ones where I did not receive satisfactory answers. From there, I read reviews. Then I tour any remaining properties.
Conducting online research, narrowing down options, and engaging with leasing agents or landlords. It's essential to visit properties in person, explore neighborhoods, and evaluate all factors to make an informed decision. Finally, reviewing and negotiating lease or purchase terms.

### The Digital Echo Chamber: Online Reviews Rule

When it comes to getting the scoop on a rental, potential renters are turning to the internet, specifically review sites. Real estate sites like Zillow and Apartments.com are trusted sources, and even Google is a wellspring of valuable insights. While renters are generally aware of several review platforms, (such as Facebook, Yelp, and Rent.com), awareness levels differ from platform to platform. Google is familiar to 86% of renters, Apartments.com to 69%, and Facebook and Zillow are familiar to 65% and 64% of renters, respectively, with little variance between generations. This high familiarity highlights the integral role of online review sites in the beginning phase of a renter's search.



Generation	Google	Facebook	Apartments.com	Zillow	Yelp
Boomer	82%	60%	71%	64%	43%
Generation X	85%	65%	67%	65%	45%
Millennial	89%	70%	68%	63%	50%
Generation Z	90%	65%	66%	66%	49%

This wide familiarity with online platforms reinforces the importance of maintaining a strong online presence across multiple sites. It highlights the fact that carefully managing feedback on every platform is key, as potential renters may find information there.

## Putting People First: A Balancing Act

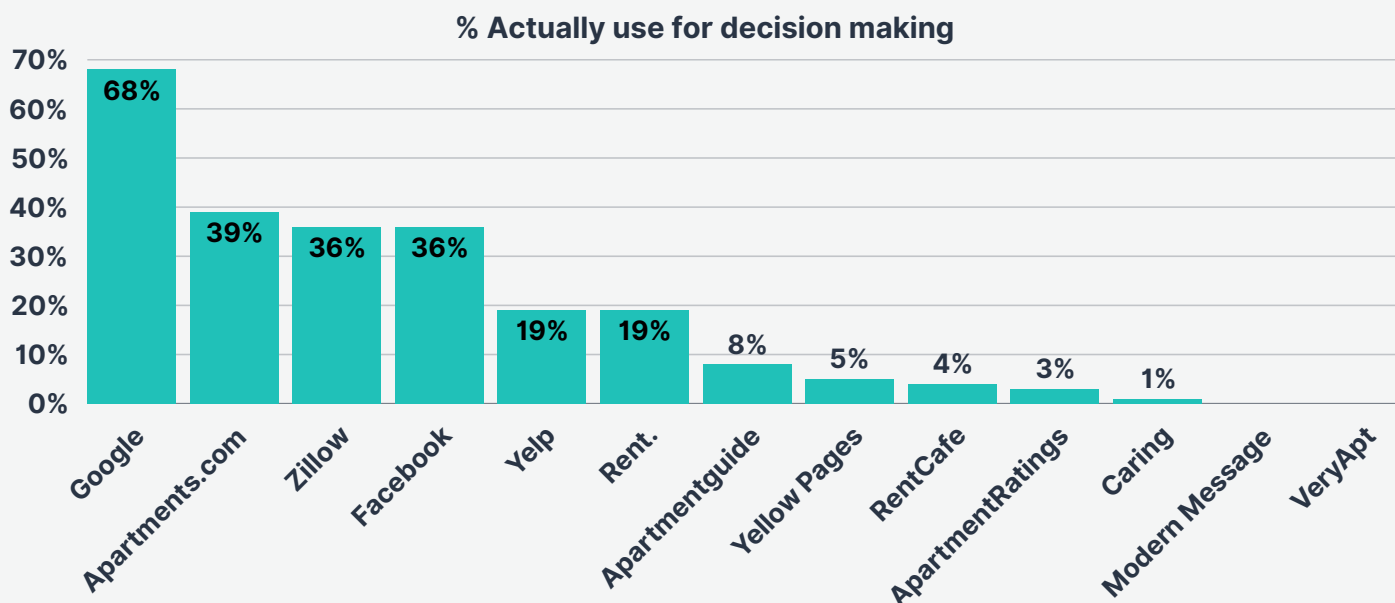
As explored, renters are looking for more than just a building – they're looking for a community to call home, they want to see happy residents, and to feel social connection. While the market demands cost efficiencies and the industry is looking to cut expenses where it can, this information is critical to success. While apartments are still the most popular choice, single-family homes remain a valid contender for some. In all of these choices, online reviews are extremely important in the decision-making process. Ultimately, this data underscores that we must remember our business is people first.

## Decoding the Starry Sky: How Reviews Rule

In the current rental landscape, online reviews have become a powerful force, acting as a digital compass guiding prospective residents toward or away from an apartment community. This section will explore the influence of these digital reviews on the renter journey and delve into which platforms are most frequently used, how different generations are impacted by reviews, the power of star ratings, and the effectiveness of simply asking for a review.

### Digital Astrolabe: Where Prospects Are Looking

As previously stated, renters are familiar with a myriad of review sites, but when it comes to actively utilizing these platforms in their apartment searches, a select few dominate. Google emerges as the clear leader, with 68% of renters reporting using its reviews to find their next home. Apartments.com follows with 39%, while Facebook and Zillow are neck-and-neck, both being used by 36% of renters. This concentration of usage underscores the importance of focusing on the key sites, ensuring a strong and positive presence on these platforms.



While many review sites exist, renters are not actively using all of them. The key sites are the primary destinations for people searching for apartments and therefore are the primary destinations for apartments to maintain and manage their reputation. This heavy usage indicates that a focus on these platforms is essential, as they hold the most sway in the minds of potential residents, and is the first step into many of their journey of choosing a place to call home.



## Star Gazing: How Different Generations See the Stars

The power of online reviews isn't uniform across the board. Younger generations lean into digital evaluations far more heavily. While Google is consistently popular across all ages, the gap between Google and other platforms like Facebook, Zillow, and Apartments.com is much wider for Gen Z (75%) and Millennials (76%), who use Google significantly more than Boomers (54%) and Gen X (65%). Gen Z and Millennials also show higher engagement with the other three platforms, demonstrating their overall greater reliance on online reviews. This shows a generational shift in how prospects evaluate their options, underlining the need for communities to tailor their online strategies to these different needs.

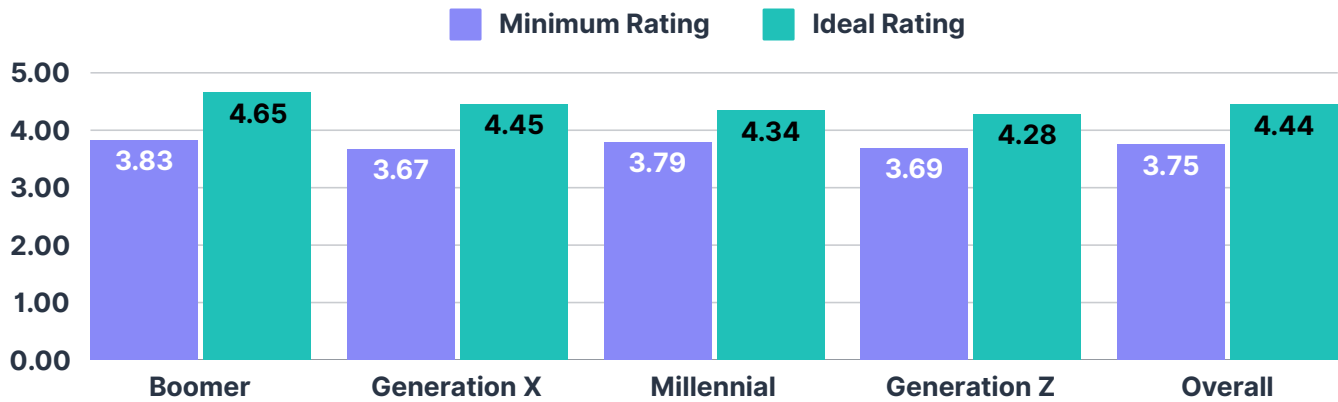
Generation	Google	Facebook	Apartments.com	Zillow
Boomer	54%	28%	35%	29%
Generation X	65%	35%	36%	30%
Millennial	76%	41%	41%	41%
Generation Z	75%	41%	44%	46%

The data is clear: online reviews are not just a passing trend for the younger generations, it is a key aspect of their evaluation process. As such, any apartment community hoping to attract the modern resident should make review sites a key point of focus. This generational difference therefore highlights the importance of having high reviews as it appears to be a more influential factor for the younger generations. It is likely to only to continue to grow in importance as newer generations continue to come into the rental housing industry. But, what is considered acceptable for most potential residents?

## The True North: Where to Look

A property's online star rating is more than just a number; it's a form of currency in the rental market. The study revealed that on average, a 3.75-star rating is the minimum for a prospect to even consider a community. The sweet spot? A 4.44-star rating. It should be obvious at this point that your digital reputation can make or break your chances with prospective renters, meaning that a poor rating could translate to less business. It's not about chasing perfection, but about striving for excellence and showing that your community cares.

## Ratings to Consider an Apartment

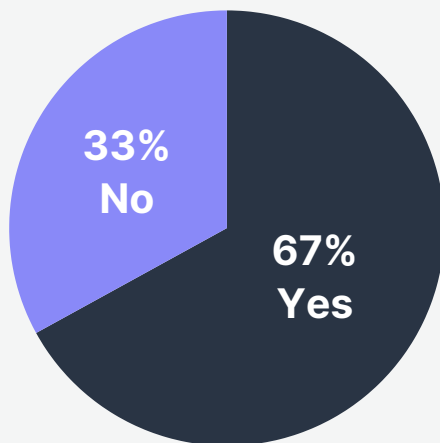


These ratings illustrate that a community's online presence can be the first and sometimes only impression a prospect has. It's crucial that communities aim for these high standards, as they directly translate to attracting potential residents. These ratings become a form of currency in the rental market, indicating that having a poor rating could directly translate into less business. Therefore, it is important that not only is the online presence maintained, but also that the online presence is actively growing in the right direction. Understanding that it is crucial to maintain these high ratings, how does a community go about getting these much desired stars?

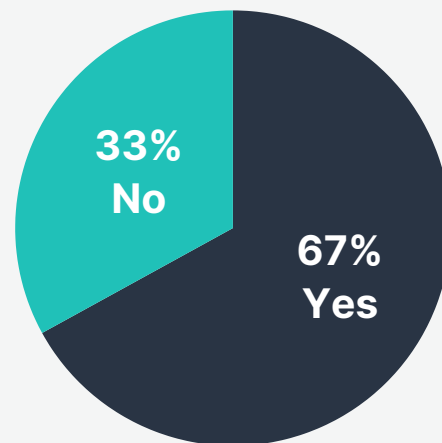
### Naming the Stars

Here's the good news: asking for reviews works! A whopping 67% of residents who are asked are likely to leave a review. A direct, proactive approach can significantly boost your online presence. It's not about sitting back and hoping for the best; it's about actively shaping your online narrative by asking for feedback and responding accordingly. This means that getting reviews is not just about passively waiting for a positive review, it is about actively working towards getting those reviews. However, properties should ensure they have reviewed the FTC guidelines before asking for reviews.

#### Have you been asked to leave a review?



#### Have you left a review when asked?



This proactive approach can be a powerful tool for communities to boost their online reputation and illustrates that it is important to take the opportunity to collect reviews.

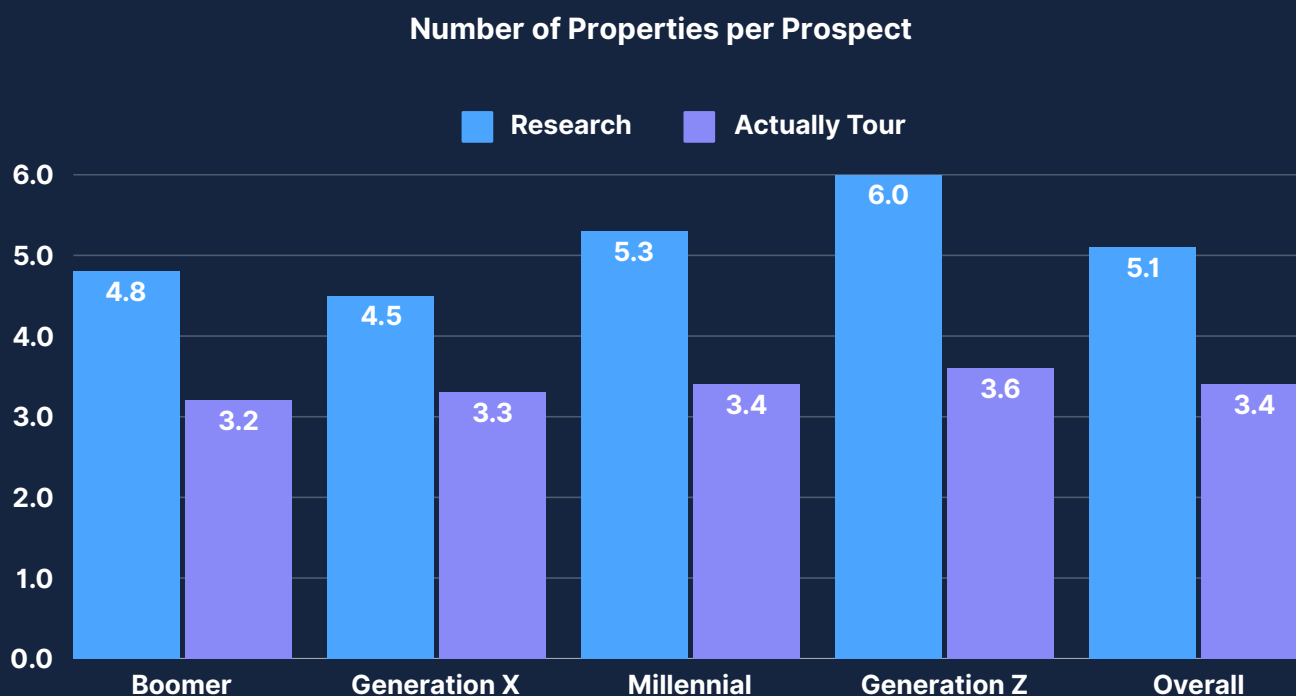
Online reviews aren't just a suggestion box anymore; they're a megaphone! Those little stars and written testimonials are swaying opinions and influencing decisions more than ever. From first impressions to final thoughts, these digital touchpoints are shaping the renter's journey like never before. What does this mean for us as an industry? We need to understand these trends and recognize the power of a positive online presence. A strong online reputation is no longer a "nice-to-have," it's a must-have if you want your property to shine. But, how do people actually engage with these properties after their initial online search is over?

## Leap of Faith: The Apartment Hunt Reimagined

After the online research, the in-person tour remains an integral part of the renter's journey. This section will explore the data surrounding this critical point, from the number of properties researched versus toured, to the deal-breaking red flags renters avoid, the importance of management responding to reviews, and the nuances of the in-person experience itself.

### The Digital Dig: Paving the Way for the Walkthrough

The days of spontaneously wandering into an apartment community are long gone. Today's renters are digital detectives. The data reveals that, on average, prospective residents meticulously research 5.1 properties online before even considering a physical tour. Then, they typically narrow it down to 3.4 locations to visit in person. Think about that: your property has to survive the digital gauntlet first just to be considered! This highlights just how critical a strong online presence is – a negative digital footprint can be an instant deal-breaker.





This diligent research demonstrates that renters aren't just aimlessly browsing; they're making informed decisions. The apartment hunt is no longer a casual stroll, it is now an active investigation. As such, it is imperative that all stages of the potential renter's journey are as appealing as possible. This pre-tour research sets the stage for the next important piece of the puzzle: the red flags renters are on the lookout for.

### The Land of Red Flags: What Makes Renters Run?

Forget the glossy brochures, renters are digging deep and reading between the lines. Certain negative comments in reviews send up giant red flags. The top five deal-breakers include: pest infestations, poor unit condition, a lack of transparency around finances (hidden fees!), subpar maintenance service, and safety concerns. These aren't just minor annoyances; they are immediate turnoffs for potential renters. The order of importance changes slightly across generations, with some emphasizing general cleanliness or move-in condition more heavily, but overall, renters are actively looking to avoid very specific pain points.

Top 5 Categories that would discourage from considering				
Average	Boomer	Generation X	Millennials	Generation Z
Pest Control	Condition of the Unit	Pest Control	Pest Control	Pest Control
Condition of the Unit	Pest Control	Condition of the Unit	Condition of the Unit	Condition of the Unit
Financial Clarity/Hidden Fees	Financial Clarity/Hidden Fees	Condition Upon Move-in	Financial Clarity/Hidden fees	Security
Maintenance Service	Security	Financial Clarity/Hidden Fees	Maintenance Service	Financial Clarity/Hidden Fees
Condition Upon Move-in	Maintenance Service	Security	General Cleanliness	General Cleanliness

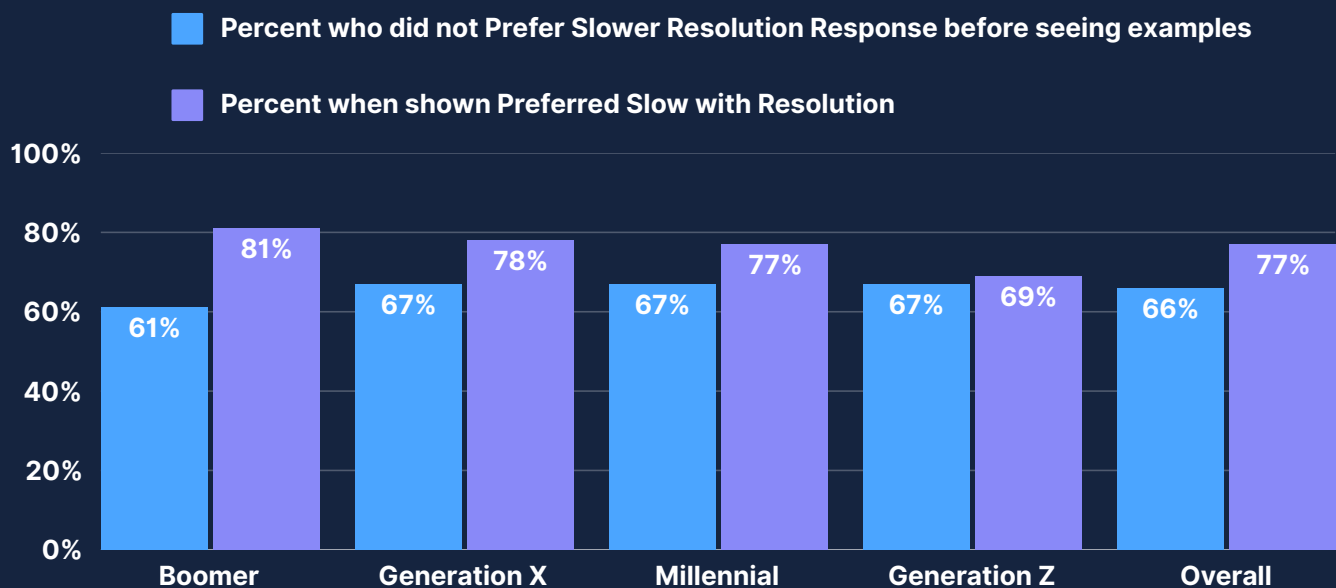
This should make it crystal clear: renters aren't just looking for a pretty picture, they are trying to avoid potential nightmares. This means transparency, proactive maintenance, and security are paramount for attracting and retaining great residents.

Later this year, J Turner Research will release research further diving into the ramifications of failures in these operational areas. But beyond the issues themselves, renters are also paying close attention to how management responds to these very concerns.

## Words Matter: The Power of a Thoughtful Response

When it comes to negative reviews, a simple response is not enough, people want to see a resolution. When asked how important management responses are to reviews, on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being most important), the average was 1.8. The breakdown across the generations shows that these responses are fairly important to everyone, with Boomers at 1.7, Generation X at 1.8, and Millennials and Generation Z both at 1.9. A fast response is nice, but ultimately it is the resolution that really matters. While 66% of respondents thought they preferred a quick response – when given the choice between a quick response and a slower response that includes resolution – 77% stated that the response showing resolution was better. That shows that people want to see action, they do not just want words.

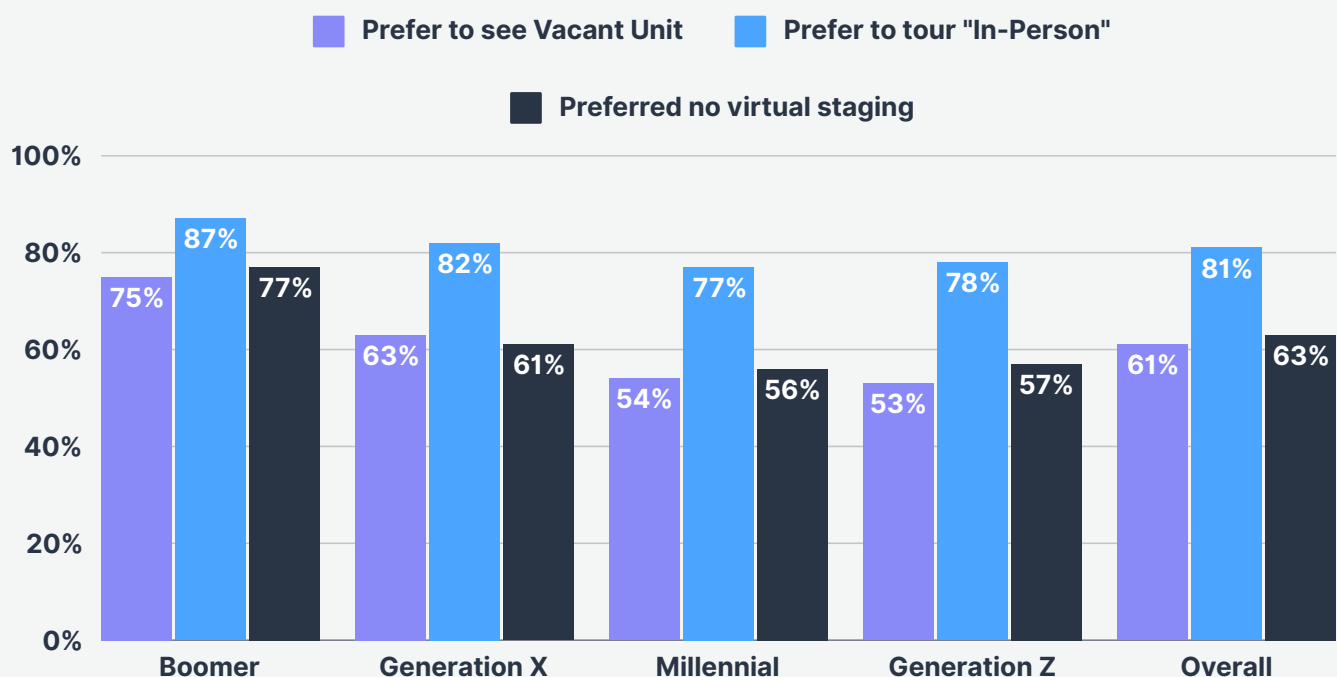
Generations	Does seeing the management team respond matter to you? (1 Better)
Boomer	1.7
Generation X	1.8
Millennial	1.9
Generation Z	1.9
Overall	1.8



What this means is that a genuine and solution-oriented approach to negative feedback is key to building trust with potential and existing residents. While speed is important, resolution and empathy are far more valued. People want community and human interaction, not just canned generic responses. Now that we've looked at the behind the scenes elements, let's delve into the main event: the in-person tour.

## The Real Reveal: Beyond the Virtual Curtain

In the modern world of online searches and virtual tours, you might think digital experience is what renters want. However, when it comes down to it, what renters really crave is authenticity. 61% of renters would prefer to tour a vacant unit rather than a model unit. This is particularly true for older generations, with 75% of Boomers and 63% of Gen X preferring vacant spaces. The younger generations are more accepting of model units, with 50% of Millennials and Generation Z preferring it, respectively. This trend also continues in virtual touring, with a clear majority of people (81%) preferring an in-person tour over any other type of tour. Furthermore, 63% of people dislike virtual furniture in photos and virtual tours of apartments. All of this data shows that real world touring and authenticity is what people are really after.



This further cements the importance of having well-maintained vacant units and highlights the value of a personalized, authentic, in-person tour experience. While younger generations are more open to technological add-ons, it's clear that the majority of renters still crave that tangible, real-world experience.

The apartment tour process is no longer just a formality, it's a critical step for renters making a big decision. They're doing their homework, actively searching for specific red flags and are closely observing how management interacts with reviews. They crave authenticity over digital trickery and are seeking genuine connection over automation. As an industry, we may be looking to cut costs and run a tighter ship, but let's not lose sight of what truly matters – the people we are here to serve. By understanding these nuanced needs, property management teams can truly focus on the aspects of the renter journey that are crucial, ultimately leading to more satisfied residents and thriving communities.

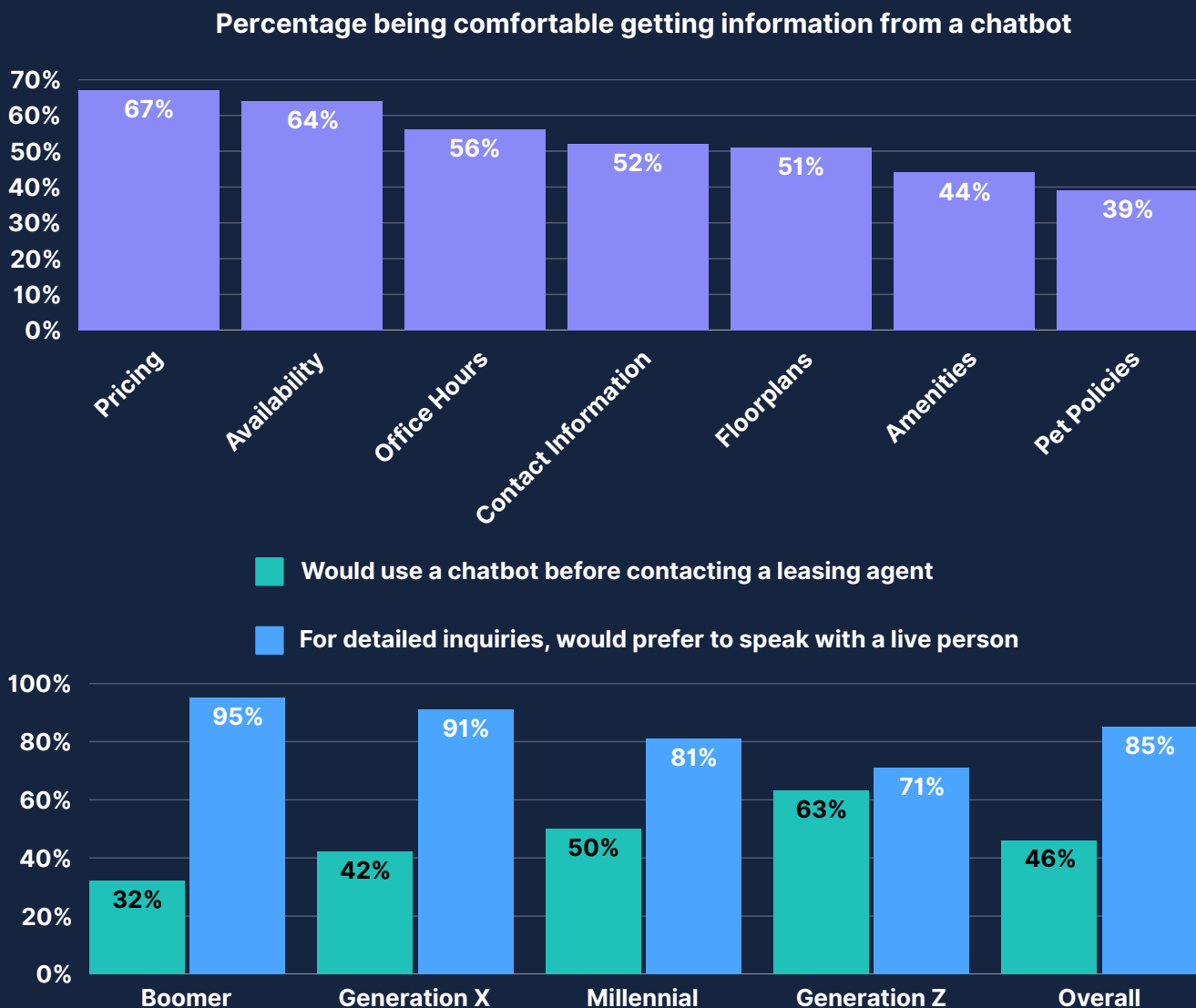


## AI Adventures & The Chatbot Chronicles

As the rental industry increasingly centralizes its operations and implements AI-driven tools to reduce costs, a disconnect is emerging. Although technology, such as chatbots, is being deployed across the rental experience, its effectiveness is often limited to simple tasks. This section will explore how chatbots are utilized in the rental process, while emphasizing the critical need for human interaction and empathy when renters encounter complex problems or critical time-sensitive matters, needs sometimes overlooked in the pursuit of maximized efficiency.

### Bots Welcome...To a Point

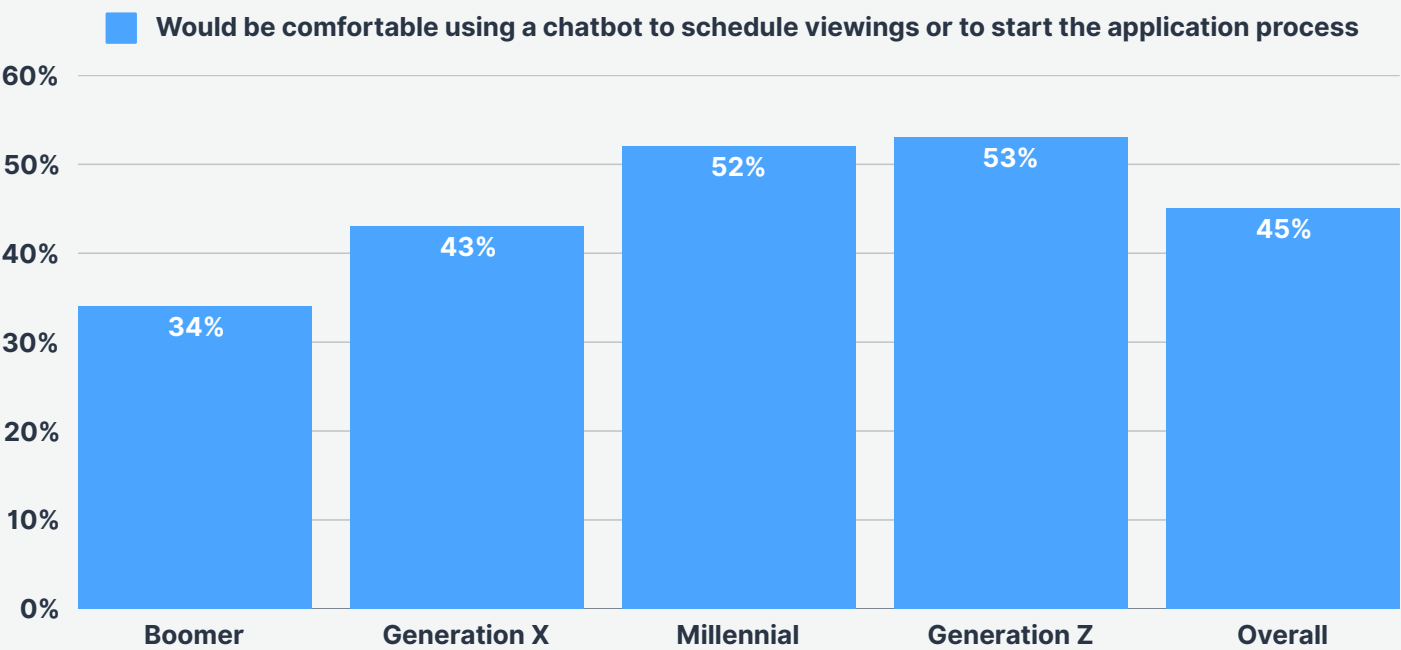
Renters are becoming savvy, and technology is their friend – to a point. They're happy to use chatbots for the basics: pricing information (67% comfortable) and availability checks (64% comfortable), for instance. In fact, younger generations are leading the charge, with 63% of Gen Z and 50% of Millennials likely to reach for a chatbot before contacting a leasing agent. This definitely makes it easier on everyone involved and frees up time for more in depth needs. However, this comfort has its limits. When it comes to those deeper inquiries, a resounding 85% still prefer the human touch.



While digital tools are great for those first interactions, people crave the personalized guidance that only a real person can offer. Even the most tech-embracing renters will still seek out human empathy and problem-solving skills when the situation calls for it.

**Bots as Tools, Not Friends**

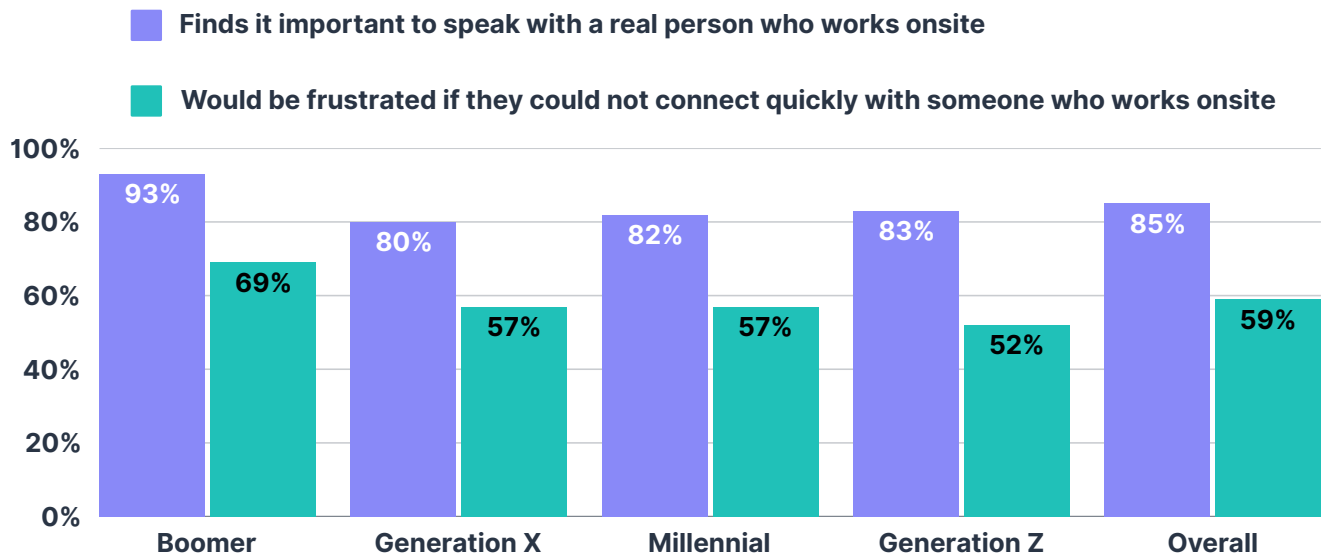
Renters are moderately comfortable (45%) with bots for tasks like scheduling tours or starting applications. They appreciate the efficiency, but it's more of a "let's get this done" approach, not a "let's build a relationship". This is more appreciated by younger generations, with only 34% of Boomers being comfortable with the concept. This reinforces the concept that while efficiency is valued, it can't come at the cost of real support.



Renters see chatbots as a tool, something to streamline certain tasks, but they don't see it as a way to connect. The data is very clear that they know where they are comfortable with bots and where they need the support of an actual human.

**The Human Touch Matters**

When issues get complicated, a massive 85% of renters want to talk to someone **onsite**. This makes it very clear that having available staff ready to jump in is crucial. Even more compelling, 59% of renters want that person quickly, especially when a chatbot or a centralized employee can't hack it. This need for speedy human assistance is even more pronounced for older generations, with a whopping 69% of Boomers emphasizing its importance.



While chatbots or call centers may provide an initial layer of support, the need for human interaction, especially when things get complicated, remains a key factor, even for the younger, more technologically inclined generations. But, where exactly are chatbots or call centers not as well received?

### Providing a Pulse

Complex situations, money matters, safety concerns, and anything time-sensitive are all big red flags that immediately make renters want to connect with a real person onsite. When it comes to navigating financials, deciphering a contract, asking about security, or handling maintenance issues, it's overwhelmingly a "talk to a human" situation. Renters want to feel confident they're making the right choice, and that takes more than automated responses; it takes human connection and understanding. It seems they want a relationship with the property and the people who run it, not simply an automated service.

What kind of issues or questions would always require you to speak with a live leasing agent?
Complex lease concerns, special requests regarding your unit or move in date, concerns about credit or background checks
Lease Terms and Conditions, discussing real-time availability of units, special offers, and exact pricing, application process, and moving-in/Out procedures, community rules and regulations

This solidifies the importance of the human touch. While renters are comfortable with a mix of technology, there is no replacement for a real human when it comes to making sure they are making the right decision.

In conclusion, renters are embracing technology when it's convenient, but they overwhelmingly value the human touch for the deeper things – complex issues, financial matters, safety concerns, and that overall human connection that makes a place feel like home. The future of our industry lies in finding that perfect balance between the two. Yes, AI plays a role, but it can never replace the importance of building trust and relationships. It's about efficiency with empathy, automation with understanding, and that's where the real magic happens.

## Conclusion

Our 2025 Internet Adventure study paints a vivid picture of the modern apartment hunt. Prospects aren't just passively looking; they're savvy digital explorers, navigating a landscape of online platforms to find their perfect place. Google, Apartments.com, Facebook, and Zillow are their trusty maps, with online reviews acting as the compass, guiding their choices with star ratings and authentic management responses. While younger generations live and breathe digital cues, everyone, regardless of age, still craves that "boots on the ground" experience. They yearn to walk through real, empty units (not just the perfectly staged model) and, most importantly, to connect with a real human being rather than just an automated response.

The rise of shiny new tools like AI and chatbots offers an exciting avenue for us as an industry to streamline the initial phases of a prospect's journey, allowing us to save time and resources by handling those everyday inquiries around cost and options. It should be seen now that technology is the "sidekick," not the superhero, in this story. When things get complex – think detailed financial questions, issues, or security concerns – renters need a real, empathetic person on the other end of the line. A quick response with genuine understanding is the golden ticket, especially when dealing with complaints or problems.

### Recommendations:

- **Most Important Review Categories:** Focus on pest control, unit condition, and financial clarity (hidden fees) in resident reviews as these are major red flags for prospective renters.
- **Chatbot Limitations:** Renters primarily want chatbots for simple inquiries about pricing and availability. Supply onsite human interaction for complex issues, financial questions, security concerns, and urgent situations.
- **Review Sites That Matter:** Prioritize your online reputation management efforts on Google, Apartments.com, Facebook, and Zillow. These are the most actively used review platforms by prospective renters.

This report serves as a roadmap for multifamily owners, operators, and marketers looking to win in a competitive world. It's not about choosing either technology or human interaction. The winning combination is a strategic blend. The goal is to have a top-notch online presence (think sparkling reviews and happy residents), a commitment to active review management (engaging and responding to feedback), and a high-quality in-person experience that has the warmth and understanding that renters crave. Investing in a positive online image, ensuring well-maintained and transparent tours and fostering a genuine human connection is key. The job is not to simply adopt the latest technology; it's about integrating it thoughtfully, always keeping in mind that behind every apartment search is a real person looking for a place to call home.





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