RESIDENTIAL Resource NARPM™

THE OFFICIAL MONTHLY NEWS MAGAZINE OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY MANAGERS

Point and Counterpoint: Should my property management company have a maintenance department?

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AUGUST 2026 ISSUE | 1403 GREENBRIER PARKWAY, SUITE 150, CHESAPEAKE, VA 23320 USA | WWW.NARPM.ORG

IN THIS ISSUE August 2026

NARPM® provides resources for residential property management professionals who desire to learn, grow, and build relationships.

FEATURE ARTICLES

MONTHLY COLUMNS

NEW MEMBER REFERRALS • JUNE 2026

REFERRING MEMBER	NEW MEMBER	REFERRING MEMBER	NEW MEMBER
Akime Heyward	Mackenzie R. Douglas	Nicole Huffman	Robert Mason
Amy Hanson, MPM® RPM®	Christine Norton	Paul Bullington, RMP®	Michael Girma
Gary Chad	Arthur Lieb	Paula Cleveland, RMP®	Natalie Robertson
Juli Schumann	Angela Ransom	Victor Jernigan	Erika Tucci
Kathryn Macgeraghty, MPM® RPM®	Jennifer Williamson		

EDITORIAL MISSION

Since 1989, the NARPM® news magazine has been a key focal point for the organization. The *Residential Resource* keeps members up to date on association events and provides valuable industry advice and insight. NARPM® members receive the *Residential Resource* as part of their membership, included in their annual dues.

The *Residential Resource* is published monthly, with occasional combined issues. Submit articles by email as a Word doc to: publications@narpm.org. You will be advised if accepted and be required to sign NARPM®'s Author, Presenter and/or Creator Warranty and Agreement before your article's publication. Items mailed in for publication cannot be returned. Address changes may be forwarded to NARPM® National. NARPM® reserves the right to edit or refuse all publications for content and selection. Members are encouraged to submit articles for publication. Printed articles help earn members credit toward their designations.

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NARPM® ANTITRUST STATEMENT

It is the policy of NARPM® to comply fully with all antitrust laws. The antitrust laws prohibit, among other things, any joint conduct among competitors that could lessen competition in the marketplace. NARPM®'s membership is composed of competitors; they must refrain from discussing competitively sensitive topics, including those related to pricing (such as rates, fees, or costs), individual competitors or specific business transactions, or controlling or allocating markets. NARPM® shall not restrict members' ability to solicit competitors' clients. NARPM® shall not restrict members' ability to advertise for business, provided the advertising is not false, deceptive, or otherwise illegal.

NARPM® Member Spotlight: Jarrett Lau, The Tech-Forward Manager

Editor's note: Jarrett Lau writes The Tech-Forward Manager ongoing feature in Residential Resource® *magazine and is the Owner/CEO of Green Ocean Property Management in Boston.*

I've been in a NARPM® Member since: 2018

I became involved with NARPM®: To be more involved in the property management community and connect with other industry leaders.

I pursued property management because: I was born into it! My grandmother started buying buildings in the '50s, my father continued through the '90s, and I took over the family business in the 2000s!

I became intrigued by the utilization of technology for property management because: I have always loved technology and, more importantly, efficiency and profitability

The most marked way AI is changing property management is: It is allowing us to be able to manage more properties more effectively and be more profitable.

Property managers should watch closely for these fast-moving technology changes: Automation, an all-encompassing knowledge base, and autonomous agents.

Besides technology, one of the most significant changes I've seen in property management in the PAST five years is: Tightening regulations.

Besides technology, I think the following will impact the industry the most in the NEXT five years: Regulations.

My favorite NARPM® memory is: My first NARPM® Broker/Owner Conference.

In my opinion, the greatest challenge facing the property management industry today is: The fact that it is a 24/7 business.

NARPM® membership is important to me because: It allows me access to great events and even better leaders.

My best advice for those who want to get involved in NARPM® is: Do it!

My favorite pastimes are: Surfing, cars, and traveling the world.

Fellow NARPM® Members would be surprised to know: I was a child model.

Read this month's installment of The Tech-Forward Manager on page 26.

MEMBERSHIP Growth

NARPM® membership as of June 30, 2026: **5,359**

A WARM WELCOME TO ALL THE NEW MEMBERS WHO JOINED FROM JUNE 1 – 30, 2026.

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Continued on page 30 "Growth"

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Dave Borden *is the CEO of Rentvine (https://www.rentvine.com/) and an experienced business leader with a strong background in growing technology companies. With expertise in leadership, strategy, SEO, sales, advertising, and entrepreneurship, he is passionate about helping property management companies improve operational performance and scale effectively. Dave is a graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point, where he earned a degree in Strategic Management. Reach him at https://www.rentvine.com/.*

The scaling trap: How to grow your door count without breaking everything else

At some point in every property management company's growth, there is a moment when adding doors stops feeling like progress and starts feeling like pressure. The phone rings more. The team stretches thinner. Processes that worked fine at 200 doors start buckling at 400. It is not a staffing problem, and it is not a market problem. It is a systems problem, and it is one of the most predictable traps in this industry.

Most operators do not see it coming. Growth feels good. New doors mean new revenue, and the instinct is to hire and hustle through the friction. But hustle is not a system. And the companies that scale most successfully are not necessarily the ones that grew the fastest; they are the ones that built the infrastructure to support the growth before it arrived.

WHAT BREAKS FIRST

When a property management company scales without the right systems in place, the cracks tend to appear in the same places. Owner communication gets inconsistent, not because the team stopped caring, but because there is no process ensuring it happens on a schedule. Maintenance coordination slows down as volume increases and work orders pile up faster than anyone can triage them. Accounting becomes a monthly fire drill as reconciliations that were manageable at 150 doors become genuinely risky at 500.

These are not random failures. They are predictable ones. And they share a common cause: the business grew, but the way it operates did not grow with it.

WHAT 1,000 DOORS ACTUALLY REQUIRES

The operators who manage 1,000 doors well are not working twice as hard as the ones managing 500. They have built systems that do the repeatable work so their team can focus on the work that actually requires human judgment. That distinction matters more than almost anything else at scale.

What those systems look like in practice: owner communications that go out on a schedule without someone manually triggering them. Work orders that are triaged and routed the moment they come in, not when a coordinator gets to them. Month-end close

that follows a defined process rather than depending on whoever happens to be available. Reporting that gives ownership a clear picture of portfolio health without requiring someone to build it from scratch each time.

None of that happens by accident. It requires deliberately designing how the business operates, and then building or adopting the tools that support that design.

BUILD TOWARD THE NEXT LEVEL BEFORE YOU NEED IT

The mistake most growing companies make is waiting until the pain is bad enough to force a change. By then, they are rebuilding the engine while the car is moving. The smarter move is to look at where you want to be in three years and ask honestly whether your current operations could handle that volume today. If the answer is no, the work is not in adding doors. It is in closing that gap first.

That means documenting the processes that live in people's heads. It means identifying the workflows that depend on a specific person rather than a defined system. It means evaluating whether the tools you are using were built for the size you are trying to become, or just the size you were when you started.

Growth in property management is not just a sales problem. It is an operational one. The companies that reach 1,000 doors and keep performing well did not get there by working harder; they got there by building something that could carry the weight. Start that work now, and the next level of growth becomes something you are ready for rather than something you are surviving.

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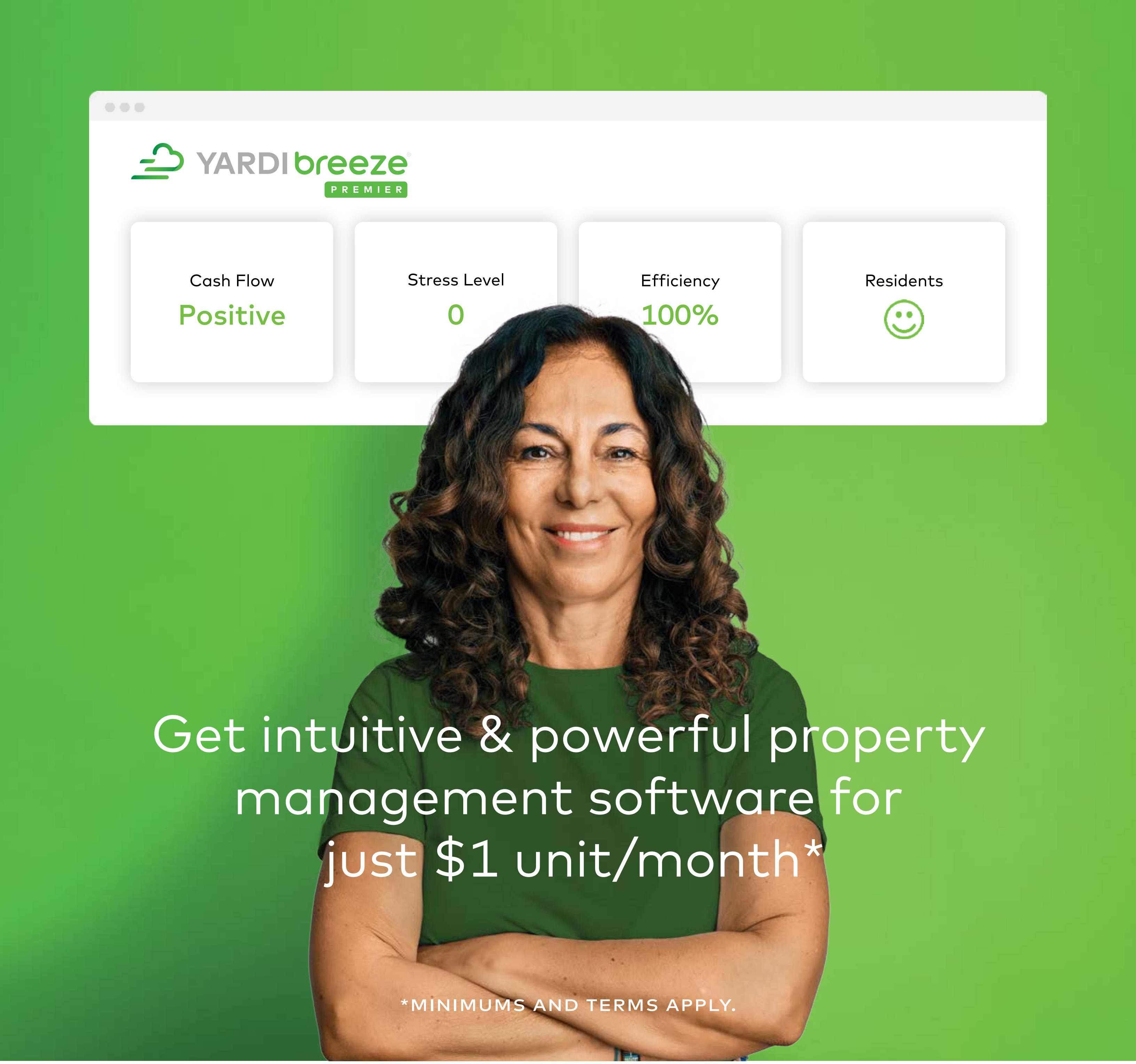

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The right buyer will protect more than your purchase price

Patrick Hurley *is the founder of PM Broker Group (https://pmbrokergroup.com/), a brokerage focused exclusively on the valuation and sale of property management companies. With more than a decade of experience advising owners on exits, succession planning, and value optimization, Patrick has worked closely with buyers and sellers nationwide. His work centers on helping founders understand how operational structure, leadership depth, and owner involvement directly influence market value.*

I've met a lot of people in business who believe that a company's buyer and seller are opponents. The objective for each is to "win" the deal. In my experience, however, the most successful transactions are those in which the two parties view themselves as partners working toward a common goal.

Of course, both buyers and sellers want to negotiate the best possible price and terms, and that process can sometimes be emotional. But those negotiations represent only a small part of the overall transaction. In many cases, the really important work begins after the contract, or even the closing documents, have been signed.

After all, the buyer is the one who will carry the company's legacy forward. They will inherit relationships with employees, clients, vendors, and industry partners and be responsible for preserving the culture and reputation the seller spent years building. That's why it's important to consider more than just financial qualifications when determining whether a buyer is the right fit for the business and whether the business is the right fit for the buyer.

The first opportunity to gain that insight often comes during an initial "get-to-know-you" call. It allows the seller to tell the story of the business, explain how it has evolved over the years, and share the values that have contributed to its success. At the same time, the buyer can explain why they're interested in the opportunity and how they envision the company's future. While it won't make sense to involve a seller until the buyer has been thoroughly vetted, it can play an important role in finding the "right buyer" by digging beyond the terms that appear in an LOI or transaction documents.

Acquisition consultant Stacey Salyer, who works extensively with property management buyers before and after acquisitions, encourages buyers to come prepared with thoughtful questions about the company's foundation, including its employees, major clients, operating systems, geographic footprint, equipment, and growth opportunities. She believes buyers should evaluate not only the financial opportunity but also whether the business aligns with their personal and professional goals.

Stacey Salyer

To help buyers stay focused, Salyer developed what she calls the "Buy Box" – a framework that helps define the characteristics of an ideal acquisition, including geography, company size, profitability, culture, and transaction structure.

"Without a clear and comprehensive plan for the kind of business you want to acquire, it can be easy to get distracted by opportunities that look interesting but aren't a good fit for your experience or skills," Salyer said. "Without a well-defined Buy Box, every opportunity feels like a 'maybe.'"

Ideally, an acquisition or merger leaves both organizations stronger by bringing together talent, improving operational efficiencies, and creating economies of scale. But sellers should also remember that they remain in control of the process. They ultimately decide who will carry their business forward, and trust and transparency are essential ingredients in any successful transition.

In fact, I often tell sellers that one of the most important considerations is what I call "soft alignment." Financial terms may not have even been discussed yet, but if the communication styles, values, and long-term vision don't feel compatible, the transaction may never reach the negotiating table. That's perfectly acceptable. Selling a business is both a financial and an emotional decision, and sometimes the right answer is simply that the fit isn't there.

The goal isn't simply to get to the closing table; it's to position both the buyer and seller for long-term success.

The best acquisitions aren't won by either side. They're built on trust, transparency, preparation, and alignment.

Closing the expectations gap: Why vague promises create problems you never agreed to solve

Anne Lackey *is the co-founder of HireSmart Virtual Employees, hiresmartvirtualemployees.com, a full-service HR firm helping others recruit, hire & train top global talent. She has coached and trained hundreds of people in the U.S. and Canada in creating successful businesses to be more profitable and to create the lifestyle they desire. She can be reached at anne@hiresmartvirtualemployees.com or at meetwithanne.com.*

When an owner signs with a property manager, they leave that first conversation with one of two things: a clear picture of what they're getting, or a space they'll fill in themselves. That space is where relationships can break down.

That gap appears because the manager chose to stay general instead of specific in that first conversation. It's an understandable choice. A new owner is sitting across from you; the relationship is just starting, and the last thing you want is to create friction by overspecifying things that might not go perfectly. If you commit to something specific and miss it, you're accountable. Stay general, and there's nothing to be held to.

So, there can be a temptation to be vague with promises instead of offering clear deliverables. It feels safer, but the owner is left to construct their own picture of what the working relationship should be.

I choose to treat information consumption like food. I treat it as a meal to be scheduled. I decide in advance what I'm going to consume and when, and when that time is up, I close it. Anyone can do this, but it takes some discipline.

THE COST OF STAYING VAGUE

And that picture is almost always more demanding than anything you'd have agreed to. The owner draws on whatever they've experienced before, such as the last manager they had, or what a neighbor told them, or what they think is reasonable. By the time you've been working together for a few months, you may be falling short of something you never agreed to and didn't know was expected.

Specific expectations protect you both. The owner knows what they're getting. You know what you're accountable to. The relationship has solid ground to stand on before anything goes wrong.

That means agreeing on how you communicate, not just what you do. Settle on a schedule at the start: how often the owner hears from you, in what format, and what threshold of issue warrants contact outside that schedule. Most routine updates belong in the regular report. Anything that affects the owner's income or liability gets a call. Everything else waits for the scheduled communication.

The difference between vague and specific here is considerable. Telling an owner, "We keep you updated regularly on your property's status," sounds reassuring but means nothing. Telling them, "You'll receive an automated financial update on the 10th of every month, and we'll only call you directly if a single maintenance repair exceeds $500" gives them something real to hold onto.

Owners don't want to hear from you constantly. That can get annoying. What they want is to know that when they do hear from you, it means something, and that the scheduled update will arrive when you said it would. That clarity is what the first conversation should establish. It's considerably easier to deliver on over the next two years than whatever picture the owner was going to build on their own.

FOLLOWING THROUGH ON THE SMALL THINGS

The gap closes in that first conversation. Whether it stays closed depends on what happens after. Once the communication schedule is established, the work is honoring it. That means the monthly report goes out when you said it would. It means that if you told an owner you'd have something resolved by Thursday, you tell them on Thursday whether you do or not. Volume isn't the point. Reliability inside the structure you already agreed on.

Consider two managers who both miss a Thursday deadline. The first resolves it quietly on Friday and

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

moves on. The second sends a short note on Thursday afternoon: I told you I'd have this handled today, and I don't yet. Here's what's happening, and here's my new timeline. Both managers missed the deadline. One of them is building trust. The other is eroding it without realizing it.

Owners can absorb imperfection. What tends to wear on them is the feeling that the manager isn't tracking what they said they'd do. Once that feeling settles in, the owner starts reading everything through it. A late report that would have been fine six months ago now feels like confirmation of something.

The small commitments matter as much as the significant ones. I'll get back to you by the end of the week is a promise. It may feel minor when you say it, but the owner noted it. When Friday passes without a response, they note that too. A manager's reliability gets built from moments like these, not from the big ones.

CHECKING IN BEFORE YOU NEED TO

The gap can also come back without anyone opening it. Expectations set at the start don't hold forever. The owner's circumstances change. What they needed from you at month three may be different at month eighteen, and a lot can shift in a year without either of you naming it.

The manager who waits for the owner to raise this is leaving something important to chance. A good trigger is the annual renewal. Before you send the paperwork, reach out directly and ask whether the relationship is working the way they need it to, not whether the property is performing well, but whether the relationship itself is right.

Some owners will have something specific to say. Others will say everything is fine and mean it. Either way, the follow-up questions are worth asking. Ask whether the communication schedule is still working for them, or whether they'd want more or less contact. Ask whether there's anything that happened in the past year they'd want handled differently next time. Ask whether their situation has changed in any way that should change how you're managing the property. Those questions give the owner something concrete to respond to instead of an open-ended invitation they don't know how to accept.

The whole conversation takes ten minutes. When it happens, owners remember it and appreciate it.

WHAT THIS ACTUALLY BUILDS

The owner who trusts you before the first crisis arrives is a different kind of client than the one still deciding whether they made the right choice. The first gives you room to work, and when something goes wrong, they assume you're on top of it. They wait for your explanation before they form a conclusion. The second reads every invoice carefully for something to question and second-guesses decisions you've already made.

A property can perform well, and the relationship can still fall apart. The two aren't the same thing. What holds the relationship together is whether the owner knows what to expect from you and finds out over time that you meant it.

None of that is complicated. It just requires deciding that the relationship is worth the same attention you give to the property.

Continued from page 24 "AI"

on doors better. They run community events. They do the things that only humans can do. Engage face-to-face.

You're not eliminating employees. You're 10Xing them.

The industry report says 50% of companies plan to cut costs by adopting new technology. That's the right instinct. But if your version of "adopting AI" is using ChatGPT to write a property listing, you're using a chainsaw to cut butter. The tool isn't the problem. The ambition is.

Operational expenses in this industry are up 39% since the pandemic. Insurance, labor, materials. Only 38% of owners say their properties are consistently profitable. The pressure is real, and it isn't going away.

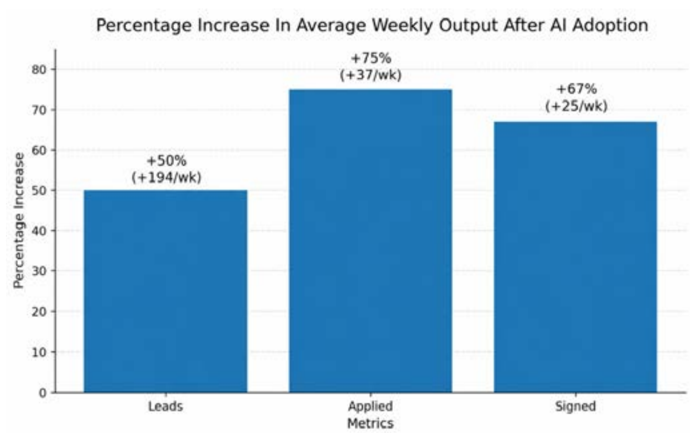
BOTTOM LINE

AI doesn't fix all of that. But a 20% reduction in your largest controllable cost changes the math on every deal in your portfolio.

The companies that figure this out in the next 12 months will operate at a different cost structure than the ones still drafting property descriptions with ChatGPT. In a business where margins are already thin, that gap will be the difference between growing and getting acquired.

If you want job security in this business, be a plumber. I'm half kidding.

The real security is understanding that AI doesn't replace the work that matters. It replaces the work that was never the best use of a person in the first place.



3 things to keep in mind when buying a property management book of business

Jordan Coleman *is a Loan Officer at Live Oak Bank, specializing in financing for property management. Jordan brings over seven years of experience in the financial services industry, including a strong background in supporting small businesses across diverse sectors. She holds a degree in Financial Services from East Carolina University and is committed to providing exceptional service and facilitating the growth of her clients. Contact her at jordan.coleman@liveoak.bank.*

Whether you are just starting your property management career or you're a seasoned professional looking to expand your residential property management business, acquiring a book of business can be an efficient way to grow your list of tenants and owners.

A book of business is an ever-evolving asset, and its value lies in the goodwill of the clients and tenants rather than tangible assets like commercial real estate or equipment. Consider these best practices when buying a property management book of business to verify that the book will be a strategic fit and a wise investment.

CONDUCT DUE DILIGENCE

To determine if the book being sold is a good fit for your business, conduct research to confirm that your service model will align with the seller's current model. Unearth how the seller runs the property management business and what the client or tenant expectations are. An example would be if you're acquiring tenants who are accustomed to quarterly property inspections but you run inspections yearly, make sure that you can meet the demands of those tenants. Set parameters for your search, including the ideal type of tenant or client and the target price you are willing to pay.

During the due diligence phase, it's critical to dig deep into every aspect of the property management business to ensure that the tenant retention rate is high. It could be beneficial to schedule meetings with several tenants and clients who have been with the seller's business for a while to gain insight into their expectations and goals. Make sure you have a clear understanding of why the owner is selling the book. Are they retiring? Changing careers? Ask the right questions to confirm that you aren't inheriting unsatisfied customers.

Additionally, before completing your acquisition, assess the overall health of the property management business. Review tax returns and financials, analyze cash flow, and identify the general organization of client data. The due diligence process should encompass a comprehensive evaluation of every facet of the book of business.

PAY A FAIR PRICE

After you've completed due diligence and decided to move forward with acquiring a residential property management book of business, an appraiser will help you determine a fair purchase price. Every book of business is different, and a variety of factors play into the market value of the book, including revenues, client demographics, and tenure. After considering all aspects of the deal, the seller and buyer settle on a purchase price.

BUILD A TRANSITION PLAN

Before closing on the book of business, it is strongly advised to have a plan in place for transitioning the clientele. Establish a mutually agreed-upon timeline for the seller to support the transition and complete all responsibilities to their tenants and clients. The first six to nine months are crucial in executing a smooth changeover strategy to retain clients. Remember, these clients can choose to leave and take their businesses elsewhere, so you must establish trust and nurture these new relationships for long-term success.

It's also beneficial to host meetings with the seller so that you can set expectations, address any concerns, and create consistent communication. If you take the time to document your goals and priorities, along with a timeline for the transition, you'll have a global outlook of how best to incorporate the new business into your existing service model.

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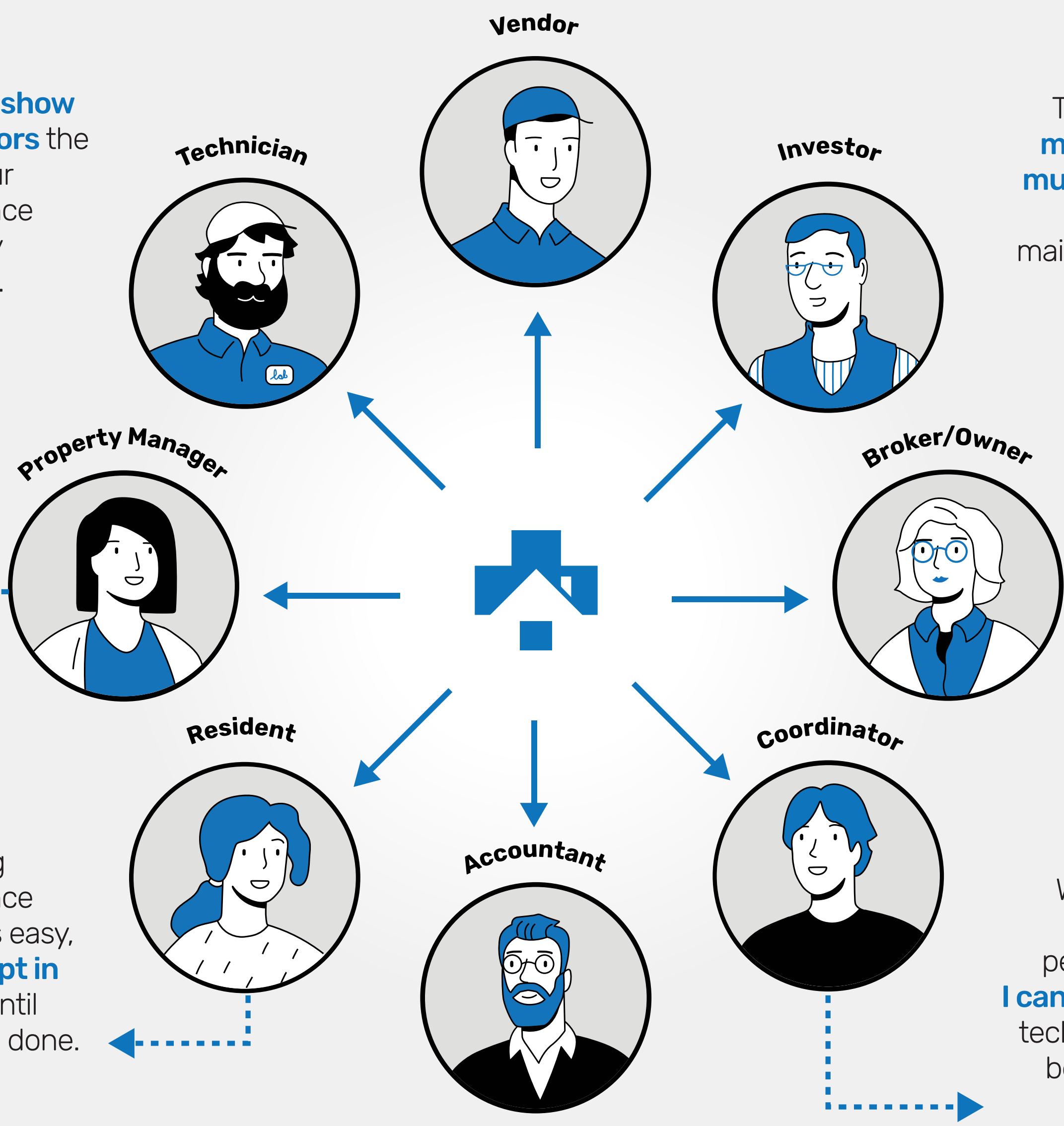

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PROPERTY**MELD**

Should my property management company have a maintenance department?

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Having a successful property maintenance department depends on your clients' willingness to pay for the service and whether you can staff it correctly.

SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL

I was involved in managing a property maintenance department for over 40 years. For the first 20 years, we profited from our maintenance department. Then the leaders of the maintenance department (only four of them) retired, and none of the next five department heads could help us profit. It seems that as long as we had a small department with a working manager, we made money, but once we added more than five technicians, we ran into trouble.

WORKFLOW

As we grew staff- and service call-wise, we had to add a dispatcher and accounting help, and the working manager became a full-time supervisor. We started getting financially choked. As our hourly prices increased to meet the challenge of keeping good technicians, we had problems getting enough work for them regularly because the property managers thought our employees should cost less than contractors in the marketplace, and the workflow was reduced.

QUALITY

As we added more technicians, we also struggled with getting experienced staff. That meant some work was not completed correctly and had to be redone by someone else or a contractor, and, of course, then we had to eat the additional cost. Once the property managers lost confidence in the quality of work being offered, we also struggled to get service calls from them.

The bottom line was quality work, and quality control was essential.

As we added more technicians, we also struggled with getting experienced staff. That meant some work was not completed correctly and had to be redone by someone else or a contractor, and, of course, then we had to eat the additional cost.

LARGER VS. SMALLER PROPERTIES

If you have larger properties or roaming commercial engineers with a set schedule, you can profit with a preset workload, and full-time engineers and porters assigned to buildings. With roaming maintenance technicians, it's much harder to manage and forecast a consistent workload.

Challenges of supervising employees in the field:

- Employees may take drugs.
- Employees have accidents, including:
  - Auto accidents.
  - Workers' compensation injuries.
- Employees can steal from you.
- Employees may not have enough experience (you must constantly rework repairs started by inexperienced technicians).

STAFF LANDSCAPERS AND PAINTERS

It's hard to make money with landscapers and painters unless you have large properties and employ them full time. Again, it's hard to get the timing right. They still need constant supervision, and your on-site property manager usually does not have time to do that.

SUMMARY

Having your own property maintenance department is not a straightforward proposition. It's critical to have excellent, experienced leadership to

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A larger-portfolio perspective on maintenance for small property management companies

Travis Buchanan *is a residential real estate and property management operator with experience building and scaling platforms across public company, institutional, and high-growth private company environments. As COO of Poplar Homes, Travis helped lead the business through a period of rapid growth from roughly 1,500 to 15,000 homes, while building the company's M&A function, leading the first several acquisitions and integrations, and scaling operations across maintenance, renewals, customer service, leasing, and other core departments. Travis comes from a family with a 50-year history in commercial real estate in Southern California, including managing, financing, owning, and developing real estate assets. That background shaped his appreciation for real estate as both an operating business and a long-term value creation platform. Beyond the operating work, Travis is driven by the idea that businesses are powerful vehicles for meaningful change. He believes strong companies should create environments where all stakeholders are better positioned to succeed. He lives in Las Vegas with his wife and three children. Connect with him at https://www.linkedin.com/in/travisbuchanan/.*

At one point in my career, I worked with a platform that owned approximately 40,000 single-family rental homes. That scale allowed us to build an institutional-quality, nationwide maintenance operation from the ground up.

Most local and regional property management companies will never need — or want — to build something that large. But there are still valuable lessons small and mid-sized operators can borrow from a scaled maintenance program, especially if they are trying to improve response times, reduce vendor costs, increase resident satisfaction, and add operational control.

Maintenance is generally easier in larger multifamily properties because the units are concentrated in one location. Scattered single-family homes are much harder. Travel time, scheduling complexity, vendor coordination, inventory, and quality control all become more difficult. That said, even smaller property managers can benefit from thinking more systematically about maintenance.

Companies should have appropriate systems for technician scheduling, work order status, vehicle use, parts usage, and job completion. Fleet tracking, photo documentation, resident confirmation, and manager review can all help protect the business.

UNDERSTAND THE GROWTH "NO MAN'S LAND"

Like any business, maintenance operations hit painful inflection points as they grow.

At a certain size, an operator has to decide whether to push revenue first and stretch existing resources or hire ahead of growth and absorb the added cost. This is where many companies get stuck between "small is beautiful" and having enough scale to justify schedulers, lead technicians, vehicles, fleet management, inventory systems, software, and supervision.

The challenge is that these resources are often necessary before the economics are obvious. But without them, service quality can decline quickly. Work orders pile up, residents get frustrated, vendors become inconsistent, and owners start to lose confidence.

For small property managers, the key is not to overbuild too early, but to recognize when the business has outgrown informal processes.

TREAT MAINTENANCE LIKE ITS OWN BUSINESS

A maintenance team should be run as separately as possible from the core property management operation. In many ways, it should be treated like a third-party vendor — except with higher expectations.

That means tracking performance, measuring responsiveness, comparing pricing, and holding the team accountable for results. Internal maintenance should not automatically get every job simply because it is internal. If the team is not responsive, cost-effective, or producing high first-trip completion rates, it should be evaluated just like any outside vendor.

The benefit of having your own maintenance capability is control. But that control only creates value if the operation is managed professionally.

BUILD SYSTEMS BEFORE PROBLEMS BECOME EXPENSIVE

As maintenance operations grow, more people, tools, vehicles, materials, and spending enter the system. With that comes the need for better guardrails.

Theft of time, money, supplies, and inventory is real. It is not always massive, but it can quietly erode profitability if no one is watching. In a larger operation, we built analytics tools that pulled spending by SKU into dashboards and flagged unusual activity. That helped identify issues such as technicians buying gift

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manage it for you, and these are hard to find.

The biggest benefit to having your own maintenance team is that they can respond quickly to tenants' needs and emergencies. Building a profitable department depends on the cash flow that properties have available for repairs.

The challenges include recruiting, training, safety, workers' compensation issues, lack of technical skills, managing the constant turnover, and dealing with required licensing requirements. If you have a maintenance department, you will also see your business insurance expenses increase as maintenance companies and departments typically have higher loss run.

As another option, you can also have maintenance subcontractors respond to the property emergencies.

The decision regarding starting and keeping an in-house maintenance department depends mostly on your property mix. With the wrong mix, it might be better to subcontract your maintenance needs to established vendors and charge a markup on every maintenance call.

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cards and using them personally.

We also used inventory management tools with auto-replenishment and required maintenance managers to conduct periodic and random inventory spot checks.

Small companies do not necessarily need enterprise software to start. But they do need basic controls: spending visibility, inventory tracking, approval thresholds, vendor comparisons, and some form of routine audit. These systems are not always expensive, but they do require discipline and organization.

BE VERY INTENTIONAL ABOUT TECHNICIAN HIRING

In my experience, technician quality is one of the biggest drivers of maintenance success.

Although more expensive, I would generally prefer hiring HVAC-certified technicians when possible. Strong HVAC technicians often have enough electrical, mechanical, and plumbing knowledge to solve a broad range of general maintenance problems. That versatility matters, especially in scattered-site property management, where every trip to a property has a cost.

Hiring should be systematic. A good process should include structured interviews, technical testing, practical simulations, onboarding, shadowing, and ongoing quality checks. We used manager ride-alongs with detailed assessments and sent resident surveys immediately after work was completed. Residents were asked about competence, professionalism, friendliness, cleanliness, and whether the technician respected the home.

This may sound excessive, but maintenance technicians are often the only people your residents ever meet in person. They directly shape how residents feel about your company.

USE TRACKING AND OVERSIGHT WITHOUT APOLOGY

Maintenance is an area where trust is important, but verification is essential.

Companies should have appropriate systems for technician scheduling, work order status, vehicle use, parts usage, and job completion. Fleet tracking, photo documentation, resident confirmation, and manager review can all help protect the business.

This is not about assuming the worst in people. It is about protecting residents, owners, technicians, and the company. Without clear systems, even good people can operate inconsistently, and bad behavior can go undetected for too long.

STAY FOCUSED ON THE HIGHEST-VALUE WORK

For most small property management companies, I would not recommend bringing painting or landscaping in-house.

I have built and piloted both landscaping and painting crews in a larger institutional environment. They can work at a significant scale, but they usually do not make sense for most local or regional operators. Labor management, equipment, scheduling, and quality control can become a distraction.

Instead, I would focus on the highest-frequency, highest-impact maintenance categories: electrical, plumbing, HVAC, doors, locks, and garage doors. In many rental portfolios, those categories represent a large percentage of total work orders and are the areas where speed and competence matter most.

The goal is not to perform everything. The goal is to control the work that most affects resident satisfaction, owner confidence, risk, and cost.

MAINTENANCE CAN BE A PROFIT CENTER AND A RISK MANAGEMENT TOOL

A well-run maintenance operation can add profitability, but the financial margin is only part of the value.

Internal maintenance can also create better visibility into the condition of properties. Technicians become additional eyes in the field. They can spot deferred maintenance, resident-caused damage, safety issues, unauthorized pets, poor property conditions, or potential lease violations.

A strong maintenance team also gives the company flexibility. It can respond quickly to emergencies, reduce reliance on overpriced vendors, improve first-trip completion rates, and help prevent small issues from becoming expensive ones.

That value does not always show up neatly on a profit-and-loss statement, but it can be incredibly important.

FINAL THOUGHT

For small property management companies, the goal should not be to recreate an institutional maintenance platform. The goal is to borrow the right lessons from one.

Start with the highest-impact work. Hire carefully. Track performance. Put basic controls in place. Treat the maintenance team like a real business unit. Compare it honestly against outside vendors. And, most importantly, make sure the operation is led by experienced maintenance supervisors who understand both the technical work and the service expectations of property management.

When done well, maintenance can become more than a necessary headache. It can become a competitive advantage.


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The most profitable door is the one you already have

Growth is the goal: more doors, more revenue, a bigger footprint in your market. Every property management company worth its salt is working toward that. But here is something the most successful operators understand that others often learn the hard way: Your growth strategy is only as strong as your retention strategy. The two are not separate conversations. They are the same one.

When an owner walks, the cost is rarely just one month of lost management fees. Factor in the vacancy period, the make-ready work, the time spent finding a replacement owner, and the onboarding that follows, and a single departure can run close to $4,000 in real, measurable impact. That is before accounting for the referrals that never happen, the reviews that go unwritten, and the word-of-mouth that dries up. Turnover is expensive in ways that rarely show up cleanly on a P&L but compound over time.

Most property managers genuinely care about their owners. The problem is not intention; it is infrastructure. Retention tends to be reactive in this industry. We focus on the owner when something goes wrong, when they ask a question, or when they mention they are thinking about leaving. By that point, the relationship had already been quietly eroding for months. The goal is to get ahead of that drift before it becomes a departure.

COMMUNICATION IS THE PRODUCT

Owners do not leave because their property has a maintenance issue. They leave because they feel uninformed, unimportant, or like a number in someone else's spreadsheet. What they are really paying for, underneath the management fee, is peace of mind. And peace of mind is delivered through consistent, proactive communication.

That does not mean more emails or longer reports. It means the right touchpoints at the right times. A brief monthly update, even when there is nothing significant to report, tells an owner that someone is watching. A quick note when a maintenance issue is resolved, not just when it is opened, closes a loop that most PMs leave open. A check-in call that is not about a problem signals that the relationship matters beyond the transactional.

These are small habits. The compounding effect of them is not small at all.

TREAT RETENTION LIKE A SYSTEM, NOT A RESCUE MISSION

The operators who retain owners at the highest rates are not necessarily the most charismatic or the most available. They are the most consistent. They have built retention into how they operate, not as a response to warning signs but as a baseline standard of service.

That looks like owner statements that include a plain-language summary at the top, not just line items. It looks like a calendar reminder to reach out to every owner at least once a quarter with no agenda other than checking in.

RETENTION MAKES YOUR GROWTH WORK HARDER

Here is the part that often gets overlooked: a strong retention culture does not just protect your existing portfolio. It amplifies everything you are doing to grow it. Owners who feel well-served refer other owners. They leave reviews. They stay through market fluctuations rather than shopping around when conditions shift. They give you the benefit of the doubt when something goes wrong, because you have built enough trust that one mistake does not define the relationship.

Every new door you add lands in a portfolio that is already running well, with owners who are already engaged. That is a very different foundation for growth than one where you are constantly backfilling departures.

The most profitable door in your portfolio is not the next one. It is the one that stays, refers, and compounds in value year after year. Build the systems to protect it, and your growth strategy will become more efficient.

Alan Stalcup *is the CEO and founder of GVA Real Estate Group, a vertically integrated company focused on acquiring multifamily properties and adding value through effective asset, property and construction management. GVA has completed more than $10 billion in transactions and managed approximately 30,000 apartment units across Texas and the Southeastern United States.*

58% of property managers are using AI, but only 8% are using it where it counts

Fifty-eight percent of property management companies are now using artificial intelligence (AI). A year ago, it was 20%. That's a tripling in 12 months, according to the 2026 State of the Property Management Industry Report.

Sounds like a revolution. It's not.

Dig into the data and you'll find that most of these companies are using AI to write property descriptions and summarize documents. Just 8% have fully automated a single workflow. The industry adopted the tool. It hasn't adopted the change.

THE REAL REVOLUTION

The companies treating AI as a drafting assistant are leaving the real money on the table.

Here's what AI can do in property management right now. Not in some future release. Not in a pilot program. Today.

- Leasing. AI handles every inbound lead. Phone, email, text. It follows up until the prospect books a showing. It does this in whatever language the prospect speaks. After the showing, AI picks it back up: follow-up, nurture, all the way through to a signed lease. You still need a person to show the unit. That's it.
- Collections. AI sends every reminder, every follow-up, every escalation notice. The only thing it can't do is knock on someone's door. Everything else is handled.
- Renewals. All follow-up. All reminders. All scheduling.
- Maintenance. This is where it gets interesting. A resident submits a request: "I have a leak." Today, a person has to follow up. Where's the leak? Which bathroom? Which fixture? AI handles that entire diagnostic conversation. Then it dispatches the right technician. Not just any tech, the correct one for that issue. After the repair, AI follows up: Did this fix your problem? Are you satisfied?

One of the biggest customer service failures in property management is the maintenance request that's poorly defined, so it doesn't get done right, so the resident is unhappy, so they don't renew. AI closes that loop.

We're implementing all of this right now across our portfolio. The result: a 20% reduction in payroll costs.

Not theoretical. Not projected. Actual.

CASE STUDY: HOW AI INCREASED OUR WEEKLY LEASES SIGNED BY 67%

When we rolled out AI across our leasing pipeline, we tracked weekly averages before and after.

Leads handled jumped 50% from 386 to 581 per week. Applications rose 75%, from 49 to 85 per week. Signed leases went from 37 to 62, a 67% increase.

That is revolutionary. But even more exciting are the avenues that AI is opening for the first time. We had AI automatically book tours with new prospects, engaging 72 per week. After-hours responses, previously impossible, reached 98 people per week. That's 98 prospects every week who would have gotten a voicemail and moved on to the next listing.

The leasing funnel didn't just get more efficient. It grew to capture opportunities that weren't even on the table before.

AI MAKES YOUR EMPLOYEES MORE VALUABLE, NOT LESS

Now, before anyone reads "20% payroll reduction" and hears "layoffs," let me be direct about what's actually happening.

Property management has a turnover problem that most people outside the industry don't understand. I've seen 600% turnover in a single position at a single property. You hire someone, they leave. You hire again; they quit. You hire again, you have to let them go. Six times in one role in one year.

So what happens when AI takes over the repetitive functions? Next time that position turns over, you don't rehire. The good people who stay? They get better. They show units better. They knock

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Jarrett Lau *is the owner of Green Ocean Property Management, a Boston-area firm managing residential rentals and condo associations across New England. He also runs SmoothOperations.ai, where he builds AI and automation systems for service businesses — most of which are tested first inside his own company. He spends most of his time looking for ways to make his team's work easier and his company run more sharply.*

Treat AI like a new hire, not a search engine

Most property managers are using AI like a search box when they should be using it like a new hire.

Think about what happens when a new employee joins your team. You don't walk up to them on day one and say, "Handle this tenant issue," then disappear. You explain the property, the situation, the owner, the tenant, and how you want things communicated. You give them context, examples, and boundaries.

Then those same property managers open ChatGPT, type "write a tenant email about a repair," and wonder why the result is terrible.

The problem usually isn't the AI. It's the instructions.

I see this happen all the time. Someone tries AI for a maintenance update, an owner email, or a lease renewal notice. The response comes back stiff, generic, and unusable. After a few minutes of frustration, they decide AI is overhyped and go back to doing the work themselves.

What they're really seeing is the result of giving the tool almost nothing to work with.

AI doesn't know your properties. It doesn't know your owners. It doesn't know that one tenant who sends five follow-up emails every time a vendor is scheduled. It doesn't know your company's communication style or the promises you avoid making.

When information is missing, the tool fills in the blanks with averages. That's why so many AI-generated emails sound like they were written for nobody in particular.

The fix is surprisingly simple.

Before you ask AI to do a task, give it four things.

First, provide context.

Instead of saying, "Write a tenant email about a repair," explain the situation.

Tell it the tenant reported a kitchen leak on Tuesday. Mention that this is the second complaint this month. Explain that the owner wants to be copied on all communication. Include anything you would tell a new employee before asking them to respond.

The details you assume are unimportant are often the details that produce a useful result.

Second, assign a role.

Tell the AI who it is supposed to be.

For example:

"You are a professional property manager responding to a frustrated tenant."

That single sentence changes the output more than most people expect. You're giving the tool a frame of reference instead of forcing it to guess.

Third, provide an example.

This is the step that solves the most common complaint I hear: "It doesn't sound like me."

When you hire someone new, the first week takes longer because you're teaching them how you operate. Once they understand your expectations, things get faster. AI works the same way.

Take an email you've written in the past that reflects your communication style. Paste it into the conversation and tell the AI to match that tone.

AI is fundamentally a pattern-matching tool. If you show it your pattern, the results become dramatically more useful.

Most property managers spend time tweaking AI-generated content when they would get better results by simply showing the tool an example upfront.

Finally, set constraints.

Tell it how long the response should be. Tell it what to avoid. Tell it what cannot be promised.

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For example:

"Keep it under 150 words. Do not promise a completion date. Do not admit fault. Maintain a professional and friendly tone."

Without boundaries, the tool tends to wander. With boundaries, it becomes much more focused.

Now compare two requests.

The first:

"Write a tenant email about a repair."

The second:

"You are a property manager responding to a tenant in a six-unit building who reported a kitchen leak on Tuesday. This is the second complaint this month. The owner wants to be copied on all communication. Match the tone of the example below. Keep the email under 150 words. Do not promise a completion date."

Same tool. Completely different result.

The quality of the output is usually tied to the quality of the instructions.

That's why I encourage property managers to stop thinking about AI as a search engine and start thinking about it as a team member.

When you hire someone new, the first week takes longer because you're teaching them how you operate. Once they understand your expectations, things get faster.

AI works the same way.

The time you spend building a good prompt for maintenance updates, owner communications, lease renewals, or move-out instructions isn't wasted time. Once you have a framework that works, you can reuse it repeatedly. You simply swap in the details and move on.

The upfront effort is small. The benefit compounds.

One final caution: start with low-risk tasks.

Use AI for drafting emails, summarizing inspection notes, creating first drafts of owner updates, or organizing information. Review everything before it goes out.

I would not recommend using AI without careful oversight for anything involving fair housing, application decisions, lease enforcement, legal notices, or moving money.

Like any employee, it needs supervision.

If you're skeptical about AI, here's a simple exercise.

Pick one repetitive task this week.

Ask AI to complete it using a single sentence instruction. Then run the same task again, this time providing context, a role, an example, and clear constraints.

Compare the results.

The difference between those two outputs is the difference between treating AI like a search box and treating it like a new hire.

Be well.

Andrii Patiutka *is the founder and CEO of TrueDoc, a document-fraud detection platform first created in Canada and now incorporated in the United States. His work focuses on cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and document forensics, especially risk signals in pay stubs, bank statements, invoices, identity documents, and other records used in remote decision-making.*

How property managers can identify suspicious pay stubs and income documents

A polished document is not necessarily a trustworthy one. A pay stub may carry a familiar payroll logo, a bank statement may use the expected colors, and an employment letter may appear to come from a human resources department.

None of those details, by itself, proves that the information is genuine.

The most convincing alterations are often modest. Someone may start with a real file and change only the employee name, gross pay, year-to-date total, or account balance. Because everything else is authentic, a quick review can miss the change.

Property managers do not need to become forensic examiners. They do need a consistent way to decide when a document deserves a closer look. The goal is not to label every unusual file as fraudulent. It is to identify inconsistencies, ask neutral follow-up questions, and apply the same standards to every applicant.

Professional presentation is not suspicious, and AI use does not prove fraud. Legitimate businesses use automation every day. The practical change is that visual quality carries less weight. Numbers, dates, sources, and surrounding records matter more than polish.

HOW AI CHANGED THE EQUATION

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) has reduced both the time and skill needed to create polished-looking records. A task that once required design experience and specialized software can now begin with a few typed instructions. In some cases, an employment letter, income summary, or supporting explanation can be drafted and polished in about 30 seconds.

AI can also improve an alteration by matching tone, cleaning up wording, or generating a plausible explanation for unusual figures. The result may look more professional than a legitimate record from a small employer or an older payroll system.

Professional presentation is not suspicious, and AI use does not prove fraud. Legitimate businesses use automation every day. The practical change is that visual quality carries less weight. Numbers, dates, sources, and surrounding records matter more than polish.

BEGIN WITH THE ARITHMETIC

Numbers are often more revealing than design. On a paystub, gross pay minus taxes, benefits, garnishments, and other deductions should reconcile with net pay. Small rounding differences are normal. Repeated or material mismatches deserve an explanation.

Year-to-date figures deserve equal attention. If an employee is paid every two weeks, cumulative totals should generally fit the pay date and current pay-period amount. Bonuses, overtime, commissions, and changing deductions can cause variation, but the sequence should still tell a plausible story.

When possible, compare two or three consecutive pay periods. A short series makes it easier to see whether year-to-date earnings rise logically, deductions follow a consistent pattern, and pay dates move forward as expected.

LOOK FOR CHANGES WITHIN THE DOCUMENT

A low-quality scan is not automatically suspicious. Printing, photographing, compressing, emailing, and downloading can introduce blur or uneven backgrounds. What matters more is whether one part of the document looks different from the rest.

An altered amount may be darker or sharper than neighboring figures. One line may use a different font weight, or a decimal point may not align with

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the column. On a statement, one transaction may have spacing or background texture that does not match nearby rows.

These are not verdicts. There are reasons to slow down and ask whether the field belongs naturally with the rest of the document.

READ THE RECORDS AS ONE STORY

Pay dates, pay periods, employer details, employee identifiers, hourly rates, regular hours, overtime, and year-to-date figures should support one another. Employment letters should agree with the paystub and the application on job title, start date, salary, work status, and company information.

Bank statements require the same whole-document approach. Opening balance, deposits, withdrawals, fees, and closing balance should reconcile. Running balances should move correctly after each transaction. Deposits that do not affect the balance, inconsistent date formats, missing page numbers, or unexplained breaks in the normal pattern deserve review.

A disagreement may be harmless, but it should be resolved rather than ignored.

USE METADATA CAREFULLY

PDFs and images may retain creation dates, modification dates, and the name of the software that produced them. A file presented as an original payroll download may warrant a closer look if its history indicates recent editing in a graphics application.

Metadata is also easy to misunderstand. Printing to PDF, combining pages, scanning, downloading from a portal, or forwarding a file can change or remove it. Metadata should therefore support a decision, not make it. It matters most when it aligns with other concerns, such as faulty math, a locally edited field, or conflicting dates.

ASK FOR THE ORIGINAL FILE

Screenshots and photographs are common, especially when applicants complete a process on a phone, but they remove much of the original PDF structure and may crop out page numbers or account context.

When a downloadable PDF should be available, ask for that version. If the applicant submitted a photograph of a screen or printed page, request a clearer copy in neutral language. Glare, perspective distortion, shadows, and compression can make legitimate text appear irregular; a better original often resolves the concern.

VERIFY KEY INFORMATION INDEPENDENTLY

A document should not be asked to authenticate itself. When authorized and permitted by policy and law, confirm key facts through an independent channel, such as a publicly listed employer number, an approved income-verification service, or another record supporting the same claim.

Do not rely only on contact details printed on the submitted letter. Locate the organization independently and compare its public information with what the applicant provided. An unfamiliar domain or free email account is not conclusive, particularly for a small business, but it may justify another verification step.

CREATE A FAIR ESCALATION PROCESS

The best safeguard is not a single detection trick. It is a consistent process. Decide in advance what moves a file into additional review: calculations that do not reconcile, multiple unrelated inconsistencies, contradictory records, or an inability to provide a reasonable original file.

Record what was observed, what clarification was requested, and how the applicant responded. Avoid language that assumes intent. An unusual field may result from a payroll-system conversion, scanning problem, formatting error, or legitimate compensation change. The appropriate conclusion is often "additional verification required," not "fraud confirmed."

Procedures should align with company policy and applicable fair housing, privacy, consumer reporting, and local requirements. When in doubt, consult qualified legal or compliance counsel.

A PRACTICAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

- Recalculate gross pay, deductions, net pay, and year-to-date totals.
- Compare more than one pay period when available.
- Look for local differences in font, spacing, alignment, sharpness, and background texture.
- Reconcile opening and closing balances with statement activity.
- Compare dates, employer information, job details, and identifiers across all records.
- Request the original PDF when a screenshot or photograph is submitted.
- Treat metadata as supporting evidence, not proof.
- Verify important information through an independent source when authorized.
- Escalate based on the overall pattern, not one unusual detail.
- Document the review and use the same procedure for every applicant.

EVIDENCE IS STRONGER THAN APPEARANCE

Real records can contain typos, unusual formatting, retroactive pay, one-time bonuses, corrections, and software quirks. At the same time, a professionally designed file can still contain altered information. Appearance alone is a weak basis for a decision.

A stronger approach combines arithmetic, internal consistency, visual comparison, file-level information, and independent verification. It gives property managers a clearer basis for follow-up while giving legitimate applicants a fair opportunity to explain an irregularity or provide a better copy.

As generative AI reduces the time needed to produce polished-looking records, disciplined review will matter more than instinct. The goal is not to catch applicants in a mistake. It is to make sound decisions from evidence and to know when a document needs one more step before it can be relied upon.

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