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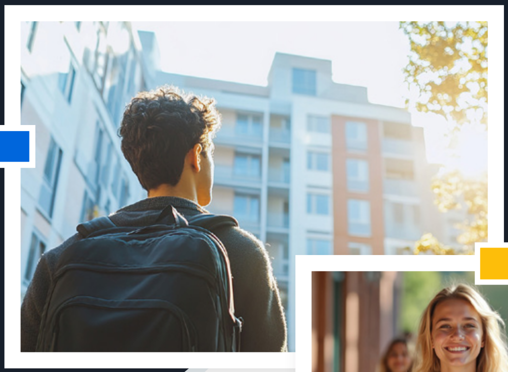

Fill Beds Earlier with Fewer Concessions:

Win Student Leasing Season, Before It Starts.

Purpose-built student housing operators can fill beds earlier, protect rates, and reduce concessions by aligning digital marketing with the realities of the leasing cycle.

"Our growing work with student housing operators has reinforced how different this market is from conventional multifamily. The properties that perform best build demand early, using digital intent signals and accurate reporting to reach the right prospects and understand what's driving signed leases."

– Jeff Allen
CEO, OuterBox

The Season's Won Before It Starts

Most student housing marketing quietly follows a conventional apartment playbook. It assumes a twelve-month leasing calendar, one decision-maker, and a short retargeting window. But this market works differently. It leases by the bed on an academic-year calendar. The critical window opens roughly 10 to 12 months before move-in, and the decision often belongs to a student, their parents, and a group of friends.

Operators that wait until spring to ramp up marketing have already missed the earliest, highest-value leases. They are left competing for a smaller pool of prospects while relying more heavily on concessions to protect occupancy.

The properties that win the season do the opposite: They align their marketing to the structure of the leasing cycle and fill beds at full rate before the scramble begins.

This playbook follows the season as it actually unfolds, showing what to run, when to run it, and how to measure what works. The goal is to help operators start the next cycle earlier and close it stronger.

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Why Student Housing Isn't Conventional Multifamily

Purpose-built student housing marketing is its own asset class, which means nearly every marketing assumption carried over from conventional apartments deserves a second look.

Five structural differences reshape the playbook:

- **Leased by the bed, not by the unit:** A four-bedroom apartment could represent four separate leases, so prospects compare properties based on the rate per bed.
- **A guarantor is on almost every lease:** Because many students have limited income or credit history, a parent or guardian often co-signs, bringing two very different audiences into the same decision.
- **An academic-year calendar:** Leases typically begin in August and run through July, creating a concentrated, market-wide turnover period every summer.
- **Proximity to campus as a key demand driver:** After price, distance from campus is often one of the strongest influences on demand and can outweigh many traditional selling points.
- **Resort-style amenities as table stakes:** Students are comparing communities with similarly robust amenity packages, not conventional apartments. Amenities may attract attention, but they do not always create meaningful differentiation.

Taken together, these differences make the challenge clear: You are not marketing apartments to adults on a rolling calendar. You are marketing individual beds to students and their parents within a leasing cycle that starts much earlier than many operators plan for.

The Leasing Clock Starts in the Fall

The critical window for an August move-in opens roughly 10 to 12 months earlier, in September or October of the prior year. The exact timing depends on the school.

Renewals generally open about a month into the academic year, so the window may open in September at an August-start school or October at a September-start school. A property leasing beds for August 2027, for example, should have campaigns live in fall 2026. Miss that window, and you are chasing the market instead of leading it.

Importantly, the window opens with your renewal offer to current residents. Retention and acquisition are not sequential efforts. The formal renewal launch and the first acquisition campaigns should begin at roughly the same time.

Why does this early window matter?

Although tiered pricing may allow later leases to command higher rates, those leases can also require more media spend and larger concessions. Early leases are often less expensive to acquire, and properties that fill sooner can reduce or pause marketing for the remainder of the season. The result can be a stronger overall return, even when early signers secure a lower rate.

The Leasing Clock, Month by Month:

September – October

The window opens for the next year. Early signers secure the lowest pricing tiers, while properties can generate leases with less competition, lower acquisition costs, and fewer concessions.

November – December

Momentum builds and pricing tiers begin to fill. Competition for attention is often lighter, making this one of the most efficient periods for reaching prospects.

January – February

In competitive markets, properties launching campaigns now are behind. Many communities are just beginning to advertise after early prospects have signed elsewhere.

Spring

A property on pace should be approaching its pre-leasing target. Properties that are behind may need to increase marketing spend or introduce stronger concessions to compete for the remaining prospects.

August

Move-in begins, bringing the leasing cycle to a close.

Understanding Industry Benchmarks

72% National student housing units pre-leased ahead of summer 2026

By late spring, roughly 72% of student housing beds nationally were already leased for the upcoming fall, according to [Yardi Matrix]. That share typically continues to climb as move-in approaches.

This figure is a directional market benchmark, not a universal target for every property. Your most meaningful comparison is your local competitive set—the properties pursuing the same students. A community sitting well below the benchmark heading into summer may be facing one or more challenges:

- Pricing that is not supported by the property's value.
- A location disadvantage (communities close to campus often run ahead of the national benchmark).
- Reputation issues that are suppressing conversion.
- Gaps in marketing coverage.

In supply-heavy markets, a new development can also cause students to delay their decisions. That is where an established community's resident history, authentic reviews, and proven experience can become meaningful advantages.

Two additional figures add context:

National enrollment grew by 1.8%. That average masks declines in some markets and stronger growth in others.

Meanwhile, national average leasing-season rent growth, the change in rent after accounting for concessions and discounts, is slowing sharply, from 5.9% in 2024–2025 to 2.6% in 2025–2026. **It is projected at 0.9% for 2026–2027.**

Together, these trends change what drives a successful season. Enrollment influences the size of the prospect pool, while slowing rent growth limits an operator's ability to offset a late start through higher rates. With less room for rent increases (and greater pressure to offer concessions when behind pace) timing, retention, and competitive positioning become even more important.

"When a property falls behind in pre-leasing, costs begin to snowball. As the renter pool shrinks, every remaining lease becomes more expensive to close. The strongest operators treat pre-leasing data as an early signal and act while they still have options beyond deeper concessions."

– ***Justin Widmayer***
Managing Partner, Housing - OuterBox

What Beating the Benchmark Looks Like

The benchmark becomes more meaningful when you see a property surpass it. The three lease-ups, below, come from our work with student housing operators. Although each property faced different conditions, the pattern was consistent: **Marketing began before the leasing window opened**, focused on the students most likely to lease, and built demand before urgency set in.

The rest of this playbook turns that pattern into actionable steps for the full leasing season.

The Tribe (Tallahassee, FL)

A new 693-bed community entered the country's most crowded student housing market, with roughly 34,900 purpose-built beds across 75 competing properties near Florida State University. We launched geofencing and Meta campaigns months before leasing opened, supported by paid search and SEO. The Tribe reached 100% occupancy within weeks of opening leasing for the 2025–2026 season, while the rest of the market was approximately 35% pre-leased. Selling out early allowed the property to reduce its remaining marketing spend, contributing directly to net operating income. *Read case study >*

The Campbell (Tallahassee, FL)

In the same competitive market, the strategy was built for speed. Months before leasing opened, geofencing campaigns were already live around competitor properties, classrooms, and dorms. Paid search focused on high-intent terms such as "FSU student housing," while broader apartment searches were intentionally excluded. When leasing opened, the demand was already there for the on-site team to convert. The Campbell reached 100% leased in three and a half weeks, the fastest new student development lease-up in Tallahassee market history, at a $12 cost per conversion compared with the $50 industry benchmark. Finishing early also conserved eight months of planned marketing budget. *Read case study >*

Aero on 24th (Gainesville, FL)

This 550-bed community, located 1.5 miles from the U. of Florida, competed against 58 properties, including five new developments, during a year when students had left campus. We used retroactive geofencing to reconnect with prospects whose devices had previously been near classrooms, recreation centers, and competing properties. More than 40,000 micro-geofences were then created around those students' home locations. Aero surpassed 95% pre-leased, the highest rate in Gainesville that season, at a $16 cost per conversion.* *Read case study >*

** The Aero on 24th campaign ran in March 2020. Platform capabilities and housing-related targeting requirements have since changed.*

You're Marketing to Two People and a Group

Student housing is one of the few categories where two distinct audiences must be reached at the same time with different messages, and where the final decision often depends on a group of friends. Reach one audience but overlook the others, and the lease can fall through.

The framework below keeps all three influences in view:

- **The student builds the shortlist:** Students research properties, tour virtually, compare rates per bed, and evaluate amenities and social fit. They respond to lifestyle content, amenity photography, social proof from current residents, and short-form video.
- **The parent co-signs the decision:** For many students, a parent or guardian shares the decision and carries significant influence as the guarantor. Parents want clear answers about lease terms, financial responsibility, value compared with on-campus housing, building access and security features. Student housing marketing often leaves these questions unanswered.
- **The group decides together:** A four-bedroom unit is often leased by four friends who have chosen to live together, rather than by one student who plans to find roommates later. That changes not only the math, but the decision-making process.

A student's year in school adds another layer. A first-year student may prioritize proximity to classes, while an upperclassman may be more focused on living with friends, finding the right floor plan, or accessing roommate-matching options.

The group dynamic is a powerful lever. When one person becomes an advocate for a property, several leases may follow. When one person hesitates, the rest of the group may wait—even if they are ready to sign. Accurate availability and timely urgency can give that advocate a reason to move the entire group forward.

With multiple audiences involved, this decision takes time. Prospects may return to a property's website repeatedly over several weeks or months as roommate groups form and students and parents monitor pricing, availability, and concessions. Those return visits can signal continued intent, not simply indecision. Be prepared for the long haul.

"For Gen Z, picking up the phone is a last resort. Students expect to find pricing, availability, and lease details immediately, while parents want clear answers about costs, guarantor responsibilities, and property operations. If that information isn't readily available online, both audiences may look elsewhere or turn to AI, which can only surface what a property has made clear and accessible."

– Zach Kent
Group Vice President,
Integrated Strategy, OuterBox

Retargeting Built for A Longer Decision Cycle

A conventional renter may have an expiring lease and need somewhere to live next month. A student, however, typically already has housing for the current academic year. So the timeline that feels urgent to a marketing team will not feel urgent to a student and their roommates.

That means using a retargeting strategy borrowed from conventional multifamily will misread this student behavior. Set the retargeting window to reflect the full decision cycle, then evolve the message as that cycle progresses:

Timing Cycle:	Conventional Multifamily	Student Housing
Retargeting Window	Approximately 30 days	90 to 180 days
Early-Window Creative	Not typically applicable	Lifestyle and community messaging that builds recall
Mid-Window Creative	Not typically applicable	Availability and pricing-tier urgency
Late-Window Creative	Not typically applicable	A specific concession with a firm deadline

Note that urgency only works when it is credible. Students will know a countdown that resets every Monday is a marketing device. Instead, “six two-bedroom units remain for fall move-in” provides useful, verifiable information.

The test is simple: Could a student check the claim and find it to be accurate? If not, avoid.

For The Parker at the University of Arizona, paid search, display, TikTok, and social retargeting kept the community visible throughout the decision cycle. The campaign generated 610,000 TikTok impressions and a 6.2% paid search conversion rate, contributing to a season that reached 90% pre-leased and ultimately 100% occupancy.

Remember that housing is a restricted category across major advertising platforms, with stricter targeting requirements than many other campaigns. That matters before a campaign launches, but compliance is not the only reason to write carefully. **Specific copy is more useful to prospects, especially parents, than broad claims**.

The Line Every Ad Must Respect

To get your ads specific, start by removing vague terms such as “safe,” “secure,” and “walkable.” These words can create unnecessary risk while providing little detail. The same principle applies to travel-time claims. “A 10-minute walk to the main quad” depends on the person, pace, route, and starting point.

A measurable statement such as “0.3 miles from the campus entrance” is more precise and universally useful. If you include travel time, identify the mode of transportation and make sure the claim can be substantiated. This approach also helps answer parents’ questions about security and resident support without promising an outcome.

These details are verifiable and collectively provide a more useful answer than simply calling a property “secure.”

University names require similar care. A school may be referenced factually, such as “near the University of Texas.” Avoid using university logos, mascots, branded design elements, or other language that could imply an official affiliation or endorsement unless written permission has been confirmed.

AVOID	USE INSTEAD
“Safe” or “secure”	Describe the relevant access, staff and maintenance availability, parking, lighting and camera configurations
“Walkable”	“0.3 miles from the campus entrance”
“A 10-minute walk”	A verified distance or transportation detail
University branding or implied affiliation	A factual reference such as “near the University of Texas”

Targeting is restricted separately from copy. You should write content that answers parents’ questions, however, targeting users specifically because they are parents may not be permitted for housing campaigns. Platforms can also restrict demographic, ZIP code, and geographic-radius targeting. For example, *Google currently prohibits parental-status and ZIP code targeting for U.S. and Canadian housing ads and requires a radius of at least one kilometer.

Write for the audience, then confirm each platform’s current targeting options.

Specific, factual content better answers student and parent questions while improving SEO and AI visibility. Because student housing has a distinct discovery ecosystem, operators should prioritize channels built for its unique buyer journey.

** Platform requirements and applicable housing laws change. Campaigns should be reviewed against current policies and, where appropriate, by legal counsel before launch.*

"You don't want Reddit to be the first place a student discovers your property, because you have very little control over the story they encounter there. Your website, listings, social channels, and Google Business Profile should establish who you are first, then strong reviews and community conversations validate that story rather than define it for you."

– **Kat Callender**
Lead Market Analyst, OuterBox

Discovery is No Longer Just Search

Students and parents may begin their searches in different places. Students increasingly use TikTok and Instagram as search tools, while parents are more likely to begin with Google. A plan that prioritizes one journey while neglecting the other could cost you the lease.

Proximity, described factually. Again, distance from campus is an important non-price consideration, and properties closer to campus have an advantage. However, access can matter just as much. Provide specific details such as the shuttle or bus stop location, route, schedule, and number of buses serving the community.

Listings and portals. General sites such as Apartments.com, Zillow, and Apartment List can reach students, but they are not specifically designed around per-bed pricing or academic-year lease terms. University off-campus housing portals can be valuable, often underused channels with built-in relevance and institutional credibility. Market-specific aggregators, such as Swamp Rentals in Gainesville, can also provide strong local visibility.

Reviews and online communities. Students may evaluate a property through Google reviews, Google Business Profile, ApartmentRatings, university subreddits, TikTok, and Instagram before ever visiting your website. Google Business Profile should be actively managed as a discovery channel, not maintained as a listing, because it is often one of the first results prospects encounter when searching for a property by name.

Virtual and social content. Many out-of-state, international, and early-signing students lease without visiting in person. For these prospects, 3D tours, floor-plan videos, photography, and social content may become the primary property tour.

AI adds another layer to discovery. When students or parents ask an AI tool to compare properties, its response draws from information published across your website, listings, reviews, local profiles, and third-party sources. Clear, accurate, and consistent information gives both prospects and AI systems more useful material to work with.

Reputation connects every channel in this ecosystem, and it cannot be solved through media spend alone. A negative Reddit thread or pattern of poor reviews can become a conversion problem that requires a direct response, not a larger advertising budget.

Everything above earns the property a visit. What happens next is where many student housing websites quietly lose the lease: **The operator has information the prospect and algorithms cannot easily find.**

What Happens When They Land

If the community down the street publishes its rates, floor plans, fees, and current availability, and you don't, your property cannot be evaluated on its merits during the discovery phase. For some, it could take you out of consideration completely.

"Call for pricing" is one of the clearest examples.

While some parents may be willing to call for more information, students look for a faster, self-service option. Publish pricing upfront and offer next steps such as "Check Availability," "Text the Leasing Team," or "Ask a Question" so each audience can engage in the way it prefers.

Publish the information prospects need to self-qualify:

Pricing that reflects the full cost

Include rent by floor plan and bed type, how the lease term affects pricing, and relevant fees such as application, administration, parking, utilities, amenities, technology, and pet rent. Include current specials and clearly state when they expire.

Availability that is current

Show which floor plans are available, limited, waitlisted, or sold out. Removing a sold-out floor plan does not eliminate confusion; it can create it. A student searching for a four-bedroom layout may assume the property does not offer one. Keep the page published, mark as sold out, and provide an option to join the waitlist.

Every page should provide a next step

"Join the Waitlist"

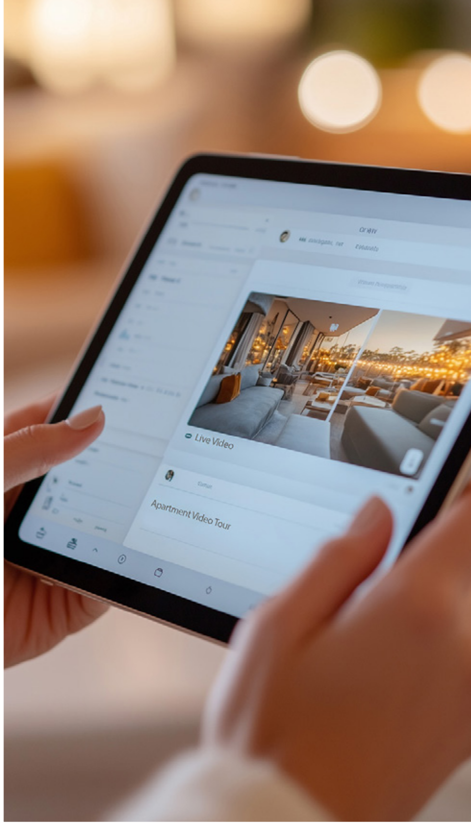
"Explore a Similar Layout"

"Schedule a Tour"

"Contact the Leasing Team"

Finally, test the entire journey on a phone. Count how many clicks it takes to move from the landing page to a form or application, then look for opportunities to shorten that path.

Your Creative Does the Touring for You



Creative does not simply support the leasing effort. In many cases, **it is the leasing effort.**

Capture the following during the July-to-September preparation window, before campaigns launch:

- **Real photography:** Feature actual units that are staged, current, and representative of the property. Generic lifestyle imagery is easy to overlook because competing properties use similar visuals. Students may compare your gallery with several competitors during the same browsing session, so outdated or limited photography can raise questions. For new lease-ups, construction-progress content can ease concerns of readiness while building the creative library for launch.
- **A 3D tour and video for every floor plan:** For out-of-state or international students, what's online may be the only tour. One hero walkthrough cannot represent every layout and a roommate group evaluating the property may hesitate to sign if it cannot see the specific unit type it is considering.
- **Resident-created short-form content:** TikTok and Instagram can provide authentic resident content that can feel more credible than highly produced advertising. No residents yet? Begin with staff-created content and construction updates, then incorporate resident perspectives after move-in.
- **Polished brand video—in the right places:** Use professionally produced video for the website hero, tour introduction, and pages parents are likely to study. In those settings, production quality can reinforce the impression of professional management.

Finally, a 90-to-180-day retargeting window can create creative fatigue if it relies on a limited set of assets. Produce enough content to rotate throughout the season and plan a refresh when spring urgency messaging replaces fall lifestyle content.

Now you know what you need for campaigns. Now it's time to talk budget.

What it Costs, and When to Spend It.

The benchmarks below cover paid search and display advertising. These figures are starting points. Actual investment should account for market size, competition, property goals, inventory, leasing pace, and the channels being used.

Market Situation	Monthly Paid Media Benchmark
Standard competitive market	Approximately $3,500
Difficult market or lease-up behind pace	Approximately $5,000
Highly competitive market or significant pace gap	More than $5,000

** Note that SEO should be budgeted separately as a long-term investment that builds visibility over time rather than generating immediate traffic.*

Two principles help turn that budget into leases:

- **Timing can matter more than the total:** Dollars spent reaching early signers from October through January often work harder than the same dollars spent during a late-spring concession push, when the remaining prospect pool is smaller and more difficult to convert.
- **Monitor the concessions offered by competitors:** When one property combines a gift card, a free month, and limited-time pricing, it may indicate that the community is behind pace. When similar offers appear across the competitive set, they may point to broader supply or demand pressure.

The type of incentive matters. A rate lock creates urgency but does not lower immediate costs, so price-sensitive students and parents may respond better to a clear cash-equivalent concession.

Avoid dividing an annual budget evenly across 12 months. Leasing demand varies by season, so weight spending toward the most influential months and reallocate based on performance. Properties that fill by midwinter can reduce or pause media spend, making those savings part of the campaign's return.

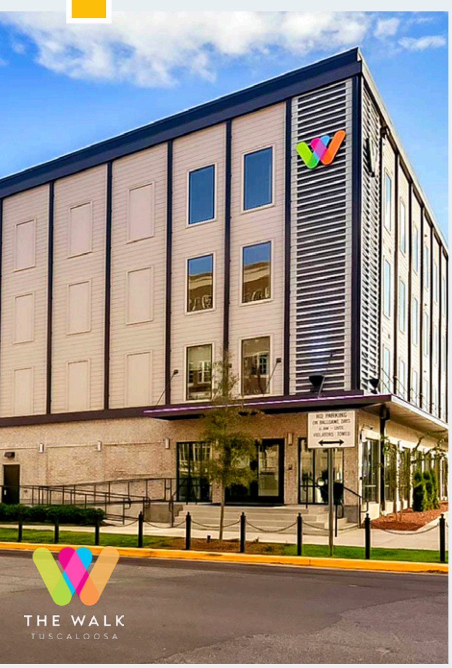
A successful leasing season requires budget, timing, retention, targeting, creative, conversion, and measurement to work together. Next, an operator's timeline brings these pieces together.

"Spreading the budget evenly across 12 months may sound logical, but it can leave a property underfunded when demand is most valuable and overspending when the opportunity has already narrowed. The budget has to follow the leasing cycle—and move as the data shows where signed leases are coming from."

– Zach Kent
Group Vice President, Integrated Strategy, OuterBox

The Season, Run Right

This timeline focuses on the operator's side: what should be live during each stage of the season.



May to August: Retain and Prepare

Focus on current residents while building the foundation your acquisition campaigns will need.

Every bed retained is one you do not have to acquire again. Run retention messaging and maintain enough visibility to keep returning students from beginning a new search.

With rent growth slowing, retention becomes an increasingly important performance lever. That foundation has delivered results:

- **Hilltop Auburn's** brand-led website and full-funnel campaign helped the property reach 100% leased 10 weeks ahead of schedule.
- **The Walk** in Tuscaloosa opened with strong first-year leasing and later received a Student Housing Business Innovator Award for Best New Development.

Now to prepare. Finalize the brand and website, publish per-bed pricing and floor-plan pages, produce 3D tours, claim university housing portals and relevant market listings, and respond to reviews.

September to October: Open the Window

Launch renewal offers and core acquisition campaigns at roughly the same time.

Concentrate paid search on high-intent terms such as "FSU student housing" and "four-bedroom apartments near UF," while excluding broader apartment searches that are less likely to convert.

Where current platform policies permit, use geofencing around relevant campus locations and competing properties. Begin with lifestyle creative on Meta and TikTok because the initial goal is awareness and recall—not urgency:

- **The Tribe's** campaigns were active months before leasing opened. That early demand generation helped the property reach 100% occupancy while the surrounding market was approximately 35% pre-leased.

October to January: Prioritize the Early Window

Weight more of the budget here, when competition may be lighter and leases can be acquired with less spending and fewer concessions.

Run retargeting across the full 90-to-180-day window. Pay attention to advocates within roommate groups: When one person tours or shows strong interest, give that student the information and creative needed to bring the rest of the group along.

February to March: Introduce Credible Urgency

Shift creative from lifestyle messaging toward current availability as floor plans and pricing tiers begin to fill. Use specific concessions for price-sensitive prospects when needed. Compare leasing pace with both national benchmarks and the local competitive set, increasing the frequency of those reviews as move-in approaches.

April to June: Adjust Based on Pace

If the property is on track, taper acquisition spending and use retargeting with a clear, time-bound offer to convert remaining prospects. If the property is behind, diagnose the cause before discounting: pricing, location, reputation, or a gap in marketing coverage.

When limited reach or visibility is the issue, retargeting may be one of the fastest available levers. However, the spring auction is generally more competitive, so the same budget may reach fewer prospects.

The Payoff

A season managed this way can finish before leasing becomes expensive.

- **The Campbell's** three-and-a-half-week lease-up was supported by months of awareness campaigns before leasing opened. Reaching full occupancy early conserved eight months of planned media spending.

Finally, send every campaign to a page that fulfills its promise.

An ad for a four-bedroom apartment should lead directly to the four-bedroom floor plan. A returning visitor who already knows the property may be better served by a virtual tour, current availability page, or direct contact option.

Tracking Success

The lease is typically recorded outside the advertising platform, which can break the attribution trail. A prospect may first discover the property through a paid search ad in October, return through organic search in December, and tour in February, only to appear in the CRM as "property website." The marketing touchpoints that created and sustained the demand disappear.

As a result, early-window campaigns that influenced the season may be cut first, while the late-spring push that captured the final interaction receives more credit than it deserves.

Part of the solution is better tooling. Calls should be tracked and connected to the campaigns that generated them, while the prospect's journey across multiple visits should carry into the CRM instead of collapsing into a single last-click source.

This is what we built LOOP to do: Follow the journey from the first marketing touch to the phone call, capture what the prospect asked about, and (when connected with leasing data) show whether that conversation contributed to a signed lease.

The other part is agreeing on what success means. **Three metrics help define a successful season:**

- **Pre-leasing percentage against goal:** Review it weekly, rather than monthly, once the leasing window opens.
- **Cost per lease:** Measure the cost of producing a signed lease, not simply a lead. The two can differ significantly when lead quality or closing rates vary by channel.
- **Closing rate:** Track the percentage of leads, tours, or applications that become leases, using one consistent definition. This metric reflects traffic quality, pricing, availability, and the on-site team's ability to convert interest.

Traditional metrics like impressions, click-through rate, and cost per click still have value when diagnosing campaign performance. However, they become misleading when treated as the final outcome. A campaign can generate large amounts of inexpensive traffic while producing very few tours or leases.

None of this works without timely leasing data. Marketing teams can only adjust strategy based on what they can see, and ad platforms do not show what happens inside the leasing office. Weekly data on tours, applications, signed leases, availability, and closing rates provides the context needed to act. If closings increase unexpectedly, that may be a signal to invest while demand is strong.

"Numbers never tell the full story on their own. Pre-leasing pace, lead volume, and closing rates must be viewed alongside developments at the property and across the market—from community initiatives and new supply to university enrollment goals and shifts in student behavior. That context is what turns a number into an action."

– Kat Callender
Lead Market Analyst, OuterBox

Leasing Readiness Checklist

Now, let's take everything above and condense it into a short list of things to have in place before the window opens. Work it by group.

Site and SEO / Content:

- [ ] Target floor-plan-specific searches such as "four-bedroom apartments near UF"
- [ ] Publish parent-focused guides, including how to co-sign a student lease
- [ ] Add move-in logistics and academic-calendar content that captures early intent
- [ ] Confirm rate per bed, availability, and floor plans are current and accurate

Website and Transparency:

- [ ] Publish pricing by floor plan, including the fees that make up the real monthly cost
- [ ] Keep sold-out floor plans published, marked, and carrying a waitlist
- [ ] Give every page a next step, including the sold-out ones
- [ ] Check the site on a phone, then count and cut the clicks to a form or application

Creative and Social:

- [ ] Produce or refresh 3D tours and per-floor-plan videos for the sight-unseen audience
- [ ] Stand up resident-generated short-form video alongside polished brand video
- [ ] For a first-year lease-up, seed a content library early with staff and construction content
- [ ] Make sure the creative says something only your property could say

Campaign Timing and Management:

- [ ] Launch early-window campaigns in the fall window rather than the calendar year of move-in
- [ ] Set the retargeting window to 90-to-180 days with creative that evolves across it
- [ ] Flight the budget toward the months that decide the season rather than dividing it by twelve
- [ ] Run retention work before the acquisition season opens
- [ ] Confirm parent and student are each addressed in copy and creative
- [ ] Agree what counts as a lease, and get weekly leasing numbers to whoever runs your marketing

Work through it before peak season rather than during it; every item on it is cheaper to handle in September than in March.

Align to the Structure and the Season Will Follow

A stronger leasing season is built the previous fall by aligning marketing with how student housing actually leases. That means entering the market when the window opens, speaking to students, parents, and roommate groups, retargeting across the full decision cycle, investing in the channels prospects trust, and measuring what turns interest into signed leases.

When those efforts work together, operators can fill more beds earlier, protect their rates, and reduce their reliance on late-season concessions. Benchmarks keep the strategy grounded. Compare your property with national pre-leasing trends and, more importantly, with its local competitive set. A performance gap is not a final verdict, but a signal to investigate what may be holding your property back.

That distinction matters even more as rent growth slows. Timing, retention, and the clarity of your digital presence now carry more weight. In supply-heavy markets, established communities can compete with advantages new developments have not yet built: authentic reviews, resident-created content, a proven history, and accurate information across every channel.

This is the work OuterBox does with student housing operators throughout the leasing cycle: interpreting the market, sequencing campaigns, and connecting websites, content, creative, and media strategies to signed leases.

We helped The Tribe and The Campbell reach full occupancy in a highly competitive Tallahassee market, and Aero on 24th achieved the highest pre-leasing rate among 58 competing Gainesville properties despite being 1.5 miles from campus.

The next leasing season may feel months away, but the window to win it opens much sooner. Now is the time to prepare.

Plan the Next Season with Our Team

We begin with where the property actually stands. A first-year lease-up in a crowded market and an established community losing ground to a new development face very different challenges.

The strategy that works for one may not address the needs of the other.

OuterBox and OBx Multifamily Intelligence help purpose-built student housing operators understand the full picture behind their performance—from market conditions and leasing pace to the website, content, creative, and paid media.

If you want a second perspective on how your property compares with the market, and which gaps should be addressed before the next leasing window opens, our student housing team is ready to help.

Connect with our Student Housing Experts >

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