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Renters seek savings in bigger apartments

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Online apartment listing service [Rent.com](#) has produced a "[fascinating apartment-shopping white paper](#)" ([HERE](#)) that shows the recent evolution of the rental market through the online habits of apartment seekers. Roommates are "in" as renters seek to share housing costs in a harsh economy. Bottom line, the report concludes, "It appears renters are seeking larger apartments and homes for rent in order to accommodate consolidations in households."



Highlights of the study:

- Rent.com figures show top online search terms in 2007 and 2008 for rental topics were "houses for rent," "apartments," "homes for rent," "apartment," and "for rent apartments." Searches for "houses for rent" grew by 310% year-over-year in terms of search share vs. declines for the other three.
- Google Trends — a tool from the popular search engine — show that searches on "houses for rent" surpassed "apartments for rent" in 2008 for the first time in four years.
- Rent.com figures show that 2007's average number of bedrooms searched for ran on a clear downward trend throughout the year. Throughout 2008, that trend reversed.
- In 2008, average minimum and maximum rent amount that renters searched for increased in 2008, surpassing 2007 levels mid-year.
- Rent.com's Christina Aragon writes: "There are at least two possible interpretations of the data ... (1) renters are trading up or (2) renters are doubling up. The experience of our multifamily customers lends support to the 'doubling up' theory."
- Rent.com figures show that the share that the "bad credit" keywords held of the top 1,000 apartment-related keywords increased nearly four-fold in the year ended in January 2009. (What's a "bad credit" keywords? "no credit check apartments" or "bad credit apartments," for example!)
- Google Trends math shows that the relative search volume for "bad credit apartments" nearly doubled from December 2007 to August 2008.

Orange County's recent rent trends, from RealFacts' survey of large complexes, also shows shoppers favoring larger apartments — favor, used loosely, as on average rents fell at a 2.9% annual rate in the year ended in Q1 2009! So, smallest declines were for larger units ...

- Studio: -6.7%
- Jr. 1 bedroom: -3.5%
- 1 bedroom / 1 bath: -3.2%
- 2 bedroom / 1 bath: -1.5%
- 2 bedroom / 2 bath: -2.8%
- 2 bedroom townhome: -2.5%
- 3 bedroom / 2 bath: -2.9%
- 3 bedroom townhome: -3.7%