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Rent.com Promo Takes Subversive Stab at Homeownership

Spot modeled after iconic Apple Computer commercial doesn't pull punches, gets broad media attention, says Rent.com director of consumer insights Christina Aragon.

By: Chris Wood

AdWeek calls it an ingenious use of “striking imagery to push a subversive message.” *Curbed.com* says it challenges the notion that a mandatory part of the American dream is the purchase of a home. Either way, the latest [Rent.com promo](#), launched just before the July 4th weekend, is already one of the top trending YouTube videos and is getting a lot of attention (not to mention tens of thousands of views) over at the ILS's [NewAmericanDreamer YouTube channel](#). Take a look here:

Inspired by Apple Computer's iconic 1984-themed [Super Bowl commercial](#) that introduced the Macintosh computer, the Rent.com video takes an unapologetic stance on the rent-versus-own discourse, literally and figuratively smashing the concept that purchasing a home is necessary to be a meaningful, contributing member of American society.

Rent.com's director of strategy and consumer insights Christina Aragon checked in with *Multifamily Executive* this week to talk about the video, branding, unlocking consumer individuality, and tossing bricks at outdated American traditions.

MFE: We saw the Rent.com video after it was passed to us by an *AdWeek* fan who otherwise didn't know anything about the multifamily industry. What can you tell me about the reception thus far?

ARAGON: It's been really positive. The views count is up to 15,000 or so, and we think that is just the beginning of it taking off. There's some momentum still building: After the July 4th holiday lull, we saw activity spike again this week. Within an hour or two of us releasing the video, the *Wall Street Journal* had covered it, along with a mention of the original Apple video, which was great to be paired with such an iconic and loved brand.

MFE: Was that the inspiration behind the video? To specifically riff of the Apple 1984 video because that kind of messaging would resonate with renter audiences?

ARAGON: Through the process of talking about and looking at, quite frankly, the devastation that a lot of Americans have experienced, we really had to question whether homeownership was the American Dream. We wanted to make a statement not against homeownership, but about people making a more thoughtful housing choice: not succumbing to societal pressures or familial pressures or the pressures of your friends or being sold by the mortgage brokers or the government but really evaluating their housing decision, and then being unapologetic about it.

Within that context, we were crafting the creative for this video at the beginning of the year and it followed the Apple *1984* video, which we thought was so pertinent to what we were trying to say. Orwell's *1984* is this iconic book that talks about conformity and the mindlessness of society and how actions and words are dictated by "the party." When Apple referenced that, they were sending a message about nonconformity and individuality. That aligned with the message we were sending and we were really pleased with the outcome.

MFE: Smashing single-family glass houses with a brick and depicting homeowners as mindless mannequins is pretty blunt, but tell me more about the messaging. Was there any internal reticence about making such a provocative statement on the rent-versus-own discourse?

ARAGON: Yes, and this was even the toned-down version of the video. A lot of the feedback and coverage so far has gravitated towards the people chasing the hero: We've heard them called the mortgage brokers, we've heard them called the bankers, and we've heard them called the government. They are really meant to be this amorphous culture police, and a sum of all of those things including also your parents and your co-workers and all of the people who say you are throwing money down the toilet by renting. We edited some stuff out, including a mannequin that told the hero to "think of the kids." We'll be releasing a making-of video that talks a lot about those decision-making and creative processes.

MFE: When does the making-of video come out?

ARAGON: Maybe as early as today via our YouTube channel, but likely within a week or so.

MFE: How does this video tie in to the larger New American Dreamer campaign?

ARAGON: We've been talking about the American Dream for about two years. One of the things we've tried to do is survey the shifts in demand and sentiment. We have all seen studies showing that there are changes in consumer sentiment around homeownership, that it wasn't the guaranteed positive investment experience that it has been sold as. Part of the New American Dreamer campaign was a contest with hundreds of people sending in videos and essays explaining what their new American Dream was. The fact that we got so many entries tells me that the concept resonates with a lot of people.

MFE: Do you think we've seen a permanent psychological shift among consumers about housing? Or are we just on the downward side of a trend where all sentiments are cyclical?

ARAGON: It depends on what demographic you are talking about. I think there are people who were going down the path of homeownership who are now holding back, but I'm not confident that that is a

permanent shift because I think that people have short memories. I think there is a greater possibility of there being a permanent shift in the homeowner-to-renter ratio in the country that we have seen in our country over the last 20 years. So we may be looking at the beginning of a new normal, but it might take a generation to completely reveal itself.