

UC Berkeley's Cal Rentals

Meeting the Needs of an Evolving Off-Campus Housing Program

CASE STUDY

About

Founded in 1868 when the College of California and the Agricultural, Mining and Mechanical Arts College merged, the University of California, Berkeley is a public research university, located in Berkeley, California. The university enrolls 31,780 undergraduates and 11,915 graduate students. Of that student population, 94% of first-year students live in college-owned, operated, or affiliated housing, while 73% of all undergraduates live off-campus or commute.¹ Cal Rentals, a unit of Cal Housing, is UC Berkeley's rental-listing, information, and advising service, that supports all students and career employees in need of assistance related to off-campus housing.

Challenge

In order to continue supporting UC Berkeley students and career employees, the Cal Rentals office sought to upgrade their existing software, while maintaining both the generated revenue for staffing costs and the high level of customer service expected by both housing seekers and providers. The Cal Rentals office fielded regular complaints over the limited functionality of their existing listing website, and their unique revenue model posed some challenges to simply switching providers. The service was funded by charging students to search on the Cal Rentals listings website, yet landlords weren't being charged to advertise on the site due to the high demand for local housing. As a result, the paywall for housing searchers limited how many students utilized the service, and housing providers lacked an incentive to keep listings updated.

Solution

Off Campus Partners proposed a model to deliver an off-campus housing service at no-cost to UC Berkeley nor its students, faculty, and staff while providing the university with a source of revenue. Subscription fees from property managers fund the provision of software, support, and property manager outreach. The mobile-friendly solution informs the UC Berkeley community of available listings and sublet housing options, enables connections via a Roommate Finder, and provides educational content housed in an online resource repository.

Results

Since partnering with Off Campus Partners in 2015, Cal Rentals has seen the volume of housing searchers multiply 10-fold, in large part due to the removal of the paywall students and career employees faced previously. The inventory of housing providers has remained steady, despite a cost associated with a housing provider subscription. Revenue generated from the service continues to support the staffing costs of the office, and, as an added benefit, Cal Housing uses the listing service to promote its portfolio of on-campus housing, generating over 1,000 leads annually.

I have worked with Off Campus Partners for the past five years and I cannot begin to express how happy we have been with their staff, their support, and the products that were provided. Off Campus Partners has been our one stop shop for website design, marketing, event planning, and amazing customer service. We would strongly recommend them to any university looking for an off-campus housing solution!

-Elaine Perkins, Cal Rentals Coordinator