



IREM® From the Front Lines Podcast

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Bonus episode

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Beyond Automation: AI's Real Impact on Property Management

Erin:

Welcome to another edition of From the Front Lines, where we discuss both the day-to-day, and one-of-a-kind issues facing real estate managers. In this special bonus episode, Kimberly Vasseur, ARM®, Learning and Development Manager at Jefferson Apartment Group and member of the IREM Technology Advisory Council, joins us to unpack the findings from the 2025 IREM & AppFolio AI Survey Report. AppFolio is a Gallery Level Industry Partner and this report was made possible thanks to their support through their 2025 Industry Partnership. We dive into how AI is streamlining property management tasks—from reputation management to financial reporting—and why its impact on employee experience remains complex. Kimberly also shares her perspective on the leadership strategies, training gaps, and workflow redesigns needed to unlock AI's full potential across the industry. Welcome to the podcast, Kimberly.

Kimberly:

Thank you for having me. It's great to be here.

Erin:

Now first, from your vantage point, what surprised you most about the pace and nature of AI adoption in property management over the past year?

Kimberly:

Well, I'm not surprised that there was a shift, but I am slightly surprised at how little companies have actually started implementing AI. But I completely get it. It's hard to choose products to implement when they are changing so rapidly. I do understand the hesitation. Companies have to start somewhere, though. The landscape is adapting and growing, and they don't want to get left behind. But I am glad to see that there is more openness to innovation and a real urgency to address operational challenges like rising costs and shrinking margins.

Erin:

Okay, makes sense. And you've spoken about the importance of strategic leadership in driving AI adoption. What qualities or actions distinguish successful AI leaders in property management firms today?

Kimberly:

In my opinion, successful leaders should be cautiously proactive and people-focused. Oftentimes people hear AI and think, "Oh, I'm losing my job," or something like that, but that doesn't necessarily have to be the case. The survey shows that some companies are encouraging the use of AI, which is great. Those companies appear to have roughly about 35% higher unit-to-employee

ratios, and that could indicate that they have better efficiency. Leaders at these companies, unlike some, they are not just joining every single AI initiative. I would imagine that they are redesigning workflows, investing in solid training, and fostering a culture of innovation. I say this based on my own personal experience in the companies that I've worked for and currently work for. There are companies that just kind of go all out—they try multiple different avenues and every new AI that comes along. But the prudent companies, typically those with a decent budget but not unlimited, are very selective and really try to make a go of what they see is the right AI product that can grow with the company.

Erin:

Awesome. And the report shows that AI users respond to online reviews 44 minutes faster than non-users. What do you think this says about the operational impact of AI, and where do you see the next big efficiency gains?

Kimberly:

Great question. To me, that stat is a clear indicator of how AI is streamlining reputation management. Faster response times have always directly influenced resident satisfaction and retention. Looking ahead, I can see this being used to make major efficiency gains in financial reporting, where AI users already generate complex reports almost a full hour faster than non-users. I think there's untapped potential in renewal management as well, where AI users can know about renewals and decisions almost a week ahead of their peers.

Erin:

All right, awesome. So some cool stuff on the horizon to look forward to.

Kimberly:

Absolutely.

Erin:

And you noted that AI hasn't yet transformed the employee experience despite reducing mundane tasks. What barriers are preventing AI from delivering more meaningful change for property management professionals?

Kimberly:

Well, AI can reduce mundane tasks, that's true. It hasn't yet transformed the employee experience. To me, the survey found little impact on job satisfaction and work-life balance, that's where I come up with that thought process. Many AI users still wish they had more time for strategic work. That suggests a need for better workflow integration, clearer role redesigns, and more leadership support to ensure that AI actually frees up time for higher-value activities—not just speeding up those low-value ones. As these low-value activities speed up, additional low-value activities are often added to the plates of team members without an AI workaround. So those high-value opportunities like training, one-on-one meetings, and full participation in resident events are often minimized, which is unfortunate because that's the whole point of AI—to free up time to put it back into customer service, the team, and growth.

Erin:

All right, that makes sense. And general-purpose AI tools like ChatGPT and Microsoft Copilot are widely used. How can property management companies better train staff to use these tools effectively while preparing for more specialized AI solutions?

Kimberly:

Training needs to go beyond tool tutorials. It should focus on AI literacy, including how these tools work, what their limitations are, and ethical considerations. The survey shows that less than half of respondents feel confident explaining how AI works, even though 70% of those respondents are confident they can learn new tools. Companies should offer scenario-based training, peer learning, and provide ongoing support to help bridge the gap and prepare teams for more specialized AI applications.

Erin:

Okay, perfect. And the survey revealed that maintenance teams may be struggling with AI adoption. What do you think is missing in current AI solutions for maintenance workflows, and how should vendors respond?

Kimberly:

This one is near and dear to me. I love the maintenance teams and feel like they get left behind frequently. Maintenance teams do appear to be struggling with AI, but I don't think that's necessarily because they are unable to understand how to use it. I think it's a lack of training. Non-AI users in maintenance roles take longer to create and schedule work orders than AI users. This suggests that the current tools may not be intuitive, well integrated, or simply not being used. Vendors can do a better job of providing user guides, one-pagers, and training for mobile accessibility. Multilingual options, this isn't really a big one yet. There are training materials that are multilingual, but they don't really have functions in the apps that are multilingual, and I think that's important. Maintenance training is one of the nearest and dearest and it's so important, I can't stress that enough. There are many options with current technology that maintenance teams can use in real time that are typically free with the service packages property management companies use. Technicians can manage work orders from mobile apps, handle make-ready options, and call residents without it showing their personal phone number. There's tons of opportunity there, and it eliminates printing work orders and that old-school process of stapling papers together and hoping they don't blow off the golf cart on the way back to the office. It eliminates all that stress and extra double work just by using the app. Another cool feature with most of these companies—your RealPages, Entratas, and Yardis—is that they have apps that still function even when not connected to Wi-Fi or cell service. They'll sync later on, so you can still work within that app and do your work orders, even if it's in those basement apartments with no reception and close them out. Then, when you reconnect to data or Wi-Fi, it will auto-sync. That's huge for maintenance teams. It's just not being implemented successfully, I think, through a lack of training. Vendors really need to step up their game by adding multilingual portion and having better training solutions. Property management companies also need to ensure that they're offering solid, ongoing training for their maintenance teams.

Erin:

All right, that makes a lot of sense. And looking ahead, what does a mature AI integration look like in property management? Can you paint a picture of how AI might reshape workflows, decision-making, or even tenant relationships in the next few years?

Kimberly:

To me, mature AI integration would mean AI is embedded across the entire resident lifecycle—from the leasing phase all the way through renewals and move-out. I really think it can reshape workflows by automating routine tasks and enhancing decision-making through predictive analytics. We already see a little of that being used, but then also personalizing resident

interactions. Imagine a system that not only flags potential vacancies but also recommends retention strategies based on specific resident behaviors. That's where I see AI going and what mature AI would look like. So we start with programs that help identify which prospective residents are likely to be good leads and then those good leads are going to be great residents, and while they're actually residents, don't stop at just getting them in the door—foster those relationships over time. Track those relationships, work orders, complaints, and surveys to help determine if residents are likely to renew or how we can encourage renewals, all with AI in the background helping guide us along.

Erin:

All right, great. Well, thanks for joining us, Kimberly.

Kimberly:

Thanks for having me. It's been a pleasure.

Erin:

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