



How to Set Your Local Pricing

One of the most important early decisions for a new Whole Property Management location is setting pricing that is competitive, simple to explain, and profitable.

The goal is not to be the cheapest property manager in your market. The goal is to understand the local competitive landscape, price yourself intelligently, and create a compelling owner-facing offer that gives you a small edge without giving away meaningful revenue.

Step 1: Identify Your Top Five Local Competitors

Start by identifying the five property management companies in your market that a typical rental owner is most likely to find and consider.

Use Google, Google Maps, and AI tools to help you build this list. You are looking for the companies that appear to have the strongest local presence.

Focus on companies that meet several of these criteria:

They rank near the top of Google for searches like:

“property management [your city]”

“rental property management [your city]”

“single family property management [your city]”

“best property managers [your city]”

- They appear in the Google Map Pack.
- They have a strong Google review count.
- They have solid Google ratings.
- They appear repeatedly in organic search results, local directories, or “best property manager” lists.
- They specialize in the same general type of property you want to manage, such as single-family homes, townhomes, condos, and small multifamily properties.

Avoid using companies that are not a real competitive fit. For example, if a company only manages large apartment buildings, HOA communities, or commercial property, they may not be a useful pricing comparison for our model.

Your final list should include the five companies that are most likely to be considered by the same owner leads you want to attract.

Step 2: Research Their Published Pricing

Once you have your top five competitors, review their websites carefully and record every fee you can find. Create a spreadsheet with one row per competitor and columns for each major pricing item.

At minimum, track:

- Company name
- Website
- Google rating
- Google review count
- Management fee
- Leasing fee
- Lease renewal fee
- Setup fee or onboarding fee
- Vacancy fee, if any
- Maintenance coordination fee or markup, if disclosed
- Lease-up only pricing, if offered
- Cancellation fees or contract term requirements
- Guarantees or protections offered
- Tenant fees disclosed on the website
- Any other unusual charges

Some competitors will publish their pricing clearly. Others will make it difficult to find, or may not publish pricing at all. That is still useful information. If a competitor hides pricing, make a note of that. WholePM generally benefits from being clear, direct, and easy to understand.

Step 3: Secret Shop the Competitors

Website research is only the starting point. You should also call or inquire online with each of your top competitors as if you are a rental owner considering management services.

Your goal is to understand how they sell, what they charge, what they emphasize, and what their management agreement actually looks like.

When secret shopping, ask questions like:

- What is your monthly management fee?
- What is your leasing fee?
- What is your lease renewal fee?
- Do you charge any setup, onboarding, marketing, or inspection fees?
- Do you charge owners any maintenance coordination fees or markups?
- Do you require a long-term management agreement, or can owners cancel?
- Do you offer any guarantees, such as eviction protection, pet damage protection, tenant placement guarantees, or leasing guarantees?
- What fees do tenants pay before and during the lease?
- Do tenants pay application fees, admin fees, lease prep fees, resident benefit package fees, mandatory insurance fees, technology fees, portal fees, HVAC filter fees, or other monthly fees?
- Can you send me a copy of your management agreement to review?
- Can you send me a sample lease packet or tenant fee disclosure?

You may not always get a copy of the management agreement or lease agreement, but you should ask. These documents can give you valuable insight into the competitor's fee structure, cancellation language, tenant fees, owner obligations, and guarantees.

Be professional and truthful in your interactions. You are gathering market information, not trying to mislead or damage anyone's business.

Step 4: Pay Close Attention to Tenant Fees

Tenant fees are an important part of your market research because they directly affect how attractive your listed rentals are to prospective tenants.

Many property managers generate extra revenue through tenant-side fees. These may include application fees, lease admin fees, monthly resident benefit packages, insurance programs, technology fees, utility setup fees, pet fees, filter programs, credit reporting fees, or other charges.

You need to know what your competitors are charging tenants because tenant fees can become a leasing hurdle. At WholePM, we generally want our tenant-side fees to be reasonable and, when possible, lower than the heaviest-fee competitors in the market. This can become a meaningful differentiator with owners.

The owner-facing message is simple:

- Lower tenant fees can help reduce friction for applicants.
- Lower move-in costs can make our listings more attractive.
- A more tenant-friendly fee structure can help generate stronger leasing activity.
- Stronger leasing activity can reduce vacancy risk for the owner.
- This does not mean you should charge no tenant fees. It means your tenant fee structure should be intentional, defensible, and not so heavy that it makes your properties less competitive.

Step 5: Build a Pricing Comparison Spreadsheet

Your spreadsheet should make it easy to compare your market.

Suggested columns:

- Competitor name
- Website
- Google rating
- Google review count
- Monthly management fee
- Leasing fee
- Renewal fee
- Setup/onboarding fee
- Inspection fee
- Maintenance markup or coordination fee
- Vacancy fee
- Contract term / cancellation policy
- Owner guarantees
- Tenant guarantees
- Application fee
- Lease admin fee
- Monthly tenant fee / resident benefit package

- Pet fees
- Other tenant fees
- Notable differentiators
- Notes from phone call

After you fill this out, you should be able to see the market clearly. You will know who is expensive, who is cheap, who is hiding fees, who has strong guarantees, and who is creating friction for tenants.

Step 6: Set Your Monthly Management Fee

Your monthly management fee should generally be around the market average or slightly below it. You do not need to be dramatically cheaper. In fact, you should avoid being meaningfully cheaper unless there is a specific strategic reason.

The goal is to create a small pricing advantage without damaging your long-term revenue. Think of it like a loaf of bread on a grocery shelf. If one loaf is \$1.99 and the other is \$1.98, many customers will choose the \$1.98 loaf, even though the difference is tiny. That is the type of advantage we want. You want the owner to feel like your pricing is competitive and fair. But you do not want to give away \$20, \$30, or \$50 per month per door unnecessarily. Small differences become very meaningful as your portfolio grows.

For example, being \$10 cheaper than a competitor may help you look slightly more attractive. Being \$50 cheaper may cost you a large amount of revenue without making the owner meaningfully more likely to sign.

Set pricing that allows you to say:

“We’re very competitive with the market, and in many cases we’re a little less expensive than the larger local companies. But the bigger difference is our operating model, responsiveness, leasing process, and owner experience.”

Step 7: Set Your Leasing Fee

The leasing fee should also be compared against your top competitors. In many markets, leasing fees are charged as either:

- A percentage of one month’s rent
- A flat fee
- A percentage of the first month’s rent
- A larger fee for tenant placement only

You should avoid making the leasing fee so low that it creates bad economics. Leasing is one of the most labor-intensive parts of property management. It includes pricing, photos, listing, syndication, inquiries, showings or self-tours, screening, lease preparation, move-in coordination, and owner/tenant communication. Your leasing fee should be competitive, but it should still reflect the value and work involved.

If competitors are mostly charging 50% of one month’s rent, you may want to be at or slightly below that. If competitors are charging 75% to 100%, there may be an opportunity to be more attractive while still maintaining strong revenue.

Step 8: Set Your Renewal Fee

The renewal fee is usually less sensitive than the management fee or leasing fee, but it still matters.

Track what competitors charge for renewals. Some charge a flat fee. Others charge a percentage of one month's rent. Some do not clearly disclose the fee.

Your renewal fee should cover the work involved in reviewing the market, making a renewal recommendation, negotiating terms, preparing the renewal document, obtaining signatures, and updating the system.

Do not set this fee at zero unless there is a specific strategy behind it. Lease renewals require real work and create real value for the owner by reducing vacancy and turnover.

Step 9: Decide on Setup Fees and Other Owner Fees

Some competitors charge setup fees, onboarding fees, inspection fees, technology fees, marketing fees, or account initiation fees.

You need to decide whether those fees make sense in your market.

As a general rule, simple pricing is easier to sell. Too many small fees can make the company feel nickel-and-dimey. However, certain fees may be appropriate if they cover real work or help offset onboarding costs. If your competitors charge large setup fees and you do not, that can be a differentiator.

Step 10: Choose Your Guarantees and Differentiators

Pricing is only part of the decision. Owners also compare what they get for the price.

Review your competitors' websites and agreements to see what guarantees or protections they offer.

Common examples include:

- Eviction protection
- Pet damage protection
- Tenant placement guarantee
- Leasing fee guarantee
- Satisfaction guarantee
- Cancel-anytime contract
- Maintenance guarantees
- Rent income protection
- Damage protection

Be careful with any guarantee that creates meaningful financial exposure. A guarantee can be a great sales tool, but it must be priced and structured responsibly.

The safest guarantees are typically no-cost or low-cost guarantees.

A good example is a tenant placement guarantee:

“If the tenant we place does not make it through the initial lease term, we will re-lease the property at no additional leasing fee.”

This is a strong owner-facing promise because it shows confidence in our screening and leasing process. It also usually does not create direct cash exposure in the way a large monetary guarantee would.

Other guarantees, such as pet damage protection or eviction protection, may also be useful, but you should think carefully about the dollar amount, exclusions, eligibility requirements, and legal compliance in your state.

Before offering any major monetary protection, make sure it is clearly defined and sustainable.

Step 11: Use Tenant-Friendly Pricing as a Differentiator

One differentiator to consider is being more tenant-friendly than your competitors. That does not mean you are soft on lease enforcement. It means you reduce unnecessary friction during the leasing process.

If competitors are charging heavy tenant fees, you may be able to tell owners:

“We try to keep tenant-side fees reasonable because we do not want qualified applicants choosing another property simply because the move-in cost or monthly junk fees are too high. Our job is to make your property attractive to the best tenants in the market, not create extra hurdles.”

This can be a strong differentiator because owners care about leasing speed, vacancy, and tenant quality.

Step 12: Position Your Pricing Clearly

Once you set your pricing, you need to be able to explain it simply.

A good pricing position might sound like this:

“We studied the major property management companies in this market and built our pricing to be very competitive. We are not trying to be the cheapest company in town, because cheap property management usually becomes expensive in other ways. But we do want to be priced fairly, with a simple fee structure, strong leasing systems, and fewer unnecessary tenant-side hurdles that can slow down leasing.”

That is the balance we want:

Competitive, but not cheap.
Simple, but not underpriced.
Attractive to owners, but still profitable.

Step 13: Final Pricing Decision

After completing your research, choose your final pricing by answering these questions:

- Where is the market average for monthly management fees?

- Can I be slightly below the average without hurting long-term revenue?
- Where is the market average for leasing fees?
- Where is the market average for renewal fees?
- Are competitors charging setup fees or onboarding fees?
- Are competitors charging large tenant-side fees?
- Can I use lower tenant fees as a leasing advantage?
- What guarantees are competitors offering?
- What guarantees can I offer safely?
- What is my clearest pricing differentiator?
- Can I explain my pricing in one or two simple sentences?

Once you can answer those questions, you are ready to finalize your local pricing.

General Rule

Your pricing should be competitive enough to help you win business, but not so low that it weakens the business you are trying to build.

The WholePM model is built around efficient operations, strong systems, and healthy margins. Your pricing should support that model. Lower prices can help you win a deal, but recurring revenue is the foundation of the business. Protect it.