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# IN THE KNOW

TIPS AND TOOLS FROM THE RESIDENT SCREENING EXPERTS

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**RentGrow**  
RESIDENT SCREENING EXPERTS

## President's Letter

In this month's newsletter, we provide you with background on how criminal data collection works and questions you should keep in mind when considering your own criminal screening strategy.

One way to do this is by evaluating how your screening partner accesses criminal data. Because of technological advances such as linked databases, the quality of this information has greatly improved. But is your screening partner making an effort to provide you with the best information and the support you need to understand it?

As always, we hope you find this information useful, and we welcome your feedback.

Sincerely,  
[Mike Lapsley, CEO](#)  
RentGrow, Inc.

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## RentGrow "In the Know" Criminal Records Update

The better the information you have on a prospective resident, the better the decision you can make about a person's application, especially when that information is criminal data.

In 2003, 42% of screenings processed by RentGrow included a criminal check. Today, that percentage has doubled (85%). Why the increase? There are two reasons:

1. The quality and availability of criminal data have greatly improved. It's more reliable, and it can be delivered faster and in a more cost-effective manner.
2. There's been a mind shift within the industry--more and more properties are embracing criminal screening as an important tool for decreasing liability and increasing compliance.

Challenges still exist, however, despite the advances in the quality and availability of criminal data. Most of these challenges involve navigating regional differences in how data is collected and stored by government agencies, interpreting results, and achieving consistency in decision-making and compliance with fair housing and company guidelines.

With these challenges in mind, here's what you need to know. Unlike credit data, criminal data is not equal in every state, and in some cases, it can even vary between counties. That's why it's important to work with a qualified screening partner to identify the best available criminal search in your region and to determine the best process for making decisions based on the available data.

Credit data is more standardized across the country because the data is collected and maintained by three national credit bureaus. When it comes to criminal data, however, there are multiple sources and it varies by location and screening provider

### By Location:

Criminal data comes from hundreds of different courthouses and is aggregated by many different data providers across the country, so you need to consider what's available in your state.

**SPECIAL OFFER:**

[Email us](#) today to request a free evaluation to see whether you're taking advantage of the best criminal data in your state/region!

**Did You Know?**

Did you know that RentGrow offers a Premium Service for criminal data? With this service, we establish customized criminal criteria for each client. If there are "hits," professional RentGrow public records analysts review and interpret the records, conduct cross-checks, eliminate "false positives," and return with an accept/decline decision in accordance with the established criteria. This ensures consistency and compliance, and it eliminates any uncertainty, which makes life easier for you and your staff.

[Ask us about our Premium Service today!](#)

For example, in Virginia (and many other states), good criminal background information is available instantly and is reported up to a national repository. You'll receive a criminal check with breadth, depth, speed, and at a reasonable price. However, in Wyoming, there's no "instantly available" criminal screen. Your best option is to conduct a county level search. This doesn't have the breadth of a national search and you have to wait longer for the results, however, it does provide excellent information in the county(s) searched, and is the best available option. At RentGrow, we always work with customers to customize criminal searches that best fit their needs.

**By Vendor/Provider:**

There are hundreds of sources available for criminal data, and the quality can vary between screening companies depending on the data sources they choose to tap into. Here are some questions to think about:

- Where does your resident screening company get its data? At RentGrow, we research available data sources in each state, and incorporate the strongest ones into our screening product.
- How many different criminal data providers does your resident screening company tap into? At RentGrow, since we are an independently-owned company, we have partnerships with over a dozen different criminal data companies to ensure the greatest depth and breadth of data. (Note: if you ask how many "sources" the data comes from, your screening partner could say "hundreds" if they're referring to counties or courthouses. The better question to ask is how many different *vendors* or *providers* does your screening partner obtain data from, since many get all of their criminal information from just one data provider).

At RentGrow, we do analysis on a regional basis to identify criminal data providers that offer the highest quality in each region, and we weave them together to provide the most complete picture.

Ask yourself, "Am I getting the most information available--and the most reliable information available--within the regions where I operate?"

In Alabama, for example, many screening companies offer Department of Corrections information only. This isn't necessarily the most useful data because it reflects only those currently incarcerated! Those who are no longer under department of corrections supervision could be missed. However, in that particular state, RentGrow's product searches an additional database of Alabama courthouse information including historical felonies and misdemeanors, not just Department of Corrections data.

Quality criminal data is a critical layer in your overall resident screening process. Take the time to understand how it works, and make sure your screening company is fully committed to offering you the best available data in the regions where you operate.

**SPECIAL OFFER:** [Email us](#) today to request a free evaluation to see whether you're taking advantage of the best criminal data in your state/region!

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If you have additional questions about criminal screening policies or any other aspects of your resident screening strategy you can contact RentGrow at [www.rentgrow.com](http://www.rentgrow.com), 1-800-RENTGROW (1-800-736-8476).

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