

BEST PRACTICES FOR YOUR RTO BUSINESS



RESPONSIBLE AI USE IN RTO

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INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence is becoming part of everyday business operations across the rent-to-own (RTO) industry. From customer communications and marketing to internal workflows and operational support, AI tools are helping companies improve efficiency, expand service capabilities, and support employees in new ways.

At the same time, these technologies raise important questions around customer trust, data privacy, regulatory compliance, and fairness. Because rent-to-own is a relationship-driven business, how AI is used matters just as much as whether it is used.

These best practices are intended to help APRO members adopt AI responsibly, confidently, and in a way that fits the realities of day-to-day RTO operations. The goal is not to discourage innovation, but to provide practical guidance that helps companies use AI effectively while maintaining the personal service, accountability, and customer relationships that define the industry.

Used thoughtfully, AI can strengthen operations and improve the customer experience. Used carelessly, it can create compliance risks, damage trust, and undermine the very relationships that successful RTO businesses are built on.

By following these principles, companies can take advantage of AI's benefits while protecting their customers, employees, and long-term reputation.

QUICK RULES FOR USING AI TOOLS

- Do not enter customer information into public AI tools
- Use only company-approved platforms
- Review all AI-generated content before sending
- Do not rely on AI for compliance or legal decisions
- Escalate uncertain situations to a human



14 RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

FOR RESPONSIBLE AI USE IN RENT-TO-OWN

01 Use AI to Enhance – Not Replace – Human Relationships

One of the strengths of the rent-to-own industry is the personal relationship between customers and store teams. AI can help support those relationships by improving responsiveness and handling routine tasks, but it should not replace the human judgment, flexibility, and trust that are central to successful RTO operations.

Most customers are comfortable with AI handling simple interactions like payment reminders or basic account questions. Fewer are comfortable when sensitive conversations are fully automated. Companies should be thoughtful about where AI helps and where human interaction still matters most.

Best Practices:

- Keep employees involved in meaningful customer interactions, especially:
 - onboarding
 - payment issues
 - complaints
 - hardship situations
- Use AI for routine operational tasks such as:
 - reminders
 - FAQs
 - drafting responses
 - scheduling
- Make it easy for customers to reach a person when needed
- Configure AI systems to escalate sensitive situations automatically
- Use AI to support customer service teams – not to eliminate the personal service customers expect



02 Be Transparent About AI Use

Customers should know when they are interacting with AI systems. Being open about how AI is used helps build trust and avoids confusion, especially in a business built on long-term customer relationships.

Most customers are comfortable with businesses using technology to improve service and responsiveness. Problems usually arise when customers feel misled or cannot easily reach a real person when they need help.

Transparency does not need to be complicated. In most cases, simple and clear communication is enough.

Best Practices:

- Clearly identify AI chatbots, automated messages, or AI-assisted communications
- Use simple disclosures such as:
 - “AI-assisted message reviewed by our team”
 - “Virtual assistant”
 - “Automated payment reminder”
- Avoid making AI systems appear human or intentionally deceptive
- Make it easy for customers to reach a live representative at any point
- Provide clear opt-out options where appropriate
- Review AI-generated communications regularly to ensure tone and messaging remain professional and accurate

03 Maintain Human Oversight and Accountability

AI can help employees work more efficiently, but it should not make final decisions that directly impact customers. In a relationship-based business like rent-to-own, important decisions often require context, flexibility, and judgment that AI tools simply do not have.

Customers may experience unexpected hardships, unique circumstances, or communication issues that require a real person to step in. AI can help organize information and support decision-making, but accountability should always remain with the business and its employees.



Best Practices:

- Require human review for decisions involving:
 - payment plans
 - collections actions
 - pricing changes
 - account status changes
- Use AI to assist with recommendations or administrative support – not final decisions
- Assign a designated employee or leadership team to oversee AI usage within the company
- Maintain records of significant AI-assisted communications or decisions where appropriate
- Make sure employees understand when situations should be escalated beyond automated systems

04 Protect Customer Data Carefully

Rent-to-own businesses handle sensitive customer information every day. As employees begin using AI tools more regularly, companies need to be thoughtful about what information is entered into these systems and where that information goes afterward.

Many popular AI tools are designed for convenience and productivity, but not all of them are appropriate for handling customer information. A simple mistake – like pasting customer account details into a public AI platform – can create unnecessary privacy and compliance risks.

Protecting customer trust should remain the priority.

Best Practices:

- Do not enter customer personal information into public AI tools unless the platform has been approved by the company
- Use secure, company-approved AI platforms for any business-related work involving sensitive information
- Limit access to AI tools and customer data to employees who need it
- Use reasonable safeguards such as passwords, access controls, and secure storage practices
- Regularly review vendors and software providers for security and privacy standards
- Train employees on what information should never be entered into AI systems
- When in doubt, leave customer-specific information out of AI prompts entirely

05 Build Compliance Into Everyday AI Use

Using AI does not change a company's legal or regulatory responsibilities. Whether a message is written by an employee or drafted with AI assistance, companies are still responsible for making sure communications, collections practices, and customer interactions comply with the law.

As AI tools become more common, businesses should take a practical approach: slow down, review outputs carefully, and avoid assuming that AI-generated content is automatically accurate or compliant.

Best Practices:

- Ensure AI-assisted communications comply with applicable laws and regulations, including:
 - Federal Trade Commission Act requirements regarding truthful and non-deceptive practices
 - Fair Debt Collection Practices Act requirements for collections activity
 - Telephone Consumer Protection Act requirements for automated calls and messages
 - State rent-to-own laws and consumer protection rules
- Review customer-facing AI tools and communications before deployment
- Maintain records of customer communications and consent where required
- Build compliance review into workflows from the beginning instead of treating it as an afterthought
- Avoid relying on AI tools for legal advice or final compliance determinations
- When uncertain, escalate questions to legal counsel, compliance staff, or company leadership

06 Prevent Bias and Ensure Fair Treatment

AI tools can sometimes produce inaccurate, inconsistent, or unfair results if they are not monitored carefully. In a relationship-driven business like rent-to-own, companies should make sure AI supports fair and respectful treatment of all customers.

Most RTO businesses are not building their own AI systems from scratch. However, even widely used tools can occasionally generate inappropriate language, inconsistent messaging, or recommendations that do not reflect company standards. That makes regular review and human judgment important.

Best Practices:

- Review AI-generated communications regularly for tone, accuracy, and consistency
- Make sure customers are treated consistently across locations and communication channels
- Watch for patterns where AI tools may:
 - provide different levels of service
 - generate inappropriate or misleading language
 - escalate collections activity inconsistently
 - create inaccurate customer communications
- Encourage employees to report unusual or concerning AI behavior
- Correct problems quickly if issues are identified
- Keep employees involved in sensitive customer interactions and decisions
- Use AI to support customer service – not replace judgment, empathy, or common sense

07 Start Small and Scale Strategically

Many companies are still figuring out where AI fits into their operations. That's normal. The most successful implementations usually start with simple, low-risk tasks before expanding into more advanced or customer-facing uses.

Trying to automate too much too quickly can create unnecessary confusion, operational problems, or compliance risks. A slower and more practical rollout is often the better approach.

Best Practices:

- Start with low-risk use cases such as:
 - email drafting
 - payment reminders
 - internal summaries
 - marketing content
- Pilot new tools with a small group before rolling them out company-wide
- Review results carefully before expanding AI into customer-facing or compliance-sensitive areas
- Measure whether AI tools are actually improving efficiency, service, or workflow
- Expand usage gradually as employees become more comfortable and processes become more reliable
- Avoid adopting AI tools simply because they are trendy or heavily marketed



08 Choose Vendors Carefully (and Hold Them Accountable)

Many RTO businesses will not build AI tools themselves. Instead, they will purchase software or services from outside vendors. That makes vendor selection important, because the tools your company uses can quickly become part of your operational, compliance, and data security risk profile.

Not every AI vendor understands the unique needs of the rent-to-own industry. Companies should take time to ask questions, understand how customer information is handled, and avoid rushing into long-term agreements without proper review.

Best Practices:

- Work with vendors that can clearly explain:
 - how customer data is stored and protected
 - what information is shared with third parties
 - how AI-generated outputs are monitored or reviewed
- Ask vendors about:
 - security certifications
 - data privacy practices
 - service and support expectations
 - integration with existing systems
- Review contracts carefully before implementation
- Make sure agreements address:
 - data ownership
 - confidentiality
 - termination rights
 - data deletion procedures
- Avoid relying too heavily on a single vendor without understanding backup options or alternatives
- Choose vendors that are responsive, transparent, and willing to work through compliance or operational concerns

09 Monitor Performance and Accuracy Regularly

AI tools are not “set it and forget it” systems. Even reliable tools can occasionally generate inaccurate information, inconsistent responses, or outputs that do not reflect company expectations.

As employees begin using AI more frequently, businesses should periodically review how these tools are performing in real-world situations. Small issues that go unnoticed early can become larger operational or customer service problems over time.

Best Practices:

- Review AI-generated communications periodically for:
 - accuracy
 - professionalism
 - consistency
 - compliance with company standards
- Pay attention to:
 - customer complaints
 - employee concerns
 - repeated errors or confusing responses
- Watch for common AI issues such as:
 - inaccurate information
 - outdated responses
 - misinterpretation of customer questions
 - inappropriate tone or wording
- Encourage employees to flag AI mistakes or unusual behavior
- Adjust workflows, prompts, or vendor settings when recurring problems appear
- Continue evaluating whether AI tools are actually improving operations and customer experience



10 Preserve the Core Value of the RTO Business

One of the defining characteristics of the rent-to-own industry is the personal service it provides to customers. While AI can improve efficiency and responsiveness, it should not come at the expense of customer trust, dignity, or the relationships that successful RTO businesses are built on.

Technology can support employees and improve operations, but customers should never feel like they are interacting only with automated systems. The goal should be to use AI in ways that strengthen the customer experience — not make it feel colder, more confusing, or less personal.

Best Practices:

- Keep the relationship-driven nature of RTO at the center of AI implementation decisions
- Use AI to support operations by:
 - extending service availability
 - improving responsiveness
 - reducing repetitive administrative work
 - helping employees focus on customer relationships
- Continue offering multiple communication options, including both automated and human support
- Be thoughtful about where automation improves service and where personal interaction still matters most
- Prioritize long-term customer trust and reputation over short-term efficiency gains

11 Train Your Team – Not Just Your Technology



Most AI-related problems in business operations come from people using tools incorrectly, relying on them too heavily, or not understanding their limitations. As AI becomes more common in day-to-day workflows, employee training becomes just as important as the technology itself.

Employees do not need to become AI experts. However, they should understand the company's expectations, basic risks, and when situations require human judgment instead of automation.

Best Practices:

- Provide training before employees begin using AI tools in their daily work
- Make sure employees understand:
 - data privacy expectations
 - approved and prohibited uses
 - compliance considerations
 - when AI-generated content should be reviewed or escalated
- Train employees to recognize common AI mistakes such as inaccurate information or inappropriate responses
- Encourage employees to ask questions or raise concerns when they are unsure about AI use
- Offer periodic refresher training as tools and company policies evolve
- Remind employees that AI should support good judgment – not replace it

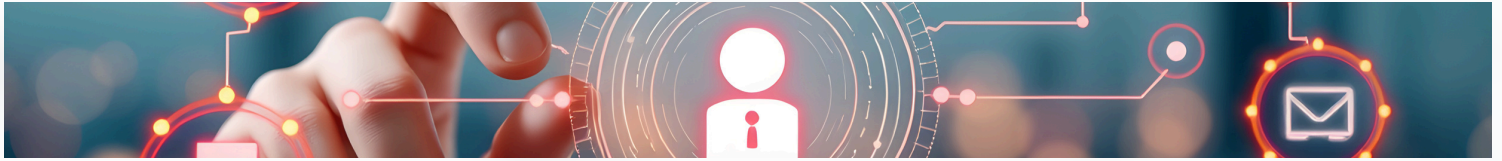
12 Establish Clear Internal Guidelines for AI Use

As AI tools become more common in the workplace, employees need clear direction on what is appropriate, what is not, and when additional review is required. Even a simple internal policy can help prevent confusion, inconsistent practices, or accidental misuse.

The goal is not to create complicated rules. Most companies simply need a practical framework that helps employees use AI responsibly and consistently across the organization.

Best Practices:

- Develop a written AI use policy that addresses:
 - approved tools
 - prohibited uses
 - customer data handling
 - review and oversight expectations
- Make sure employees know where to go with questions or concerns about AI use
- Review internal policies periodically as technology and business practices evolve
- Document important AI-related workflows or approval processes where appropriate
- Keep policies practical, understandable, and aligned with day-to-day operations
- Apply AI expectations consistently across departments and locations



13 Use AI Responsibly in Marketing

AI tools can help companies create marketing content more efficiently, generate ideas, and improve communication with customers. However, marketing content still reflects directly on the business, and companies remain responsible for making sure advertising and communications are accurate, honest, and appropriate.

Customers should never feel misled about who created content, what products or pricing are being offered, or whether testimonials and images are authentic.

Best Practices:

- Review all AI-generated marketing content before publishing
- Make sure advertising and promotional materials are accurate and consistent with company policies
- Do not use AI to create:
 - fake reviews
 - false testimonials
 - misleading pricing or promotions
 - AI-generated images that appear to represent real customers or individuals when they do not
- Use clear disclosures where appropriate for AI-generated content or imagery
- Ensure marketing materials comply with Federal Trade Commission advertising and consumer protection requirements
- Keep human oversight involved in all customer-facing marketing communications

14 Design for Customer Choice and Control

Customers should feel supported and informed when interacting with AI tools – not frustrated, confused, or trapped in automated systems. While automation can improve speed and convenience, customers should still feel like they have control over how they communicate with the business.

In a relationship-driven industry like rent-to-own, flexibility and accessibility matter. Some customers may prefer automated tools for quick questions or reminders, while others will want direct human interaction, especially in more sensitive situations.

Best Practices:

- Give customers clear ways to opt out of AI-assisted interactions when possible
- Make it easy to reach a live employee for questions, concerns, or escalations
- Respect customer communication preferences and contact methods
- Ensure AI tools and communications remain accessible and understandable for a broad range of customers
- Be thoughtful about where automation improves the customer experience and where personal interaction is still more appropriate
- Avoid over-automating sensitive interactions involving complaints, hardships, disputes, or collections concerns



BOTTOM LINE: WHAT THIS REALLY MEANS

AI by itself is not a competitive advantage. The businesses that benefit most will be the ones that use these tools thoughtfully, responsibly, and in ways that support both their employees and customers.

For the rent-to-own industry, success will not come from automating everything as quickly as possible. It will come from using technology in ways that strengthen operations while preserving the trust, service, and accountability that customers expect.

The companies that navigate AI successfully will likely be the ones that:

- stay compliant and protect customer information
- use AI strategically rather than relying on it blindly
- maintain strong customer relationships and human oversight
- focus on long-term trust instead of short-term shortcuts
- use technology to support employees – not replace sound judgment

**ACCESS MORE
AI RESOURCES:**



aPRO