



RentSmart startup helps renters find homes

This might not be a peak time for people seeking rentals, but that makes it an ideal time for Jo Edwards to work on her new startup: RentSmart.

A recent [SCORE](#) client, Edwards has spent the past year planning her dream business. Much of the planning was done in her head, but starting in August, the plan has come to life with a name, website and first draft of a business plan. The business combines Edwards' extensive experience as a property manager with her love of the more creative aspects of business.

"I wanted to find a way that I could do marketing and advertising and still be in the property management [business](#) a little bit. This business is the perfect fit," she said.

RentSmart (www.rentsmartrewards.com) brings a new concept to the market. When Edwards did her competitive analysis, she couldn't find anything like it. Rather than charging a fee to tenants, Edwards gives a \$100 reward. "Rental Matching with Rewards" is her company's tag line.

"It's a win, win," Edwards said. "As a renter, you don't have to go on all the different websites or dig through ads. We do the homework for you, and you can even make some [money](#)."

Any fees are paid by the property owner, and only after receiving proof that the lead came through her website. The [database](#) is hidden so that the selection process is objective and based on the specific needs of a client. The website has a 43-point questionnaire to ensure that matches are a good fit.

Because detail is so important, property owners must provide specific information. Apartments, duplexes and [homes](#) are all included to provide a wider range to clients. Edwards has started with Northeastern Wisconsin and is signing contracts and entering data.

"I'm doing 95 percent of the work at this point — marketing, advertising, website management, [data](#) entry, everything," she said. "I want to be very careful that we don't go too fast, and take one step at a time."

With Feb. 1 as the target date for starting an aggressive advertising campaign, Edwards has a busy few months ahead. She wants to be ready when the rental season starts with a good quantity of listings and clients, so she can be able to make top quality matches. In the interim, she will focus on property owner contacts, search engine optimization and development of a creative marketing campaign that will draw traffic to her site.

Once this is accomplished, she will look at adding employees and expanding to all of Wisconsin and then the nation. Throughout the process, Edwards plans on talking to SCORE counselors to get insight and perspective. Having received positive reviews, Edwards is enjoying the [journey](#).

"I love the whole process and wish I would have done it years ago," she said.

Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt is co-owner of DB Commercial Real Estate in Green Bay and district director for SCORE, Wisconsin.