

Landlords and Computers by Rick and Sally Richards

In which category do you fit?

- a) have a computer and use it extensively in all aspects of my rental business;
- b) have a computer and use it a little for my rental business;
- c) don't have a computer, but would like to/plan to get one to use for my rental business;
- d) don't need a computer, as my current way of handling my rental business is just fine;
- e) won't get a computer – ever.

***A landlord with a computer
is like a landlord with a good
plunger ... things flow a lot smoother!***

If you are not in the “a” category, it's time to re-think your situation. Computers are one of the best tools for landlords. Even if you have just a few properties, the need is there. Think back to the 80's when we were all resisting the answering machine. Remember how people thought it was so rude to get the “beep” and would hang up or leave a caustic comment? Now most of us would be in dire straits without our voice mail! Computer is the “machine” – only much, much better.

Some of you may be intimidated by all the “dot coms”, search engines and browsers. Actually, it is quite simple and relatively inexpensive to get a basic system. Let's discuss some of the uses for a computer in the rental business.

Forms: You can use your computer for all your forms and notices. They can be personalized and easily changed. Your forms are professional in appearance and impressive to your tenants. ***[Editor's Note: AOA will send you all rental forms FREE via email.]***

Record keeping: Doing the books is much easier and complete. There are even software programs designed for landlords by landlords. You will save money as your accountant won't have to spend as much time sorting invoices from your shoebox.

Advertising: Print your own fliers and “for rent” signs. Use the Internet for free worldwide ads – your competition does! We rented a unit in two days, sign unseen, over the Internet and the ad was FREE. At last check, we found 178 Everett apartments listed for rent on one server.

E-mail: Set up an e-mail address for your rental business. This is free and is an excellent mode of communication with your tenants. Instead of a call at dinner time about a broken lint filter, they can e-mail you at their convenience and you can read it at yours. We have set it up and our tenants love it! We learn of maintenance problems sooner, can deal with them easier and no one is disrupted. Print out the –mail and you have a hard copy for your file. This does not eliminate all phone calls, and you definitely need to still post and mail notices. So far, about 50% of our tenants have used the e-mail.

Information: The Internet has so much information on anything concerning the rental business. On-line forms, ads and even advice. One of the speakers at last year's WAA convention has a web site that is really good. He is a Seattle attorney who specialized in landlord/tenant law. His site has all the forms for notices and evictions – free. There are also on-line clubs for landlords. It's fun and educational to chat with landlords from around the world! The one problem we have discovered is that tenants with computers also have access to all this information. Keep that in mind.

Cyber tenants: We have found that tenants with home computers are really good residents and worth attracting. Quite a few prospective tenants plan to use one bedroom as their “computer room.” When we construct new units, we building to attract these tenants by putting in extra phone jacks, cable outlets and spaces designed for a computer. If we remodel or rehab a unit, we try to do the same. Some of the new apartment communities are putting n common

areas supplied with computers for the residents' use. Some of this won't work for everyone, but it is worth considering.

The job of a landlord is tough and we need to use all the tools available to us. A landlord with a computer is like a landlord with a good plunger ... things flow a lot smoother!

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