

How to Get Top Dollar for Your Rental

By Craig A. Lane

If you are not getting the top dollar per square foot for your apartment units, there may be some things that can be done to improve the picture and first impression that your potential tenant sees at your building.

The first impression that you get of anything, any product, means a lot. It is the reason that packaging plays such a vital role in the marketing of everything that we buy. Real estate is no exception. If your tenant doesn't get inside, there is no sale.

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- How does the building look? Does it need painting? Do any windows need to be replaced? In what condition are the drains, gutters and awnings?
- How is the landscaping? Has the lawn been mowed? Are there any bare spots? Do the shrubs need trimming or cultivating? Have animals fouled any areas? Are gravel-filled areas well maintained?
- How does the entryway sign look? Are all signs in good shape? Do any need to be repaired or painted? Are they well lighted?
- Are the walks in good repair? Are they well lighted and free of cracks and debris?
- Is the parking lot well maintained? Is it kept clean and free of litter? Are there potholes? Is the lot well lighted?
- Is the entrance clean, well lighted and free from debris, dirt, umbrellas, etc.? Be sure that bicycles, baby carriages and the like are not blocking the entrance.
- Are the tenant's mailboxes polished? Uniform lettering on all boxes looks best.
- Are the hallways clean, neat and well lighted? They should not be cluttered with umbrellas, floor mats, toys, baby carriages, etc. Do any light bulbs need to be replaced? Are any carpets stained? Are the walls, ceilings and doors clean and in good repair? Do all doors close properly? Are apartment numbers on the doors? Are there adequate locks on all doors in the building? Are hallway mirrors clean? Are elevators and stairwells clean and adequately lighted?
- Do fire extinguishers or exit signs need to be replaced?
- How does the on-site manager's office look? Is it neat and clean and does it reflect an orderly run building?
- Does the apartment being shown look as if a willing tenant could move in immediately? The unit's kitchen should be neat and clean. Are the cupboards bare and spotless? Is the sink clean and stainless? Faucets should be shining. The stove and oven should be clean. Is the refrigerator empty, sparkling clean and does it smell fresh?

- What is the condition of the bathroom? Are the tub, sink and toilet clean and stainless? Are the faucets and other hardware polished and sparkling? Is the whole room scrubbed?
- Do the walls and ceilings need repair or painting? What is the shape of the floors? Do all of the doors work well? Does the entire apartment smell clean and fresh? Are all windows clean and clear?
- Do all lights and outlets work? Do bulbs or light fixtures need to be replaced?
- Are all the closets empty? Be sure that phone books and hangers left behind by the last tenant have been removed. Don't forget to sweet out the closets.
- Is there anything that needs electrical or plumbing work?

The above items are of great importance to your prospective tenant. When visiting your unit, view the apartment through the eyes of a renter. Would you move in? Does your building feel safe? Presenting an attractive, well cared for building will bring you top dollar for your vacancies; tenants are more likely to stay longer and even give referrals.

Remember, first impressions are lasting, and if your building does not present a good one, you can bet that vacancy across the street that does will rent first.

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