



Writing Ads to Attract Applicants And Qualifying Prospects by Phone by Robert L. Cain

Why do you advertise? The answer is obvious, you say. Not really. Phrased differently, what do you hope to accomplish by advertising? It's still kind of obvious, but more to the point. The automatic answer is "to rent the unit." But nothing anywhere was ever rented by an ad. The renting takes place AFTER the applicant comes over, looks at the unit, fills out a rental application, you check it out and he pays you money. All the ad does is get the phone to ring.

How Many Calls Do You Want?

An ad can be the ad in the paper, a flyer in front of the property, a notice on a bulletin board or just about anything else that is designed to get people to contact you about the property for rent. Obviously, you want several people to see your ad; you just don't want all of them to call. That's a waste of their time and yours. So, you write the ad to attract attention but also to keep others from calling you. How many you want not to call you depends on your situation.

Let's say that you live next door to the property or you have an on-site manager. Your ads might be directed toward getting as many people to call you as possible. After all, it's no trouble to show the unit, the manager just walks out the door. If the prospect stands them up, they're a little irritated but not out much of anything except a few minutes watching for them. In that case, your ads would be designed to get lots of people to call you.

On the other hand, let's say you live 30 miles from your rental property and it is a big imposition to drive to show a unit to someone not really interested or qualified to rent it. In that case, you would write your ad to get that type of prospect to eliminate himself. I had never thought about that until one of my seminar attendees in the above situation did not want to be driving 30 miles in the winter to show property to someone he wouldn't rent to anyway. So he wanted techniques to keep the unqualified, uninterested applicants from calling him to see the property.

How Do You Do That?

Understand to begin what people do when they look at classified ads in the newspaper. Studies have shown that they go through and circle or highlight the ones that might be of interest. The next step is eliminating those properties that will not work for them. They do that by calling you and finding out about the properties or by getting you to show it to them.

When potential tenants look at newspaper ads, their first interest is the amount of rent. If they can't afford it, they go to another ad. If the rent is ok, they go on to the second item – features they are looking for. Or they look for basic needs then see if the rent fits their budget. If they need three bedrooms, they won't call on one-bedroom units (usually).

After that, they will look for features that would make the unit a nice place for them to live or for features they don't want to try, to eliminate it.

To Ring or Not to Ring

In order to get the phone to ring, you put less information in the ad. You don't want to tell them anything that would discourage them from calling you. In that case, your best ad would be something such as:

- Prime Property 3 BR Duplex: Close to bus. \$695. Call 123-4567

Trying to avoid a 30-mile drive (each way) is something else again. Now, you want them to eliminate themselves. Give more information such as:

- Prime Property 3 BR Duplex: Large, immaculate, fenced yard, across from school, off-street parking, on bus line. No pets or smokers. \$695. 1st & last plus deposit. Call 123-4567.

Right away you have eliminated people who don't want to do yard work, who don't want to live next to a school, who don't want buses going by all times of the day and night and who don't have a last month's rent and deposit. Plus, most of the smokers and pet owners will leave you alone – not all, of course, some don't read that far or think maybe they can sneak by.

One of the best ways to get bad tenants not to call you by putting the following wording in your ad: **“So that our properties remain great places to live, we screen applicants carefully.”** Bad tenants stay away in droves.

An important point to remember is that good tenants tend to be picky. The first judge you by the advertising they see and then by how they are treated on the phone. Second, they judge by the property. Good tenants are hard to get into a property and easy to get out.

Bad tenants will accept just about anything and consider themselves as having put one over on another landlord when they get to rent. But they feel especially comfortable with landlords who write unprofessional ads, who are unprofessional on the phone and who don't seem to care much about the property. The better your ad, the fewer bad tenants will call.

Using the Telephone More Effectively

A cardinal principle when approaching new prospects on the telephone is that the sole objective of the phone call is to secure the appointment and not sell, which is the job of the interview. The secret of effective phone selling is to arouse interest and introduce the proposition without forcing a premature decision.

Telephone Delivery

1. Above all, remember that visual communication is lost over the phone. To compensate, oral skills and listening habits must improve.
2. Your lips should be half an inch from the telephone mouthpiece for maximum effectiveness. Speak directly into the transmitter and pronounce words clearly and carefully. Use simple language and avoid technical terms and slang.
3. On the phone, people have a tendency to copy the tone of the other person. Your voice should say, "I am friendly, understanding and competent." As unconventional as it may sound, one way of doing this is to smile into the telephone. People will note the difference in vocal intonation.
4. Be aware of your rate of speech – talking too fast creates misunderstanding and mistrust. Too slow encourages daydreaming and makes you sound boring and unenthusiastic. Experts feel that 140 words per minute is about the right pace.
5. Use plenty of variation in your voice – people like talking to people, not machines.
6. Let the customer know you are listening by interjecting "yes", "I see", etc.
7. Make sure your voice is neither too low nor too high pitched.

How to Qualify Prospects By Phone

As soon as you pick up the phone for an ad call, you can begin qualifying a potential applicant. Even before you make an appointment to show the property, you can pretty well have determined if this person is someone who can actually rent your property – or would want to.

You qualify by asking questions. There is no particular order in which to ask them, the course of your conversation will determine that. The questions should begin with the words, "who, what, when, where and why". Just like a good newspaper reporter, you need an answer to each of these questions before you show the property.

Who Is Calling

You need their name and phone number. If they will not give you their name, you have reason to be suspicious about a couple of things. First, are they seriously looking for a new place to live, are they just testing the market or are they Fair Housing testers? It is a good idea to get their phone number so if you are disconnected for some reason, you can call them back. It is also the first step in verifying the information they might give you on a rental application. If the phone number they give you is not listed to them, yet they give you an address which they say is their current one, you have reason for concern.

"What Ad Are You Calling On?"

Studies have shown that people call on ads to eliminate the property. It is truer with houses for sale than property for rent, especially if the rental market is tight. But your caller may not be looking for what you have available. For example, yours may be a three-bedroom unit while they are looking for a two-bedroom. They might be calling because they want help locating what they are looking for. Don't brush them off! This could be a great opportunity for you to feed a lead to another landlord who has such a

unit available. It could result in a referral fee, if it is legal where you are, or just a return of the favor.

“When Do You Need to Move?”

Do they need to move at the end of the month? In three months? Tonight? The answer tells you if their needs match yours, as to availability and timing. Some answers might also beg another question such as, “Why are your moving?”

“Where Do You Want to Live?”

It may be that your unit does not meet their location needs. If that is the case, you have another referral opportunity.

“Why Are You Moving?”

When you asked when they needed to move and they told you “right away” you have a good reason to ask further. The word “eviction” springs to mind with an answer like that. They could be moving in from out of town, a perfectly legitimate answer, assuming it is the truth. If they are evasive or inconclusive when they answer, ask them point blank if they are being evicted. Yes it is harsh; but yes, it is also your money and your property, both of which you will sacrifice on the altar of “too much in a hurry” or “too little gumption” if you fail to follow up and to rent to them after they were evicted because they didn’t pay the rent or wouldn’t follow the rules.

IMPORTANT: Write out these questions. Do not ad lib anything when you answer an ad call. Check them off as you ask them. The information you get on the initial phone call could decide whether you let a bad tenant get to first base with you or whether you miss out on an outstanding tenant.

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