

## Showing Your Rental Unit

by Robert Griswold

When your rental prospects arrive, be sure to greet them and introduce yourself. Ask for their names and shake their hands. Refer to your notes on the telephone prospect card from your initial phone conversation to let them know that you remember speaking with them. This will give the prospective tenants a good feeling that you are not just going through the standard rental spiel.

Listen to any questions or concerns that may have come up since you spoke on the phone or during their travel to your rental property. Ask them if they found your directions accurate and easy to use. Also, ask them if they have any other needs that they are looking for in a rental property that haven't already been discussed.

Don't just let the prospects wander through the rental unit by themselves. (Of course, this is particularly true if you are showing an occupied rental unit.) Listen carefully to your prospect and anyone they brought with them as you informally guide them through the rental unit. Pay close attention to the features that your tenants have indicated are of particular interest, or comments made during the walk-through.

### Showing a Vacant Rental

If you're showing a vacant rental, begin the tour of the rental unit and act as a tour guide. Don't be too controlling; instead, let the prospects view the rental in the manner that suits them. Some prospects go right to a certain room, which gives you a clue about the importance they place on that aspect of your property. Of course, if the prospects hesitate or are reluctant to tour on their own, you can casually guide them through the rental property yourself.

Warning! Encourage your rental prospect to see the entire rental property, including any garage or storage areas and the exterior grounds or yard, if there are any. You want to be sure that the prospect had the opportunity to observe the condition of all portions of the rental property and ask any questions. This minimizes claims that you may have discriminated against a prospect by selectively showing the rental property.

There are as many different ways to show a rental unit as there are rental property owners. Keep in mind the information provided by the prospect and customize the tour by beginning with the feature or room that you feel has the most interest for the prospect. This is not the time to head straight to *your* favorite feature. When in doubt, start with the kitchen, then transition to the living areas and the bedrooms.

Tip: As you begin to show the interior of your rental, avoid making obvious statements such as, "This is the living room" or "Here's the bathroom!" Instead, listen and observe the body language and facial expressions of your prospects as they walk through the property. You don't need to oversell if they seem pleased, but you should feel free to point out the benefits of your rental property (for example, "It sounds like this neutral colored carpet will go great with your living room furniture," or "The view from the kitchen of the sunsets is so relaxing").

Tip: Rental units look smaller when they are vacant. If your prospects express concerns that their furniture won't fit in your rental, you can consider a strategy used by property managers and owners of large rental properties: Set up a partially or fully furnished model rental unit to demonstrate what furniture will fit. Although this may not be feasible for most single-family home or condominium rental units, it can work quite well for medium to larger apartment properties that regularly have units vacant or have a market for furnished rentals. Smaller rental properties can use a *vignette*, which is a rental unit that has been decorated with towels, books, and knickknacks to give the unit personality. Sometimes you can even close the sale by offering to give the new renter these small items.

Warning: If you are holding an open house, you can quickly find yourself dealing with multiple prospects who all seem to have better timing than a synchronized swimming team. Do your best

to courteously greet and speak with each prospect individually. At least cover the basic information and get the prospects started on the property tour before beginning to work with the next prospect. Be sure to communicate clearly that you will answer all of their questions, and be sure to treat all prospects openly and fairly to avoid any allegations of favoritism or discrimination.

### Showing an Occupied Rental

If you will be showing an occupied rental unit, be sure to consider the inherent advantages and disadvantages.

**Warning:** If your current tenant is being evicted, is not leaving on good terms, or has an antagonistic attitude for any reason, don't show the rental unit until the property is vacated. Be sure to complete your rent-ready preparation work and any rental unit upgrades. This strategy also works best if your current tenants have not taken good care of the rental property or their lifestyle or furnishings may be objectionable to some rental prospects.

In most states, if the current tenants are at the end of their lease or they have given a notice to vacate, the rental property owner is specifically allowed to enter the rental property in order to show the unit to a prospective tenant. Of course, you must comply with state laws, which require you to give your current tenant advance written notice of entry prior to showing the rental unit. Your tenant could agree to waive the notice requirement, but make sure that you have that agreement in writing.

Try your best to cooperate with the current tenants when scheduling mutually convenient times to show the rental. Be sure to respect their privacy and avoid excessive intrusions into their lives. To ensure the cooperation of your tenant, you may even want to offer the current tenant a small bonus after they vacate, as a part of their security deposit disposition.

**Remember:** Although the current tenant may legally be required to allow you and your prospects to enter the rental unit for a showing, they do not have to make any efforts to ensure that the property is clean and neat. They also are not required to help you in your efforts to impress the prospect. Keep this fact in mind when deciding whether you want to show your rental unit while it is still occupied.

Showing a vacant rental unit is generally much easier, but touring your prospect through an occupied rental property does have some distinct advantages. Your current tenant can actually be a real asset if they are friendly and cooperative and take care of the property. The rental prospects may want to ask the current tenant questions about their living experience at your property.

**Tip:** If you can, get copies of recent utility bills from your current tenant, in case your prospective renters have any questions about utility costs. Utility costs for electric, natural gas, water and sewer, and trash are becoming significant items in the budgets of many renters. You don't want your tenant to be unable to financially handle the typical monthly utility costs, because that may impact their ability to pay your rent. You may also be able to use low utility costs as a marketing tool.

*The information contained in this article is not intended as legal advice. Always consult an attorney if you have a particular problem or question.*

*Robert Griswold is the author of "Property Management for Dummies" from which this excerpt is taken. He is the host of radio's Real Estate Today!, a live, weekly, call-in news and information talk show. Owner of Griswold Real Estate Management with more than 20 years practical property management experience, Robert is a well-known speaker for groups such as IREM and author of many articles. He may be reached at (858) 597-6100 or via Web site: [www.retodayradio.com](http://www.retodayradio.com).*