



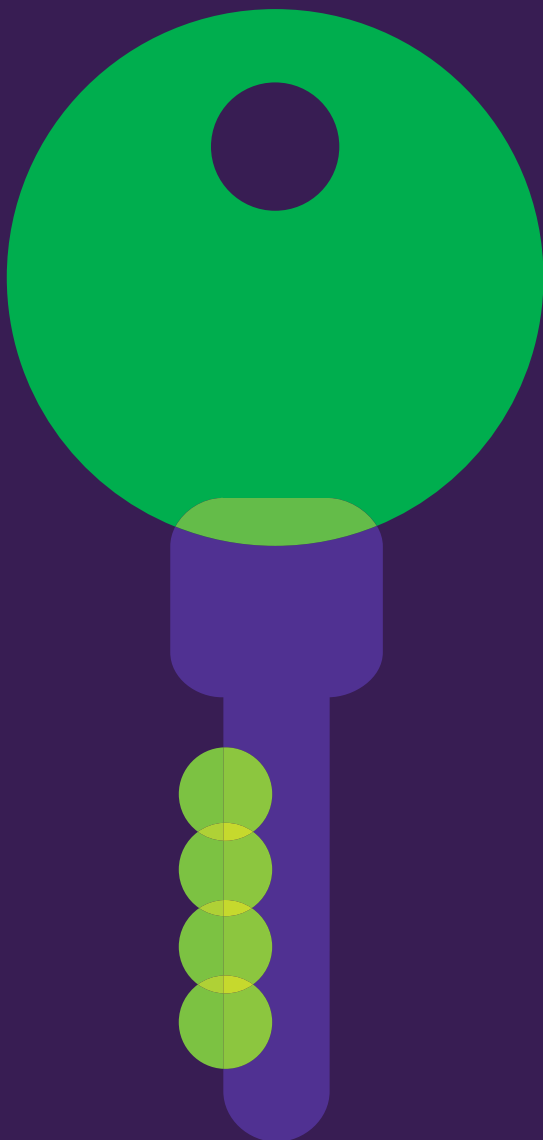
Jelf Top ten marketing tips for landlords

How to find your
perfect tenant

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So you have a portfolio of properties, but they won't do you much good until they're filled with tenants - and that's why marketing is such a crucial aspect of being a landlord.



Not only do you need to find people to live in your homes, but you need to find the right people: tenants who are well-suited to the property, and preferably ones who will take good care of it and pay their rent on time.

If you're new to being a landlord, it can be challenging to find the right tenants and to cope with issues like vacant properties.. This guide is designed to be an easy reference of tried-and-tested ways for landlords to keep a constant flow of tenants.



Do a marketing assessment

You should carry out a marketing assessment on each property you own. An assessment helps you to **identify what your target tenant is like**, which will in turn help to answer many more questions about the best way to market a property. Try to answer the following questions about your target tenant(s):

- How old are they?
- Are they employed?
- If so, what type of job do they have...
- ... and where do they work?
- Do they drive a car?
- Do they use public transport?

Don't worry if you can't find a definite answer for all of these. Together, they should establish a profile of the type of tenant you're looking for, and what are the **most effective channels** to reach out to them.

For example, maybe you've decided your property would be perfect for a new graduate. You can then decide to advertise the property through universities and student union newsletters, beginning around January when most final-year students are making preparations for their life after university. Alternatively, you may have a three-bedroom home close to schools that would be best suited to a family, and should be marketed accordingly.



Look at your property through a tenant's eyes

Another important step in marketing a property is to walk around it and try to look at everything as if you're seeing it for the first time - just as a potential tenant will when they're being shown around. Are there any areas that look run-down and in need of repair? Do any of the rooms seem too small because they're cluttered with furniture? Is the garden well-maintained?

Looking at your property through a tenant's eyes will identify parts of the property that need work, as well as helping you to anticipate any questions people might bring up during a viewing. If you're finding it

hard to look at your property objectively, ask a friend or family member to view the property. Make sure they're brutally honest! The more issues you can anticipate before you start showing people around, the easier it'll be to fill the property.

This is also a good time to make sure you are familiar with the immediate local area so you will be able to **tell prospective tenants** where shops, schools, bus stops and so on are located - this sort of knowledge is always appreciated by people who are thinking of moving in.



Compare local rental prices

While price isn't everything - many tenants will pay a bit more for a property in a better condition or a better location - there's no sense in pricing yourself out of the local market. Find out what local landlords with similar properties to yours are charging, either through websites like **Gumtree**, **PrimeLocation** and **Zoopla**, or by contacting letting agents.

Gather all the data onto a spreadsheet to get an idea of the range of rents your competitors are offering. It's generally **best to price yourself** somewhere in the middle - overpricing means your property could stand empty for longer than it should, while under-

charging could just mean you'll have to put the rent up in future. By all means, charge at the higher end if you feel your property deserves it, but be prepared to justify the extra cost to potential tenants.

Remember that you cannot increase the rent during a fixed-term tenancy, so once you've set a price, you'll **have to stick with it** (usually for a year) even if your costs or circumstances change. Your tenants may also appeal against an increase if they think it is too much, and raising the rent every year isn't great for maintaining their goodwill!

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Get the most out of property portals

Online property portals such as **Rightmove** are one of the best ways to market your property at a low cost. These sites are often the first port of call for people who are looking for a rental, so if you're not listed you're missing a vital opportunity to find tenants **before your competitors do**.

It's worth noting, however, that many of the biggest sites, including Rightmove and Zoopla, don't deal with landlords directly. You'll have to go through an 'online letting agent' such as **Upad** or **Visum**: the benefit of this is that they will then usually market your property across dozens of high-profile portals, cutting out a lot of the hard work for you!

When you use these letting agents, you're still involved in the lettings process, although some of them will handle your administration and legal work too, as well as offering other services such as photography for listings, energy performance evaluations and so on. They do charge a fee for their services, but it's often less than you'd expect.

If you'd rather not go down this route, don't overlook the value of advertising your property on a site like **Gumtree** - this is completely free, and still gives you a **good deal of exposure on a popular site**.

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Write a good rental advert

At some point, you'll probably need to write a description of your property for potential tenants to read. This is a more **important step** than you might think: a poorly-written ad can be really off-putting, and leaving out essential details can leave viewers frustrated when they come to view the place!

Your ad should convey the best points of the property first - whether it's spacious, in a great location, newly refurbished or has a large outdoor area. Use the most positive words you can to show your property **in its best light** - so if it's a bit on the small side, call it "cosy" or "manageable", while a property in

a heavily urbanised area has "great accessibility". Every property has its downsides: your job is to emphasise **the best qualities and make it sound as desirable** as possible.

There's no need to be too wordy in your ad - keep it concise but make sure it includes all the things a tenant needs to know (location, number of bedrooms and bathrooms, utilities, garage or parking spaces and so on). Finally, make it easy for tenants to contact you by providing both a mobile number and an email address.

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Take good photos

Taking good photographs for your rental advert is just **as important as writing the copy**. Unless your letting agent provides photography services, you might need to brush up on your snapping skills - although the most important thing is that your advert has photographs at all. Rental ads without any photographs tend to attract very little interest: people like to get an idea of what a property looks like before they come for a viewing.

You don't need expensive equipment: a decent digital camera, preferably one that can take good indoor shots, will be fine. It's best to take photos while the

property is empty and give it a good going-over beforehand, clearing away clutter and arranging the furniture to make the rooms look as spacious as possible. A good tip is to dress the beds - bare mattresses look depressing!

Focus on the best points of the property - if there are any quirky or interesting features, these make a **great 'headline' shot** to make your ad stand out from the rest. If you're still not too confident in your photography skills, take some tips from **this article** on how to compose shots that show a property in its best light.



Use social media (wisely)

This is particularly good if you already have tenants and want to keep them updated and informed of your plans; for instance, new properties in your portfolio they might consider moving to when their tenancy is up. It also **bolsters your business's** web presence, and provides another channel for communication between you, your tenants and potential new customers.

However, be warned that using social media can backfire too. If you fall out with a tenant, they may be tempted to **vent their anger on your profile**. Regardless of who's in the right, it doesn't look good to have comments from unhappy tenants on your Twitter feed or Facebook wall!

If you decide to market your letting business through social media, **make sure you're ready** for eventualities like this - and if you do get public messages from disgruntled tenants, the best way is not to get drawn into a public argument. Contact them in person, explain what you're doing to resolve the situation and ask politely if they'd consider removing their post. Used well, social media can be a great way to stay in touch with your tenants - it can even offer an easy method for them to send new business your way.



Market seasonally

As a landlord, you're probably already familiar with the **times of year** people tend to start looking for houses and when they need to move. Many people tend to **begin making living plans** in the first few months of a new year, so January to March is a good time to increase your advertising and make sure you're visible when these searches begin.

Seasonal marketing is made easier if you're letting to students, as you can set a regular schedule to the academic year: they tend to move in July and August, ready to return to university in September. However, bear in mind that some students will be on six-month

rental contracts, so it's worth putting some feelers out around December and January for a chance to drum up interest in any available properties you have.

Getting to know your target market and adjusting your activities to their annual schedule is a vital part of keeping your properties as full as possible and avoiding the dreaded void periods. While it's useful to keep up some form of marketing activity all year round, knowing the best times to increase your focus will ensure that you get the best return from your investment.



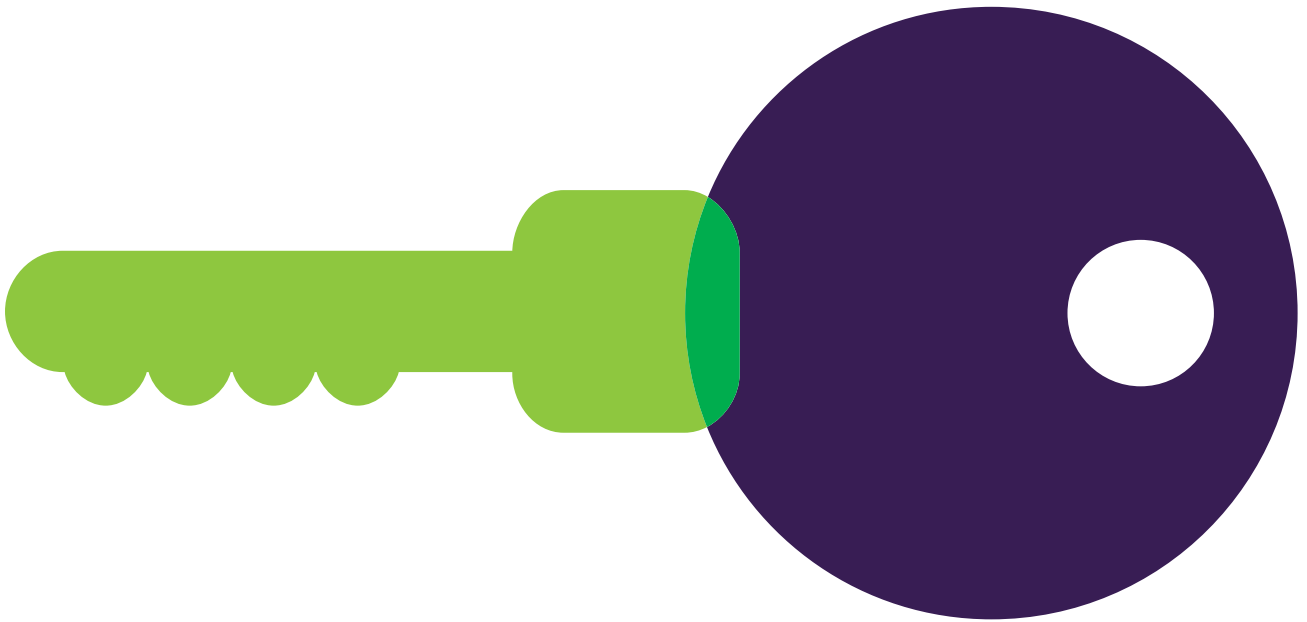
Consider adding extras to your let

There are plenty of incentives you can throw in to make a property a bit more appealing to potential tenants: paying their utility bills, offering free broadband and/or digital TV, and equipping the property with brand new utilities may all cost you money, but they're also **great selling points**. Consider your target market when deciding what extras to throw in: for example, students will appreciate free broadband and paid utilities, while older tenants may find a new boiler and washing machine more attractive assets.

Including contents insurance as part of the package is another way to incentivise tenants and show that

you're thinking about their needs. Some landlords forego the usual deposit to encourage people to move in - while potentially a risky move, this can be a big help to tenants **when money is tight**.

It's also worth **widening the net when it comes to pets**. While many landlords don't allow tenants to keep dogs and cats, this means landlords who do can corner this section of the market. While dogs in particular may lead to more wear and tear on furniture and the need to be more thorough with your post-occupancy cleaning and vacuuming, it may be worth it if it means you can fill a vacant property when you need to.



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Get referrals

Recommendations and referrals from former tenants are one of the **best ways to market your property**. To get these, of course, means building a good relationship with your tenants by responding quickly to any problems they have, keeping the property in a good state of repair and working with them to resolve any difficulties they have in paying their rent.

Happy tenants who feel they've been well-treated are more likely to **recommend you** to friends that are moving into the area and give you good reviews online - that's the kind of publicity you can't buy! You

may want to give your tenants a short questionnaire to fill out when their contract is up, asking how they found their experience: you can put their positive comments on your websites or in your ads.

Of course, references work both ways: you can use sites like **Rate My Tenant** to recommend good tenants to other landlords, as well as finding out who not to let to. Problem tenants cause you stress, cost you money and often unfairly damage your reputation as a landlord - avoiding them is just as important as finding good ones.