



When you go looking for a business or service, where do you turn first? The Yellow Pages or Google? Many people ignore businesses that are not online, because if they can't find you through a web search, then you simply do not exist. Potential tenants look at rental properties the same way – if the building or property owner/manager does not have an online presence, then tenants won't check you out in the real world.

Many building owners and property managers do not have an online presence. Some will advertise their rental properties on Internet listing services, which will provide leads for potential tenants. However, building and maintaining your own website can do much more for your business and rental properties.

### Increase visibility

If you have signage on your rental property, then you already have a high traffic medium to post your URL. This allows potential tenants who walk or drive by your building to check out unit photos, learn about rental fees and determine whether they would want to live there – without having to make an appointment. Your website can also drive traffic through Google from people looking for an apartment in your area.

According to research, approximately 30 per cent of website traffic should come from direct visitors (people seeing your building signage), while 60 per cent will result from organic web searches (not paid traffic). The remaining 10 per cent comes from other referral sources, such as Internet listing sites.

"You can use your website to generate leads from rental prospects finding your property through search engines," said Max Steinman, Director of Sales, Landlord Web Solutions. "You can also capture a direct audience of people who pass by your building and search for more information by entering your URL on their smartphones."

Your website can serve as your portfolio, as it allows potential tenants to view your rental properties in one location. You can

emphasize the quality of your units and allow renters to find the right location and unit for their needs. Use the high profile sections of your website (such as the home page) to highlight property and suite promotions, and showcase high-vacancy buildings to increase online viewings.

### Reduce your costs

Some people view websites as an expense, as there is an upfront cost to build the site and monthly fees for hosting. They might believe that it is unnecessary, as they ran their business for years without one. An online presence is an essential component of your marketing toolbox. Having your own website means that you can decrease your reliance (and spending) on Internet listing sites and print materials.

Your website is always working and promoting your rental properties. It will continue to generate leads day after day, month after month, year after year. This ongoing lead generation makes it cost effective to market your properties. It saves time that would have been spent on the phone with potential tenants, sending them emails or meeting with them face to face. They can easily access all materials and view units online without your involvement.

"You can use your website to generate more leads and prospects, which gives you more choice of potential tenants," said Steinman. "This gives you access to a higher quality tenant base, which saves time and hassle spent on problem tenants. It also enables you to choose renters with higher credit ratings and strong references, which in turn will lower your long-term turnover costs."

### Raise credibility

Your online presence is a reflection of your business and what you have to offer to clients. It tells potential and existing tenants about who you are and what you represent, and it can raise your profile in the community. Professional web design and content can elevate and

establish your status. Include testimonials and reviews to raise your credibility and give potential tenants more information about your buildings.

"If you're a third party property manager, your website can also help you to establish a credible brand," said Steinman. "It can serve as a marketing tool for signing up new clients. You can show off the buildings in your management portfolio, and provide building owners, real estate agents, mortgage brokers and lenders with a way to contact and sign up with you."

### Improve customer service

Your website functions as an office that is always open, which makes it more convenient for potential tenants who work full time or are coming from out of town. They can access all the information they need to make a decision about renting a unit, including floor plans and property photos, at their convenience. An online application tool would replace the need for printing, filling out and faxing application forms.

Use your website to keep current tenants informed on what is going on in the building. This can include news articles, blog posts, FAQs, updates on work being done in the building and more. Create a tenant portal and add other capabilities to make the site more useful for residents.

"You can include a number of tools to improve the customer service experience," said Steinman. "The tenant portal can include the ability to make rent payments and schedule maintenance requests, which saves time for both you and your tenants."

### Make it mobile

Approximately 40 per cent of visitors to rental property websites are doing so on their mobile devices... and this number is expected to grow year over year. Research has shown that mobile usage to view websites is increasing by 0.2 per cent every two months.

Having a mobile-responsive (versus mobile-friendly) site is important for improving the web viewing experience. Instead of creating two separate websites for desktop and mobile visitors, which means creating separate content and hosting two sites, implementing a mobile-responsive site will ensure that visitors see the same content in a visual format that works best for their device.

"Almost every modern website is mobile-

responsive because people use a wide range of devices to go online," said Steinman. "Younger renters do everything on their smartphones. And with older tenants, their children and grandchildren are doing most of the online searching for them, so it makes sense to ensure that your website is mobile-responsive."

### Conclusion

You need an online presence to promote

your business and your rental properties. A mobile-responsive website will drive regular leads to your building and provide you with an ongoing list of potential tenants. It can help you to lower your marketing costs, improve the customer experience, and raise your credibility among tenants and partners. **RHB**

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