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How to Market a Pet-Friendly Building

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By **Sandra Phinney**

Picture this: You own a vacant property that's pet friendly, but it is not turning over as quickly as you would like. How can you speed up the process and also increase your chances of securing good tenants? Here are some tips on marketing a pet-friendly building.

1. Pre-Screen and Train Your Owners

Nothing sells a building like happy tenants. To keep current tenants happy, Adam Stephens, marketing and advertising coordinator with Residential Leasing Group in Calgary suggests pre-screening potential tenants and their pets before they sign a lease. "Ask a lot of questions," says Stephens, who helps market luxury condos, apartments and houses in downtown Calgary. "It's a lot easier to turn an application down than to deal with damages to a property because of an untrained pet or inattentive pet owner."

To help prevent possible problems, consider getting references for the pet as well as for the tenant, suggests Carly Ludwar-Jellis, member service manager of the Rental Owners and Managers Society (ROMS) BC, which serves residential landlords in British Columbia. Then make sure to discuss where the pet is and is not permitted on the property, requirements about flea treatment, picking up after the pet and how damage will be handled in a "Pet Agreement" she says.

2. Target Your Audience

Then improve your application pool by marketing appropriately. To ensure well-behaved pets and owners are applying, Ludwar-Jellis suggests using specific phrases when advertising. Instead of just saying, "Pets allowed," market your building with phrases like "Your well behaved pet will be considered." Put the ball in the applicant's court, Ludwar-Jellis says.

3. Use Social Media to Optimize

Social media is a great way to generate more traffic and capture the attention of potential pet-owners who are looking for a place to live, Stephens says. Consider creating a Facebook fan page, website or blog to increase the volume of people who see you. To optimize that traffic, Stephens also recommends trying a Google AdWords Pay-Per-Click (PPC) campaign and Facebook PPC. "They are very effective as you can get really specific about the type of people you want to attract – like animal lovers and pet owners," he says.

4. Add Videos to Your Website

Consider creating YouTube videos and adding them to your property's blog or website. "Videos are great because people are 75 percent more likely to click through a link from a video than any other form of media," Stephens says. Feature a prominent figure from the property talking about pet care tips and then discuss pet-friendly units that are available for rent. "This positions you as both an authority and as a useful resource for information within your industry," Stephens says.

5. Increase Maintenance Check-Ups

Having a pet-friendly building also means additional upkeep to maintain the property. Furnace filters need to be replaced more often, carpets need deeper cleaning and hardwood floors may need to be replaced in some situations. To help keep costs manageable, many property owners ask for a pet deposit. In Alberta, those typically range from \$150 to \$500, Stephens says, but make sure to review the Residential Tenancy Act in your province to find what is legal in your area. "Even if there is no apparent damage making the place free of allergens for the next tenant can be a costly and time consuming endeavour," he says.

6. Advertise Pet-Friendly Areas

Draw attention to any renovations or features that make the rental units "pet-friendly." Give residents and potential residents a list of any pet-friendly parks, beaches and nearby outdoor restaurants in the neighbourhood. Include vet clinics, grooming salons, pet stores, boarding kennels and other pet services companies.

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7. Stage Your Property

Most pet owners view their pets as family members so it's imperative to translate that into the staging your property, says Kristy Morrison, founder of Capital Home Staging & Design in Ottawa, Ont., which stages commercial and residential properties.

For cat lovers, place a "cat nap" station in a guest room or office to help potential tenants picture their pet living in the unit. Remember to avoid an excess of pet-related props and keep the staging tasteful. For instance, a black and white photo of a cat or dog in the bathroom or on someone's desk is appropriate.

8. Add Amenities

Consider creating a "dog pit stop" in the lobby with a complementary water dish for furry pets, Morrison says. If your property has a backyard, play it up by having a doggie home in the corner facing the house or main building. Make sure to include a basket of rolled black towels for wiping dog feet. Then, to make an inviting space for dogs to relax, place a nice leash on a hook next to the entrance, a food station near the kitchen and a dog bed staged with one or two toys.

9. Remember Your Target Audience

Above all, remember your target audience, Morrison says. "A property that is targeted to a specific clientele, like pet lovers, will rent a lot faster than a place targeted to any buyer," she says.

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