



Avoid the Voids

a landlord's guide to keeping your property let

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£3 billion in rental income is lost every year by UK landlords due to their property standing empty.

That works out to an average of £1,000 for each property - or around half the net profit of the average landlord.

It's not just lost income. The mortgage still has to be paid. Service charges and utilities still have to be paid. Put quite simply, landlords cannot afford to keep their properties standing empty.

There are many things that landlords can do to keep their accommodation occupied and earning. Get started with our 20 quick tips to avoid the voids.





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1. Be seen. You can have the most desirable property at the lowest rent, but if no one gets to see it, it will stay empty. The days of relying on shop windows and local papers are gone: your target market is on the internet, and you should be too. Reach the largest number of people with one quick and easy form: just [register as a landlord with Upad](#) and we'll list your property on 100+ rental sites and portals for just £59 – tenant guaranteed. [\[Find out more about advertising property on the internet\]](#)

2. Advertise with photos. Our tenants tell us the living room is what they want to see most, followed by the garden if you have one. Take several decent quality photos of all the rooms in your property and you'll generate up to three and a half times more enquiries than ads without photos. [\[Find out more about using photos to best effect.\]](#)

3. Advertise immediately your tenant gives notice. Don't wait until they've moved out to start looking for your next tenant: that just guarantees your property will sit empty for a while. Include in your AST contracts that tenants need to co-operate with viewings. If you're a [Upad registered landlord](#), our system will save the details of your property, so you can have it advertised again in just one easy click.

4. What's your unique selling point? Do your properties come with broadband, a TV license included, jacuzzi baths? Maybe they should! Giving yourself a USP and emphasising it in your adverts can help generate extra interest in your properties and get them filled more quickly. [\[Find out more about adding that little extra to your property listings\]](#)

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5. Keep your rent reasonable. While it might be tempting to demand the highest rent you can get away with, lowering the rent a little can help keep your property filled. Its better to take a little less money for 12 months of the year, than to hold out for every last pound and have your property empty for 2 months. [Check average rents](#) for your area and price accordingly: Upad's interactive rental index makes it easy to see what your competition is charging. [\[Find out more about setting a rent that keeps everyone happy\]](#)

6. When you're showing a property, make it look decent. If it's unfurnished, "stage" it with borrowed or hired furniture: make it look like a home. If you have existing tenants, help them tidy up before the viewers arrive! It's in your interest. [\[Find out more about staging your property for instant tenant appeal\]](#)

7. Remember the outside. Estate agents call it curb appeal: that first glance as you arrive at the property can make all the difference between taking it, or not. Keep gardens tidy and external features well maintained. There's nothing like a leaky gutter to make you leave without even viewing. [\[Find out more about improving your property's kerb appeal\]](#)

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8. Complete repairs. If something needs fixing, or redecorating, do it before you show the property. Promises that “it’ll be fixed before you move in” are worth nothing.

9. Every lead’s a hot lead When you receive an enquiry from a prospective tenant, make sure you respond as soon as humanly possible. Don’t let them move onto the next property.

10. Ask your existing tenant to help you find their replacement. If you’ve been a great landlord throughout their stay, they should have no problems recommending you to their friends.

Which brings me to the next crucial point. ...

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Filling a void property quickly is important, but an even easier way to avoid the voids is to stop them happening in the first place. Keeping your existing tenants happy is crucial. You can't, obviously, stop those who need to move to a new area, but you should never allow a situation where tenants move on because they're unhappy with the property, or with the service you're providing.

11. If a tenant's leaving, find out why. Is it a problem you can solve? If there are issues with the property itself, then try to work with the tenant to resolve the problem, rather than allowing them to move on. If they need a larger or smaller property, you might have something else in your portfolio that would suit them better. But you won't know unless you ask.

12. During the life of the tenancy, treat your property as your tenant's home. You can't just turn up unannounced: that leaves you open to accusations of harassment by your tenants. Make sure you take reliable references at the beginning of the tenancy so that you feel confident your tenants will look after their home, and you can leave them to quiet enjoyment of it.

13. Be prompt and helpful about repairs. Tenants who are cared for are more likely to stay. And accept that repairs are going to need to be done: one tenant told us recently, "my landlord always does repairs reasonably quickly, but he makes me feel like such a nuisance for contacting him, I'd almost rather not bother." Tenants who feel like a nuisance won't be staying long. It's not unreasonable, after all, to want a working house!

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14. Go beyond your legal obligations. Landlords do have certain legal obligations to ensure their properties are kept in a decent condition, but take these as a minimum, not a maximum. Providing carbon monoxide detectors makes your tenant feel cared for, and costs just a few pounds. If you have more than one property, be prepared to shuffle furniture around so that people get what they need rather than what happened to be there when they moved in. And even in an unfurnished rental, provide curtains! Your tenants won't magically have curtains that fit, and expecting them to purchase a full set for a rented home is unreasonable.

15. Be realistic about management time. It's tempting to try to save money by doing everything yourself. But being a landlord can be a 24/7 job. If you can't commit to being available for your tenants at any hour of the day or night, or you live a long way from your properties, consider hiring a management agent to do the job for you. It needn't be expensive: [Upad offers full property management](#) from just £60 + VAT per month. It's a small price to pay to know that your tenants will be looked after properly. [\[Find out if you have what it takes to be a full-time landlord\]](#)

16. Don't automatically put the rent up. Especially at the moment, when many of us are still feeling the credit crunch, automatically increasing the rent can be the last straw that makes your tenant move on. If average rents in your area haven't changed much since last year, then consider keeping yours the same. And tell your tenants you're doing that: they'll certainly appreciate it. [\[Find out more about rent increases\]](#)

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17. Rent doesn't have to be paid monthly. Tenants who are paid weekly may struggle to budget for monthly rental payments, and yet be great tenants in every other way. Consider accepting payments to fit in with their wages: having them pay you weekly or fortnightly will make everyone's life easier.

18. Reward long-stay tenants. We've heard of landlords offering all sorts of things to reward tenants who stay with them long-term, from gift vouchers, bottles of wine and flowers, to meals out and weekends away. What you choose to do will depend on your budget and your tenant, but some form of appreciation will make your tenant think twice about moving on.

19. Redecorate – or let your tenants do it. If it's been a couple of years since your tenants moved in, the decoration's probably in need of freshening up. Be prepared to do this. And if your tenants ask if they can decorate themselves – let them. Someone who's spent time and money sprucing up their home is less likely to move on. You can always ask to see the paint first to make sure the ceilings aren't going to be purple!

20. Finally, treat your tenants like you'd want to be treated yourself. Some landlords seem to think that every tenant is just waiting to rip them off, to ruin their property and to run off without paying the rent. If you're suspicious of your tenants, they'll be suspicious of you. Having an open and friendly but professional relationship with your tenants will make the life of the tenancy run smoothly, and should keep your tenant with you long-term.

Why online is the best place to advertise your property

Once upon a time (because that's how all the best stories begin), all you had to do to advertise a flat or house for rent was to slap up a card in the local newsagent's window, pay for a classified ad in the local paper, sit back for a month or three, and wait for tenants to call you.

Times have changed. If you're advertising in the local paper or the newsagent, you might get lucky, of course. But most likely, your target market is looking online, so that's where your ad should be too.

Online advertising has some huge advantages over traditional methods of finding a tenant. Most importantly, you're not restricted by geography. Local papers are – after all – local. If you're moving into an area, they're not much help to you. The internet has a global reach for a lower price than traditional advertising.

The internet's immediate too. If your tenant tells you at 8am on a Monday morning that she's moving out, you can have the accommodation advertised by 9am. If you only advertise in a local paper that comes out on Wednesday, you might be too late for the print deadline already and not be able to advertise for another week and a half. That's an extra week and a half you're sure to be without a tenant.

And internet advertising is just so much more fun! Photos, floor plans, video walkthroughs – all so much better than pay-per-word classifieds. Multi-media internet advertising lets your tenants get a view of and a feel for your property before they even need to view it. Not only does that make it more attractive to them, but it also cuts down the number of wasted viewings of unsuitable property, so it saves your time too.

The problem, perhaps, with online advertising is that there are just so many sites. How do you know where a prospective tenant will be looking? On one of the big property portals? On a newspaper's site? On a free listing site? Don't guess: just list on all of them. If that sounds like a daunting task, don't panic: Upad.co.uk makes it easy for you. Fill out one form, and we distribute your ad across more than 100 different property portals and sites.



Picture Perfect

Did you know that rental ads with pictures get four times as many enquiries as those without? If you want to avoid the dreaded void and let your property quickly, there's no doubt that photographs are key.

Tenants have told us that the living room is what they most want to see: unsurprising, as it's the room they'll spend the most time in awake. Next most important is the garden. Even if it's just a small terrace, outside space really adds to the rentability of your property, so make sure you include a picture of it.

Choosing the right time of day to take them is one of the most important aspects to getting a good interior photo. Take them at midday, and all you'll have is glare from the windows throwing the rest of the room into shadow. Choose the early morning or later evening, when the light is softer and there's less contrast between indoors and outdoors. Drawing the curtains and putting the lights on can also counteract bright light from outside. And do turn the flash off: it makes for over-lit spots and too-dark shadows. Instead, use a tripod to support the camera while you frame your shot perfectly. Ensure the camera is straight: pointing upwards or downwards can distort lines and make the room's proportions look all wrong.

Someone once said that photographing interiors is "10% creativity and 90% moving furniture". Don't feel that you have to include the whole room or everything in it: it's better to have a decent picture of part of the room than a terrible picture that crams everything in.

Before you take the picture, declutter. That means tidying up: you'd be amazed how many landlords don't even bother to do that, and a picture with the previous tenant's belongings strewn across it isn't going to get anyone running round to put down their deposit. But it also means removing all the small bits and pieces, pictures, vases and mirrors, that might make the room look nice when you're in it, but can make a photograph look over-busy.

Arty, aspirational shots of detail can be great to set the mood, but a designer doorhandle won't get your property let. Make sure you include plenty of documentary photos showing what the accommodation is actually like.

Some landlords with a lot of similar flats to rent out – a newly converted house, or a new-build block, for example – will use the same pictures for all the adverts. One magnolia-painted bedsit looks very like another, doesn't it? Not if you're a prospective tenant. Renters browsing through a lettings website are likely to see all your properties listed with the same photos: at best, you look like a landlord who can't be bothered, and at worst, you look like a fraudster who doesn't really have a property to rent at all. For the sake of a few extra minutes, take a picture of every rental you've got.

If you're feeling really adventurous, why not use video too? A short tour of the property can be filmed and uploaded to YouTube in a couple of minutes, but can work wonders for your viewings. It not only grabs tenants' attention, but cuts down on wasted viewings as people can take a preliminary look around right from their own living room.

How to set a rent that keeps everyone happy

You found the perfect property, sorted the mortgage, the redecoration and all that paperwork – and now you're ready to find your first tenant. But first, you need to decide what rent you're going to charge them.

You'll soon know if you've set the rent too low or too high. Too low, and your phone won't stop ringing; too high, and the only people who'll be calling are telemarketers. How do you set it just right?

Start by finding out the average price for your area. [Upad's rental interactive index](#) helps you find the average rent for your area by the number of bedrooms in the property. This gives you a good ballpark figure to start working with.

Take a look at similar properties currently available for rent in the same area. Our price search will let you select a range, rather than a specific price, so it's best to look both above and below your target rent. Whether you're looking online or at traditional agents, get to know your local rental marketplace. Which properties get snapped up immediately? Which sit there, month in, month out, empty? Can you find a "sweet spot", where the rent is as high as it can be without putting tenants off?

It's not just about determining the average in your area and charging that: don't sell yourself short. If your property offers off-street parking, a garden or even broadband, those facilities will all increase the desirability of your property and mean that you can charge a higher rent. Decent decor, flooring and furnishings, of course, also improve rental value.

You can't always get what you want...

Consider the effect of lowering your rent on void periods. If it keeps your property fully-occupied, you could actually be better off in the longer term charging a lower amount, than holding out for the full amount but having a couple of months where you earn nothing at all.

Tenants charged a lower rent are likely to stay longer, again, minimising void periods and keeping your income stream going. Higher rents will earn you more while a tenant is in the property, but you may find they move out more quickly and that filling their place is more difficult.

The strategy you use here will depend on demand in your area, so again, it's worth keeping an eye on the local market to see how quickly property is let and just how much supply is available. In areas where there is a plentiful supply of rental property, setting rents lower to keep your rentals competitive is probably the best advice.

Do you have what it takes to be a full-time landlord?

It looks like an easy way to make money: buy the right properties, sit back and wait for the millions to roll in. Before you take on a portfolio of tenants, ask yourself our four essential questions.

Do you have time?

There's more to being a landlord than counting the rent. A tenant who phones at midnight Friday about a burst pipe needs the problem dealt with now, not on Monday morning. If you like a strict 9 to 5, this may not be the career for you.

Do you have the organisational skills?

You don't have to be an accountant or a lawyer, but sometimes you'll feel like you are. If paperwork terrifies you, if the words "cash flow" bring you out in a cold sweat and you have no idea how to work out if you're making a profit or not, steer clear of rental property.

Do you have the people skills?

It's important to get on with your tenants. But it's equally important to remember you have a business relationship with them. If your tenant hasn't paid rent, can you insist they pay up or leave? If you're too soft-hearted, sooner or later, your tenant will take you for a ride.

Do you have the technical knowhow?

Every time you have to pay a handy-man to fix something on a property, that's a little more of your profits gone. It pays to be able to do the simple jobs yourself. Moreover, an eye for property maintenance helps you keep things in shape; being able to look over roofs, damp courses and insulation before the winter sets in, is essential for keeping your property maintained properly.

If the answer to any of these is "no", you might be better off using a property management service to look after your buy-to-lets, letting you get on with your life. Upad.co.uk offers a full property management service from just £60 per month: [find out more today](#).

10 tips to increase your rental's kerb appeal

Estate agents call it kerb appeal. It's that first glance at a property that tells you, almost without thinking, whether you're interested in living in it or not. And it's as important when you're renting as it is when you're buying.

If your rental property makes a great first impression, you should have no trouble attracting new tenants when you need them. But if the outside is tired, scruffy or in need of repair, however nice the inside is, you may find yourself facing a longer void period than you'd like. Follow our top ten tips to spruce up the outside of your property in an afternoon.

Tidy up the front door. If the paint's looking faded or chipped, give it a quick coat of fresh paint. Is the number visible? If not, your viewers may not even be able to find you! Give all metal fittings a quick clean.

Check the rest of the exterior paintwork and the windows. A quick clean of the windows not only makes the outside look better, it makes the inside brighter too.

Check guttering and downpipes too. Nothing puts a prospective tenant off like having the gutter leak on them while they're waiting for you to open the door!

If there's a gate, make sure it's tidy, clean and easy to open and close.

If the property has outside lighting, make sure it's working properly. Replace bulbs and give light fittings a clean: grimy lights make everything look dirty. If there is no exterior lighting – especially if you're showing the property in winter – consider fitting some. It's good for security, and it makes the home look so much more inviting.



How's the garden looking? Trim the grass. Cut back any plants that have been allowed to take over. Rake up leaves. And if it's a concrete wasteland, then add a few jazzy plants of your own: they make the place look cared for.

Allow some time to tidy up any outside space in front of the house. Gardens and parking spaces always make a property more popular, but if they've become a motorcycle graveyard or are covered in abandoned toys, they'll just put people off.

If there's a driveway, patio or path, make sure it's clear of debris, algae and moss: pressure washers make cleaning easy.

Properties with shared entrances have their own special challenges. Be prepared to tidy hallways, stairs etc. even though those may not be part of your own property. In flats with shared hallways, time viewings to avoid mealtimes so your viewers aren't greeted with cooking smells before they even get through the door.

Finally, always get there early when showing property so that you can have a last quick look around – both outside and in. There's nothing worse than having to apologetically tell a viewer that "it isn't normally like that".



When can I put the rent up?

There are three ways for a landlord to increase the rent payable on an assured shorthold tenancy:

1. by agreement with the tenant – normally by issuing a new fixed term tenancy agreement stating the new rent amount.
2. following a rent review clause in the tenancy agreement.
3. by notice of increase. Landlords may serve this once a year.

But bear in mind...

Just because you can, doesn't mean you should

Some landlords think they should put the rent up every year: we disagree. Especially if there's a surfeit of rental property in your area, *and* you've got great tenants who always pay on time, consider leaving your rent as it is. A little note, maybe with a bunch of flowers, a bottle of wine or a voucher for dinner at a local restaurant, saying thanks for being great tenants, no rent increase for you can make your tenants feel appreciated, and more importantly, keep them in your property.

Putting the rent up can have repercussions for your own expenditure too: a tenant asked to pay more money is more than likely to present a landlord or their agent with a list of all those niggling little maintenance jobs that need doing – and the cost of fixing those things can easily eat up any extra cash you'd have gained.



What is Upad.co.uk?

Upad.co.uk is a UK based nationwide online letting agency, harnessing online technology and outsourcing to deliver services previously only offered by high street agents, at a fraction of the cost.

On average, Landlords spend over half their annual net profit (£1,144) through agents to find a tenant¹. By comparison, Upad.co.uk offers an industry leading property marketing service for just £59 and a marketing plus personalised viewings package for just £350.

Upad.co.uk has spent two years developing its technology platform, service fulfilment model, and provider network to provide the highest possible level of services to its landlord customers at dramatically reduced prices.

1. The Rugg Report 2008 – 1.2m in 2006 and 1.88m in 2009



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