



OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS, BETWEEN TENANTS

A little planning and budgeting by landlords can turn a rental property vacancy into an opportunity. Not only is it much easier to work on an empty house but a spruce-up will almost certainly fetch a higher rent and attract more tenants. **Carolyn Brooke** shows you how

A SPRUCE-UP between tenants is an opportunity to improve the performance of a rental property. A nicer place will attract more tenants for you to choose from and achieve a higher rent.

You want your property to be in great shape to attract good tenants prepared to pay a premium rent and to look after it. Aside from obvious maintenance like fixing broken locks, handles and light fittings, there are many simple jobs you can do to rejuvenate your property in a short amount of time.

From new carpets, paint, benchtops or curtains to creating a small outdoor area to installing insulation, upgrades will be noticed and welcomed by prospective tenants. A spruce-up is generally superficial work that is easy and quick to do and doesn't require any structural or building changes.

Mark Trafford, of Maintain to Profit, works with landlords on all manners of renovation, maintenance and decoration. He says it is about being better than the competition.

A well-planned and executed spruce-up that is project managed can be done in a couple of days.

"The ultimate goal is for a prospective tenant to really like it from the outside then to walk in and think 'I really want to live

here' and then when they move in to treat it as their own," Trafford says.

A common mistake with landlords is not being prepared for vacancies and not planning or budgeting for necessary work. Not only will this unexpectedly sting your wallet but will likely cause a longer period of vacancy while you organise everything. Downtime = lost rent.

Ideally you should inspect the property before the tenants leave so you can plan ahead. It can be difficult to thoroughly look through a rental while tenants are living in it, with furniture and other items in the way, but it is still worthwhile.

"Most property managers and landlords generally don't have a really great look around because most aren't comfortable in other people's homes – they don't want to be opening wardrobes looking for damp."

Asking exiting tenants for feedback about the property can also help identify areas needing attention. Research what other properties are renting for in your area by looking on Trade Me and talking to other landlords. A higher than average rent can easily be achieved for a nicely presented and functional place.

Landlords can also be unrealistic about the costs of doing work, Trafford says. If you know that a kitchen replacement is coming up, then budget for it.

**NEW CURTAINS,
DOOR HANDLES
AND LIGHT
FITTINGS ARE
INEXPENSIVE
IMPROVEMENTS.**



PHOTOS: RESENE

“We have people ring us and say ‘our property became vacant last week, we’ve just been to look at it and it needs a new bathroom and a new kitchen’, we say that’s \$25,000 and they say ‘we don’t have the money.’”

When planning work on your rental, improving street appeal should be a priority. Street appeal is just as important when renting a property as it is when selling. Mow the lawn, tidy gardens, paint fences and replace tired letterboxes. Don’t forget to mow the berm, too.

“Tenants tell us they drive up to properties and just drive off – that is just ridiculous.”

Once the front of the property is taken care of, turn to the small jobs. Go through the house room by room noting door handles, curtain rails, light fittings, door locks and window latches. Replace or repair anything broken or looking poor.

Security is hugely important to tenants, Trafford says, so make sure all locks, latches and outdoor lights are working as it will be noticed by prospective tenants.

When it comes to the bigger jobs like doing a kitchen or a bathroom, think it through carefully. Ask yourself if a replacement is actually needed if a repair would suffice. Consider also the impact of the work in terms of its attractiveness to tenants.

A new benchtop and door handles, along with a repaint of cabinetry, might be

all that is needed in the kitchen to make it look clean and well presented. Tenants like clean work surfaces so anything that is peeling, water damaged or looks unclean should be replaced.

Broken appliances such as ovens or dishwashers are an annoyance for tenants and landlords alike. Remember a tidy, reconditioned oven will often do the trick rather than forking out for a new oven. A rangehood is always worthwhile to reduce moisture and smells from cooking.

In the bathroom, a coat of white paint and a large mirror will go a long way. Even a new shower curtain is an improvement. Or it might be that new shower fittings and taps are all that are needed. Opt for good quality bathroom taps and faucets as they take a hammering.

Make sure ventilation in the bathroom is adequate by installing a fan. Wiring it into

the light switch so it goes on automatically is a great idea.

Recarpeting a place is usually a sure-fire way to increase rent. It looks and smells amazing. Use a tenant-friendly carpet like a good quality solution dyed nylon rather than anything too expensive.

New curtains, door handles and light fittings are inexpensive improvements. Coupled with a fresh coat of paint, the place will look great. Always opt for paint that can be wiped and cleaned, so it is easier for tenants to clean. Wallpaper in good condition can be sealed and painted over. Washable wallpaper is an option for imperfect walls but will likely cost more than painting.

Creating a small paved area outdoors can be easy and cheap to do and is another selling point to prospective tenants. Putting up trellises for privacy is another good idea.



If you are not planning to do the work yourself then remember that contractors usually need quite a bit of notice. You can’t expect to phone a contractor when the property becomes empty and have them in the next working day.

You may also want to consider doing a meth test. Some property management companies offer this service.

In between tenancies is also a good time to improve health and safety aspects, especially with a building warrant of fitness for rentals in the pipeline.

Make sure your rental property is fitted with an adequate number of working smoke alarms. Check insulation by looking under the house and in the roof space, and remember to look into the various funding initiatives on offer.

Check railings, stairs and decks are all safe and up to standard. Make sure balconies and decks are draining well to prevent water build up and sort out slippery decks, paths and driveways.

Coming into winter is also a good time for a chimney sweep or a service for wood and pellet burner fires. Fix any broken electrical sockets which can be hazards. Check the roof, chimney and flashings for any signs of problems. Clean gutters annually and check all drains and gutters for tree root damage.

Thoroughly check for damp and mould and that there is adequate insulation and ventilation (bathroom and kitchen fans should help with this). Always remind tenants to regularly open windows to bring air in. ■

**SPRUCE-UP
WITH IMPACT**

- Mow the lawn, tidy the garden, paint the fence and replace the letterbox if shabby
- Repaint interior for a fresh new look
- Ensure kitchen surfaces are clean and replace old benchtops that look messy or unhygienic
- Replace door handles and repaint cabinets
- Spruce-up bathroom with white paint and new tapware, mirror and shower curtain
- The look, feel and smell of new carpet is hugely appealing to tenants
- Do obvious maintenance like fixing broken locks, handles and light fittings
- Create a small outdoor space with pavers and pot plants and use trellis for privacy
- Help the property look after itself by cleaning gutters, fixing leaks, attaching loose downpipes and installing insulation, a kitchen rangehood and bathroom fan
- Always opt for tenant-proof products like quality tapware and solution dyed nylon carpet.