

# Rental scams - red flags to look out for

By [Mark Burt](#)

17 Oct 2018

For the prospective tenant, renting a property should be a relatively easy task without hassle - provided you are well-organised and informed. Once you have found a property you wish to lease, saved up a deposit and have met the minimum requirements, the agent or landlord is then entrusted to see through the deal.



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However, the emergence of social media and online scamming has grown exponentially over recent years with so called 'hijacked ads'. In this scam, criminals make use of real properties that have been listed on legitimate sites. The ad's contact information is modified and gets relisted, usually on lesser known websites, where unsuspecting tenants fall victim to rental scams.

Tenants should only search for rental properties on well-known property portals such as Property24, Private Property and IOL Property. These portals follow a stringent security process wherein they are required to establish ownership of each property before listing. Finding a property listed on one of these websites is a good indicator of the validity of the rental. Consider properties that are listed by a reputable agency. Find a brand that you or someone that you know trust and contact them about the property you are interested in.

## Be aware of the following red flags:

- Be cautious if the landlord or agent refuses to or cannot meet you in person. An agent or landlord will always do their utmost to meet you at your convenience.
- Be wary if an agent or landlord express enthusiasm or insists on renting out a property without having done a thorough background and credit check.
- Be cautious if you are asked to pay a deposit, portion of a deposit or your rent without having signed a lease agreement or having had a proper viewing of the property.
- Be suspicious if the agent or landlord does not ask to sign a lease agreement due to a distorted verbal agreement. Always insist on signing a lease agreement and going through it thoroughly as well as keeping a copy for yourself.
- Be aware if your agent or landlord asks you to pay your deposit or rent in cash. This is dangerous for many obvious reasons and is important to have a paper trail.

Conduct the necessary due diligence before entering into a potentially detrimental agreement. If you have taken the time to

ask the right questions, then your risk is minimised accordingly. Don't be afraid to have an attorney investigate the validity of the owner and contract you have been presented with, if you are not using an agent. This will come at an extra cost but will give you peace of mind.

Always make the utmost effort to do your research and ensure you have a paper trail to cover yourself. Deal with an agency who is able to offer you all the security and property checks you may need before you sign.

Lastly, if after everything something still feels wrong with the listing, the landlord's story changes or something just seems odd, then halt the process to reevaluate.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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