

View your prospective property, virtually

TheRoomLink.co.za, an online portal dedicated to matching students and young professionals with safe and secure accommodation, has introduced a video application for viewing properties in the digital space.



Virtual viewing allows potential tenants and landlords to 'meet' and 'see' a property for rent without even being in the same city. This is done using video calls from a tablet, laptop or Smartphone utilising Skype or an equivalent such as Tango which is available for PC, iOS and Android devices, Google Hangout, Facetime, or Blackberry 10.

The video concept is certainly not new, but the application has not been widely used for the virtual viewing of rental properties, nor recognised before as a solution to a large gap in the student accommodation market. Properties can be viewed either in real-time (akin to a Skype video call), allowing a conversation between the landlord and potential tenant or pre-recorded. Both methods can be used in conjunction with the other and videos can even be loaded onto sites such as YouTube. Although pre-recorded virtual viewing is not new, TheRoomLink is the only rental website utilising the application.

"This is a safeguard and time saving route for both landlords and prospective tenants," says Liezl Hesketh of TheRoomLink.co.za, an online portal dedicated to matching students and young professionals with safe and secure accommodation. "Instead of inviting many unknown strangers to pass through your doors, this gives an opportunity to narrow down to a few."

Technology to assist out of town and international students

Hesketh believes that virtual viewing will also fill a much needed gap for students preparing to attend an out-of-town university, but who are unable to travel to see the rooms ahead of time due to time or financial constraints. This is especially good news for international students who wish to study in South Africa.

"This gap became apparent through our work helping students find accommodation," says Hesketh. "We found that many students were unable to actually visit a rental property so we realised that we would need to offer a reliable alternative for these students, something that works for both parties, in an accessible and affordable way."

This is reiterated by Liani Lombard, marketing manager at Off Campus Rental, "We are very excited to utilise virtual viewing

and the doors this will open for us," says "To date we do have a policy which requires potential tenants to visit a property which is designed to protect both a tenant and the owner. However, this is not always possible to achieve, especially with international and out of town students."

Off Campus Rental is an estate agency service provider to students, potential students, and other interested parties around the University of Pretoria.

Accepting accommodation without viewing can have negative repercussions for both parties. A tenant will be required to sign a lease and pay a deposit to secure the room, but without having first viewed the property, a few surprises may be apparent upon arrival. However, without virtual viewing this has often been the only option for those seeking accommodation out of their residential area.

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