

What to look for when selecting a real estate agent

Property investment is a costly affair, so one should take as much care in selecting the right sales or rental agent as one would choosing a babysitter.



Source: Supplied

The Rawson Property Group's regional sales and commercial manager, Craig Mott, and national rentals manager, Jacqui Savage, share their advice on the attributes you should be looking out for when choosing a real estate or rental agent.

Appropriate professional credentials

Real estate is a regulated industry with very specific professional requirements. According to Mott, the easiest way for a property owner to check that an agent conforms to these standards is to request a copy of their Fidelity Fund Certificate.

"FFCs are granted annually to qualified agents registered with the Estate Agency Affairs Board," he says. "Any agent without a valid certificate is legally prohibited from practicing."

A valid FFC is essential, but it only proves that an agent meets the industry's bare minimum professional requirements. Savage says ongoing professional training is a more revealing indicator of an agent's dedication to staying on top of their game.

"The rentals market, in particular, operates in a complex regulatory environment," she says. "Staying up to date on the latest legal and procedural developments is key to protecting landlords' interests and keeping them on the right side of the law."

Good brand visibility and top quality marketing

Good real estate agents tend to attract more clients. That means you'll likely see more of their "For Sale" or "To Let" signboards in your area than those of other agencies or real estate brands.

"This is a good sign for a number reasons," says Mott. "Firstly, it shows the agent is active in your area and has first-hand knowledge of local trends and market conditions. Secondly, it suggests they provide good service – agents without a strong track record struggle to build a good customer base."

"Buyers and tenants are also more likely to approach the most popular local real estate agent to keep an eye out for properties that meet their needs," adds Savage. "This can give landlords and sellers a valuable opportunity to get their foot in the door before their competition."

Visibility is about more than just signboards on lampposts. Savage says researching an agent's online presence is essential as well.

"Check their website, their social media pages and, of course, their active listings," she says. "You want someone who presents a strong professional image, engages with people successfully, and creates compelling listings on all the major online portals, complete with useful descriptions and high-quality photography."

Word of mouth referrals

According to Mott, word of mouth referrals are one of the biggest ways good real estate and rentals agents attract new clients.

"Nothing beats the security of knowing the person you're trusting with your property has already done exceptional work for friends and family," he says.

If you don't have any personal contacts in your area, he suggests reaching out to friends and family or on local social media groups to get first-hand stories from the community on their real estate experiences.

Tech-enabled team

A great online presence is the tip of the iceberg when it comes to a good real estate or rental agent's use of technology. Mott says virtual tours, virtual showhouses and virtual meetings have all become indispensable for both sales and rentals, as have a variety of technology-driven support services that enable agents to perform more efficiently and effectively than ever before.

"Navigating today's property market takes far more time, skill and specialisation than it used to," he says. "Without the support of technology, it's virtually impossible for agents and agencies to effectively fulfil all their obligations and still provide quality advice and personal service to their clients."

Comprehensive services

Both Mott and Savage highly recommend choosing an agent or agency that can deliver the full suite of required property services, under one roof. For sales, that includes in-house bond origination and conveyancing. For rentals, it includes in-house accounting teams handling rental collections, account payments and financial reporting.

Good personality fit

As a landlord or seller, you'll likely be working very closely with your real estate partner for some time. Finding an agent who "gets you" and is a pleasure to deal with can make that process a lot more enjoyable.

"Ideally, you want to find someone who can become a long-term real estate advisor," says Savage. "Someone you trust to help you make the most of your property investments, now and in the future, whether that's through rentals, sales or purchases."

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