A GUIDE FROM WESTMONT PROPERTY

Avoid These 20 Costly Mistakes Before You List Your Rental

20 things every self-managing landlord needs to get right in 2026 — and where to get help with each one. Pricing, marketing, screening, compliance, and your time — all covered in one place.

BEFORE YOU LIST AGAIN

The Rules Changed Under You

If you own a rental in California, the landscape shifted in the last two years — and more changes land in 2026. None of it is a reason to panic. It's a reason to get organized. This guide walks through the 20 things that separate a listing that rents fast at a strong price from one that sits empty for weeks — grouped into five areas: pricing, marketing, screening, compliance, and your own time.

AB 12

Security deposits capped at one month's rent for most landlords.

AB 2801

Photo documentation now expected at move-in and move-out.

2026 Leases

A working stove and refrigerator must be included at move-in.

AB 414

New rules for how deposits get refunded — including electronic returns.

Price It Right the First Time

Pricing is the single biggest lever on both speed and rent amount — and it's the one most self-managing owners get wrong in one direction or the other. Price too high and the listing goes stale. Price too low and you've given away money for the life of the lease.

What to Get Right

- Know the real number — not last year's comp
- Rent in most CA markets has moved in 6–12 months
- Decide upfront: speed or premium? You can't always have both
- Every day past two weeks trains renters to think something's wrong

Why It Matters

A stale listing doesn't just cost you time — it costs you leverage. Renters who see a property sitting for three weeks assume there's a problem, and they'll negotiate harder. Getting the price right from day one protects both your rent amount and your negotiating position.

Free Resource: A simple rent-comp worksheet you can run yourself. Find it under the resources tab at westmontproperty.com.

Get the Listing in Front of the Right Renters

A lot of rent-by-owner listings only go out to one or two sites. Reach is often the real reason a good property sits vacant for a month. The good news: you don't need a big budget — you need the right distribution.

Syndicate Beyond Zillow

Renters search differently across platforms. Being on more of them — Apartments.com, HotPads, Craigslist — shortens time-on-market significantly.

Invest in Photos First

Listings with strong photos get more clicks and more qualified inquiries per click. The photos do a lot of the pre-screening for you before you ever send a reply.

Write for the Neighborhood

Parking, commute, schools, and pet policy usually outweigh square footage. Write your description around what actually matters to renters in that specific area.

Free Resource: A listing description template that covers what renters actually search for. Find it at westmontproperty.com.

Screen Without the Guesswork

This is where the fear lives for most owners — and it's a legitimate fear. A bad tenant is expensive and slow to fix. The antidote is a consistent, written process that protects you legally and financially.

1

Run the Same Process Every Time

Credit check, income verification, eviction history, and a rental reference call — every single applicant. Consistency is your legal protection under fair housing law.

2

Set Written Standards Before You Look

Define your screening criteria in writing before you see a single application. Decisions based on criteria — not gut feeling — are defensible if challenged.

3

Use Lease Language That Holds Up

A lease copied from the internet often doesn't reflect current California law. That becomes a real problem the first time something goes wrong with a tenant.

Free Resource: A tenant-screening criteria checklist that stays inside fair housing guidelines. Find it at westmontproperty.com.

The 2026 California Compliance Checklist

This is the section most self-managing owners haven't fully caught up on yet — and it's the one with real financial exposure if you miss it. Here's what changed and what it means for you.

Security Deposits — AB 12

Most landlords are now capped at **one month's rent** for both furnished and unfurnished units. A narrow exception allows up to two months for owners with two or fewer rental properties and four or fewer total units — but that exception **never applies to active-duty military tenants**.

Move-In Documentation — AB 2801

Photo documentation of unit condition at move-in and move-out is now expected practice, and it's what makes a deposit deduction defensible if a tenant disputes it. Without photos, you're relying on memory — and memory doesn't hold up in small claims court.

Appliances — 2026 Lease Requirement

For any lease signed or renewed in 2026, the unit must include a **working stove and refrigerator** at move-in, unless the tenant opts to supply their own at signing. This is a new habitability standard that applies to virtually all residential leases.

Deposit Refunds & Fair Housing

Deposit Refunds — AB 414

Deposits must be returned within **21 days** with an itemized statement and receipts for deductions over $125. Starting in 2026, if the tenant paid electronically, the refund must also come back electronically — unless both sides agreed in writing to another method.

Missing the 21-day window without a documented good-faith estimate can expose you to damages up to twice the deposit.

Fair Housing — No Exceptions

Ad language, screening criteria, and showing practices all fall under fair housing law. This applies to a single-property owner exactly the same as it does to a large management company.

Small differences in how you treat applicants — even well-intentioned ones — are where complaints start. Written, consistent standards are your best protection.

Free Resource: A one-page 2026 California compliance checklist you can keep on file. Find it at westmontproperty.com.

Get Your Time and Your Money Back

Even when the price, the marketing, and the paperwork are all right, self-managing still costs something most owners don't put a number on: their own time. Here's what tends to wear owners down over time.

Showings & No-Shows

Fielding showing requests, no-shows, and reschedules one text at a time — it adds up to hours every week during a vacancy.

Maintenance at 9pm

Being the person who gets the maintenance call at night, and then having to find someone to actually fix it — on your dime and your schedule.

Vacancy Days Stacking Up

Turnover work that doesn't get scheduled in advance means empty weeks between tenants — and every empty week is real money gone.

Chasing Rent Payments

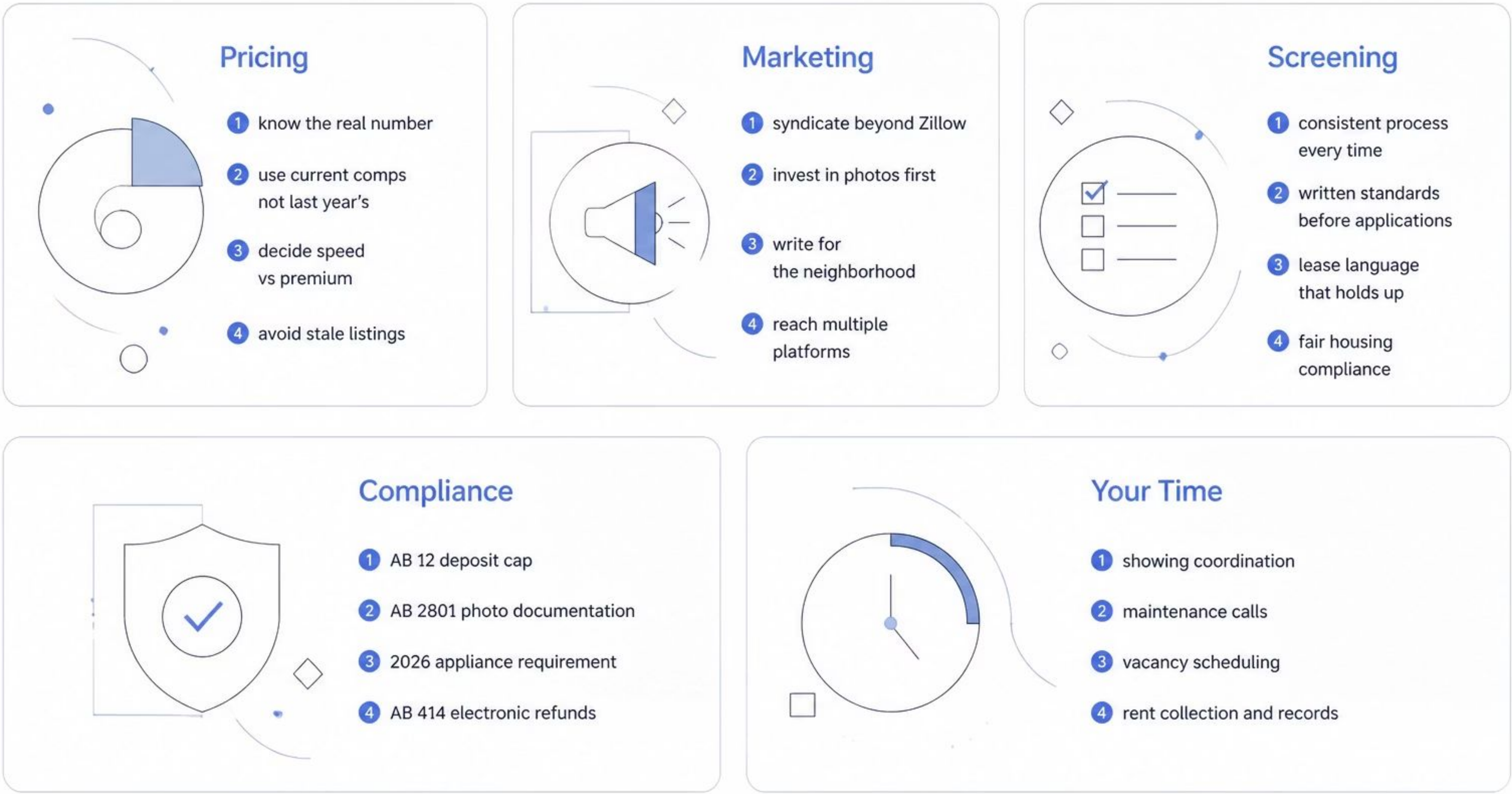
Having the awkward late-rent conversation every month — and keeping records clean enough that tax season isn't a scramble.

Free Resource: A vacancy-cost calculator that shows what an empty week actually costs you. Find it at westmontproperty.com.

THE BIG PICTURE

The 20 Things at a Glance

Here's everything covered in this guide, organized by the five areas that determine how fast your property rents and how much it earns. Use this as your personal checklist before your next listing goes live.



THE LAST ONE

Peace of Mind Is Also a Strategy

Everything above is fixable with enough time and attention. The honest question most owners land on eventually isn't *"can I do this myself"* — it's *"do I want this to be something I think about every week."*

This guide is yours to use either way. If you'd rather see what it looks like to hand the whole list off, you can get a **free rental analysis** for your specific property — no obligation, just a clear picture of what it would rent for and what it would take off your plate.

Self-Manage with Confidence

Use the free resources at westmontproperty.com to handle each of the 20 items on your own terms.

Get a Free Rental Analysis

See exactly what your property would rent for and what full management would look like for your situation.

Get My Free Rental Analysis

Browse Free Resources