

Taking care of business



Fancy earning an income from a property management business in France? Glynis Shaw gets the lowdown from a couple who do just that



Tips on setting up a letting management business

■ **Set up your business at the local Chambre de Métiers** under the correct *statut*. There are many! You have to consider your income (you can be VAT-exempt up to an income of around €33,000), what level of costs you will have (the status of *auto-entrepreneur* does not suit businesses with a lot of expenses), and whether you feel able to cope with the accounting. A *micro-entreprise* frees you up from this, but may not be advantageous to you. Research thoroughly and take the time to get this first stage right. Changing it later is always expensive, always lengthy and sometimes impossible.

■ **Obtain the all-important SIRET number**, making sure that you have declared all the possible activities that you think you may be involved in. Adding an activity later can cost as much as €200.

■ **Take out proper business insurance** to cover what you do.

■ **Offer as many services as you can**, or have a reliable team on hand. Owners are not keen on finding out that you can manage their marketing and the garden but are not able to offer them a cleaner, for example. You'll need to build up a bank of knowledge and skills (especially for managing swimming pools). Also build up a reliable team of builders, plumbers, boiler engineers and electricians.

■ **Do not be tempted to offer services for which you are not registered.** The French authorities come down very hard indeed on those who do. Cleaning a rental property, for example, requires you to be inside their property – so make sure you are registered for this before doing so.

■ **Find your unique selling point.** What can you do that is different from (and better than) other businesses offering similar services?

■ **Make as many contacts as you can.** It is usually easier to find properties to manage that have just been bought by someone who wishes to rent them out, so estate agents and builders can help. Talk to people, and spread the word!

■ **Don't try to work only with British owners.** French holiday property owners can often find it hard to tap into the UK holidaymaker market, and if you have a good level of French language then this can be hugely rewarding.

■ **Be ready to clock up the miles on the car.** France is big and your properties are unlikely to be bunched closely together.

■ **Offer a personal meet-and-greet service** to all arriving guests. This is time-consuming and diesel-thirsty, but guests appreciate it and so do the owners.

■ **Make time to improve your French** if it isn't good already. You never know when you'll have to ring a boiler engineer, a local builder or the emergency services. le-cloup.com



Many owners of second homes in France want to let their property for holidays when they are not in residence. While some are happy to organise the letting process themselves, others prefer to hand it over to somebody who is on the ground in France, has enough professional experience and is reliable.

Here we talk to the owners of a thriving business in letting and property management, ask them what it takes to be successful and pass on some tips to property owners who decide to use such a service.

Career change

Steve and Carinne Trinder moved to the countryside near the riverside village of Varen in Tarn-et-Garonne in 2004, close to the famously beautiful village of St-Antonin-Noble-Val, voted one of France's favourite villages in 2015. They now run a thriving property letting and management business.

"We were teachers in the UK but wanted a new career in France," explains Steve. "This area has a high level of tourism, so that seemed a logical opportunity. After periods of washing up in a restaurant, working for a local estate agent and running our own gîte, our business was born."

At first the Trinders had been looking after gardens and pools for owners, who started asking for more services. "Perhaps the biggest development in our business came about when

we realised that, after successfully renting out our own gîte for several years, we could offer to do the marketing for other owners who wanted to run holiday lets. We made business plans and researched how we could do this in a strictly legal fashion."

Through word of mouth, advertising and legwork the business took off, and it now manages around 30 properties for a mix of British, French, Belgian and Dutch owners. The Trinders have consciously grown the business at a steady pace. "Growing too quickly without being properly ready or equipped could lead to letting people down – and this business is founded principally on trust and reputation," Steve affirms.

Services offered include marketing, changeover cleaning and laundry, pools and gardens, personally meeting guests and looking after the properties out of season. The Trinders co-ordinate a team of six who offer cleaning and gardening services – all French locals. They firmly believe that using French people wherever possible is an excellent way to help the integration process and earn appreciation from the community.

Path to prosperity

What do Steve and Carinne see as the keys to success? "Determination, as with any business. Property owners don't beat a path to your door. You need to be proactive in your marketing and professional in everything you do.

A good website is essential, but nowhere near as important as looking after your clients, who are entrusting you with the well-being of their property – and their income from it – for

much of the year.

"Building up a good relationship with property owners is vital as they need to feel reassured that they have a trusted team on the ground – people who can go out at any time, whatever the weather, to look after both the property itself and the guests who are staying in it.

"We also remember that owners love repeat bookings – and holidaymakers only

return if they have felt well looked-after. If that means unblocking a washing machine drain for them late on a Saturday evening, so be it!" ■

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Tips for owners on using a letting management company

■ Ask to see the SIRET number of the company, their 'Kbis' document (business registration), proof of business insurance and the price of their services in writing, as well as numerous references – and ensure you follow them up.

■ Ensure the company allows you to take bookings privately too, without paying their booking fee. If you are

asked to sign a contract which effectively hands over the property to them for renting from June to September, you may find that they ask for their booking fee even when it is you wanting to take a fortnight at the property.

■ Before you rent out the property each year, complete a *déclaration en mairie des meublés de*

tourisme form (a simple form) and send it to the local *mairie* (town hall). This doesn't entail any extra taxation, but it is a legal requirement for all rental properties and it pays to do things properly.

■ Add 'gîte insurance' to your property insurance. It costs a pittance per month, but covers you for having guests there.

