

# Identity theft scams: protecting yourself from rent fraud

 By [Michelle Dickens](#)

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Rent is, in most cases, the biggest monthly expense for the average consumer. So it shouldn't come as a surprise then that scam artists are out to target landlords through identity theft in an effort to avoid paying their dues. This particular type of fraud is quite common - and what is most concerning is how easy it is to become a victim.

We've seen a definite rise in tenants using identity theft to scam their landlords. This is most often accomplished either through the manipulation of ID documentation or through the theft of a family member's identity.

One of the recent incidents we encountered involved a tenant who signed a lease with the landlord and proceeded to hand over a false proof of payment. Not knowing that the payment was false, the landlord handed over the keys. It was several days before they realised they had not actually been paid and issued a letter of demand. Initially, the letter of demand could not be processed because they had been given the wrong ID number. The landlord, with the help of TPN, tracked down the correct ID number and issued the letter of demand.

## Vindictive tenant

By the time the landlord was successful in evicting his tenant, he had sustained the loss of eight months' rent as well as an outstanding electricity bill - not to mention the fact that the tenant was vindictive, vandalising property on departure.

I urge landlords to protect themselves from this type of rent scam by being thorough in their administrative processes. Never accept a photocopy of an identity document as valid ID, make sure that you see a copy of the original and that the person in front of you is the same person photographed in the document. Also remain strict about running credit checks on potential tenants. In cases in which landlords perceive red flags, credit bureaus such as TPN are able to assist with further background research.

## Co-signing a lease agreement

Other fraud tactics that landlords should be aware of include tenants conning other individuals without negative credit histories into co-signing a lease agreement with them so that their own credit history will be overlooked, as well as tenants stealing the identities of family members or altering a number on their ID document.

The alteration of isolated numbers, such as date of birth, should be relatively easy to spot, as naturally the ID number will no longer match. In cases such as these, typing the ID number into the credit bureau will quickly provide evidence that something is amiss.

With incidents of fraud and identity theft on the increase, landlords simply cannot afford to be caught unawares. Maintaining strict procedure during tenant screening and the signing of lease agreements is vital if they are to avoid falling victim to rent scams.

## ABOUT MICHELLE DICKENS

Michelle Dickens co-founded TPN Credit Bureau in 2000 and is now its CEO. TPN Credit Bureau is a registered credit bureau which specialises in the education and property markets.  
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