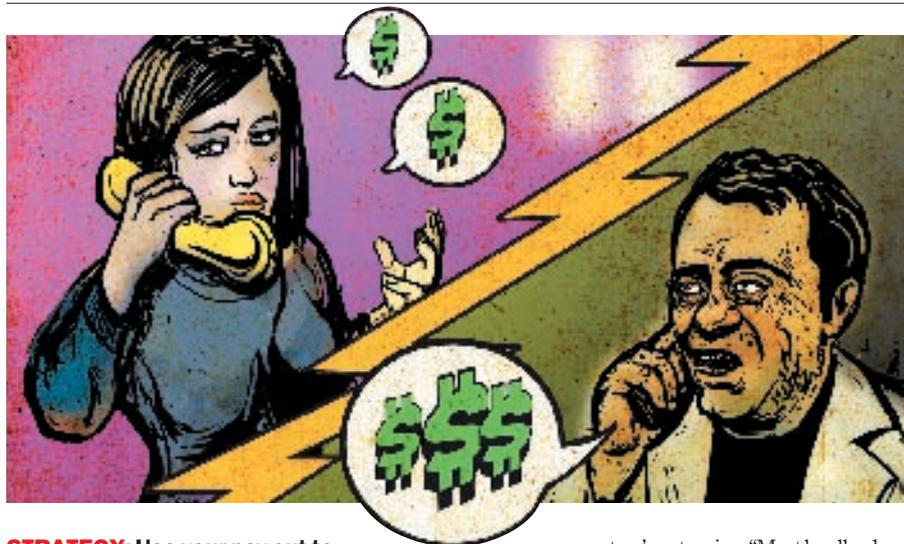


# Lower your rent!

Thanks to a crappy economy, you might be able to negotiate a bargain. Here are three tested strategies. By **Cristina Velocci**



**STRATEGY: Use your pay cut to your advantage.**

“People’s situations have changed. The rental market has changed, and landlords and management companies know it has,” says Beau Nova, a senior associate broker at Corcoran, who recommends honesty as the best policy. “If you’re making less money but you’re still working and paying your rent on time, the landlord may actually [lower your rent] because they’d rather not have you leave or default.” Dan Rosenthal was laid off last November, and when he couldn’t find someone to sublet his Garment District studio, he decided to come clean. The minute he fessed up, his landlord offered to knock \$200 off per month. “I knew I was coming from a position of power because she needs somebody to pay the rent,” he says. “She didn’t want to lose me as a tenant.” However, depending on the type of building you live in, this approach could backfire. “Keep in mind,” Nova cautions, “depending on how much less you make, you may not even qualify for that apartment anymore.”

**If you’re making less money, the landlord may actually lower your rent.**

**STRATEGY: Extend your lease—early.**

While you might not have as much negotiating power if you’re in the middle of a lease, you have more of an edge as you get closer to its end. “A lease is a binding contract, and the landlord has no reason to renegotiate,” says an Upper West Side landlord with 39 years’ experience and more than 250 tenants (who’s asked to remain anonymous lest all his own tenants start haggling). But make the call about two months before the lease ends and you could schmooze your way into a lower rate in exchange for

a year or two’s extension. “Most landlords are amenable in this market to longer leases, because it lets them keep tenants they have a relationship with,” he says. Just be sure not to wait until the last minute. Give enough notice to show “that you’re looking to do this from a point of mutual respect” and not trying to pull a fast one.

**STRATEGY: Play the economy card and just ask—many landlords now expect it.**

When it was time for Jen Winter, 24, to renew the lease on her “teeny tiny little studio” on the Upper West Side, she received a letter from her management company that opened the door to negotiation. “My rent didn’t increase but it didn’t decrease, which I was hoping it would, and it said something along the lines of, ‘If this doesn’t meet your needs, feel free to contact the leasing agent to discuss it,’” she says. “I think they were prepared for everyone that they’re dealing with to try and negotiate.” Winter made the call, arguing that since rental rates have decreased, she could easily find a similar apartment for less—and had \$100 per month knocked off with no push back. Although she’s happy to have received a discount at all, she would’ve liked a steeper one. “I wish I did more market research and made more comparisons,” she says. For those of you contemplating this strategy—even if it’s not so helpfully offered by your own management company—try sites like PadMapper and My Apartment Map to see what similar apartments in your neighborhood are renting for. ■

**MYTHBUSTER:** Is it true that landlords are releasing vast quantities of warehoused rent-stabilized apartments? By **Ted Hesson**



Deep down, we all have the same irrational fantasy: living in a \$400-a-month downtown apartment—preferably southern-facing—that we can stay in well into Czar Bloomberg’s glorious ninth term. So it’s not surprising that during the current economic nosedive, rumors are circulating about cash-strapped landlords opening up hidden stockpiles of rent-regulated apartments to the public.

Warehousing—holding on to vacant apartments for profit—drew scorn from housing groups and city legislators in the 1980s, when some landlords kept empty units in the hopes that their buildings would eventually be converted into co-ops. But does this practice still happen? And if so, are the landlords who do it—perhaps themselves laid low by the economy—suddenly unclenching their viselike grips on those coveted pads?

Not quite. “You hear of individual instances, but in terms of widespread hoarding I haven’t heard of any of that recently,” says John Fisher, the director of Tenant Net, a website that specializes in NYC and New York State housing issues. “I haven’t heard of it since the early ’90s, and that was what was left over from the ’80s.” Magda Cruz, who represents owners’ interests on the NYC Rent Guidelines Board, agrees: “We do not see owners holding apartments off the market,” she says, “or any particular trend suggesting that apartments are not being improved when there is a vacancy.”

These days, it’s more common for landlords to renovate a vacant unit and get it back on the market as quickly as possible—the exact opposite of hoarding—because he or she can raise the rent by a certain percentage of the cost of the upgrade. When the raised monthly rent exceeds \$2,000, a unit becomes destabilized, and can be let at market rate. According to Tom Waters, a housing policy analyst who interprets data on rent-regulated apartments at the Community Service Society of New York, “That’s why you can’t find a rent-stabilized apartment anywhere in Manhattan below Harlem.”