

Why you shouldn't challenge your business rates yourself

The Valuation Office Agency (VOA) likes to stress that you can appeal against your business rates without an agent to represent you. They would say this because the VOA doesn't like agents. This may be true but agents have an annoying habit of proving that their valuations are incorrect and securing business rates savings for ratepayers. Although ratepayers can lodge an appeal themselves, the vast majority instruct an agent and for good reason.

Here are some reasons why you need professional help to reduce your rates:

1. The Valuation Office is the enemy

The Valuation Office Agency is an executive division of HMRC. It has one job and that is to defend their own business rates assessments and therefore the tax the government collects. They may tell you that you don't need an agent and that they will consider your case but don't be fooled: they don't want to reduce your rates. The whole appeal process is littered with procedural hurdles designed to trip up the uninitiated. Miss a deadline and you can lose your right to appeal.

2. You get one shot to get your rates right.

The outcome of your appeal will last for up to 7 years subject to there being no changes to the property. If you get the agreement wrong you are stuck with it. We are regularly contacted by ratepayers who have settled the appeal themselves and the final value has been wrong. In some instances these companies miss out on substantial savings. There is very little that can be done about these situations. Settle at your peril.

3. Experience

The VOA are very good at putting forward plausible arguments as to why their rates assessment of your property is correct. Evidence may be presented to you on which they have based their valuation but that doesn't make the rates assessment correct. It is common for the VOA to analyse rental evidence incorrectly or to present evidence as reliable when in fact it is not. An experienced agent will be able to spot these tricks and challenge the VOA's approach.

4. Appearing at Valuation Tribunal

If you can't agree your business rates appeal with the VOA then you will have to proceed to a Valuation Tribunal hearing. This is a hearing in front of a lay panel with a clerk and there are strict procedural rules relating to the hearing. You will have to present your case, cross examine the Valuation Officer and be cross examined yourself. Unrepresented ratepayers tend not to fair well at Tribunal and it is not for the faint hearted.

If you want the best chance of reducing your business rates then call RatesRecovery on 01865 594070 or email us at enquires@ratesrecovery.com. RatesRecovery are Chartered Surveyors and members of the RICS.

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