

REALTOR'S GUIDE TO USING PHOTOS IN REAL ESTATE MARKETING

Photographs are a central component of marketing a property. **The primary function that photos perform is to get prospective buyers to come look at the property.**

In today's market where 80% to 90% of home buyers start their home search online a little thumbnail of the front of the property becomes the first reason buyers choose to look at more photos of your listing over the 20 others at the same price and location. Great interior photos in turn become the reason a buyer chooses to come look at your listing instead of the others. As pointed out by Vivian Toy, in her classic February, 2007 New York Times article, *Making Every Pixel Count*, **"a picture can be worth more than a thousand words, much, much more."**

For these reasons having strong, compelling photos that show off the selling points of your listing is critically important to marketing success.

As the marketing expert in charge of selling your client's property it is all important these days to understand the way marketing photos work so you can use photography to maximum benefit whether you are shooting your own photos or hiring a professional photographer.

Here are 10 basic aesthetic principles that you can use to give your marketing photos maximum effectiveness:

- 1. Keep in mind what the primary purpose of a real estate marketing photo is.** It's to sell the property. Make sure that each photo visually supports this purpose. Any visual distractions that distract the viewer's attention from this purpose should be eliminated if possible. Items 3 through 8 below are the most common distractions that pull the viewers attention away from the purpose of the photo and visually distract from the primary purpose of the photo. Also, photo composition is all important because it controls the photo viewers attention and focuses attention on the purpose of the photo.
- 2. Use a wide-angle lens to shoot interiors.** Wide-angle lenses increase the feeling of space in interiors. What's a wide-angle lens? Lenses with a wide enough angle of view to shoot interior don't usually come with off the shelf cameras. For interiors a lens should be between 16mm and 24mm effective focal length.
- 3. Remove clutter and stage interiors for best results.** It's a well known fact that staging homes pays off. Homes sell faster and for a higher price when they are staged. Most lived in homes have too much clutter. Photos will look better and show better if clutter is reduced and staged by a trained home stager.
- 4. The primary exterior shot is THE most important photo.** Spend extra time, money and effort to get a knock-out front photo because this is the photo that will be seen most and first by the prospective home buyer. Online thumbnails of this photo must entice the buyer to look closer at the property. Because of elevated home siting some properties benefits from an elevated front shot where the camera is 10' to 20' above the street level.
- 5. Render interiors light and bright.** Bright interiors are up-beat and make a more positive impression on the prospective buyer so you want light and bright photos. Special lighting techniques must be used to get interior photos to come across light and bright.
- 6. Vertical lines (walls etc) must look perfectly straight.** We live in a world where we unconsciously know that all walls are perfectly vertical. When a viewer sees a room where the walls are not parallel with the side of the photo the viewer is visually distracted and disoriented. A voice in your head is saying this is not right.
- 7. Vertical and horizontal lines must be straight.**

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Wide-angle lenses cause the edges of photos to curve so special efforts and software must be used to remove this barrel distortion from photos where lines near the edge of the photo look curved.

8. **Don't let bright windows distract.** Unless special lighting or software photo editing software is used interior windows will tend to look too bright so the view out the window is not visible. It is always possible to show the view out the window if the view is an important selling point of the property. However, special work by the photographer may be required to control and make sure the exterior view is clearly visible.
9. **Don't let color casts distract.** Strong color casts (typically a strong orange color) distract the viewers attention.
10. **The way photos are presented, both online and in print has a big impact on the overall effectiveness of marketing a property.** Photos have the most impact when presented large (800x600 pixels or larger) and in a smooth easily controllable slide show. Real estate sites typically do not present photos in the most effective way possible. The purpose of a virtual tour or slide show is maximize the impact of marketing photos.

As a Realtor you can use these principles to choose a professional photographer or you can use these principles to shoot photos yourself if you are technically inclined or have support staff that shoot your photos.

In the end analysis, as a listing agent in charge of marketing a property, you are responsible for implementing these principles. Use these guidelines to produce, select and present your marketing photos.