

Bad MLS Photos

Bad MLS photos – they shouldn't be, but they're much more common than you think. And when I say bad MLS photos, I mean: “That agent should NEVER have taken a picture of that!” Or “What the heck were they thinking?” Or “That agent could have at least slowed down a tad before they stuck their arm out of the car window to snap the exterior picture of the house with their cell phone camera!”

We all know that a picture is worth 1,000 words. But in real estate, a picture is also worth a \$1,000 – or more! (See next page.)

Houses that were professionally photographed also tend to sell faster. For instance, houses in the \$400,000 range that were professionally photographed sold 21 days faster than those that were photographed with point-and-shoot cameras.

With most people first seeing the home they wind up buying on the internet, it behooves sellers and their agents to take some care with the photos they post.

And yet, much to our collective amusement, many of them do not.

With all the hoops to jump through in selling a house, real estate agents are bound to make a few mistakes – but snapping subpar listing photos should never be one of them.

Selling a house in today's market is difficult enough – so why compound the problem by taking blurry, dark, and crooked photos, or showcasing your one-of-a-kind all-in-one kitchen-office-bathroom?

If the real estate agent you hired to sell your house shows up to take pictures with an iPhone, a smart phone, or a point-and-shoot camera, fire him (or her)! And find one who can take professional looking photos with a higher-end DSLR or one who uses a professional real estate photographer.

A Picture Is Worth \$1,000 or More

According to a recent analysis done by Redfin Corp., a Seattle-based real estate brokerage, real-estate listings that feature photographs taken with the higher-end digital SLR cameras favored by real estate photographers and photography enthusiasts tend to do better than those who use photos from cheaper point-and-shoot, iPhone, or smart phone cameras.

Not surprisingly, listings with better photos command higher asking prices. If you believe your house is worth the investment of good photography, you'll probably ask more money for it. The surprising part is the tactic works! At the closing table, listings with nicer photos gain anywhere from \$934 to as much as \$116,076 MORE – as measured by the difference between asking and final price – over listings using photos from point-and-click, iPhone, or smart phone cameras.

Curb appeal will always be important. But today, “web appeal” is even more important! Today's home buyers are busier than ever and may not have the opportunity to do a 'drive-by' to see the exterior of the house. Instead, the first impression most buyers most often get of a house is from the photos in the MLS listing which they automatically receive in their emails from their agent or from their search online. With limited time and countless listings to review, buyers will quickly move on to other listings if the photos don't reflect well on the property. This is why “web appeal” is so important!

Using high resolution photos (and no, photos taken with a smart phone, an iPhone, or a point-and-shoot camera do not qualify as high resolution) in a real estate listing is a necessity. No matter whether the house you're selling is listed for \$200,000 or \$2 million, the value to the end user is now found in their ability to see bright, crisp, and beautiful photos of the house – both inside and out!

Why You Need Professional Photos to Help Sell Your House

Looking to sell your house quick – and for top dollar? The photos your real estate agent posts online might make the all the difference, so using a professional photographer to help you market and sell your house is a must.

In an internal case study, IMOTO – a company creating real estate photography for both sellers and real estate agents – compared 350 listings using their professional photography against 350 similar listings in the same ZIP code.

Listings using IMOTO's professional photography sold 50% faster and 39% closer to the original listing price than similar homes without professional photos.

The statistics department at Latter & Blum, a New Orleans-based real estate agency, also found listings using IMOTO's professional photography were viewed 118% more than comparable listings.

And while professional photography may help you sell your house faster – or for closer to list price – it still all depends on who you hire and how you use the photos.

Finding the Right Photographer

For real estate photography, you'll need a specialized photographer.

A lot of professional photographers seek to create artistic renditions. However, you really want photos done from the perspective of marketing and selling a house.

To find the right photographer, take some time to look through portfolios of real estate photos done in a style you like.

Once you find a potential photographer, ask him or her what equipment he or she will be using. Having a higher-end DSLR camera is very important. Inferior equipment can create distortion.

And don't overlook software. Most photos are enhanced or post-processed after taking, and a good photographer should know what software to use to create the best-looking photos. Most professional photographers will use either Lightroom or Photoshop.

The Photos You Need

To make sure you're getting the most for your money, you'll need photos that appeal most to home buyers. The first photo a photographer should focus on is the exterior of the house. That first photo is the most important photo, because it's going to be highlighted in the search engines and on websites with real estate listings.

After you have an enticing exterior shot, make sure the photographer covers these key areas that will help sell your house:

- Living Room
- Kitchen
- Master Bedroom
- Dining Room
- Family Room
- Bathroom(s)
- Children's Bedrooms
- Guest Bedroom
- Unique features such as mantles, leaded-glass windows, or built-in bookshelves
- Small area such as half-baths and laundry rooms

The Small Bathroom Test

To get a really good idea of what a photographer is capable of, look for photos of small rooms. A great way to see if a photographer is capable is to see if there is a photograph of a small bathroom such as a half-bath. Those are very tricky to take, and will not show well if he or she is not a good photographer.

If the photographer you're considering doesn't already have a similar photo in their portfolio, ask them to take one of your half-bath.

Multiple Listing Service (MLS)

And don't forget to consider how your real estate agent will use the photos. Many listings are posted in the Multiple Listing Service (MLS) which handles photos differently than other property listing databases.

The MLS system and many real estate websites that advertise homes for sale (such as real estate brokers, Zillow, Trulia, Yahoo!, etc.) best show off horizontal photographs. A good photographer should have an understanding of that.

Online Photos Have an Impact on the Effectiveness of Marketing a Property

According to the *2007 NAR Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers*, images are one of the biggest reasons Internet marketing has become so popular. And, according to a *2006 Pew Study*, 80% of Internet shoppers say images are imperative when deciding to buy or use a company's product or services.

Home staging and professional photos of the property are the first – and quite often the only – impression you have to make to the majority of homebuyers who are searching online for homes for sale. Make it a good one. You won't get a second chance to make a great first impression.