

FOR HOMEBUYERS, PICTURES TELL A THOUSAND WORDS

Homebuyers are using the Internet as their primary means to search for homes. How have real estate agents responded? By providing low quality photography of the houses they are selling. Wrong! Realtors still don't seem to understand that marketing a home properly always includes first rate photography. High quality digital photography should be a major component of every real estate agent's marketing efforts. An agent's goal in photo marketing is to provide a quality collection of photos showing home exteriors and interiors for both buyers and sellers. These photos are used for listing presentations, flyers, emails, multiple listing services and agent web sites.

There are many excellent cameras on the market. It's important to choose one that takes quality photos in almost any kind of interior lighting. Visit a quality photography store and talk with a knowledgeable salesperson. At a minimum, the camera must take wide-angle photos and work with an external flash or "slave flash." Another useful accessory is an easily adjusted tripod.

Once you have purchased your camera, here are a few simple tips to get you started:

- Wide-angle, wide-angle, wide-angle. Use a wide-angle lens. For most interiors, you'll want to take in the largest possible area of the room.
- Decide what part of the room is most interesting from a visual standpoint and make that your focus. You want to photograph the most appealing areas of the room and compose your photo so that these key areas are emphasized in your photograph.
- Eliminate excessive clutter. A famous photographer observed that photography is "ten percent creativity and ninety percent moving furniture."
- Keep vertical lines vertical. It confuses your viewer when vertical lines are tilted. Also try to keep horizontal lines parallel to the top and bottom of the frame. Finally, keep your camera level and don't tilt it up or down.

The main problem in indoor photography is lighting. The built-in flash of the digital cameras simply isn't bright enough light up an entire room. However, there is an easy solution called a "slave flash." A slave flash has an electric eye that senses when your built-in flash fires, and then the slave flash fires at the same time. These flash units are usually battery powered, and run from about \$75 up depending on the brightness and features. You can find them at your local camera store, or do a search on the Web for "slave flash" and "digital camera."

Another potential problem is the red-eye reduction feature. You'll either need to turn this feature off or purchase a flash unit that can work with it. Some of the slave flash units are designed specifically to work with cameras having red-eye reduction and will fire at the right time, but it's usually easier to turn the feature off on the camera.

There are a number of other things that you can do to improve the lighting of your indoor photography. Turn on all of the lights in the room. A low cost solution that you may want to consider is buying one or two clamp-on flood light units from a home improvement store and bouncing their light off the ceiling in darker rooms. Be sure to open all curtains to allow as much natural lighting as possible, but try to avoid shooting directly into a window where glare may overexpose your photograph.

After you have taken your photos, a mistake often made by agents is sending photos to clients via email that, in terms of file size, are much larger than need be. Your client is not going to be happy if they use a modem to connect to the internet and you send them twenty megabytes of photos!

There is an easy solution to this problem. Microsoft has a free program named Image Resizer that is included in PowerToys for Windows XP. Image Resizer enables you to resize one or many image files with a right-click and reduce the file size to one tenth its original size and still provide an excellent image. You may download this program by going to the Microsoft download web site at:

<http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/downloads/powertoys/xppowertoys.mspx>

Rather than send photos directly to clients, you may also choose a photo sharing service like Shutterfy.com to create an online album. To share photos, go to Shutterfly and open an account. The various screens will guide you through uploading your pictures to its web site. Then you can send an email to your client with a link to the online Shutterfly album.

If you follow these simple suggestions, you'll be amazed at how much improvement you'll see in your interior photos. A well-taken picture is worth a thousand words.