

# Putting a Lens on Listing Photos

Is limiting professional photography to upscale listings a form of ‘financial profiling’?

Some of the real estate practitioners who use my photography services tell me they hire a professional photographer for listing photos only when the home “deserves” it. Usually, that means if the home is expensive, they’ll spend market-dollars on high-end photos.

I see many cases where the quality of the online listing photos for different properties represented by the same agent varies greatly. Some listings show sharp, clean images of orderly homes. Other listings’ photos feature cluttered interiors and are out of focus and under- or overexposed. Typically, the listings with better photos command a higher sale price. Does this say something about the agents representing these listings? Are they offering a higher standard of service for clients with more property wealth?

Picking and choosing when to use professional photos based on the price of a listing is a form of what I call “financial profiling.” It suggests that you might work harder for clients of a certain income level. While such disparate treatment may not constitute discrimination under the law or the Code of Ethics, I believe it’s unfair. We all know that better photos draw more buyer attention. You’re basically steering business toward certain clients and away from others if you apply unequal standards for listing photos. That has a deleterious effect on the clients who get the short end of the stick.

Of course, you don’t have to use pro-

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fessional photographers in your business. Any practitioner can use a point-and-shoot camera to take listing photos. But if that’s how you’d handle some listings, perhaps it should be how you handle all listings to avoid unequal levels of service.

While few would agree that nonprofessional listing photos would suffice for a \$10 million property, I would argue they shouldn’t be acceptable for a \$100,000 property either. The owner of the lower-priced home is no less deserving of your highest level of service than the owner of the luxury property.

I don’t deny that professional photography services can be expensive. Cost control is probably a big reason many professionals choose not to hire a photographer for every listing. That’s not a good reason to apply professional photography standards only to selected listings. Practitioners factor the costs of many marketing materials into their budgets that they consider nonnegotiable: business cards, yard signs, brochures and mailers, and online ads, among others. Why should professional photography be any different? Isn’t it also a part of your marketing plan?

This thinking also applies to drones, which are expected to soar in popularity once the Federal Aviation Administration releases rules for their commercial use this year. Aerial photography using

drones won’t make sense for every property, but for those where it does, avoid disparate treatment based on property value.

Many of my photography customers have found a way to incorporate the cost into their budgets, even if cash flow issues require an alternate payment method. Some have their clients pay for photography services and then reimburse them at closing. Others cover the shoot with a business credit card to maintain cash flow until closing.

As a real estate professional, it’s your job to make sure no one gets short-changed in the transaction. That requires being fair to all clients in the way you market their homes. There’s both a professional and a moral obligation to treat all clients the same and give 100 percent of your effort to market their home, irrespective of the commission you earn at closing. Applying an equal standard for all listings when it comes to photography would also strengthen the image and perception of the real estate industry.

I once heard someone say, “Pursue excellence, and success will follow.” Let’s look at that through the lens of how we service our clients.



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