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Get Strict About Internet Marketing Standards For Your Listings

by *Blanche Evans*



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The old adage that you are only as strong as your weakest link was never more true than in the online advertising of listings. Showcasing listings with no photos, virtual tours and spotty information may still get the phone to ring back home, but on the Internet, the practice will get your listing ignored by online consumers.

Here are some reasons why it doesn't pay to do things the way you've always done. It's a new world, and consumers want information, not make-me-call-you tactics. They figure if the property is right, they'll call. If not, they won't.

Some brokers are moving at the speed of the Internet, while others pace their advertising by their MLS rules and their local newspaper publication dates. They just aren't in that much of a hurry to get the listing show-ready online.

The biggest, glaring absence is pictures and virtual tours. A picture is worth a thousand words? Try telling that to the consumer who is looking at "Photo not available" instead of the property you're trying to sell.

Maybe agents don't want to pay a virtual tour firm. Maybe brokers want the agent to take their own photos. But today's modern brokers pay agents to get listings, and get them sold. They have marketing staff to make sure the listings are marketed effectively.

While service is an issue that certainly varies, your agents who are struggling to get listings to the MLS, but drop the ball when it comes to photos and/or virtual tours are wasting valuable marketing time, and possibly alienating potential consumers.

For example, if a listing appears in the MLS without a photo, how is that a service to the seller? Especially if the listing is aggregated by companies like Realtor.com, the number one

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destination for online *homebuying consumers*. That listing is then up against other brokers who have virtual tours, additional pictures, and other extensive information about their properties.

It is against the Code of Ethics to do so, but a clever agent can use an unembellished listing against another broker in a listing presentation and never get called on the carpet. All she has to do is show the seller how her company presents listings, and then take the seller to Realtor.com to show him how the rest of the competition does it. The listings with blank photos will say all that needs to be said. They look unfinished and ill-prepared to compete.

Listings without photos make the agent and her broker look sloppy and uncaring. If one company can get photos online, why can't another? Consumers simply don't understand or have the patience to make assumptions for Realtors, and they certainly have no empathy for an agent who simply "didn't have time" to get a photo to the MLS.

Pages of listings with spotty pictures on national sites make the entire industry look incompetent. In a world where consumers can e-mail a digital photo from their cell phones, there simply isn't any excuse for not having photographs of all listings online.

Because an unprepared listing can be used against you by your competition and in the evaluations by consumers, it is unforgivable not to have systems in place that prevent your listings from being marketed incompletely even for a brief period. As a competitor, you have to respond to the new standards that are being set by Internet savvy brokers and their technologies, and that new standard is that listings must be accompanied by photos and virtual tours.

As soon as your brokerage acquires a listing, it should be part of your policy that color photos and virtual tours are taken the same day as the listing is acquired, or at the latest within three days. This generous time frame should cover any MLS rules about submissions within a certain deadline. A listing should never, repeat never, be allowed to be entered into the MLS or prepared for any kind of marketing without a photo.

Here's why: Because of the speed of the Internet, the role of the MLS is changing. Once the repository of listings for brokers to share between

themselves, the MLS is now mandated to provide its membership as well as third parties with consumer-ready listing information. Consumers are going to your agents' sites, your company site, the MLS's site and Realtor.com as well as other portals to view homes.

They skip over homes without photos. Further, most search engines are designed to favor homes with virtual tours and photos. If your consumer chooses the "Show only homes with virtual tours" button, and your listing isn't there, you've just done your seller a disservice.

Human behavior is what it is -- if a buyer is seeking information, he will go to the homes that provide the most, and he will be frustrated by homes that are presented for sale that aren't ready for the market.

If you don't have your listing market-ready in a competitive time frame, you may also be in violation of your listing agreement. You've told the seller that you are going to obtain the quickest sale at the highest price possible, didn't you? Having a home that isn't market-ready (that consumers ignore or are diverted away from by search engines) hardly meets that goal.

Don't help your competition make you look bad. Don't contribute to the industry looking bad. Never let a listing leave your brokerage on the way to the MLS or even an e-mail to a customer without a market-ready photo at the minimum. And make it a policy, and support the policy with quick action systems in place, that all listings your brokerage takes will have a virtual tour within three days.

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Blanche Evans is the publisher of [Agent News](#) and the associate editor of [Realty Times](#), the Internet's largest independent real estate news service. She is the author of two best-selling

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