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'A photo is worth a thousand words'

With the popularity of searching for homes online, having good pictures is more important than ever

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As more and more consumers turn to the Internet to shop, first appearances are the most important impression, especially when it comes to selling a home.

"A photo is worth a thousand words," said David Elya, president of the Metropolitan Consolidated Association of REALTORS who works at Realty Executives Group in Shelby Township. With listings now available online, quality photography of a home is a major marketing tool, he said.

Elya, like the majority of Realtors, takes pictures of his clients' homes himself with a digital camera. He suggests playing up a home's best features and taking wide-angle shots of the front and back of the house, as well as key rooms including the kitchen, family room or great room - and skipping less inviting areas such as bathrooms and basements. If the house is seated on a corner lot, take a panoramic shot of this valuable asset. Keep outdoor photos up-to-date with the current season, and make sure all indoor shots are free of clutter.

"Stage it in the best way," Elya added. Ruth Clevers, a Realtor with Weir Manuel Snyder & Ranke in Birmingham, agrees.

"You want the composition to be good," Clevers said. Clevers also photographs her clients' homes herself so she'll have better control over the quality of the pictures, which the marketing department at her company can adapt to best fit their Web site.

"Nighttime pictures with the house lit up are becoming very popular," she noted, adding that these pictures usually turn out very well. For vacant houses, which are hard to display in pictures because of the large empty spaces that may be visually unappealing, Clevers seizes the opportunity to capture images of the house's backyard and neighborhood, giving the consumer something more positive to remember the house by.

She also uses a computer program to stitch together panoramic shots into a virtual tour of the home, another popular feature of online listings.

"I love the ones that have the virtual tours," said Susan Dahlstedt of Bloomfield Hills, a client of Clevers' who is looking to purchase a home. For Dahlstedt, online tours of homes save a lot of time in the house-hunting ordeal. Clevers sends her listings of homes that she might be interested in through the Internet, and Dahlstedt can check each house out on the Web site before deciding whether to actually visit the home.

"Some houses don't have any pictures online," Dahlstedt said, "which seems so surprising."

It is surprising, especially given the fact that, according to a recent online research study, the average number of words in a house listing is just 32.

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