

Visual Marketing for Luxury Listings

Creating the Impact Your Luxury Listings Require

Competitive Advantage

Successful professionals constantly strive to gain an advantage over their competition. Even the smallest advantages can pay enormous rewards. The number one golfer in the world in 2004 was Vijay Singh. His average score over 116 rounds was 69 shots per round. For this he earned \$11 Million. John Rollins, also a professional, also played 116 rounds. John averaged 71 shots per round. John earned \$737,000, (1/16th of what Vijay earned). Does this mean that Vijay is 16 times better than John? No, Vijay is simply two shots or 3% better. The rewards however for being 3% better are 1600% greater. The same is true in almost every industry.

In the Luxury home market, clients have high expectations, the competition is fierce and the rewards are significant. As experienced professionals in the luxury market know, image is everything and presentation is critical.

The Power of Photography

Photography is **the** most compelling way to grab someone's attention. When photography is used for sales and marketing the purpose is to affect, move and motivate people. In luxury real estate this means getting prospective buyers to connect with a property. Luxury buyers don't purchase a particular property because they have to, or because it's the best that they can afford, they buy a property because they want it. They are excited about it and they SEE themselves owning it.

Real estate is a visual and emotional transaction, which is why photography is the most effective means of generating interest and activity. When you look at today's marketing programs almost everything revolves around photographs. Web postings, magazine ads, postcards, TV and brochures all require great photographs to be effective.

In today's luxury home market consumers don't demand visual content, they **expect** it. This means that if they don't SEE what they are looking for, they won't tell you, they will simply go to someone who does provide it. Many agents and brokers who don't incorporate visual marketing as part of their luxury program will never even know how many prospective clients they are losing.

Pro-fes'sion-al, *adj.* 1. An expert, 2. An occupation as a means of livelihood

Most prospective luxury home buyers will tell you, "The only thing worse than 'No Photo', is a poor photo." A poor photo defeats the entire purpose of taking the time, effort and expense in the first place. The difference between professional photography and others is as clear as the difference between a REALTOR[®] and a FSBO.

Unfortunately, too many agents approach photography as 'documentation' as opposed to the powerful sales and marketing tool it is meant to be. The difference can be summed up by consumer statements such as; "Yeah, it's a house" vs. "**Wow, what a house!**"

That's the difference a professional makes, the 'wow' factor. The attention grabbing, 'pick up the phone and call the listing agent,' difference.

Sellers of luxury homes list with particular agents because they want the benefits of working with an experienced professional; someone who can provide the utmost in service and professionalism. When it comes to the photography, sellers expect nothing less. Providing anything less only diminishes the value of an agent in the seller's eye.

As digital photography becomes more popular, the temptation is to minimize costs by doing it yourself. Of course this flies right in the face of why a seller hires a professional luxury real estate agent in the first place. Like a general contractor, a seller expects their luxury real estate professional to leverage the best of professional resources to sell their property. Just as you would be alarmed to see your general contractor using discount subcontractors for the work on your new house; i.e., plumbing, electrical, landscaping, etc., a home seller expects a top professional to work with other top professionals to market their home.

Professional luxury home photographers have an eye and a passion for this type of photography, for the kind of photography that makes people say "Wow, that's what I want". Professional luxury home photographers, like professional luxury real estate agents, have the talent, the experience and the tools to get the job done right.

In addition to great photographers, top professional companies, have studios to make great images even better. A studio can not only compensate for uncontrollable situations at a shoot but can digitally optimize and enhance images. This leads to the major 'selling points' of a home being presented in their best possible light.

Winning the Listing

The key to a successful luxury listing presentation is the same as any great marketing/promotional program; get the client's attention, differentiate yourself, and move the client to action. But most importantly, focus on what is important to the client; the benefits the client will receive from your services. When presented effectively in a listing presentation, professional photography can easily be leveraged to win the listing contract.

Simply illustrating the benefits that a seller will experience from your world-class visual marketing program significantly increases the client's perceived value of your services/brand. Those benefits include:

1. Attention
Selling luxury homes is about selling more than a property it is selling an experience. First impressions are critical and great photography can guarantee grabbing the right buyer's attention.
2. Convenience
For luxury clients, time is money. Much more so than standard listings, luxury listings are more time consuming to showcase. Great photography makes the entire experience much more convenient for both luxury buyers and sellers.
3. More buyers in a shorter amount of time
Luxury buyers come from a much broader geography than a typical buyer, i.e. Europe, Asia, etc. Great photography allows an agent to effectively showcase a property to as many possible buyers in the shortest amount of time possible. This results in more offers, at higher prices and more confident closings.
4. Marketing materials with impact
Marketing materials for luxury homes have to reflect the value of the property. These materials are not cheap. Poor photography turns large investments in materials into a waste of time and

money, while great photography ensures a return on investment in property marketing materials.

5. Motivated buyers
Luxury buyers who want to visit a property and have already visually previewed it are much more motivated clients. They have already had a positive experience, they have narrowed their choices and are usually looking to make a decision or confirm their initial feelings created by the photographs.
6. Value
The better something looks the more people feel it is worth. Great photographs create a higher perceived value of a property (and agent/brand), which is critical in the luxury home market.

Professional photography is simply the most compelling and cost effective way to showcase a seller's property.

Now more than ever agents need to have that 'one better' or 3% edge, that difference that makes the decision easy for the sellers. Newspaper ads are yesterday's news, pardon the pun. Today's luxury consumer is more sophisticated and more interactive. People today expect to see it to believe it. No one who values their time will book a hotel room, buy a product or visit a house, until they can SEE it first.

By presenting the benefits of the Power of Photography and showing examples of a Professional Visual Marketing Program, a professional real estate marketer can affect, move and motivate a seller to take action. By promising and delivering on providing world-class service and marketing, a successful agent is investing in future referrals and repeat business.

Many highly successful agents make professional photography a part of every listing presentation and make sure they provide it on every listing. A well presented visual marketing program very visibly differentiates a successful agent from the competition. It also justifies to the seller what they are getting for the commission. A professional visual marketing program presents an image of an agent who understands today's market, understands marketing, and most importantly, is willing to make a visible investment in selling the property.

Winning the listing, Part II - Checkmate

The leaders in the industry have already taken the idea of using Professional Photography to win listings one step further. A number of market leading brokerage firms now provide professional photography on all of their luxury listings. The benefit of this is that their website attracts more luxury buyers than any other sites in their market. It also provides a consistent luxury brand image. Instead of spending money on inventory ads, they advertise that their site has more photos of luxury properties than any other. For luxury buyers, especially those early in the sales cycle, this is exactly what they are looking for. By providing this valuable information/content, these brokerages are establishing relationships with luxury buyers long before their competitors even know the buyers exist.

This use of photography to attract clients, coupled with a well structured lead capture and management system, provides agents with the ultimate listing tool/advantage. In this scenario an agent can now tell a seller, “Because our firm produces professional photographs of every luxury property we list, we have more luxury buyers visit and register on our site than any other. So, I was able to run a list of potential luxury buyers who are interested in this very type of listing and I have over thirty names. If you list with me, I will have our professional photography team come out, we will produce a high quality listing presentation package to make a great first impression, and I will personally deliver that presentation to those buyers who are interested in this property.”

This type of model gives sellers exactly what they want from an agent/broker: Buyers. Through a professional visual marketing program, an agent not only visibly differentiates themselves on the listing presentation, they offer a unique proposition to the seller; pre-qualified buyers who will preview the home through a stunning listing package. No marketing program is more effective than one that is pin-point targeted at predisposed buyers. This is a much different world than the shotgun approach days of newspaper advertising.

Differentiating the Listing

Professional photography is your *foundation* to a strong Visual Marketing program. But as many agents and brokers have seen, taking the photograph is only the first step in a successful visual marketing program. The distribution and display of images is critical. Photographs are only as good as how they look when

presented to potential clients. Photographs are valuable assets and need to be treated as such. Too many times a great photo looks terrible in a magazine or brochure because it was resized or reformatted along the way.

Maintaining the integrity and quality of images as they are being distributed and presented on TV, in magazines, brochures, postcards and websites is a very difficult task. It's very frustrating to see the time, effort and expense of getting a great shot go to waste because the image looks blurry in a magazine. Top professional companies have systems to manage images and image quality from start to finish.

The ways to distribute your property tours and professional photography are as diverse as your listings—it's a constantly evolving landscape. As technology advances, so do your opportunities to reach greater numbers of potential buyers and to make an even greater impact on those buyers. Professional Visual Marketing companies will help you stay on top of advances in distribution and property tour presentation. Staying on top of these advances will not only help differentiate your luxury listings, it will ensure you're not falling short of your competition.

Attracting Clients

The last but probably most important benefit of using professional photography and a strong Visual Marketing program as a regular part of business is that they attract potential clients. When a potential client is looking for homes and sees the way your listings are presented, it not only gives them a great first impression of the home but of you and your business. If listings that don't have visual content are rarely viewed, that means your name and contact information is rarely viewed. If listings that have visual content are viewed 600% more often, the exposure of you and your business is increased by 600% simply by having a professional visual marketing program.

A program that is high-quality and includes stunning photographs and engaging property tours presents a very visible reflection of you and your business and your brand – make it the best!

VHT is the world's premier provider of professional Visual Marketing for luxury homes. VHT provides an entire library of resources, materials and training to enable agents and brokers to Leverage Professional Photography to Win Luxury Listings and Attract Clients® Brian Balduf is the CEO of VHT. He is a frequent speaker at industry events and provides consulting on visual marketing programs to many large real estate related organizations.

