



**Jennifer Brown** has more than 10 years experience in journalism, public relations and marketing and has recently joined the marketing team for Property-Boss Solutions, a provider of property management software solutions that empower your business. For more information about Property-Boss Solutions, visit [propertyboss.com](http://propertyboss.com) or call Jennifer at 864.297.7661 x25.

## Marketing Your Property's Image

It is often said that a picture is worth a thousand words, and that's never more true than when featuring photos of the homes and apartments property managers are trying to market.

Whether on your website or in full-color brochures, your properties won't "pop" off the page without a little photo magic. And that starts with a few basics.

### EQUIPMENT

Chances are, there is a camera in every property manager's purse or pocket these days. But is your Android or iPhone the right kind of camera for the job of shooting featured properties? If the answer is no, you have two options: buy better equipment, or hire a professional. Both will cost you, yet the rewards are increased profits either way.

"We are always adjusting to the demand of what customers want," says Carlos Tuazon, co-owner and property manager with Alpha Property Management in upstate South Carolina. "With higher fuel prices, now more than ever customers like to stay home and look at photos or videos. They need to visualize the property and imagine themselves living in it."

Currently, Tuazon and his partner take their own photos with a standard digital camera and upload them to Alpha's website. But they are considering hiring a professional photographer and/or purchasing new equipment to capture wider-angle shots and videos of their featured properties.

Just as the Sunday drive for house hunting is becoming a thing of the past, features such as 360-degree immersive or "virtual" tours have become quite popular (and successful) within the real estate and rental industries. But they can be a little pricey, at upwards of \$100 per property if a professional is hired.

One affordable alternative is purchasing a camera with a panorama mode (such as the Sony Cyber-shot WX5 for under \$300) that "stitches" together wide-angle shots into one panoramic view and also has high-definition video options. The Nikon COOLPIX

P500 is around \$400 and includes a 36x wide-angle optical zoom.

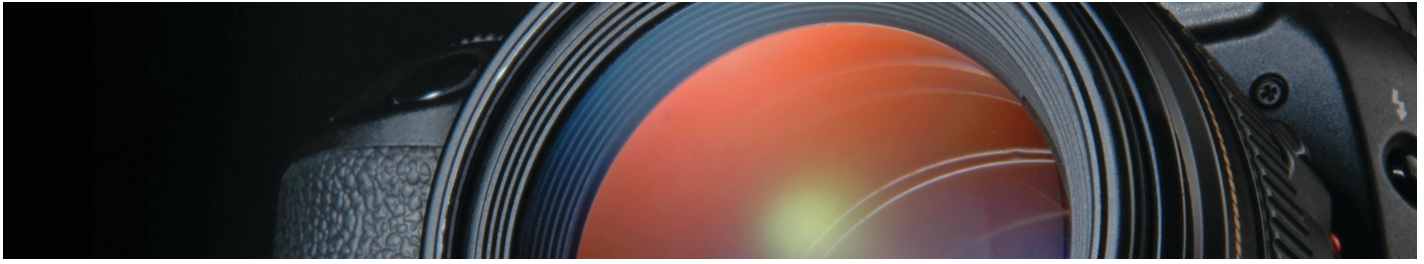
If you are going at it alone, which most property managers are, here are a few recommended features to consider when purchasing any new digital camera:

- Wide-angle functions will prove far more useful in property photography than any of the fancier zoom functions. Also, the larger the zoom, the larger the camera. So, for toting a camera around multiple properties every day, bulkier is not better.
- Don't be too concerned with megapixels these days. Most new models are at least 10MP, which is plenty of pixels to print even poster-size photos. And since the majority of your properties are likely to be marketed on the web, megapixels don't matter as much as the camera manufacturers would have us believe.
- Unless you are a professional photographer in training, or planning to publish your own full-color catalogs of featured properties, you will probably not need one of the higher-end SLR digital cameras. Even the entry-level models start around \$700 and often require additional accessories that can run up the bill fast. More user-friendly and affordable models are a better choice for your business, especially if multiple employees are responsible for pulling photo duty.

### LIGHTING

Just as important as "location, location, location" is "lighting, lighting, lighting" when it comes to marketing your properties. You wouldn't dream of showing a property without proper lighting (and pointing out all the lighting fixtures, if they're above par). So why would you photograph an exterior with shadow-casting eaves or a spacious living room that's poorly backlit by a sliding glass or French door?

As a general rule, Tuazon says make sure you take the photos – inside and out – on a good sunny day. "Even in South Carolina, it's hard to get really great photos during the winter, but photos on a sunny



winter day are much better than photos on a gloomy winter day.”

If you know you will be photographing a lighting-challenged property, take along some extra light bulbs, a few lamps, or even a hanging mirror for fill lighting. Being prepared for such situations is the key to resolving them.

### STAGING

It's a given in the real estate world that properties photograph and show better if “staged” with minimal furniture and accessories placed exactly where prospects can envision their own possessions being placed on moving day.

For managers of multi-unit complexes, this is easy enough by featuring photos of one or more model units on a website or in a brochure. For managers of individual homes, this is more difficult, as you may not have the opportunity to photograph a properly-staged home.

Tuazon says most of his company's properties are not staged for showings, so capturing an image of a nice yard or the property's “curb appeal” is even more important. “That's the biggest challenge we face sometimes, because not all properties have nice yards – especially rentals,” he said.

Even when staging isn't possible, you can't go wrong with photos that show the layout of the property inside and out, as well as individual room sizes.

### PRINT VS. WEB

There's nothing worse than seeing a photo in print that was sized for another medium, and vice versa. Here are a few tips you can follow to avoid such pitfalls:

When taking photos for print, such as professionally printed brochures or catalogs, be sure the resolution of the images is at least 300 dpi and the images are in CMYK (both standards in print production).

If the images are for a website, you need not be as picky. Usually, an image at 72 dpi or one “optimized for web” is acceptable. In fact, most web publishing applications feature optimization within the photo upload process.

### CONTROLLABLES

There are a few mistakes any property manager can avoid so as not to affect the bottom line. For example, shooting photos with a date / time stamp. This is asking for disaster when reusing a photo from 2007 to market a property in 2011.

If your intent is to convince prospects of the most current appealing view of a property, then including a recent date stamp may be appropriate. But, if you are recycling old photos for newly-available properties, a date stamp could kill your leads.

Other mistakes include intentionally (or unintentionally) omitting photos of the kitchen, bathrooms and backyards of homes. These are the areas that prospects are most curious about when comparing amenities of different properties.

### THE UNCONTROLLABLES

Just as there are measures you can take to ensure your properties are featured the way you intend, there are also some “uncontrollable” forces out there you must contend with.

For one, never underestimate the power of Google Maps. Many prospective tenants are going to “Google Map” an address to see a street-view photo (and possibly more) before ever contacting you for an appointment. Don't fret about this. Simply plan ahead and be aware of online photos of the property you are attempting to market prior to marketing it yourself. You have the power to accentuate the positives in your photos – something Google Maps isn't exactly concerned with.

### IN CLOSING

Regardless of the equipment being used, and lighting, staging or other concerns, the most important thing to remember when photographing your properties is this: photos will always help you close the deal.

“Photos are the first thing customers look for,” says Tuazon. “You can write a thousand-word description of your listing, but without photos, customers are not going to be interested.” 📷

**With higher fuel prices, now more than ever customers like to stay home and look at photos or videos. They need to visualize the property and imagine themselves living in it.**