



Practical Advice for Newer Home Stagers

When taking photos for your website or portfolio:

- Consider whether you want to use a flash – it reflects off many surfaces and can make one part of the photo too bright and leave another part dark; it also highlights dust! Better to take each shot with and without flash, and then use one of the easy, free photo editing programs like Picasa or Pic Monkey to lighten your photos (and straighten corners, crop, make lamp cords disappear, and many other handy things)
- Stand in the same EXACT spot for your Before and After photos. To do this well, you should photograph every room from all 4 corners, as well as from each doorway into the room; if your “Afters” don’t match your “Befores” then your photos lose some impact
- A wide-angle lens camera is a great tool for stagers; Panasonic’s Lumix is a good point & shoot camera with a wide-angle lens for real estate photography. Canon and Nikon make great DSLR cameras if your budget allows and you learn how to use them. Here’s a [camera buying guide](#) to help narrow your search
- NEVER take photos of a home’s interior when it’s dark outside (it makes the house look unfriendly to see dark windows or no natural light). If your staging isn’t completed until dark, you’ll want to return during daylight to take your photos
- Clean lines photograph much better than too many items in a photo. Determine the room’s main focal point and any secondary ones, and photo those to highlight the home’s best features and architectural details. Practice in your own home to perfect this
- For important staging projects, hire a professional photographer; get to know a few in your area and look at their work with a critical eye for lighting, composition, and small details like using Photoshop to erase lamp cords, correct lighting, etc.

Staging Tips:

- Always iron/steam the bedskirt, pillows, and the bedding – it makes a huge difference in the photos. Even towels sometimes need steaming to look their best. Stage as though every staging project is going to be photographed for a magazine spread showcasing your work. Remember that every job you do is an “advertisement” for your services!

- Clean every single item of décor, art, and furniture that you place in a home, each time you use it, while staging (not when it's in storage; it's better to do it on the job). People will notice if you don't, so make it a habit. I use Windex Wipes because they're easy to use and take up very little space in my toolbag
- Only angle the furniture in a room if the architecture calls for it (not just because you think it might look cool)

Working with other Stagers:

- One of the smartest things you can do is to collaborate with other stagers in your area. Reach out, get to know them, invite them to a RESA meeting, meet for coffee. By working together as colleagues rather than as competitors, you'll build mutual respect. Together you can educate local Realtors and homeowners about staging's powerful benefits
- Getting to know other stagers also allows you to have someone you trust to refer clients to when you're unable to take on a job due to your schedule, vacation or illness, etc. You can offer a referral fee (a flat fee is usually easiest) or trade referrals back and forth
- Don't be afraid to ask other local stagers to help you on staging projects, but be sure to have them sign an Independent Contractor Agreement (a legal document that protects you). Stagers who think "it's OK, we're friends" can be shocked when someone working on one of your staging projects has a bad injury and ends up suing you; the financial implications are much greater than you may think

Working with the Media:

- Never, ever turn down the opportunity for media exposure. If you're contacted for tips or quotes, ask the caller what their topic is and what type of information they need for their story. Ask if you can gather your thoughts and talk with them later that day. I've always found writers and other media staff very accommodating and appreciative, because your help can make their story better
- Once you have your first interview on the phone or in person, add the article or clip to your website. More will follow because the media always Google home staging experts for quotes or help with articles. You simply cannot buy that kind of advertising!

Working on homes needing extensive updates or remodeling work:

- Be very cautious about including overseeing any contractors or subs, unless you have a contractor's license in your state (check your state or province for local regulations). When you take oversight, you can be held liable if something goes wrong and you could stand to suffer a devastating financial loss. Instead, have a good resource list of reliable, experienced tradesmen that you can provide to your clients ... make sure you've checked out their work before you recommend them. The list could include electricians, painters, plumbers, handymen, tile and flooring installers, carpet layers, etc.

- If you're getting started and don't have a list of service providers, ask other local stagers and Realtors who they have found to be both reliable and cost-effective; also ask your homeowner clients if they have recommendations for your list. It's best to give out two or three names in each category and make sure the homeowner is the one contacting the tradesman and making the arrangements. These costs should not be part of your staging proposal – again, unless you're a licensed contractor

Using Social Media to help grow your business:

- Develop profiles on **Google Plus, Linked In, Pinterest, Houzz, and a FB Business** page. Remember that social media is a "conversation" that involves a two-way direction, your readers want to be able to comment on your posts. Don't hard sell with social media; it's better to share tips, your best Before & After photos, and helpful articles. Linked In has some great forums for home stagers where you can ask questions and get help from other stagers
 - Your blog (on your website or using a platform like **ActiveRain.com**) can be a great way for people to get to know what you do and to see examples of your work. Your blog titles and keywords should be easily searchable by Google If you need help on how to do this, a class or webinar is a good place to start
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