

Do Unto Others: Photoshop

The following is reprinted from the April 2013 issue of Commonwealth magazine.

One of Kevin's listings was waaaay out in the rural side of the county. He asked a photographer friend to take some photos for him for the listing. When she got to the house, the photographer noticed that, while on one side was a beautiful open field, on the other was a small power substation very close to the house.

Knowing that Kevin was going to use the pictures for marketing, the photog was careful to take her shots from such an angle that the substation wasn't visible. She delivered them to Kevin and explained what she did.

"Good idea," he said. "Worst comes to worst, they complain. But at least I get them to see the place."



There's no telling how an ethics panel would rule on this case. Did Kevin present less than "a true picture in [his] advertising, marketing, and other representations"? People who had to drive all that way were bound to be annoyed — it would be obvious that he had deliberately worked to hide the substation. Not only is there a possibility of an ethics complaint, he's also doing a great job of reinforcing the cliché "Realtors will do anything for a sale" perspective. And anyone who's actually interested in the home will be wary of working with him.

No, that doesn't mean you have to take pictures of all the ugly parts of a property. Think to yourself, though, whether people comparing the property to your photos would feel like you were trying to mislead them.

It was late November when Luese's clients listed their home with her — a nice place with a large front lawn. Only trouble: By the time Luese got to take pictures, the lawn had turned brown for the winter. Not a problem. It didn't take long in Photoshop to turn the brown lawn green and make the pictures a lot nicer.

"I dunno," Luese's broker said upon seeing what she did. "Photoshop is a no-no."

"I'm not adding a tree or taking out power lines," Luese said. "I'm just tweaking the color a bit. It looks green most of the year. Think of it as 'virtual outdoor staging'."

Realizing she was right, her broker agreed. "No adding or removing things," he cautioned her.

Bad advice. The house sold, but come springtime, when the lawn filled in it wasn't green at all. It was mostly green, but with big brown patches. And the green was almost all weeds. Needless to say, the buyers weren't happy.

Most people know that making a big change in Photoshop is verboten — they aren't going to add windows or remove power lines from a picture, but what's wrong with a little color adjustment?

Plenty. Even a minor tweak can easily cross the line so you're not presenting a true picture of the property. If someone is annoyed enough to file an ethics complaint, it's going to be hard to argue with the evidence.