The Visual Nature of the Internet Has Home Owners More Attuned to Aesthetics

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By Erica Christoffer

Two professions greatly benefiting from the Internet's ability to help connect people visually are interior designers and home stagers.

First, let's clarify: **Interior design and home staging are two very distinct industries.** As **Jennie Norris, president of the International Association of Home Staging Professionals,** points out: "Staging is all about depersonalizing a house and decorating and interior design are about personalizing a house."

When home stagers work with a seller, they are considering elements that appeal to a broad audience. "It's not about the seller at all. It is about presenting a product to the market (the house) and ensuring it is appealing to the buyer," says **Norris**.

Both trades use design theories to accomplish different goals. But they do share the common bond of visualizing what a home could be – something home owners have grown attuned to with online accessibility and the rise of reality television shows.

"The world, in some ways because of the Internet, has gotten smaller and smaller," says staging expert Barb Schwarz. "People are very educated and will do their research. The public is pretty darn smart when it comes to selling their home."

Schwarz founded StagedHomes.com, the Staging University, and the International Association of Home Staging Professionals (IAHSP) and created the Accredited Staging Professional (ASP) designation. When she started out speaking to real estate professionals and teaching courses in the 1980s, it was the pre-Internet era, but her ideas garnered attention.

"When you have something that is of great value – with or without the Internet – word will spread," Schwarz says.

Yet, because of the Internet's visual tendencies, and because the Internet is often the first stop for home buyers, Schwarz suggests that home staging is needed and desired today more than ever.

Poor quality or dark images, and photos of empty rooms won't cut it. As Schwarz says, home buyers will click on to the next home if something isn't attractive.

"The Internet makes everything instantly accessible, including information on home staging," says **Norris**. "A Web site or online portfolio is critical for our success as we are a visual business and being able to be found online with a basic internet search is the best way we can use the Internet."

James Charles, an interior designer, founded DesignerAtHOME.com with accessibility and the savvy home owner in mind. "The Internet has changed our ideology and how we do commerce," says Charles.

DesignerAtHOME.com is a bit of an anomaly in that it offers both professional redesign services as well as home staging options. The home owner provides room specification, such as photos, measurements, and style preferences. Then, designers create a customized color board depicting suggested ideas, including paints, fabrics, furniture, and room layout. Charles gives his final approval, and the package is sent to the home owner with step-by-step instructions and vendor recommendations.

"We've democratized the world of design," Charles says.

Norris says the Internet has been a huge asset in bringing home staging into the mainstream.

"Sites such as Facebook, Twitter, blog sites and professional networking sites such as LinkedIn are wonderful forums where a home stager can share information about their business for free, and capture additional clientele and exposure," she says.

But the Internet alone does not equal success, even for the visually-dependent fields.

"It might create interest and prompt the public to call, but it is our interpersonal skills and relationship development that convinces a person to hire us," says **Norris**, who stresses that in the real estate business, human interactions are still key.

"People, in the end, will always remember the quality of a service," says Schwarz.