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## Three tips for using virtual staging to wow prospective tenants

June 14, 2019 | Sarah Anderson | VHT Studios

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When it comes to renting or leasing vacant apartments or condos, prospective tenants often encounter the same challenges facing those scoping out houses—it's hard to visualize how they'd live and work in an empty space. Savvy property managers or commercial property owners leasing those apartments are deploying high tech tools to help prospective tenants imagine their lifestyle in their next space.

The most popular tool is virtual staging, combining photography and technology to amp up the wow factor in marketing apartments. The foundation of all virtual staging is stunning professional photography, and it has many different uses by owners and managers who are marketing properties online, in brochures or ads.

Virtual staging has been successfully used by residential real estate professionals to help virtually enhance listing photographs of select rooms in a home or condo. This allows future owners to envision their life in their next home. It's been gaining popularity on the commercial side as well, with VHT Studios (the



nation's largest real estate photography company) seeing a 166 percent increase in the amount of commercial properties that were virtually staged January through April 2019, versus the same period in 2018.

Virtual staging is a great convenience, since it replaces worn and outdated existing furniture and décor in photographs with up-to-date virtual furnishings, and saves time, money and headaches. Managers can avoid the costs of traditional staging and the rental fees required to furnish a vacant unit. With a wide variety of virtual staging tools at their disposal, building owners can use the tools to replace dated furnishings and wallpaper, repaint walls, eliminate surface clutter and give key rooms a complete makeover.

So what's the first step in taking advantage of virtual staging tools?

Property owners with vacant condos or apartments can turn to their photography partner to "install" virtual furniture into listing photographs, to give future dwellers a feel for how they'll live in the apartment.

If tenants are currently occupying a rental and are slow to clear up the clutter when it's time for the photography shoot, a "Virtual Declutter" tool can help virtually "tidy-up" the bedroom, kitchen, dining or living room photographs.

From making an empty unit feel like home to digitally redesigning a property that is currently occupied by tenants, virtual staging can be a powerful and cost-effective way to attract prospective tenants to your property. Given the popularity of online searching for properties on broker sites, Craigslist and even social media, virtual staging also enhances the online

experience, helping prospects better envision a space and how they'll live there—which is especially helpful with studios or spaces with unusual layouts.

## **1. Virtual furniture and décor make vacant units feel inviting**

A familiar scenario for commercial real estate professionals is how to best market an empty unit, whether it's in an established building or as part of a new development. How do you make it appeal to prospects who want to picture themselves in their new home?

Since taste is so personal, it's easy to appeal to a broader group of prospective tenants with virtual staging, which allows owners to present a variety of styles or room functions for the same model. The envisioning of the space filled with virtual furniture helps to answer the most common of property seekers' questions, such as, "How will I make this space homey? How will it look with my furniture in it?"

"Before using virtual staging, we mostly just used photographs of vacant units," said Phillip Thompson, marketing manager for Aimco Apartments. "This technology is great not only for prospective tenants, but also for our stakeholders to see these new development projects come to fruition in addition to showing a livable and thoughtfully designed space."

Since virtual staging is so versatile, it's easy to display the latest trends when staging model units for renting and selling. When staging a room, it's key to keep in mind its overall size and the placement of doors and windows. Too much furniture in smaller studio or one-bedroom apartments can make it appear crowded and uninviting.

“We do a lot of both digital and print marketing for our properties; we’ve published virtually staged photographs in local magazines, train wraps, building wraps and bus stops, among others,” said Thompson.

“We’ve even printed large poster boards of our virtually staged rooms and we set them up in each of the vacant units on easel stands so that prospects can view them as they walk into a vacant unit. This way, they can start gathering ideas for each room and what it would look like to call it home.”

## **2. Virtual staging tools spruce up an occupied property**

Have a unit that needs to be rented while tenants still occupy the property? Chances are the tenant’s decorating tastes are not universal. Nor is it guaranteed that the property will be free of clutter or clean when it’s time to photograph it or for a showing, which is a turn-off to anyone.

For properties that need a little extra decorating, decluttering and/or painting assistance, there are cost-effective tools to virtually redecorate, declutter and/or paint the space for mass appeal.

Sometimes, buildings are at capacity and owners need to make the models available for rent. With virtual staging, there’s no need to reserve a model unit, which helps owners free up those apartments and improves owners’ bottom lines.

“Our on-site teams love using virtual staging for preleasing—that is, units that are currently lived in, but have move-outs scheduled soon—and for leasing properties that are sight unseen,” said Thompson.

“Virtual staging allows us the ability to reduce the

number of real models we have on-site. The ability to rent those apartments means more profit potential!”

### 3. Virtual staging Suite Enhances the Online Experience

In the digital age, virtually staging photographs of rental units is more important than ever before. Virtual staging provides added pizzazz to listings and enhances the online experience for those searching for properties. Welcome them to the digital front door by swapping out old furnishings and paint colors and removing the clutter so prospects can see the true possibilities of their next home.

*Sarah Anderson is Vice President Marketing at [VHT Studios](#), the nation’s leading real estate photography and visual marketing firm.*

*Phillip Thompson is marketing manager at [Aimco Apartments](#), which has wowed tenants with more than 80 Virtually Staged apartments in the past three years.*

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