



7 Easy Steps to Improve Your Home's Listings

Increase visibility and bookings with the most attractive listings possible by following these simple steps.



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Introduction

Optimizing your listing is the most important thing you can do to take control of the success of your vacation rental. No matter how beautiful your home is, or how perfect the location, if you are not communicating the benefits effectively, you are sure to have a hard time attracting visitors. Conversely, a middle-of-the-road home that is being represented at it's best will have a much easier time finding business.

With the harshly competitive nature of VRBO, HomeAway, and AirBnB, knowing what attracts guests is the first step to success. It can also be helpful to have your optimized listing on your own website where you can book directly. When you give this listing to prospective guests, they are not tempted to navigate away easily and are focused on your beautiful home.

Follow these steps and your listing is sure to attract more guests. At HomeSites, we have over 15 years of experience in the vacation rental industry, and we are always happy to help you be more successful. If you are interested in help or support with any of these tips, please don't hesitate to contact us at 970-292-6626.



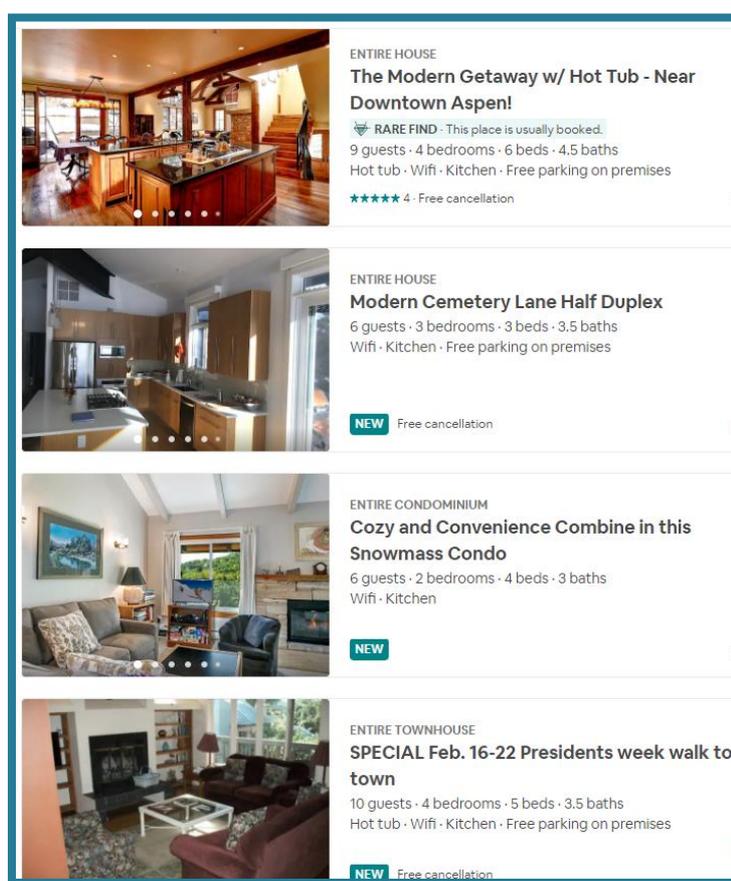
Engage With a Strong Headline

Your headline is the one piece of text your customer sees BEFORE clicking your listing, so it's important to take this opportunity to sell the most important trait your home has to offer. I'll give you a hint: It's not that your home has 3 bedrooms, or that it's on 1234 Maple Drive.

Think about what the absolute most important two details about your home would be to guests, and make sure they know you have those things to offer them right away. For instance, if your ski home has a private hot tub and slopeside ski storage, that's way more enticing than letting the guest know your home can sleep 10 people. Guests can filter for that sort of thing in search already, so make sure you're not taking up important real estate on their search results telling them things they already know.

Next, think about what makes your home UNIQUE.

If your home is a budget listing, that's a great thing for the guest to know! Wallet-Friendly and Convenient are two great selling points. If your home is in a desirable location like Beachfront or Slopeside, make sure guests know that too. If every home in your area has wi-fi and central air, this isn't the time to spell those out. If you are highlighting amenities everyone else has as special, your prospective guests will wonder if that's all you have to talk about because there's nothing else of value about your property.



Examples

Which headline makes you want to find out more about the home?

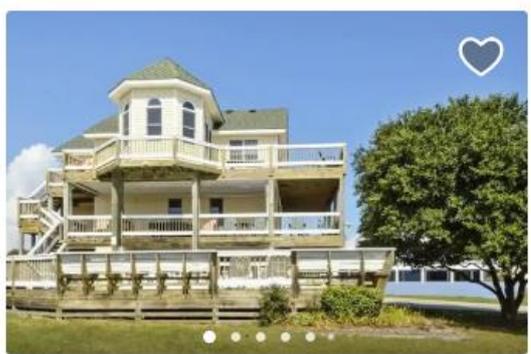


ENTIRE HOUSE - 10 BEDS

Sweet Serenity

\$200 per night

NEW



ENTIRE HOUSE - 10 BEDS

**Great Backyard w/Volleyball, Hot Tub,
Private Pool**

\$181 per night

Let's take a look at some examples of strong and weak headlines in AirBnB's listings in Duck, North Carolina.

Both these homes are lovely, 10 bedroom beach houses, looking to attract the same clientele. However, all I know looking at the first listing is that the home is beautiful, yellow, has 10 bedrooms, and is named Sweet Serenity. While the photograph looks very nice, I'm not tempted to learn more at first glance.

The second home has my attention. Volleyball, a pool, and a hot tub are all things that add value to me as a beachgoer who is looking to come to Duck with a large group. Paired with the nice photograph, I can picture my family enjoying this yard and making memories. I instantly want to see more photos and learn more about this house.

Want to know the funny thing? The first house here ALSO has a volleyball court, pool, and hot tub. It even has a gorgeous pool table for rainy days! But, since nothing special about the house is highlighted in the headline, the guest might never click and find out what they have to offer.

Take a moment to look at your reviews and guest feedback. What is the thing that guests LOVE about your home? Make sure your new guests know right away that this thing will be part of their experience. You are renting a second home for a reason, either because you saw something in it that could turn a profit, or because you are looking to share a slice of your personal paradise. Make sure your guests know how special your home is right away, before they even click on your listing.

Grab Attention with Impeccable Home Photography

Your photos are by far the most important factor of your home's marketing for capturing a prospective guest's attention and imagination. In today's highly competitive market, outdated, small, or blown out photos are highly unlikely to even get looked at and WILL cost you bookings.

We highly recommend hiring a local professional who specializes in real estate photography. They will have a good idea of the best angles to make your rooms look spacious and inviting, as well as much better equipment than you have access to, unless you're a photographer yourself.

If you're interested in giving it a go on your own or you want some more specific directions for your photographer, here are some tips to getting the best possible photos. Keep in mind, at the very least you'll need access to a good DSLR or mirrorless camera with advanced settings and a wide angle lens.

- Photograph early morning or approaching dusk, NOT in the middle of the day.
- Exterior photos: make sure the sun is behind you.
- Whether shooting inside or out, make sure all windows are open and all interior lights are on.
- Show exterior from multiple angles.
- Avoid blown-out windows by using an HDR camera and the flash, and don't shoot mid-day. An overcast day can make this easier too.
- Use a wide-angle lens, but no wider than a 24mm lens on the 35 mm standard
- Try to keep your photos from having too much of the ceiling in them.
- Shoot from the eye level of a person 5'-6' tall, squat down if you are very tall to avoid camera tilt.
- Photograph every room from many angles. You can decide later!
- Make sure to photograph any views if your home has nice ones, and make sure it's at the optimal time of day.



Here we have a great example of a beautiful home that needs to be re-photographed. The windows and lights are blown out making the photo look unappealing, and there's a yellow cast from the use of an older camera. This home was shot midday which is making the lighting very harsh. The photo's quality is a bit small and the home is shot from a high angle, making the ceilings seem lower.

Which home's living room makes you want to find out more?

Now, that's better. The color balance is lovely, and the picture is large and high-quality, communicating the quality of the house. HDR photography has been used so we can see the details of the interior while keeping the view out the windows intact. The photograph is shot from a lower angle, so we are more accurately representing the ceiling height and the home feels more spacious.



Keep Them Hooked with Clear and Concise Copy

Have you ever opened a property listing only to be greeted by a wall of text? It can be overwhelming and uninviting. It's easy to understand why many property owners wall into this trap – you are excited to tell the guest every detail about your house! But it's important to give your prospects eyes (and brains) a rest.

One of the best ways to do this is to break up paragraphs more often than you think you should. Everything may be grammatically correct to keep together, but if your paragraph is too long the information won't stick for your guest.

Another tip is to shorten sentences and cut unnecessary words. We like to use the Hemingway Editor (<http://www.hemingwayapp.com/>) to determine whether our listing is readable without giving the prospect a headache. We also use Grammarly to double check our grammar and syntax.

Remember, people do not have unlimited attention spans. Keep to the highlights and if certain less-exciting features are standard in your area, no need to mention them. You can check those amenities off on the amenities list, and if people are concerned they can look there. Otherwise, don't waste valuable space and time telling people your house has towels!

VRBO also likes it when you update your listing regularly. Make sure your amenities and descriptions are accurate and seasonal if need be.



Hemingway App makes your writing bold and clear.

The app highlights lengthy, complex sentences and common errors; if you see a yellow sentence, shorten or split it. If you see a red highlight, your sentence is so dense and complicated that your readers will get lost trying to follow its meandering, splitting logic — try editing this sentence to remove the red.

You can utilize a shorter word in place of a purple one. Mouse over them for hints.

Adverbs and weakening phrases are helpfully shown in blue. Get rid of them and pick words with force, perhaps.

Phrases in green have been marked to show passive voice.

You can format your text with the toolbar.

Paste in something you're working on and edit away. Or, click the Write button and compose something new.



What are some things about yourself that will help your guests see themselves enjoying your home and destination?

Use the About The Owner Section to Your Advantage

This is one of the most overlooked and misused sections in most 3rd party and direct booking listings. This is a chance for the guest to learn a little about you, yes, but it should also describe your ideal guest! Your description of yourself should reflect the qualities that the guests you wish to attract possess.

If guests are deciding between a few destinations for say, a surf trip, mentioning that you love the area because you love to surf and your partner loves looking for shells on the beach will help the guest picture themselves doing those activities at your home and tempt them to visit.

If you are interested in mostly families visiting, talking about how much your kids love the features of the property and the area can assure guests that their family will feel at home and make a nice memory.

Use Your Neighborhood as a Value Proposition

Your home does not exist in a vacuum. Describing your home in the context of the neighborhood helps your guest see it as a home base for the real reason they are traveling: the destination!

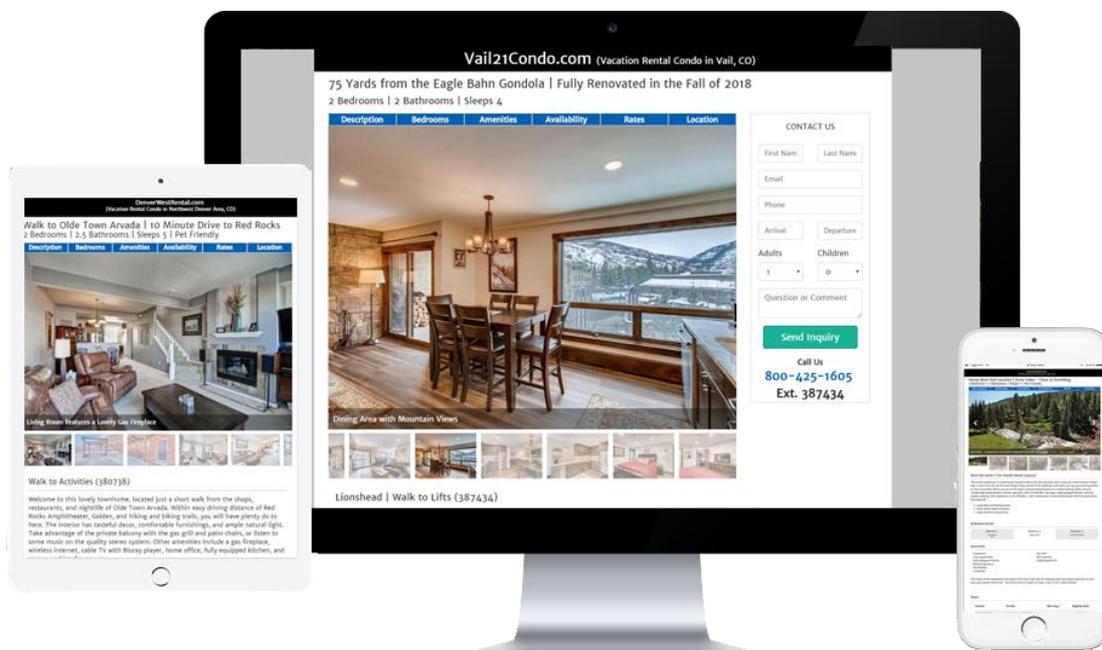
IF there's a particular reason most people come to visit your area, such as a ski resort, make sure you're describing how CLOSE your home is to that destination. Don't say your home isn't 20 minutes AWAY, say it's nearby, a short 20 minute drive. If your home is near public transportation to tourist destinations, make sure they know that it's just a few steps from the museum, or the popular nightlife, or the famous street art.

If your neighborhood has attractions that out of towners may not know about, tell them! You can sell your guests on the charming coffee shop that's a few blocks away or the amazing farmer's market in the summertime. Interesting architecture, beautiful tree-lined streets, or great walkability are all features that can help a guest decide your home is the right one for them.



Use a Standalone Website to Keep Guests on YOUR Home

When it comes to your personal network or social media outreach, it can be detrimental to give out a link to your listing on a 3rd party website. You are putting in the work to attract guests to YOUR home, so why send them somewhere that has 100s of other homes in your location to distract them from booking with you?



We believe that 3rd party listing sites have their place and are an important part of your business.

However, when it comes to sharing your home with your personal or professional network or social media, there are clear benefits to a standalone site. Your guests stay focused on your home only, and they can contact you directly to book without extra fees or limits on the way you can communicate.

You can screen guests more effectively and make sure you are comfortable with each guest who is staying in your home.



Respond as Quickly as Possible to Messages

3rd party listing sites like VRBO, HomeAway, and AirBnB now factor in your response time to guests in your rankings, making getting back to guests quickly a high priority. It can be tough to compete with property management companies with staff to answer questions, but even a short response where you elaborate later will help you beat the algorithm.

This isn't only important on sites that measure your response time. Your guests are most likely to go with a host who answers quickly, because they are likely considering several possibilities and looking to book quickly by the time they ask a question.

Keep your prospective guests engaged and happy by making sure you're available to them! If you find yourself answering the same question multiple times, consider including the answer in your listing, or saving the answer for a faster response.

Tip: Make sure you have notifications sent to your phone, and send a quick response first before sending something that takes you a long time to write.



If you're interested in a personalized audit of your listing, a custom-built website for your home in less than 2 business days, or our suite of marketing services to support the independent homeowner, please contact us.

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