



Michael Mino is president and CEO of PropertyBoss Solutions. He became a landlord in 1977 when he purchased his first rental units. A serial entrepreneur, he has started a number of software technology firms. For more information about Michael or PropertyBoss Solutions, visit propertyboss.com or call Michael at 864.297.7661 x26.



Stephen Wood is president and CEO of Epic River, LLC, the design and development company behind RentalHomePros.com. Steve has worked closely with NARPM® to create a listing service that would provide MLS-like value for property managers. For more information about Steve or Rental Home Professionals, visit rentalhomepros.com or call Steve at 970.292.5047.

Marketing in the Info Age

Traditional methods for marketing your properties are changing. Newspaper advertisements, directories distributed in supermarket lobbies, and signage placed in front of a property—while all standard a decade ago—can seem expensive or ineffective in this age of information-at-the-touch-of-a-button. Today, the demographics of residents may not have changed much, but the technology they use to find a rental property has radically changed. For example: Finding a townhome in Bethesda, Maryland while sitting at an airport in Dallas, Texas is not the daunting task it was years ago. However, learning how to harness the technology that is out there can be a challenge for property managers who never seem to have enough time in the day. Here are some helpful tips on how to effectively target potential residents with a multi-faceted online, print, and mobile marketing campaign.

THE PROPERTY DETAILS

The first step is to collect the details about each property into a system that will manage and interact with the other systems that are needed by property managers. Gathering this property information is difficult because, unlike the real-estate market, there are no universal standards for categorizing the information. NARPM® has provided a solution to this problem by assembling a list of commonly used fields that can be viewed on their subsidiary's site, Rental Home Professionals (www.RentalHomePros.com/CommonFields.pdf). These fields should include the number of bedrooms, bathrooms, asking rent, lease details, photos, amenities, utilities, a headline for the property, and a detailed description. Here are some tips for the information used to advertise your property.

- **Photos:** The photo is the first impression of the ad and typically has the greatest impact. Advertisements without photos will automatically go to the bottom of the list, and, in some situations, the viewer may eliminate ads without photos. The photo should be up-to-date, representative of the property, and as attractive as possible. In addition to the outside property picture, include

at least four or five pictures of the most attractive rooms. Add a backyard photo if appropriate.

- **Headline:** The headline for your property is the next most important opportunity to capture the attention of the viewer. It should be very concise, 70 characters or less. Due to the limited space in the headline, each word should be chosen carefully. Use key words that are important to the area. Mention only the most significant amenities that differentiate the property, and use adjectives that best promote interest such as oceanfront or great access to [feature]. Avoid overused words such as beautiful or nice. Do not leave the headline blank or just repeat the address, as this adds little information for the consumer. Special offers should be included in the headline while words in all capitals and repeated punctuation should be avoided. Stay away from local jargon or abbreviations that are not widely known.
- **The Fact Section:**
 - **Address:** Nothing is more annoying for a potential tenant than having an address that is not accurate or cannot be mapped easily. Addresses can be checked for accuracy at the US Post Office site at <http://zip4.usps.com/zip4>.
 - **Property Type:** Provide the type of property such as apartment, duplex, house, townhouse, condominium, or mobile home.
 - **Bedrooms:** Number and type
 - **Bathrooms:** Number and type
 - **Asking Rent**
 - **Deposit:** Amount, refundable, pet deposit
 - **Lease Details**
- **Description:** This is your area to be verbose. Highlight amenities and lease details that may be unique to the property.
- **Amenities:** A bulleted list works best.
- **Utilities:** Who pays for the utilities?
- **Policies:** Are there any pet or smoking policies?



- **Contact Information:** Name, phone number, and e-mail address of the management company and leasing agent to contact.

If you are not currently using a property management software package that can store these fields, you should consider a change or augmenting it with a system that can. This information is not only important for advertising, but may also play a key role in the management life cycle of the property, including maintenance.

THE PRINTED BROCHURE

Printed brochures are normally kept in or outside of the office of the property manager and/or at the property itself. The information contained in these brochures should fit onto a double-sided single page.

THE STATIC WEB BROCHURE

The first foray into the world of web marketing is to replicate the copy, graphics, and layout of your existing print materials in the web world. The easiest approach is to create a PDF (Portable Document Format developed by Adobe) electronic document and link it to your website. Most software tools (Microsoft Word, Adobe Pagemaker, Microsoft Publisher, etc.) used to create your property flyer can “print” the page to a PDF file just as easily as you can send the document to your laser printer. In addition to being easy, this method provides a convenient means for the prospect to print the flyer on their own printer if they desire to produce an attractive replica of your original. In this fast-paced world though, many people will not take the time or trouble to open a separate document. These static PDF brochures are easy to upload to your website and link to your property listing pages.

THE DYNAMIC WEB BROCHURE

Dynamic web brochures are generated from data stored in a property management software package or a web-based advertising site. The data is stored once and the web brochures are dynamically generated from this information. A big advantage of this approach is that the information is always up-to-date. There are many free and pay-based websites that will advertise your properties. There are also syndicators who will distribute your property ads automatically to other free sites. Be aware of the following when using these services:

- **Ad Hijacking:** Ad hijacking occurs when a property is advertised on a service such as Craigslist, and an unscrupulous person takes the information and pictures from this ad and re-posts them with their contact information and a new lower rent asking price. When a potential tenant replies to the fake ad, the unscrupulous advertiser collects the deposit and advance rent. Eventually, the tenant calls the real property manager and is upset because they have already prepaid for the property or the asking rent is not correct. Some items that you can do to reduce your risk are:
 - Watermark your images with your company name and phone number.
 - On your “For Rent” signs include an SMS number to get the property details. More on this approach in next month's issue.
 - Increase awareness of scammers. Place a warning on your website alerting your customers to the dangers of ad hijacking.
- **Free Sites That Turn Into Pay Sites:** Free sites need to make money to survive. They monetize their sites with advertisements or with venture capital. If a free site is not making enough money from advertising or runs low on venture capital, it often changes to a pay site. If this happens, your ads are still posted and you are charged for the leads generated. It is often a shock to property managers when they receive an e-mail stating that they must pay to receive an inquiry about a property that was posted to a free site. There is nothing you can do to prevent this situation other than to be aware of it and educate your staff.
- **Change Management:** If you are posting your ads to other sites, you need to make sure the changes that you make to your listings get propagated to these other sites. For example, if you change your asking rent or lease details, you want to make sure that these details are updated everywhere in a timely manner. The use of syndicators such as Rental Home Professionals will automate this task.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Stand by your mailbox for next month's *Technology Matters* article. We will focus on the exciting opportunities of interacting with your prospects, introducing analytics, and mobile marketing. 📧

NARPM® has assembled a list of commonly used property detail fields that can be viewed on the Rental Home Professionals website at RentalHomePros.com/CommonFields.pdf.