



Home Staging Resource

"Business Solutions for Professional Home Stagers"

Interview with Veteran Sherry Smith of Design Elements, Ltd.

When Sherry Smith of Design Elements Ltd in Lake Tahoe, CA joined HSR in November, she was juggling a successful, full-time job with her training. Her goal was to create a successful staging business that gave her the flexibility and freedom of working from home doing what she loved. In less than 2 months, she completed her training. In three months, she quit her full-time job, and eight months later she has met her business goals!

1. What was your background before starting a home staging business and how did it serve you well in this new endeavor?

I have a degree in Journalism/PR and concentration in Marketing and have spent the past 19 years in sales. Fifteen of those years selling medical equipment. I always wanted to go to college for Interior Design but ended up doing something else. No worries though....because my professional career in sales has most sincerely enabled me to hit the ground running with my own business. Knowing how to 'read' people and how to market effectively has been the key to my success in home staging. I am very organized and detail oriented so the old sales adage of 'plan you work and work you plan' certainly rings true with me. I made a plan (business and marketing plan) and set out to work it accordingly.

2. How long did it take you to go through the training/business set-up? How long before you had your first consultation/appointment?

I researched many home staging programs for a few months (was working full time) and then decided that HSR was the best program for me in November and it took me 8 weeks to complete the training because I could only devote a few hours every few days to the certification process. However, during the process I was getting more and more excited about the business and knew that I needed to focus on it full time. I left my full time job January 31st and hit the ground running on February 1st.

I actually had my first consultation in December but wasn't quite ready to move forward at that point. The consultation went well but I didn't do the job because another stager had all her own furniture/accessories AND gave this realtor a very low ball deal. He called me and asked if I could do the job for the same amount (he really wanted to work with me since I was local) but I told him he got 'a smokin' deal and to take it and run. I knew I couldn't compete with her bid. Don't be afraid to walk away from business if it isn't the right scenario for you. I now do business with this realtor's office and we have a great working relationship!

3. How did your first appointment go and any regrets or words of wisdom from that experience? (Were you nervous?)

I look back at my first appointment and realize just how far I have come in my knowledge and experience in only 6 short months of home staging! It actually makes me chuckle to myself. I remember I was so prepared with my client file filled with supportive documentation about staging and how important (and still is!) the education process is for the client. I was ready! My sales background made it very seamless in working with clients and almost all of my clients (to this day) come from a 'fear based' state because they don't really understand the process of



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staging and why staging works. So that is why it is so important to educate your clients (realtors and home owners) about staging. Once this is accomplished they are much more relaxed about your recommendations and process and much more receptive to your services. I don't know how many times clients have started off 'closed' (read their non-verbals) when I appear at their door to totally opening up to the idea and getting excited about what we can do with their home. I hear often 'Your information has been so helpful...I really understand what we need to do and why to sell this house'.

My words of advise would be to go in confident, LISTEN to your clients (everyone is different!), respect their feelings, and educate them about staging. And more importantly...have fun!

4. How did you begin marketing yourself and what marketing efforts did you find most valuable in your area and why?

Since I didn't have a 'marketing budget' I really focused on 'Gorilla Marketing techniques'. Since Realtors are our prime target market I spent the first week of my business calling all the local offices (and stopping in) to let them know I was in town and ready to help. I offer a power point presentation to all realty offices that focuses, you guessed it, on Education. I based it around 4 questions that would be important for the realtors. I booked my first presentation the first week and presented it February 14th. I brought food (a must!) and raffled off 2 door prizes (great tool to get all their business cards). I spoke to 22 realtors and got 3 referrals that day. One of them turned into the first vacant home I did and i am know great friends with this realtor. What a great perk to find good friends too! I also do a marketing flyer to all the realtor offices every few weeks. I take 'before' and 'after' shots of stagings I have done and put it on a flyer with simple marketing verbage. I stuff all 283 realtor boxes in town. This gets your face known and gives you an opportunity to talk to the realtors in person. I have gotten quite a few jobs by doing these 2 simple things: power point presentations and marketing flyers. Now, I would have to say that the past 3 months have all been referrals from previous jobs. Believe me, once your name gets out there and you do a good job business will come your way!

5. How "busy" are you today and why? Do you have any real estate agent partnerships?

I am extremely busy that I really need to hire some help but am not quite ready for that. I have many partnerships with realtors and these are relationships well worth cultivating. These relationships will continually fill your 'funnel' of work. I have been juggling 3-4 jobs at a time for the past month. The calls just keep coming in (all referral calls). Always put a sign up in your staging jobs telling people 'this house has been professionally staged by.. and leave a handful of your cards in the house too. Always leave your cards in all the realty offices (I've gotten a few calls from realtors who have said they picked my card up in so-in-so's office). The most important thing is always be visible to your market...join their affiliations, stop by their offices on a regular basis (bring small gifts like food..), email them marketing materials/educational materials.....just network all you can!

6. What additional home staging/decorating resources/books did you find helpful in your learning and growth experience?

My husband laughs at my dedication (ok, addiction) to all those HGTV shows on decorating, staging, real estate, landscaping and the list goes on! He just doesn't understand how I can do this all day and come home and vegetate (almost in a trance as he puts it) on these shows. I



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just love to learn new things and these are great shows to learn what to do and learn what NOT to do. I am always buying (and now have my husband buying them for me! He is trainable...) all the design mags on the market. The internet has been a tremendous tool for me too. I can lose hours by researching the web for different ideas.

7. What (if anything) would you have done differently looking back?

I really don't know if I would have done anything differently. What I did has been successful so far and I truly believe venturing down a new path and making mistakes and learning from them is what the process is all about. The key is to lose the fear.....and venture out with confidence and know that you will make mistakes but will hopefully learn from them. This has been a learning process for me and I really needed to be open to the journey. There are still things I come across each day that make me think 'how am I going to work through this one?' But that's what makes it so exciting and rewarding, especially when a project turns out so great and everyone is happy!

8. Are you glad you decided to go into the home staging field? Why or why not?

Yes....I feel that I have finally come full circle. I wanted to be an Interior Designer when I was in my teens and now I am designing, staging, and consulting in a field I love. Timing is everything and I am grateful I had a great foundation before launching my business. HSR was a great big help with that too! Audra's passion is evident and her vision has really taken shape for our industry and we all should applaud her!

9. Any words of wisdom for those just entering into the field?

I think I have 'sprinkled' words of wisdom throughout my answers.....but, again, be confident, don't be afraid to try new things, build your network, LISTEN, look for opportunities, and always give back.