

## **Advice to Help Your Home Sell Quickly**

Will Rogers once said, "You never get a second chance at a first impression." While Mr. Rogers was talking about people, it is also applicable to houses, especially when they are on the market for sale.

It is important to make certain that the first impression is a favorable one. That's the purpose behind this Market Preparation Guide: it's simply advice to help your home sell quickly.

If you have ever been in model homes, you know how good they look. You might have even thought that you'd like to have the home and all the furniture, the pictures, the flower arrangements, and even the knick-knacks on the shelves.

Some individuals really know how to make a home look its best without spending a lot of money. Many things can be done to give it that "model home" look so prospective buyers will want it and everything else in the house that you're willing to sell.

When homes have this kind of appeal, they sell quickly, usually for the highest price possible. Another interesting characteristic of appealing homes is that the transaction is usually remarkably free of problems.

What more could you want than to get your home sold for top dollar in short order without any hassles? If you'll read through this brochure and use some of the suggestions before you put the property on the market, you'll be on your way to a successful sale.

One word of warning, though...don't wait to see if the house will sell before implementing these ideas. Once you do decide to do something, don't do just the easy things or just the bare minimum.

The property must look good from the street, up the sidewalk, on the front porch, throughout the house, in the darkest closets, and even in the attic. You definitely want to give the impression of a well-cared-for home.

You want the prospective buyer to feel that this home is quality, through and through, not just on the surface.

You'll never have more activity on the home than you will in the first three to four weeks of the listing. The reason is simple: there are buyers out there who have seen everything available and for one reason or another, haven't bought. They are just waiting for something new to come on the market.

Agents are just as anxious. When that new property hits the market, buyers and agents will scramble to look at it. It is common knowledge that the property will usually sell for the highest price during this time. After the initial surge of interest, the only people to look at it will be those buyers new to the marketplace.

Besides all of the reasons listed above, competition is fierce. Don't be naïve; with every other home currently for sale, new and pre-owned, in your area and in other areas, those listed with agents and those trying to sell themselves. You are even competing with foreclosures.

Homes have proven to be one of the best investments for individuals. They have outpaced inflation and, in many cases, had exceptional rates of return. Experienced investors who have rented out a property for long periods of time know that to get the highest price for the property, the property has to look good.

You have to appeal to owner occupants who will pay the highest price for the property because they are going to live there.

Typical buyers put all of their savings into the downpayment and closing costs and don't have anything left over to improve the home, such as replacing the shag carpet. Those buyers will just have to live with that carpet until they can afford to replace it.

If buyers have a choice of two comparable properties at similar prices, they'll choose the one in the best condition; just as on the other hand, if two properties are in similar condition, the buyer will choose the one that costs less.

## **Drive-up Appeal**

One of the frustrations a professional agent has to deal with is after having made an appointment on a home that will meet the buyer's requirements, driving up in front of the home and having the buyer say, "I don't want to look at this. I don't like the looks of the front."

It takes a lot to overcome a statement like that, so the first place we're going to start is with the front of the house. Stand at the street and look at the house. If all you can see are trees and shrubs, you have some yard work to do.

Landscaping should enhance the home, not hide it. One of the easiest things to do is trim overgrown shrubs. They should be lowered to a height near the bottom of the windows. If there is ivy growing on the side of the home, get it off.

If there are branches hanging low in the yard, you'll need to prune them. A simple rule of thumb is to have all the limbs high enough so that you can walk under the tree.

The next thing on the list is to clean out the flowerbeds and make them look good. This means getting all the weeds out and having a distinct border between the beds and the yard.

Everyone dreams of a "House & Garden" home with flowers in the beds. Why don't you invest in a few flats of flowers such as petunias or periwinkles that will last the entire growing season and will add color and beauty to the front of your home?

You might even consider putting some nice looking flowerpots on the porch with some red geraniums or some other blooming plants in them.

Next, take a look at the front door and the area around it. If you paint nothing else, at least give it a fresh coat of paint.

If the doorbell is broken, replace it. Wash the mailbox. Keep the porch swept. Get an attractive doormat.

## **The Absolute Basics**

Start by airing out the home. You are the last person to notice any peculiar odor in your home that may be blatantly obvious to visitors. Go on a search to find the offender. It may be a kitty litter box or a dog bed. It might even be a mildewed shower.

Next, wash all the windows in the house, inside and out. While you're at it, clean the windowsills and the bottom of the window jambs, and wash the blinds.

If it has been over a year since you've had the carpets cleaned, now is the time to do it. Bare floors should be waxed or polished, even if they're supposed to be "no-wax."

Put bright light bulbs in every socket made for a bulb. Buyers like bright and cheery so you have to keep it from looking like a dungeon. You'll also want to keep the drapes and shades open during the day, even if you're not in the habit, because it will make the property look brighter.

The next item on the required list is to clean out all of the closets, cabinets, and drawers. Get rid of things you haven't used in the past five years and pack up everything that you haven't used in the last year. Do this without conscience or remorse. You're going to have to do it anyway when you move. The main reason to do it is to make the storage space look larger. Surely, you don't want to pay a mover to haul things that you never use.

Closets should look as they have enough room to hold additional items. You might need to box up off-season clothes to make it look that way. Get everything off the floor and don't pile shelves too high.

Another basic requirement of home preparation is to be sure there is not too much furniture in a room. Even though it may be inconvenient, you will be far better off by selecting the pieces that look best and putting the others in the garage, basement, or better yet, in storage. You can rent a mini-warehouse for a few dollars a month.

You need to go over the kitchen like a health inspector. Clean the oven and keep it that way, even if it means eating out more often. After cleaning the range, put new drip pans under the burners, or at least cover the old ones with foil. Clean around the seal of the door to the dishwasher.

Bathtubs, showers and sinks should be freshly caulked. All the grout should be clean and in good condition. There are excellent cleaners that will do the job without tons of scrubbing. There should be no leaks in the faucets or traps.

Put out fresh towels in the bathrooms and replace the shower curtain if needed.

### **A Few Unrelated Suggestions**

If you have limited counter space in the kitchen, be sure to put away unnecessary items.

Keep children's toys out of the front yard and off the sidewalks and front porch. Get teenagers and children to understand the importance of keeping the house looking good while it is on the market. Take down the posters until the house is sold.

Recognize the difference between decorator touches and clutter or sterility.

Clean the ashes out of the fireplace during the season that it isn't being used.

Keep the television turned off while the home is being shown.

Make sure the pull-down staircase is screwed together and strong enough to be used safely. Be sure there is a light in the attic.

If you don't have time for a garage sale, consider donating things to charity. Make a list of all the items and their estimated value, and be sure to get a receipt. The donation is tax deductible and may be worth more to you than the time and effort you'd put into a garage sale.

The pool should be sparkling and free of leaves.

Don't volunteer information to prospective buyers. If they ask you a question, answer it truthfully.

Tell your friends that your home is for sale. You never know where the buyer will come from.

### **For Those Willing to Go the Extra Mile**

There are some things you can do that will really add flair to your home. They might include changing the wallpaper in the entry, kitchen, or bathrooms. It might be replacing light fixtures that are dated or just ugly.

Some enterprising homeowners will completely paint inside and put down all new floor coverings. Others might add new window treatments.

Ceiling fans are not only fashionable but very practical. The price on them has come way down. You can put four or five fans in today for what one fan cost several years ago.

New appliances in the kitchen can actually make the difference in a prospect choosing your home over another.

Don't fall into the trap that most people do when trying to figure out how much it will cost to replace an item. The most common price reference guide in America is the Sears catalogue. As your agent, I can recommend vendors and contractors who will usually cost much less.

### **It's ShowTime**

Someone has just called to show the house, and all the hard work you've done to make it look good is about to pay off. You just need a few last-minute touches.

When the agent arrives with the prospects, have the drapes and window shades open to let in as much daylight as possible. If it happens to be night, be sure that all of your outdoor lights are on, especially landscape and pool lights if you have them.

Open all the doors between rooms to give an inviting feeling. Turn on all of the lights, including the lamps. Tune the radio to some quiet, "elevator-style" music.

Pick up any newspapers or magazines that may be lying around. See that the counters are free of unnecessary items and that any dirty dishes are put in the dishwasher. Take out the trash if needed.

If you have pets, get them out of the way. Not everyone may share your love for animals. Some people may even be allergic to them.

The beds should be made and clothes picked up. Bathrooms should be clean and the toilet lid down.

When you leave the house in the morning or during the day, please leave it as if you know it is going to be shown. It's difficult sometimes and might even mean you have to get up a little earlier in order to prepare the house for showing. But you never know when the right person is going to look at it, so you must always be ready for them.

### **Pre-contract Professional Inspection**

Another time saving suggestion is to order an inspection of your home by a professional inspector. This would typically be the responsibility of the buyer after you have successfully negotiated a contract.

The benefit of doing it now is to find out early if there is anything that needs attention. It can save time between contract and settlement if the inspector does find something you are not aware of. You will have time to get a second opinion and find a reputable and reasonable contractor to make the repairs.

One more advantage is that if the buyer's inspector finds something your inspector didn't, there is room for a difference of opinion. Many times an inspector will do these pre-contract inspections for less than their normal rates.

## **Final Note**

Please cooperate with the agents when they call for an appointment. Sometimes it will be inconvenient for you to have the house shown, but you may never get another opportunity for that particular person to look at it. Besides, the agent may feel that if the property is difficult to show because of restrictions the owner has placed on it, it may not be worth the trouble. We need all the help we can get, so we don't want to alienate even one agent.



## **Summary**

Trim the shrubs; prune the trees. Spruce up raised beds Put plant color on the entry and rear deck.

Wash all windows.

Put bright light bulbs in all fixtures.

Clean out all closets and cabinets.

Repair all leaky faucets.

Caulk bathtubs, showers, and sinks.

Remove excess furniture in all rooms, especially rooms not being used as bedrooms currently. Consider removing other furniture you don't plan on keeping.

Keep beds made and clothes picked up.

Put dirty dishes in the dishwasher.

Clean out garage, unused bedrooms and attic.

Remove excess small items in all rooms to make rooms appear larger.

Have pest inspection completed. Do any work necessary to receive final clear pest report.