

12 Ways to Sell Your Home Fast

Homeowners face stiff competition from the many other similar properties on the market. Here are things you can do to make your home stand out and improve your odds of a sale.

1. Suggest a joint open house

If the family next door and the people down the street have houses on the market, suggest hosting a combined open house on the same day. Try to work with the other sellers so that everyone is supporting each other instead of competing against each other. You might even agree to distribute each other's fliers. A combined open house can draw more people while also giving buyers a glimpse of how well neighborhood residents get along. If the interactions are positive, it reflects well on the sellers, Duffy says.

2. 'Sell' your entire neighborhood

These days, it's not enough to simply sell your home; you also have to go the extra mile to promote your neighborhood. Help your buyer get past the fear that something may be wrong with the neighborhood by describing why your community is great. For example, in your brochures, consider including relevant information about an active community social calendar, friendly neighbors or mature, well-manicured area landscaping.

Another way to plug the neighborhood is to write a seller's letter to potential buyers that anticipates and answers likely questions. Explain why you are moving, assuming it's for a positive reason, and how you're leaving something great behind. Give the impression that you're happily moving away, not that you're happy to be moving away. Make copies of the letter and place them alongside your fliers, brochures and other important sales material.

3. Give easy access to your home

When several of your neighbors are selling, too, it's best to be prepared to show the home quickly. If there are multiple listings in your area, you'll probably have a higher number of impulse house showings. Shoppers may have overlooked your house while searching online listings. When they visit your neighborhood to see another house on the market, they might spot the "for sale" sign in your yard and ask their agent to show them your property, too.

It's reasonable to expect people to give notice before showing up on your doorstep, but don't make potential buyers jump through hoops before they can see your home. Severely restricting the hours your residence is available for showings could cost you a prospect.

4. Stage your home

Home staging means decorating your dwelling in a way that appeals to a potential buyer. When done right, your home can really stand out from the others in the neighborhood. Home-staging tips include:

- Make sure address numbers are clear and easy to see from the curb. Otherwise, buyers might drive to your neighbor's house by mistake.

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- Add lighting to make the house look great at night. People often do an evening 'drive-by' before they decide to ask for a showing.
- Clean and de-clutter. Mail, bathroom toiletries and kids' toys need to be out of view.
- Depersonalize. The knickknacks that make a house a home can distract buyers from visualizing a property as their own, so remove personal items such as family photographs, trophies and vacation pictures.
- Stylize the home with up-to-date designs. Doing something simple, such as placing a slipcover over an old sofa, can greatly improve a room's appearance.

Home staging is essential because even in this tough market, buyers tend to choose a home based on emotion rather than price. Buyers want to make sure they're getting a good buy, but it is the emotional appeal of a nice-looking home that seals the deal. For sellers who want extra decorating help, hire a professional home stager. Fees for home stagers vary according to the level of service needed. An initial consultation with recommendations usually costs between \$100 and \$400.

5. Price your house right

Since home values are falling in many markets, it can be hard to know what you're asking price should be. A good way to determine the best dollar figure is to study recent sale prices of comparable homes in your neighborhood. Real-estate agents can look up these "comps" for you and suggest a fair value. Web sites such as Zillow.com and Trulia.com also provide data on recent sales. Resist the urge to ask for more than what your home is worth. Justify the value of your home. If you've made upgrades, highlight them. Most buyers won't know that your granite countertops were a \$6,000 improvement you made in your kitchen unless you tell them.

6. Use creativity to boost buyer interest

To keep the listing from appearing stale, it's important for sellers to continuously tweak their strategies. Rewrite your sales ads every few weeks, and revisit your selling Web site and change the pictures a little. Take pictures from the right side of the house and post them for a few weeks, then switch them out with pictures taken from the left side or the front of the house. As buyers browse the listings online, they may stop at your description and give it a new viewing because they hadn't seen that particular picture before. If people visited your home but didn't make an offer, check for any feedback. That information could let you know how your home compares with others in the neighborhood and whether or not you need to make any improvements.

7. Renovate

If your home isn't catching the eye of buyers, it might need more some work. A high-priced kitchen remodel to entice buyers probably isn't a great idea, but replacing damaged baseboards, worn carpet and dead shrubbery are essential renovations in today's real-estate market. If the video uncovered some eyesores, fix them. Luckily, these types of renovations don't have to be high-dollar projects.

8. Have a weekday open house

The weekends are full of open houses. Not only are there more weekend open houses than there are prospective buyers, but an increasing number of people also work on the weekends to produce extra income. A weekday open house reduces the competition, and an evening time may allow parents to view your home when their kids are at a sports practice or another activity. Open houses cost nothing but a little of your time.

9. Find a better agent

The economic downturn that resulted in millions of people losing their jobs produced a class of new real-estate agents looking for additional income. If your agent is new to the real-estate market, he may not have the professional network to get your home in front of lots of buyers. If you're desperate to sell, find a high-volume agent in your area. To ensure the agent gives your home priority over his other listings, offer a bonus or higher commission for a quick sale. Make sure he adds it to the Multiple Listing Service so other agents know that your house comes with a higher payout.

10. Don't take a back-seat role

Even if your real-estate agent is advertising your home and working hard, two people marketing your home are better than one. Put your home on your Face book page, Craigslist, Twitter and other social-media sites. Post fliers on company-approved bulletin boards and talk to family and friends. Most people would rather buy from somebody they know and respect. You'll still have to pay your agent a commission, but if you're desperate to sell, take an active role in the marketing process.

11. Lower your price

If your home isn't producing offers or interest, it's probably time to lower your asking price. Agents will help you to set your initial price based on comparable homes in your market, but in the end, that analysis is just an educated guess. Always keep the price higher than the lowest price you're willing to accept. This allows for room to haggle.

12. Make a Video

Before listing your home for sale, switch roles. Make a detailed video that shows the interior and exterior of your home. Include closets, areas behind doors, the fence and all of the other less visible features. Then, view your video and think like a buyer. What do you see that would cause you to lose interest? Show the video to friends and family, and ask them to give you candid comments. The smallest details are sometimes the difference between a buyer making an offer or moving on to the next home.