

Preparation for Showings

Feeling at Home

Buying real estate is often an emotional decision, but when selling real estate you need to remove emotion from the equation. You need to think of your home as a marketable commodity. Your goal is to get others to see it as their potential home, not yours. If you do not consciously make this decision, you can inadvertently create a situation where it takes longer to sell your property. The first step in getting your home ready to sell is to “de-personalize” it.

The reason that you want to make your home “anonymous” is because you want buyers to view it as their potential home. When a potential homebuyer sees your family photos hanging on the wall, it put your own brand on the home and momentarily shatters their illusions about living in the house themselves. Put away family photos, sport trophies, collectible items, knick-knacks, and souvenirs in a box. This includes kitchen and bath countertops. Small appliances, little jars, bottles and tubes should not be left on display. Consider renting a storage unit for a few months and put the boxes in storage. Do not just put the box in the attic, basement or garage. Part of preparing a house for sale is to remove “clutter” and that is the next step in preparing your house for sale.

Uncluttering the House

Often times, rooms just get overcrowded with stuff. If you had planned on selling, giving away, or discarding items before actually moving to your new home, consider doing it before your current home goes on the market. If you simply have too much furniture in one room, move it to another area of the house or to a storage spot for the time being, such as a basement or garage. This will free up the room and make it seem more spacious and airy. An appealing selling point for potential buyers

Furniture Arrangement

As in editing, well place furnishings can also open up a room. Avoid lining furniture along all four walls. Try placing a piece or two on an angle. In the living areas, include an area for cozy conversation. If space allows, create an out of the way corner for reading. If a room has a focal point, such as a fireplace or bay window, arrange furnishings to enhance this feature, not distract from it.

Scents

Just like certain smells can trigger memories in a person years later, the scent of your home can leave a lasting effect on a potential buyer. For this reason, you want to avoid cooking smelly foods such as fish, liver, garlic, onions, or anything fried or spicy before showing your home. If weather allows, open windows and doors to let in some fresh air. During winter months, baking a frozen loaf of bread, cookies or pie can be an inviting fragrance. And though you never want to over-perfume your home, you may want to light a candle as a quick and aromatic remedy. Staying away from sharp floral scents and sticking with a low key scent, such as vanilla or eucalyptus fragrance is best.

Repairs and Improvements

Do not do anything expensive such as remodeling your home just prior to sale. If possible, use savings to pay for any repairs and improvements, do not charge up credit cards or obtain new loans. Most likely part of selling your house is also preparing to buy your next home. You do not want to do anything that will affect your credit scores or hurt your ability to qualify for your next mortgage.

Potential homebuyers often do not know what to do when looking at homes, so they play with things. They flick switches, open everything with a handle, turn on faucets and flush toilets. Make sure your plumbing fixtures are clean and in good working order. Any water stains should be removed and the bathrooms and kitchen should be clean.

Curb Appeal

Curb appeal refers to the potential buyer's first impression of the home, which is usually developed within 15 seconds and includes everything from the entire street right up to your doorstep. You may want to consider some of the following improvements:

Building exterior

- keep the street in front of your home free of litter and debris
- keep the sidewalk swept and shoveled and remove weeds
- paint the fence and fix any squeaks on the gate
- paint the exterior or have siding cleaned
- clean and reseal driveway
- avoid parking cars in the driveway or in front of the house
- make sure all light bulbs are functional
- remove items no longer used (i.e. dog house, swing set, bikes, etc.)

Landscaping

- keep the lawn trimmed and mowed
- trees and shrubs trimmed
- gardens edged
- planting beds edged and weeded
- gravel driveway edged and weeded with no bare spots or ruts
- dead limbs removed from trees
- flower beds planted/cleaned as appropriate for season

Front Door/Porch

- repaint, if needed
- apply new hardware
- replace the house numbers
- install new light fixtures
- the front porch (if applicable) should be as clean and inviting as possible
- fresh potted flowers on the front porch/stoop and back patio/deck

Roof

- replace broken or missing shingles or tiles
- repair flashing, if needed
- paint eaves
- if the roof needs replaced, consider doing it before showings begin
- replace or repair gutters and downspouts

Windows

- replaced cracked or broken glass
- clean all windows
- clean window screens and replace any that are damaged
- make sure that the curtains and blinds on the inside of the home do not look bad from the outside of the home
- add shutters to the front windows
- install window boxes with bright flowers
- apply touch-up paint if needed

The Right Statements

The following are a few suggestions you may want to consider to help each room in your home to make the right statement.

Entry

- repaint the entry with light, neutral colors
- apply a fresh coat of polyurethane to wood floors, polish tile floors
- replace plastic switch plate covers with brass or porcelain
- replace hall light fixture if old or tired looking
- make sure the room is well lit

Bathroom

- place a vase of fresh flowers on the vanity
- replace old toilet seat
- replace old light fixture with a new style or makeup light
- have a porcelain refinishing service refinish an old tub
- place all personal care articles out of sight
- freshen the air with lemon scented products
- replace old towel racks
- add color with new towels and shower curtains

Kitchen

- the kitchen should be virtually spotless
- grind a small section of lemon in the disposal for a fresh smell
- install new hardware on cabinets
- organize cabinets for a more spacious look

- remove small appliances and gadgets for an uncluttered look
- chipped or damaged countertops should be replaced or repaired
- replace flooring if in poor condition
- fresh paint may be effective

Bedrooms

- clean rugs and windows
- organize closets to increase their perceived size
- mirrored closet doors can make the room seem larger
- bedrooms should be well lit
- add a ceiling fan
- replace tattered or worn bedspreads. Bed should always be made.

Living Room

- sweep and clean fireplace
- use chair rail or cornice molding to create a feeling of elegance
- professionally clean carpet and rugs, refinish hardwood floors
- clean windows and light fixtures
- repair any cosmetic drywall/plaster cracks

Basement

- lights operable and as bright as possible
- rearrange and neatly store items, hang things up and use shelves to minimize clutter
- vacuum and/or dust water heater/furnace/boiler and surrounding pipes
- paint a bare cement floor oil-based gray
- paint the stairway down to the basement
- make sure there are no signs of pest infestation
- clean and organize laundry area
- make sure all lights are working

Garage

- make sure lights are operable
- floors swept
- window sills and windows vacuumed and/or dusted
- vacuum and/or dust inside of garage door
- remove any excess/unused items
- clean any oil stains from your car, degrease floor if necessary
- keep the garage neat and organized
- paint the garage floor an oil-based gray
- install a garage door opener if there isn't one already
- hang gardening tools and loose articles on the wall
- hold a garage sale to dispose of unused items that create clutter (see tips on garage sales later in this guide)

Swimming Pool or Spa

- repair or replace any broken tiles
- clean and repair decking
- filter and heating equipment should be clean
replace worn or broken equipment

Creating an Atmosphere

The general atmosphere of your home may seem like a minor detail, but it can make an enormous impact. Bright light and neutral colors create the most favorable reactions.

Here are some suggestions.

Light

- keep windows clean and open drapes and blinds
- use adequate wattage in bulbs
- turn on lights prior to showings
- use light wall colors

Color

- white is the most popular exterior color
- white and very light pastels are the most popular interior colors
- avoid highly patterned wallpaper whenever possible
- limit bright colors to accents: flowers, rugs, towels, etc.

Sound

- avoid barking dogs, noisy children, vacuums, dishwashers, etc.
- eliminate sounds of mechanical problems, such as banging pipes
- classical or instrumental music helps create a pleasant atmosphere

Smell

- cleaning, lemon wax or flowers can achieve a smell of cleanliness
- avoid strong smells in the refrigerator with a box of baking soda
- avoid strong pet odors, smoke, cooking and gas