

Selling Your Home: Checklist and Guide to a Profitable Sale

Nothing pays dividends to sellers of a house quite like hard work and preparation. Good housekeeping and repair, spaciousness and pleasant aromas bring top dollar and quick sales. Conversely, dirt, lack of light and space, too much deferred maintenance and bad odors will negatively affect price and speed of sale.

This checklist endeavors to pinpoint those specific items around the house that are the keys to a successful sale. The list is extensive, but the most salable properties usually reflect attention to each of the areas discussed. If your home has extensive deferred maintenance and time or funds are limited it may not be practical to cover all areas, but do the best job possible.

The Yard and Exterior

PAINT: Few things will enhance the salability of a house quite so much as painting the outside. Before painting, scrape or water-blast any blistered or peeling paint; repair gutters and downspouts and replace wood showing dry rot.

FRONT ENTRY: Give special care to this area. This is where buyers get their first opportunity to make a close inspection, so eliminate any flaws. All woodwork should be freshly painted, including the storm doors. Replace a badly worn or broken doorbell button. Polish any brass and make sure the door knobs are tight and working properly. Replace or paint an unsightly mailbox. Replace or repair any cracked or crumbling stoops, walkways, or sidewalks and put out a new or clean door mat. Do a thorough weeding and pruning job on any flower beds near the entry and try to have some flowering plants growing.

YARD: Mow and trim the lawn. Wed flower beds, trim shrubs and remove or replace dead plants and trees. Water regularly during the growing season. Pick up any debris, toys or lawn equipment.

DRIVEWAY, GARAGE/CARPORT: Wash down the driveway and the sidewalks. Clean up grease or oil spots, removing the dirt if not the stain. See that the garage door opens freely and that the automatic door opener is in good working order.

CARPETS: Steam-cleaning is the best answer for soiled carpet. If pet odors are present be sure to clean the carpet some time before the first showing to be sure the odors have been eliminated. Anchor loose carpet.

FURNITURE: Arrange furniture to make sure each room appears as spacious and attractive as possible. If a piece is badly worn, temporarily store it in the attic or at neighbors.

Mechanical and Electrical Features

LIGHTS: Every light socket in and around the house should have a good bulb of adequate wattage. Don't overlook those outside, in the garage, utility room, halls, and closets or over the kitchen sink. Also, in the oven and exhaust hood.

SWITCHES and FIXTURES: Repair or replace wall switches, outlets and light fixtures that don't work. Replace any broken switch plates. Note: If you are not full competent to handle these repairs call a professional.

APPLIANCES: Those that will be sold with the home should be in good working order. If specific equipment does not work and you do not intend to repair it, point this out!

PLUMBING: Badly chipped or irreversibly stained sinks and tubs should be enameled, patched or replaced. Leaky or noisy toilets should be fixed as well as dripping faucets. All clogged or slow drains should be cleared. All caulking should be clean and fresh looking.

Arrange for a Spacious Look

One of the best and least expensive ways to improve your home for showings is to open up as much space as possible. Overstuffed rooms and closets give the impression of being smaller than they really are. You cannot change the size of your rooms but you may be able to improve the openness. If necessary, rent some storage space to store excess belongings in while the house is on the market.

CLOSETS and STORAGE AREAS: One of the most frequently voiced requirements of buyers is for closet and storage space. Open up your storage areas by getting rid of items you are not using.

COUNTERS and CABINETS: Overcrowding gives the impression of inadequate space. This applies to both bathrooms and kitchens, with the kitchen being the most important. Store infrequently used countertop appliances. Do some winnowing in the cabinets.

GARAGE: Buyers will pay a premium for a garage if they can visualize it being of value to them. If your garage has become a two-car attic, remove the excess to a mini-warehouse for the duration.

Hints on Housekeeping

BATHROOMS: Few places in the house can get dirty so fast and few things will “unsell” a house as quickly as dirty bathrooms. The vanity, sink, faucet hardware and mirrors are focal points and they should be cleaned until they sparkle. Other potential problems might be soap residue in a shower, a moldy shower curtain, accumulated dirt in the shower door track, soiled or missing grout and dirty or battered bath mats.

KITCHEN: Like baths, kitchens get dirty all by themselves. Most buyers will inspect this area carefully, so extra time spent here is well spent. Clean the stove inside and out. Replace badly stained or corroded plates under the heating elements on electric ranges. Don’t neglect the kitchen exhaust hood. Clear off countertops and make sure cabinets are orderly.

WINDOWS: Clean windows are an absolute necessity if a house is to look its best. Wash windows and sills sparkling clean. Curtains and drapes should be freshly laundered and all mini-blinds should be dusted.

WATER HEATER: Perhaps because it is so unusual, a clean water heater really impresses.

Sniff out Unpleasant Odors

WET TOWELS and WASHCLOTHS: Residents frequently are not aware of what a potential source of bad odor these are. Replace all used towels with fresh ones before showing.

SOILED CLOTHES: When the house is being shown keep dirty laundry out of the living areas. Move it to the utility room or storage area. This is especially true of a diaper pail.

GARAGE: Take all trash and garbage out of the house, particularly any food related discards. Make sure no potatoes or onions are going bad under the sink or in the pantry.

FIREPLACE: Clean out the fireplace and remove all ash and unburned wood. This is important to make sure there is no chance of that stale fireplace smell.

SEWER GAS IN THE HOUSE: Do whatever is necessary to correct this problem.

CATS and DOGS: As a first step move the cat’s litter box out of the house. Be sure to clean up after the dog prior to any showings.

Important Reminders

VALUABLES: You may have valuable possessions that you like to display in your home, but when your house is on the market it is not a good idea. Never leave valuable items out in plain sight or visible in cabinets. Get them out of sight or out of the house.

EXCLUSIONS FROM THE SALE: Make a list of items you do not intend to include with the sale of the house. Freestanding items generally do not convey but when in doubt spell it out. Some items that often cause misunderstandings are light fixtures, drapes, large mirrors, water softeners, garage door openers and satellite dishes.

KEYS: As you are readying the house for market make a note to gather all the keys for the house including doors dead bolts and any padlocks around the property.

INSTRUCTION MANUALS: As with keys, gather manuals and warranties for the mechanical equipment in the house- kitchen appliances, water heater and softener, air conditioning and heating units and pool filtration equipment.

Tips for Showings

LIGHT: a bright, cheerful atmosphere will go a long way to putting a buyer in a relaxed frame of mind. Open all drapes unless there is an objectionable view, and pull up the shades during the day. In most rooms you should turn on lights. Lamps and indirect lighting is preferable but use overheads if that is all there is.

AROMAS: Set out some fresh flowers, both for their appearance and fragrance. Be careful of cooking aromas. Baking cookies or bread is a good idea. Strong smelling vegetables or fried foods are not such a good idea.

CLOSETS: Keep doors closed except for walk-in closets. Have those doors slightly ajar and turn on lights to draw attention to this special feature.

POSTERS and SIGNS: We live in a tolerant age, but don't take a chance on offending a potential buyer. Remove any posters or signs that might be considered objectionable.

ASHTRAYS: Dirty ashtrays are both unsightly and a source of objectionable odors to nonsmokers. Keep them clean.

ROOMS: All rooms should be neat and tidy. Make all beds, plump up the cushions on the sofa and chairs, and straighten furniture. Stack newspapers/magazines neatly and out of sight. Make sure dishes are put away and the kitchen sink is clean. All clothes should be picked up and either hung in the closet, folded away in a drawer or placed in the laundry hamper.

PETS: Get them out of the house, if not off the property. Some people don't like dogs and nobody likes muddy paw prints on a suit or dress. Cats can be just as objectionable to the person who doesn't like or who does not like being a rubbing post. Pets can also be a distraction to the prospect.

MUSIC: Soft background music will help create a relaxed mood that prompts buyers to linger and enjoy. But no music is better than loud music. Never have the TV on when the house is being shown.

YOUR PRESENCE: Most buyers will not relax and closely inspect a home if the owners are present, so try to arrange to turn the house over to the salesperson. If you must remain home, refrain from talking unless questions are directed at you. All too often a seller will jump in to point out some special feature, fearful that the salesperson will overlook it. Please bear in mind that some of the most successful salespeople will say little or nothing during the showings for two reasons. First, they have made their selling points before entering the home: and secondly they want the buyers to discover some things for themselves in order to build excitement. The salesperson also knows the buyers temperaments. So trust their professional abilities.