

Selling your home: Where to begin?

Remember what first attracted you to your house when you bought it? What excited you about it most? When deciding how best to present your home for sale, it is helpful to try to get back into that buyer's frame of mind.

A spruced-up house makes a great **first impression** on potential buyers. An attractive property grabs their attention and makes them excited about finding a house that looks and feels well cared for. Because buyers believe they'll encounter fewer problems if they buy it, your house becomes more appealing and stands out from the competition. So if you prepare your home correctly, you'll save time selling it when it's on the market.

A good **first impression** makes an impact on a number of levels. It's not just the way your house looks to potential buyers, but how it feels and smells to them, how their friends and family will react, how they imagine it would be to live there.

With simple improvements throughout your house, you can grab the attention of potential buyers and help them see why your house is right for them.

Plan ahead. Create a plan to enhance your property. Those seemingly insignificant problems you've learned to live with can actually discourage potential buyers. Keep a notebook, as you stroll through your home and yard, make a list of what needs to be done. Consider what your property looks like to people driving by or walking through your door. What will they like or dislike? What needs fixing, painting, cleaning? What can you improve? Whether you paint your house or fix up the yard, these efforts don't need to be costly; even inexpensive improvements and minor repairs go far towards attracting serious buyers.

Consider these ideas for increasing your home's appeal in order to sell it quickly at the best price:

1. Interior

- **Clean Everything:** Buyers expect a spotless house, inside and out, so clean **everything**, especially your windows and window sills. Scrub walls and floors, tile and ceilings, cupboards and drawers, kitchen and bathrooms. Wash scuff marks from doors and entryways, clean light fixtures and the fireplace. Don't forget the laundry room!
- **Cut the Clutter:** People are turned off by rooms that look and feel cluttered. Remember, potential buyers are buying your house, not your furniture, so help them picture themselves and their possessions in your home by making rooms feel large, light, neutral, and airy. As you clean, pack away personal items, such as pictures, valuables, and collectibles, and store or get rid of surplus books, magazines, DVDs, extra furniture, rugs, blankets, etc. Consider renting a storage unit to eliminate clutter in your garage and attic.

It's hard to get rid of possessions, but cleaning and clearing out clutter can really pay off in the end. Packing away clutter also gets you started packing for your subsequent move. Make your garage, and basement as tidy as the rest of your house. Simple little tasks like storing your tools and neatly rolling up your garden hose suggest you take good care of your home. Don't let anything detract from making your best first impression.

- **Closets:** They're an important consideration to many buyers. By storing clothing you won't use soon, you'll make closets look larger.
- **Paint:** A new coat of paint cleans up your living space and makes it look bright and new. To make rooms look larger, choose light, neutral colors more likely to appeal to the most people possible, such as beige or white.
- **Carpet:** Check its condition. If it's worn, consider replacing it. It's an easy and affordable way to help sell your home faster. Again, light neutral colors, like beige, are best. If you don't replace it, you can suggest to potential buyers they could select a new carpet and you'll reduce your price, buyers like to hear they're getting a deal. At the very least, have your carpets cleaned.

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1. Interior (continued)

- **Repairs & Renovations:** it's best to avoid making major renovations just to sell the house since you're unlikely to recoup those costs in your selling price. Make minor repairs to items such as leaky faucets, slow drains, torn screens, damaged gutters, loose doorknobs, and broken windows. Make sure repairs are done well; buyers won't take you seriously if your home improvement efforts look messy, shoddy, or amateurish.
- **Leaks & Moisture:** water stains on ceilings or in the basement alert buyers to potential problems. Don't try to cosmetically cover up stains caused by leaks. If you've fixed the water problem, repair the damage and disclose in writing to the buyer what repairs were made.

2. Exterior

- **Curb Appeal:** The "WOW" factor—that first visual, high-impact impression your home makes on potential buyers—can turn a looker into a buyer. To determine your property's curb appeal, drive through your neighborhood and note other properties; then approach your own house as if you were a potential buyer. How does it look? Does it "wow" you? Will its curb appeal attract buyers? Note what needs improving, like trimming trees, planting shrubs, or painting gutters. Little things convey you've cared for your home, and this is your opportunity to sell that important message to buyers who are shopping from the street, cruising neighborhoods looking for houses for sale. To get them through your door, do what you can to make your property look like someone's dream home.
- **Paint/Stain:** If it's peeling or blistering and you can't remember the last time you painted it, your house needs some attention. That also goes for stain that has significantly faded. A newly painted or stained exterior will help sell your house faster, and whether you do it yourself or hire someone, you'll increase your home's value at the same time.
- **In the Yard:** Grab people's attention by enhancing your yard and landscaping. If your house looks inviting and well-maintained from the street, people will imagine that it's attractive inside as well.
 - Prune bushes and hedges; trim trees.
 - Keep your lawn looking healthy and green by mowing it often, fertilizing, and keeping it edged and trimmed.
 - Clean up and dispose of pet mess.
 - Weed your gardens; add fertilizer and mulch, and plant colorful flowers.
 - During Winter months, keep your driveway and sidewalks shoveled, de-iced, and well-lit.
 - Stack firewood, clean out birdbaths, repair and paint fencing.
- **The Front Door:** An attractive entry catches a buyer's eye and says, "Welcome," so highlight this area of your home with decorative touches, such as wreaths or new shrubs and flowers around the entry way. For an even grader entry, clean and paint your front door, or replace it with a new one for a few hundred dollars. Don't forget to fix and polish doorknobs, repair torn screens, and put out that new welcome mat.