

Sell It Myself

The text "Sell It Myself" is rendered in a bold, italicized, sans-serif font. The letters are a vibrant yellow color with a subtle gradient. A dark brown shadow is cast beneath the text, creating a three-dimensional effect. The entire graphic is centered on a white background.

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Chapter 1

SHOULD I SELL MY HOME ON MY OWN?

Each year thousands of homeowners ask themselves this question - primarily since traditionally, home sales were the sole domain of real estate brokers and agents.

If you ask a real estate agent about selling your own home, more times than not, they will explain the process in a way to make it appear more difficult than it really is. For an agent it would be better to convince you that you should NOT sell you own home: remember every home that an owner sells represents a brokers' commission lost!

And many times this strategy works; because for most people, their home represents their most valuable asset and they want to be sure that they get a good return on their investment. Homeowners have a clear idea of what their house is worth from a variety of sources; home insurance policies and property taxes to name just two.

When you bought your home, you looked for certain things and now that you have made the decision to sell your home, the way you look at your home has to change. Just as there were certain considerations as a buyer, the same holds true in your role as a seller.

Many people use their own home-buying experience as the motivation to sell their own homes. In recent years between the real estate "boom", heavily discounted mortgage interest rates, along with the advent of the Internet, many people have become highly informed on the ins-and-outs of selling property.

In addition, although real estate brokers receive a certain amount of training in order to get their license, many people feel that the services that they provide have very little impact on the actual sale of a property and in some cases, cause more problems for the buyer and the seller.

Not only are more real estate owners taking matters into their own hands, today more prospective buyers are also aware of the impact of the brokerage fee on the amount they pay for a property and prefer to deal directly with the owner.

Some of the tactics used under the guise of selling your home benefit the broker more than the person selling the home. Here are a few of the reasons why more homeowners are taking control of the sale of their home:

- **Wasting time hosting an "Open House"**

Several things happen at an open house, but your chances of finding a bona-fide buyer for your home is not one of them. A study conducted by the National Association of Realtors on the effectiveness of open houses resulting in the sale of the property, found that for every 100 homes shown in this manner, only 2 were sold to buyers who attended the open house.

A real estate broker will encourage you to host an open house because they know that all types of people will attend; some are in the process of selling their own home and want to gauge the price of their own property, others are just "window shopping." But no matter what their reason for attending, the broker now has more people to add to their Rolodex of prospective homebuyers.

- **Inaccurate reports of offers**

By law, if you hire a broker to represent you in the sale of your home, they are obligated to inform you of every offer for your property, but unfortunately, not all brokers abide by this rule. Rather than the offer being too low for you to consider, more times than not, it is because the brokers wants a larger commission.

In some cases, home sellers are "double-teamed," where there is an outside broker, also called a "co-broker" showing your house while the primary broker waits for one of their own clients to make an offer, then they keep the full commission for themselves.

Many home owners take it for granted that their broker will tell them whenever an offer is made on their property, but unless this is clearly spelled out in the listing agreement, a broker will be in a position to make your decisions.

- **Having prospective buyers steered to a more expensive property through loan pre-approval**

By law, a broker is obligated to tell you about every offer, but many times they will tell prospective buyers that they must get "pre approved" for the home loan, which logically will make a buyer a better candidate to buy your home. However, many brokers use this information to steer them to a higher priced property to get a higher commission.

- **Overstepping boundaries**

Transferring property involves several different laws beyond the home loan. Every state and city has certain regulations in regards to zoning, improvements and disclosure. There are some brokers who will disregard many aspects of the process in order to get the commission.

There have been cases where brokers have been aware of a problem with the property, i.e., flood damage, and withheld this information from the prospective buyer, which has resulted in legal headaches for the home seller.

In regards to the legal transaction of the house sale, most states require a certain form of contract, however some brokers will give homeowners the false impression that they can amend these contracts, when this is really a matter that should be handled by a lawyer.

As the real estate market has continued to become more competitive, the examples of what can go wrong when you sell your home through a real estate broker, along with the commission fees, has made for-sale-by-owner sales more popular. Today, with the reach of the Internet, it is easier than ever before for individuals to sell their own property.

What's The Story Behind The "FOR SALE BY OWNER" Sign?

Once you have reached the decision to sell your home, the next question is: What do I have to do to sell it? Even though real estate agents would like you to believe that the process of selling a house is complicated business, the truth of the matter is that homeowners are responsible for approximately 30% of the homes sold every year.

The key to a successful home sale is pricing and exposure. To determine the market value of your home, start with an appraisal of your home. Before you hire a licensed or certified appraiser, carefully inspect your home and repair or refurbish all the items that would detract from the value of your home.

Here are a few items that you should attend to:

- Are all of the appliances and plumbing in good working order?
- Has the interior of the home been painting within the last year?
- Is the landscaping around the house up to date?
- Have the windows and coverings been cleaned?
- Are the areas where sealants are used in good repair?
- Has the carpet been cleaned within the last 3 months?
- Are the roof and gutters clean and good condition?

Once you have made all necessary repairs and improvements you are ready to have your property appraised. The appraiser uses market data to develop an opinion of market value based upon the best use of your property. A real estate appraisal is a necessity to speed along the sale of your home.

Market value basically translates into what buyers are willing to spend for homes in a comparable size, condition and location as your own home. Current interest rates also affect how much prospective home buyers can afford to spend for a property.

Technically, when you sell your home you are "transferring ownership." In most cases, lending institutions will require an appraisal to be done before a mortgage is approved. In fact, the Uniform Residential Appraisal Report is used as security for the home loan; playing a key role in both the mortgage application approval and the amount of down payment required.

It is also a good idea to meet with your banker as well as other local lenders to have a clear understanding of what options are available to prospects to finance the purchase of your home.

SELLING YOUR OWN HOME WILL SAVE YOU MONEY

You need to prepare yourself to devote a certain amount of time and energy to the sale of your home, but you will save yourself a lot of aggravation when you realize that you have eliminated the cause of delay in negotiations; haggling over the 5-10% that would be added to the purchase price to cover the real estate broker commission.

This will give you an advantage when you begin to discuss the property with prospective buyers - "for sale by owner" properties will attract bargain hunters and without the brokers fee it will be easier to feel confident in your asking price.

You have to also consider the pulse of the home-buying market: if it is strong, you can ask for up to 15% more than the appraisal, conversely, if the market is weak, it may be to your advantage to stick to the appraisal value or go a bit below it.

It is important to pay attention to these conditions if you want to sell your home in the shortest amount of time. If you set an asking price for your property that is far beyond the range of properties in your categories, prospective buyers may pass on your property.

With your real estate appraisal completed and a price fixed for your property, you are ready to move to the next phase: getting the exposure you need to attract buyers to your property. In the meantime, you should check with your local authorities regarding the requirements to post your "for sale" sign on your lawn. In addition, call the print publications to find out which local real estate websites are the most effective for online advertising to maximize your efforts.

When you have the rates and requirements to advertise online and in the print publications you can create a budget for advertising your property. If you plan to use print advertising on your own, it is a good idea to set aside enough money to advertise your property for 3-6 months longer than you anticipate it will take to sell your home.

One of your most important means of gaining momentum in selling your home is to make sure all of your personal contacts are aware that your house is for sale so that they can help you with word-of-mouth advertising.

IT TAKES TIME AND EFFORT BUT IT IS WELL WORTH IT

The sequence of tasks that you have to perform to sell your home can provide you with valuable knowledge that you can apply to make the process as time and cost effective as possible. If you plan to purchase real estate after your home is sold, you will be able to use what you have learned to save even more money.

As a homeowner you are valuable member of the community and your home sale will affect not only yourself and your family, but also your neighbors and your community at large. Selling your own home is more than just a business transaction: you are passing the baton of responsibility to care for an asset that affects all of these individuals.

Instead of the property being sold to the highest bidder by a broker, you will be able to select the buyer for your home based on the facts you know about the property and the community that it is located within.

By taking a proactive approach to selling your home, you will be able to put your own "house in order" and begin planning for your future without burning any bridges as you move on.

The decision to sell your own home will save you money on real estate brokers commission, with the potential of saving you \$3000, \$6,000, \$15,000 after accounting from your expenses. Although there are several aspects of selling your own home, you do not have to manage the responsibility for every aspect on your own.

In the next section we will look at the roles of each of the key players of the team that will work with you to help you successfully sell your home; the lawyer, mortgage lender and home inspector.

Chapter 2

ORGANIZING YOUR SUPPORT TEAM

In the previous section, we looked at the advantages and basic steps required for you to sell your own home. With these steps completed, it is now time to talk about the players in the supporting roles of the process; your real estate lawyer, mortgage banker and home inspector.

YOUR REAL ESTATE LAWYER

Each of the steps that you take is to accomplish the goal of selling your home to a qualified buyer. To transfer the property, you will need a real estate attorney to handle the legal sales agreement and contract that are needed to sell your home.

It is in your best interests to have a list of items that you want written into the contract, i.e., items excluded from the sale of the house. In addition, your lawyer will play a vital role in witnessing the final walk-through of the property before settlement, the sales proceedings and closing.

Because you are selling your home on your own, ask your lawyer about your legal responsibilities in negotiating the final terms of the sale with prospective buyers including; the sales price, offer to purchase form, deposit receipt, buyer's cost sheet, disclosures, financing, inspections, date of closing and possession.

Especially in the case of disclosures, many states require the seller to provide all prospective buyers with a written disclosure statement of any defects in the house when the buyer first sees the property. Be sure to make note of WHEN you need to make each of the disclosures available to buyers.

The purpose of a disclosure is to provide buyers with a realistic picture of the condition of your property, so that they can make their best offer. A property that has water damage due to a flood is worth less than a house that has none.

While this damage affects the amount you can expect for your property, it is much better to disclose problems in the beginning rather than have the new owner discover the problem and then take legal action against you.

Along with the state mandated disclosures for real estate, the federal government requires sellers to provide a lead disclosure to buyers, be sure to ask your lawyer for a list of the appropriate disclosures.

Here is a few of the legal things you will have to do once you have found a qualified buyer:

1. Creating the Sales Agreement

When you have found a qualified buyer, they will need to sign a sales agreement to put the process in motion for the closing of the sale and transfer of the property. Verbal contracts are not valid when it comes to real estate, to prevent fraud, all real estate transactions must be in writing for it to be binding. In addition, the sales agreement cannot be written on the back of an envelope: this is a legal document and should be created by a lawyer or if a standard form is used, a lawyer should review it to make sure it is appropriate.

2. Opening Your Escrow and Title Insurance Account

With your signed sales agreement, you are ready to "open escrow". The escrow and title insurance company acts as an independent entity that handles all monies and documents. The escrow company searches the title of your property to see if there is any type of debt or lien that would prevent the title from being cleared.

3. Resolve Problems with the Title

In the case where the escrow and title insurance company discovers a problem, such as a loan that was paid but is still showing on your title as unpaid, consult with your lawyer regarding the best way to resolve the issue if it cannot be done directly with the recorder of the debt.

YOUR MORTGAGE BANKER

Hopefully, you have discussed the various options available to qualified buyers to finance the purchase of your home as we discussed in the first section. Most house hunters are aware that they need to bring a pre-approval letter for the mortgage to prove that they are capable of securing the financing to close the deal.

However, not all pre-approval letters are created equal. The most crucial part of this document is the commitment. A mortgage pre-approval letter should tell you how much financing is available to the buyer as well as the terms of commitment and the issuing authority.

You should see in the letter the maximum mortgage amount. In the best-case scenario, the Loan to Value Ratio (LTV) will also be given. Loan to Value Ratio determines the amount of the down payment. If you are selling your property for \$200,000 and the lender states that your prospective buyer qualifies for up to \$180,000 at 90%, the buyer must produce a down payment of 10% or \$20,000.

The best source of a mortgage pre-approval letter is a lender with the ability to guarantee the funds, such as a mortgage banker or banking institution. Letters from mortgage brokers, who must solicit funds from a lender, are in essence "pre-qualifying" letters that only offer an opinion of the potential of the buyer to secure funding.

The commitment in a pre-approval letter is rarely stated in concrete terms. More times than not, the lender will state that they have thoroughly checked the prospective buyers credit and that they are "tentatively" approved for a mortgage. But financing is not guaranteed.

Requesting a pre-approval letter can save you a lot of time, if the prospect cannot secure financing, there is no deal. When you find a pre-approved buyer and have a signed sales agreement in hand, it is a good idea to set a deadline for the buyer to secure the financing. Keep an eye on the progress of your buyer's financing, if a deadline is missed, make sure you get the details and consult with your lawyer about the best way to proceed.

A WORD ABOUT INTEREST RATES

How do interest rates impact houses for sale by owner? When interest rates are low, it is easier to find buyers who can qualify and make their monthly payments. But all it takes is a slight increase in the interest rates to change this picture.

Currently in the United States, the Federal Reserve has been raising interest rates on short-term borrowing, i.e., a 12-month personal loan will cost a borrower more. But long term interest rates for a 30 year home mortgage loan are fairly stable because most the financial institutions that make these loans believe that the Federal Reserve will continue to keep these interest rates low to retard inflation.

But eventually, this strategy will come to an end and interest rates for long-term loans will begin to rise. If you are selling your home when the interest rates begin to increase, how can you motivate a buyer? If you were selling your home for \$200,000 through a real estate agent with a 6% commission fee, the agent would pocket \$12,000. You can use this money to "sweeten the deal" by offering a reduction of the purchase price by \$6,000 to the pre-approved buyer to achieve a faster sale. In extreme cases, where the seller is under pressure, some have opted to reduce the purchase price by the full value of the commission.

YOUR HOME INSPECTOR

While the role of the lawyer and mortgage banker are vital, so is that of the Home Inspector who gives you the important information you need in order to give buyers the disclosures required by law in most states.

As stated earlier, it is best to tell buyers if the property has significant problems that you cannot fix. This will save you the embarrassment of being unpleasantly surprised or having to re-negotiate the deal.

A home inspection at the beginning of the process affords you awareness of required property repairs and property conditions so you can incorporate them in your pricing decision. It also shows buyers that you are a committed seller and makes your property more attractive. With fewer conditions and amendments to the sales agreement, closing the sale is easier.

GETTING READY FOR YOUR HOME INSPECTION

Scheduling a home inspection begins by locating a qualified and preferably licensed Home Inspector.

Before the Home Inspector's visit there are several things you can check for problems and remedy if need be:

- **Paint:** Check each room for cracked or peeling paint.
- **Stairs and Walkways:** Be sure to remove any and all obstructions to stairs and walkways, both inside your house and in the area around your property. Stair railings should be stable and secure.
- **Windows:** If you have wooden frame windows, look for signs of dry rot around the pane glass and sills. Clean the glass and check for hairline cracks in glass. Test the operation of your windows, they should be open easily and function properly. Test the seal of the window and make sure that it closes securely without draft. If you have window screens make certain that they are fitted securely.
- **The Roof:** First look for leaks or cracks/condition that may encourage a leak. If you have trees on your property make sure that they are pruned so that none of the branches in contact with the house. Wet fallen leaves create stress on your roof.
- **Furnace:** Make sure the venting around the furnace is in accordance with regulations. Check that all of the thermostat functions are operational.
- **Plumbing:** With pipes and fixtures, first check for leaks and then test the cold and hot water pressure by turning on two faucets at the same time. In the bathroom inspect the walls around the shower and tub for water damage. Look for rust and signs of leakages around the hot water heater. Make sure your inspection is in order for the water heater.
- **Your Foundation:** The foundation and mudsill (the part of the foundation that supports the house) is dry and level. Look for signs of shifting and settling crack.
- **Electrical Systems:** Check your fuse box or circuit breaker; test all of electrical outlets, light sockets fixtures and switches to ensure they work properly. Check for broken or loose outlets.
- **Drainage:** All runoff spouts should drain in a direction to take water away from house. Your lot should incline away from the house to help with water drainage. Your house foundation should be at least 8 inches above ground level.

CHOOSING THE HOME INSPECTOR

You have made all of the repairs to the problems you found and the day to schedule your home inspectors' visit has arrived. Although licensing is not required by all states, it is in your best interest if you choose to hire a licensed home inspector. This is especially true for the termite and/or radon inspections that are required by banks and mortgage bankers to issue the financing for the purchase of the home.

When the inspector arrives at your property, they will explain the inspection process in general and make a tour of the property to estimate the amount of time the inspection will take. The inspection will begin by walking through the property and investigating all visible areas, appliances and items such as the electrical system, interior plumbing, the heating system, central air conditioning system, the roof, attic space and all visible insulation.

The inspection will include checks of the interior and exterior structural condition of all aspects of your home. From the basement or crawl space to the attic and everything in between; the walls, ceilings, floors, doors and windows. The inspection will end with a check of the entire property to ensure everything is as it was when the inspection started.

While it is not mandatory for you to be present at the inspection, attending the inspection will give you the opportunity to see your property from the objective perspective of a stranger with no emotional attachment to the property. Home inspectors can provide valuable information on the different aspects of the structure and systems that function within your home and how to best take care of them.

DEALING WITH PROBLEMS UNCOVERED BY INSPECTIONS

Mortgage bankers require a termite inspection and buyers expect one. However, if the Home Inspector discovers a problem that you were unaware of, you will have to make the repairs, especially if termites are found. However, beyond termites, you can negotiate with the buyers regarding repairs that were brought to light by the Home Inspection Report.

In the next section we will look at what you need to know about competing for buyers in the "for sale by owner" real estate market.

Chapter 3

THE PRICE MUST BE RIGHT

By this time you complete all of the steps outlined in the previous section, you should have:

- an accurate picture of the market value of your property from your appraisal
- a list of the legal responsibilities when a home owner sells their own property
- an understanding of how a buyer can purchase your property from your banker
- a detailed report on the structural condition of your property from your home inspection
- a list of repairs that you completed as a result of the home inspectors report
- a list of any major problems that a buyers will be told in the disclosure
- a list of the items that you want to exclude from the sale of the house for your sales contract
- the base purchase price to advertise
- a complete description of your property for the advertising to attract buyers from the combined information of your appraisal and home inspection report

Take some time and carefully review all of the information you have received to date, because now you have to make the decision of how much can you ask a buyer to pay for your house? In other words, what is the "right price"?

Determining what your home is worth from an appraiser's perspective is different than how you as the homeowner evaluate your property. While lawyers and bankers can speak in an objective manner about your property, this helps you see your property and all its details. To these facts you have to add several pieces of information:

- **Is there a major difference between the condition of your home when you started this process and now?**

Determining the right price to ask for your property is affected by the market:

- economic factors like interest rates,
- how much your property is worth,
- how many properties are on the market in your price range
- the attractiveness of your location

From the starting point you had a good idea of how much your home was worth from your homeowners insurance and property taxes. Adding to this basic information is the figure given to you by the appraiser, who usually incorporates the change in value if outstanding

repairs are made to the property within 3 months (the general period of time where an appraisal is valid).

You should have 2 sets of figures now you should calculate how many repairs, if any, you had to make as a result of the home inspectors' report, plus the amount of time and expense you incurred to accomplish these repairs.

Now you should be able to list the following as your costs and expenses to date for:

- The appraisal
- The legal consultation
- The home inspection
- The repairs; time, labor and materials
- The legal documentation for the sale

You now have 3 sets of figures; let's use our model home from section one to see how this works:

Property Value as of July 15th: \$200,000

Appraisal Value as of August 15th: \$225,000

Cost and Expenses: \$3,500

Adding the appraisal value to your costs and expenses gives us a total of \$228,500, which will serve as your base to compare your property with other properties on the market. Now the focus shifts from you to your buyer market and seller competition.

KNOW YOUR MARKET

The market as a whole is a combination the economic factors in the world, how many people are looking to buy your type of property and how many owners are selling properties like yours.

Economic Factors

From your discussions with your lawyer and banker, you should have a good idea of the current interest rates for home loans and what types of financing options your buyer available for your property. For the past few years the Federal Reserve has kept long term interest rates low to encourage productivity. As long as this policy continues, the general real estate market will be attractive to buyers. If you are in the process of selling your home while the interest rates are low, qualified buyers will be able to secure financing easier and the sale should move forward quickly.

On the other hand, if the interest rates are on the rise, you will face a thinner field of buyers; high interest rates on home loans automatically raises the criteria that buyers have to satisfy in order to qualify for the loan.

Buyers

What is the profile of the person who could purchase your property? Depending on what type of house you have and its condition, your prospective buyer could be an individual who wants to buy a property for themselves or for their family.

Today, there are many people who choose to invest in real estate instead of the stock market. Many of these individuals purchase the property to produce income in the same way that people purchase stocks for the dividends.

Whatever their reasons for the purchase, you know that they must receive a property disclosure and should be prepared to provide a valid pre-approval letter from bona-fide lender for a home loan.

Sellers

You need to begin looking at how real estate agents list properties. Search online for any major real estate website and make note of the description components. This is the type of information you will have to supply for your own property online listing.

KNOW YOUR COMPETITION

Compare the way a real estate agent would categorize your property with other listings in the same price range. Specifically look for properties similar to yours within the same zip code and vicinity. If you have a 2 bedroom, 1 bath traditional style home of 1,000 square feet, search for homes with that criterion and make note of the purchase.

When you start this process you may be surprised at the wide range of properties within your price range as well as how many properties in your category are on the market for sale. The whole purpose of this exercise is to give you all the information you need so that you can negotiate the sale of your house for a price that satisfies both the buyer and the seller.

How these three parts work together results in how long properties remain on the market for sale. If you are fortunate to find a real estate website that displays the date the property was listed for sale, count the number of months from the initial listing date to the current one. If most of the properties in your category and area have been on the market under 3 months that is a very brisk market. In the case where the properties have been on the market over 6 months, you might have to consider how this situation will impact your plans.

If you want to sell your property quickly for a specific reason, such as relocation for employment or family, you will have to decide how to resolve the two issues. Hopefully, you will be able to budget money for your advertising for at least 6 months consistently. The amount of time a property remains on the market is not always because there are no buyers to be found, sometimes it is due to owners refusing to budge from their purchase price.

Whether the real estate sales market is moving fast or in a slow period, properties get sold, it is all about finding the right strategy and the right buyer. You have to decide what compromises you are willing to take to sell your property and how those compromises will affect your plans.

TALK TO A REAL ESTATE BROKER

Even though you have decided to sell your own property, it would be beneficial for you to talk about selling your property to understand the market conditions you are facing. This is a fact-gathering exercise, not a competition; there is no need for the real estate broker to be told that you are going to sell your property.

Take photographs of your property with you to show the broker to get their opinion of how much the property could bring on the market. Then find out how many interest buyers the broker currently has that is looking for your type of property.

It would also be helpful to find out when was their last sale of your type of property, how long it was on the market and what was the purchase price. When you have all the information you need, you are ready to create your listing to put your property on the market.

USE ONLINE SERVICES

From your online real estate research and your real estate broker interview you review and revise your base purchase price. The "right price" is always affected by the price the market will bear. In other words, our model property base purchase price is \$228,500, but what if the real estate broker told you that your type of property is in high demand, selling for \$300,000 and they have 10 buyers who have pre-approval letters from a bank waiting? Remember to factor in the amount of commission you would have to pay a real estate agent if you listed your property with them. The 6% commission on \$228,500 is \$13,710, that makes your total possible purchase price \$242,410. With that figure to use, now it's a whole new ballgame.

This scenario gives you more bargaining room, if price is the top consideration, listing your property toward the high end of the buyer field, you can adjust the price if you see it is not selling after a few weeks. Depending again on how much time you have to sell your

property, by listing the property toward the low high of the buyer market will make it more attractive to a larger group.

In the first section we discussed creating your advertising budget. From your initial calls to the real estate publications that serve your area, hopefully you have at least three that are associated with real estate websites that have a good track record in home sales. Now you just have to decide how extensively you want to advertise your property.

Keep in mind that if you decide to advertise in a print publication and online, the majority of the buyers who contact you will find your property online. The listings on the most popular real estate websites such as <http://www.zillow.com> or <http://www.realtytrac.com> are visited by millions of people everyday.

Start by performing a search for the websites that serve your local area that have information that help buyers through the home-buying process. Listing your property on this type of website ensures you that your listing will be seen by a large number of buyers. Using a real estate website that concentrates on your area in combination with a website that has a national reach will bring you a good cross section of buyers from investors looking for an income property to the young couple with small children.

There are also "for sale by owner" real estate websites that cater specifically to the buyers and sellers in this market. You will see hundreds of listings for real estate websites but even with these websites it is in your best interests to choose one that is most popular. Remember you only need 1 buyer and if there will be thousands of buyers searching the site for your type of property. You should begin to receive contacts from interested buyers within a day.

Many of the websites where you can post your property listing charge a fee, while there are many others that are free to use. When you register at these sites, you are assigned an email inbox where interested buyers messages will forwarded to your personal email or you can login to the website to retrieve the messages.

Whichever site you consider, works through the site as if you were a buyer looking for your property and see how many results are returned. If there are many listings that gives your property the room it needs to get good exposure and for its features to stand out from the crowd.

Now that you have your real estate websites selected, the next step is to prepare your listing. In the next section we will put the property listing together and get ready to greet buyers.

Chapter 4

WHAT MAKES YOUR HOME DIFFERENT?

There are hundreds of homes on the market in your city, so how can you give your property the best chance to sell quickly? By thinking like a homebuyer and accent the features about your property that will give them advantages. In other words the question that your listing needs to answer is "Why should I buy your property instead of another?"

Homeowners, who have decided to sell their property, want it to sell fast for the best purchase price. If that is music to your ears don't leave anything to chance. If you plan and prepare carefully with the following tips you will be able to have prospects competing to buy your house.

For every house on the market that sells, the buyer's expectations were fulfilled. And the same will be true for your home. Your advertising plays a key role in communicating the benefits of buying your home for the price you are asking. Of course you have to remember that the process of selling will in most cases involve negotiating and incorporate a certain amount into your price to be able to walk away from the deal satisfied.

HOME STYLES

The style of your home is the first thing a buyer will notice that makes your house different from others. Many sellers list the type of construction for their home incorrectly, for instance stating that it is a "Ranch" style when in reality it is a "Split Level" . It is helpful to use the correct description for your house style for your listing and your word-of-mouth advertising. Having a basic understanding of the different styles can also help you to sell the advantages of your house design.

- **Cape Cod**-two bedrooms downstairs and one or two bedrooms upstairs.
- **Colonial**- most popular style of house, all of the bedrooms are upstairs.
- **Victorian**-colonials with front porches, turrets and gingerbread style siding.
- **Contemporary**-built mostly in the 1980's, open floor plans, soaring ceilings, angular construction,
- **Farm Ranch**-similar to a cape, but larger. Two levels, most bedrooms on lower level, slanted ceilings in upper level rooms.
- **High Ranch or Raised Ranch**-usually built with stairs to get to the front door, main floor has the most living space.
- **Post Modern**-usually a colonial some with cathedral ceilings and oversized windows.
- **Ranch**-all living space on one level besides a basement.
- **Split Level**-has many half-stair cases usually without a bathroom on the main level.

- **Tudor-** colonials with stucco exterior walls, small windows lots of woodwork inside.

COMMUNITY FACTORS

The person who buys your house is also making an investment in the community. The collective image of the neighborhood creates its identity and most buyers place just as much value on the identity of the neighborhood as the property that they are buying.

Communities and neighborhoods have as many different faces as people. If you live in a gated community your home may be part of a real estate developers design. If you live in the suburbs or in a semi rural area, your community may have an old style charm with tree-lined streets and a Main Street, where as in a large urban neighborhood tree lined streets are not as common.

It is important to know the positive and negative points of your neighborhood when you decide to sell your home, because the home buyers will ask you questions about the community so be prepared. You can use the Internet to find the statistics about the basics like population, school locations and security. Although crime can happen anywhere, many homebuyers will often ask: "Is the area safe?" Beyond the local police presence, if your community has special provisions like "Neighborhood Watch", be sure to tell them.

Some of your prospective buyers may be looking at your property from an investment standpoint. The quality of your community can enhance the value of your home, for instance a house located in areas that are designated as "historic" are considered highly desirable and their sales price can be much higher than other homes built in the same style in other sections of the city.

As you tour your neighborhood keep an eye open for indicators of its popularity such as:

Look for these signs of increasing popularity:

Fewer rental homes

Homes being remodeled

An increase of civic improvements; re-paving of streets, new street signs, etc.

A Day in Your Community

Know the "pulse" of your community; does it have stores that remain open 24 hours a day or does everything close at a certain time. If you do not have a garage, how convenient is the on-street parking?

How accessible is public transportation? How many routes can be used to reach your location? Knowing this information can help you in guiding prospective buyers to your property.

If your prospective buyer gets frustrated because they cannot find your address, you could lose out on a sale.

THE SCHOOLS

In addition, you can use the location of your property to enhance your listing, especially if your property is well suited for a family. Many of the "for sale by owner" real estate websites offer property-listing templates that automatically generate community information about the different levels of schools that are in close proximity to homes.

As you begin to interview buyers for your home, keep in mind that many of them will be completely unfamiliar with your neighborhood. It is a good idea to keep a list of all of the service features that are important when people move to a new home.

In addition to school locations, generally most people are concerned with the location of utility services, banking and postal offices. If your neighborhood is serviced by public services for waste disposal and transportation on a certain schedule, provide the information that is essential for them to factor into their decision making process.

Selling the benefits of a home property location can include many convenience and lifestyle factors such as:

- business and shopping centers
- hospital and medical facilities
- recreational activities
- parks and forests
- beaches and amusement parks
- sports facilities
- bike trails
- transportation routes

If you have been living in your neighborhood for many years, take a tour through your community with fresh eyes to see all of the features it has to offer. Many homeowners are surprised at what they find when they look at their communities from the perspective of a new homebuyer.

HOME FACTORS: THAT EXTRA BEDROOM

After surveying your community, it's time to re-evaluate the features of your house. The total number of rooms is important, but the size of each room can be used as leverage as well, especially in terms of an extra large bedroom. Today with more people working at home, an extra bedroom can serve as a home office instead of being tucked into the corner of the living room or master bedroom. If your community now has cable, satellite and

high-speed broadband service available, you can use this to enhance the attractiveness of using the extra bedroom for this purpose.

But there are other ways an extra bedroom can be used, for instance:

- a home gym
- library
- craft workshop
- sewing room
- children's playroom
- entertainment game room
- office
- day trading room (stocks)

Keep in mind that many of the buyers that respond to your advertisement are first time homebuyers who may have lived only in an apartment. Helping them to see the advantages of how they can use the space in the home can make the deal irresistible.

Besides using an extra bedroom creatively, there are other parts of the house that can be used to enhance time spent at home. Many older homes have large attics that can be used for storage or as private retreat. Finished basements are perfect to use as a teenagers recreational area and eat-in kitchens encourage family breakfasts or informal dining.

AMENITIES: THE MULTI CAR GARAGE

Today it is not unusual for a family to have more than one car and if you have a home with a multi-car garage, check and see how common this is for your type of property. You can use this feature to your best advantage if the majority of homes in your area have single car garages or if most of the homeowners have to park their cars on the street.

GET CREATIVE

Describing your property is a combination of the exterior, interior and community features. It is to your advantage to remember the questions that were in your mind when you began looking at houses to buy. A good way to prepare to sell your home is to visit new real estate developments and review their marketing material. Look at the features that they list and see how they compare with the features in your neighborhood.

- Being creative also means thinking outside the box; is there anything unusual about your home? Here are few examples of how you can use them:

- Is it close to a major tourist attraction? Tourist attractions make great landmarks that make it easy for prospective buyers to find your home.
- Does your property sit on an extra large plot? You can suggest some of the improvements that are allowed for your neighborhood.
- Are you in a community that is zoned for residential and commercial use? Professionals will be interested to know that they can have clients visit without a problem.

Be sure to make note of the special features or improvements in your property, for instance a detached storage shed for storing landscaping equipment or a brand new water heater. Use every aspect of your home to your advantage. Does your property have a working fireplace? Many times homes are advertised with fireplaces but they either do not work or they are decorative fireplaces.

Other features that you can accent in your home are a separate dining room, food pantry or laundry room. In addition to room space, there are the room features such as hardwood or inlaid tile floors, which are enjoying a renewed popularity. Wood beam ceilings, wood paneling and finished basements are features that many homebuyers want to see.

Windows and lighting are features that are important to many homebuyers. Extra large or special windows like bay or port styles and features such as double insulated or tilt windows save energy and make cleaning easier. In terms of lighting, skylights, track and recessed lighting bring warmth to a room and make it easy to enhance the display of paintings and photographs.

As you work through the process of preparing to sell your home don't forget the importance of networking. Ask your friends and family to give you their opinion about your house and what features they think are the most distinctive, useful or add the most value.

Your family, friends and neighbors can spread the word about your property and your asking price, which can help get your marketing off to a good start. But it is wise to rent a pager for your contact number to avoid unwanted calls at your home. If you use an answering machine you can describe the features of your house and its price in your message. It is also a good idea to let a friend record the message for you.

With the information you have about your neighborhood and home you are ready to tackle the next step of improving the picture to make it ready to advertise and show buyers.

Chapter 5

THE FIRST IMPRESSION

In the last section you looked at what makes your home different from others - the positive selling points you can use in your advertising. Now the task is to enhance all of the property features in a way that they will be most attractive to buyers.

Even though you have done the repairs that the appraiser and home inspector highlighted, there are several other tasks you need to do to create the all-important first impression. The most important one is to detach yourself emotionally from your home. It is important to begin to think of your home in the same way buyers will: as a house.

After a few weeks of house hunting, most homebuyers will look at your property the same way they look at cars for sale. As you work through the process of preparing to sell your home, look to what the future has in store in your new home and say goodbye to each room in the house you are selling.

This is important because it will help you to be more objective about the condition and appearance of your house. The faster you disassociate yourself from the property, the easier it will be to begin the process of moving to your new residence.

When you begin to advertise your property, a buyer may drive by the property before they call for an appointment to see the house. This is where they will get their first impression of your house, and it can be the turning point that decides if they make the appointment or begin searching for another property.

A prospective buyer will see your house a lot differently than you do after years of living there. Over time, once you settle into the routine of a home, it is easy to overlook the details that stand out like a sore thumb under the microscope of the buyers' eyes.

The process of selling a home has been compared to a job interview. Just as you would not go to your dream job screening in jeans and dirty sneakers, you have to prepare your home for its buyer "interview" to create the best impression. That impression begins with how your house looks from the curb; the "curb appeal" of your property sets the tone for how receptive the buyer will be to seeing the rest of the property.

While buyers may haggle over price, a large part of the decision of which house to buy comes from the emotional response to the house. The goal is to make the house warm, inviting and easy to love, so you want to make it as appealing as possible both inside and outside.

TAKE OFF YOUR ROSE COLORED GLASSES AND GET REAL

Buyers are looking for their next home

While some of your prospects may be first time buyers, you will probably have several that are looking to buy their second home and will judge your property from the perspective of a homeowner and maybe even an individual looking for an investment property. Regardless of what category your prospective buyer belongs to, it is crucial to the sale of your property to give it the best presentation possible.

Now that you have said goodbye to your emotional attachment to the house, it will be easier to see it through the eyes of a buyer. It's a good idea to go across the street from your home and see your home in relation to the others on your block. How does your property rate against the houses on either side of it? Does it need painting? Are shingles missing on the roof?

If that is your view of your property, that will be what a prospective buyers will see when they drive by your home; the street conditions, neighboring houses and your home, which includes everything about the exterior of your property.

If your house fails to spark a buyer's interest from the curb, your house may stay on the market for a long time. Homebuyers are savvy about the real estate market for the most part and many times if they see a house with peeling paint or lawn that has not seen a lawn mower for a year, they simply drive away to their next house on the list.

Your lawn and all of the land around your home should be free of obstacles to seeing the house and the exterior of the home should be neat and clean. Depending on the material of the exterior of your home, you have the option to paint or pressure-wash the exterior. If you have sagging doors or windows get them realigned as soon as possible. Everything about the exterior of your home should be evaluated for curb appeal.

Now you are at the front door, when you enter your home, what is the first thing you see? Again remember you are standing in the shoes of a buyer. Their tastes in decor may be different from yours, but even if they are the same, the house no longer belongs to you, so your personal tastes must be put aside.

Brightly colored walls are a big no-no because they are distracting and make it difficult for the buyer to focus on how they would live there. You want the buyer to be able to visualize the room in their favorite color with their furniture and personal items. A fresh coat of paint in white or off white makes the room look immaculate and more spacious. In addition, it leaves a fresh, clean smell to the house, which makes a great impression. Let's take a look at some of the other things you should consider.

TAKE A WHIFF

What's That Smell?

Walking into a house from the outdoors makes house odors easier to detect and this tops the list as one of the things homebuyers do not want to encounter. Odors from cigarette smoke; cooking, pets and mildew can be offensive to many people and will hurt your chances for a quick and profitable sale.

Painting will eliminate some of this problem but you should also place air fresheners in closets and a subtle blend of potpourri in each room can help as well. Remember the point is to eliminate, not cover up odors.

Pets

If you own a dog or cat, remember that some people are frightened of these animals. It doesn't make any difference how much you tell a buyer that they are harmless, their mere presence is enough to send some prospects backing out of your driveway faster than they drove in. The last thing you want to do is make a prospective buyer uncomfortable; remember there are plenty of houses on the market.

Placing pets in any area that you need to show buyers is a bad idea because if they cannot see everything they will be hesitant about buying the house-no one wants to buy a house that they cannot investigate fully.

The best remedy is to ask your neighbor or friend to board your pet when you are showing your house. As an alternative you can contain your pet in a carrier, if there is no one who can board your pet. This way the buyer will not feel threatened.

The Problem with Basements

If your home has a basement you should be aware that odors of a feeling of dampness in the basement of a house will scare off most buyers for fear of foundation cracks. Make sure that your gutter downspout is pointed away from your foundation to avoid this problem. Other causes of this problem could be a clogged underground drain.

LOOK AROUND

Grimy Bathrooms and Kitchens

The kitchen and bathroom are the two rooms that buyers will inspect the most closely and if either of these rooms are dirty, you will most certainly lose the buyer's interest. Keep in mind that most buyers are looking for a ready-to-move-in house. There are a few hardy

individuals that will take on the task of fixing up a house, but then the seller must lower the price.

Even if it means that you hire a professional service to do the job, do whatever you have to do to make the whole house, and especially these two rooms spotless. Get out the elbow grease and scrub until everything, fixtures and appliances shine.

The Dark Room

No we are not talking about a photographer's studio. Dark rooms in a home that you want to sell, is another thing that can drive away prospects. Homebuyers like to see houses flooded with light so that they can see every detail. Natural light is best, but where additional light is required make sure that the wattage of the bulb is high enough to illuminate the area brightly.

Make sure that every area of your house has lighting installed and that the fixtures are in good working order. Areas that are many times overlooked include closets, stairwells to the basement, the laundry room and the area where the circuit breaker or fuse box is located.

To allow the most natural light into the house remove dark colored curtains, drapes or window coverings. In addition make sure that tree limbs do not cast shadows in the room. Replace these with the minimum window treatment that will afford privacy.

Make sure to clean all your windows from the outside as well as inside to make the most of your view. If you find chips or broken windows, don't take half measures to repair them with glue or tape, have the panes replaced. For the house that has double pane glass windows, check all of the seal and replace these as well.

Wall Coverings

Stenciling, murals and especially wallpaper can turn off buyers because it is a much more personal decorating choice than painting. You want your house to appeal to the largest group of buyers' possible, so strip off the wallpaper, don't simply paint over it. Very few house hunters would welcome the tedious task of stripping wallpaper, one that they should not have to do in their new home.

In fact, if most buyers had to choose between wallpaper and a paint color they don't like, most would deal with the paint job which is much easier than removing wallpaper.

Neglected Gutters

If you want a buyer to bring you a serious offer, you have to present them with a serious opportunity. Some homeowners fix the shingles on their roofs and leave their gutters full of debris. This is one of the major conditions that cause problems with water drainage.

Hovering Home Sellers

That means you. After you have welcomed your buyers into your home and given them a tour, give them the freedom to explore your house on their own. Let them know where you will be if they have questions and then leave. Again the point here is to make your prospects feel at home, if you hover around them, they may feel inhibited to open closets or walking around the outside of the house. In addition, if there is more than one buyer, they may want to discuss their findings and thoughts about the house in private.

Lack of Information

It will help your buyers if you prepare a fact sheet about your property that lists all of the features, your contact information and the purchase price to give them in addition to the required disclosures about the property.

Take the facts from your appraisal report and be prepared to answer all the questions your buyers may have which can range from wanting to know the age of the roof to questions about the neighbors or community features.

There are times when you will show your house to a buyer and they make an offer right on the spot. If this happens make sure you have all of the required documentation in a folder and be ready to negotiate your deal.

IF IT'S UGLY IT'S UGLY

Finally, there may be things that you cannot do anything about; if the neighbor's yard is a mess, all you can do is speak to them about it. Your main area of focus has to be to make your property the star, and it is very possible that once your neighbor see how great your property looks as a result of your efforts that they will follow your example on their own.

In the next section we will look at the specific steps you may need to take to have your home ready for buyers to see.

Chapter 6

SOME IDEAS ABOUT "CURB APPEAL"

In the last section we talked about the importance of the first impression that a buyer receives from seeing your home and the role that "curb appeal" plays in getting the buyers into the house to see all of its features. When you are selling a house, the better the curb appeal of your home, the better your chances are that a qualified buyer will walk through the house and make you a decent offer.

It is such a simple concept that it is hard to understand why so many homeowners do not seem to realize that if a prospective buyer doesn't like the look of the outside of the house, it will be virtually impossible to get them through the front door. Lack of curb appeal is more times than not the reason why houses sit on the market for months instead of selling in a few weeks.

Once you put your "for sale" sign on your lawn, your house will draw more attention than you may ever know just from drivers on your street. If a buyer sees an unkempt lawn and shrubs growing wild, your curb appeal is gone with the wind.

In addition, when you post your advertisement on the Internet, you literally open the floodgates for interested buyers. With hundreds of homes available in their price range, you have to make the most of the opportunity that this type of exposure gives your home and curb appeal is where it all begins. You basically have one chance to grab a buyers' attention and if you squander it, that is a prospective buyer and potential sale that you have lost.

Increase your chances by cultivating the curb appeal of your home from another persons' perspective. Ask different people such as a friend, co-worker and a relative to take a look at your house and tell you what improvements they would make. Even though you have emotionally let go of the house, the fact that you have lived there for so long will make it difficult for you to see everything that may need attention.

The exterior of the house and landscaping are very important, as well as lighting for your property at night, make sure to check your outdoor lighting fixtures and bulbs to make sure they are in good working order and illuminate your property well.

Keep your lawn trimmed and watered regularly

First and foremost, take special care of your lawn. A lush green, uniformly cut and edged yard creates a beautiful frame for your home. Pay special attention to problem areas of your lawn and if there are places that need to be fertilized or replanted do these first so that the repairs will not be noticeable. Your yard can have a well-manicured look if you use

fresh mulch around plants and make the plant bedding edges sharp with a hoe. If you are selling your home in the autumn season make sure you keep your lawn free of fallen leaves.

The Back Yard

While the inside of your home will be under close inspection by prospective buyers, remember that the land around your home is just as important. If your home is on a large lot of land, this is one feature that is sure to appeal to young families who want a safe and secure outdoor play area for their children.

Your back yard should be neat and well manicured. Pool, fountains or Jacuzzis should be clean and well maintained. If you keep your dog in the year, be sure to clean up all evidence of their activity. Remove outdoor play or exercise equipment and put them in storage. Clear everything except the essential from your back yard so that buyers can clearly see the space available.

Tend Your Front Yard

What is the standard of landscaping around your house? If it is not very attractive, it might be worth the investment to buy a few shrubs or flowering plants, but stay away from planting trees, because you will not recoup your investment.

In terms of landscaping, make it a practice to trim your lawn and shrubs around the house every week as the weather conditions permit. Make sure to spruce up your garden or add color to your landscaping with potted flowers will make your property more inviting.

If you have tall trees on your property, you need to make sure that the branches are trimmed back so that they do not overhang or touch the property. Not only is this important to keep leaves off the roof, but also to avoid damage to the roof should lightning strike the tree or a branch is broken from a storm.

Add seasonal flowers to your garden

If you do not have a flower garden, make sure that you add so colorful potted flowers and plant them. Greenery and colorful flowers help to create a good first impression. If you have a small yard, make it wonderful with seasonal flowers or decorative items like a birdbath.

Inspect your foundation, steps, walkways, patios and porches for disrepair

There are many features in a home that you may take for granted such as a front or back porch, built-in bookcases or a security system that you can include in your list of special attractions. Think of all the activities that each aspect of your home makes easier and how you can use them as selling points for your property. Many home buyers will inspect the porch before entering the house. If you want to sell your house, you'll need to make sure your sidewalks, decks, and open porches look presentable.

Remove old paint on doors and windows

If your house looks dull and faded from across the street, a new coat of exterior paint may be the answer. While a house painting is not cheap, it is one investment that is worth making for the added curb appeal value it gives your house - which can give you more bargaining power.

Consider the color theme of your neighborhood and choose a color that blends in well and is compatible with your style of house. Steer clear of extra bright hues or unusual colors; use a subtle color that will be harmonious with the most attractive feature of your property.

If you cannot afford to paint the entire house, you can paint the trim, front door and the shutters a color to catch the buyers' eye. And since the porch frames the front door and is the first part of the house buyers will actually visit, make sure it looks freshly painted, because it will be noticed more than the siding. If your house needs painting, it's best to paint the whole house. In some cases a good pressure wash will be enough to give the exterior a fresh look. In addition, pressure washing is a great way to give trim or walkways a clean, white look.

Check your gutters for problems

Be sure to check that your gutters and downspouts are firmly secured to the house. The sight of gutters that are packed full of leaves and other debris will turn off buyers. Gutters that have not been cleaned often can become a breeding ground for serious drainage problems and will call into question the condition of the entire house.

Check the roof and replace loose or damaged shingles

The roof is one of the most important-and most expensive parts of the house. Make certain that you check the roof to see if any shingles are missing. If you have a fireplace, have your chimney inspected and cleaned.

Check your house siding or brick face for signs of disrepair

Inspect the exterior material of your home. If you have siding, make sure that it is in good shape. If you find damage like holes patched and seal them. If you own a brick home, look for cracks in the brick face and missing chunks of mortar that may need to be replaced.

Make sure your walkways are free of snow and ice

If you are selling your house in winter, make sure that you keep your walkways, sidewalk and driveway cleared of snow and ice to prevent accidents.

Ensure a smooth arrival on your driveway

Make sure that the outside of your home receives as much attention as the inside. When buyers see a home with beautiful landscaping, and a smooth driveway, it not only enhances your home but also reinforces your ability to negotiate the purchase price from a point of confidence.

From the time that you decide to sell your home, inspect the walkway, sidewalk and driveway for cracks, loose tiles or other defects. If you have an asphalt driveway you may need to have it patched and sealed. You should also check and repair or paint gates, fences and your exterior mailbox.

Apply a fresh coat of paint to the front door

Your front door needs to be inspected as well as all of the doors throughout the house, especially in the attic and basement. The front door of your home should be as attractive as possible because it is the entry to the home. If you have metal fixtures on the door make sure you polish it until it shines. If the paint is chipped or peeling, refinish or repaint it. Make sure that all of the locks work easily and that you have the keys that work for each door in your house.

Remove your family name plaque from the front door if you have one; remember you want the buyer to imagine the house as his or her own. Be sure to buy a new welcome mat.

Taking care of the details

But keep in mind that buyers will also notice the "little things" like loose doorknobs, squeaky doors, loose grout around the shower or tub and missing outlet covers.

A house sparkles with cleanliness it not only impresses buyers, but helps them to enjoy your house. If a buyer feels at ease in the house it is easier for them to imagine their life there and that is the result you want and the reason for all of your efforts.

Pay attention to the things that accent a room. If you have brass doorknobs, make sure they shine. The same is true for metal awnings or trim, make sure that it is polished or painted, and buyers will see that the property is well cared for and have more confidence in the potential of the house.

If your home has a foyer, make it welcoming with flowers in keeping with the season. If you have other accents such as a mirror or umbrella stand make sure that they are clean, polished and free of overly personal effects. Your entryway acts as the prologue to the rest of your house, make sure that every aspect is in good repair.

Store RVs or old cars elsewhere while the house is on the market

If your hobby is restoring old cars, put it on hold until you sell your house. All of your efforts can be undone if you have an eyesore like an old car on the property. In addition, ensure that you have a place to store your landscaping equipment and outdoor items safely while you are showing your property.

With all of your exterior work completed, it is now time for the most time consuming part of getting your house ready for sale-sorting through years of accumulated belongs and memories. In the next section you will work through the interior of the house to get ready to move to your new home.

Chapter 7

OPENING THE FRONT DOOR

Cleanliness is Essential

In the last section you learned about how to increase the "curb appeal" of the exterior of your home attractive and inviting to prospective buyers.

Now the task is to make sure that your home is in the best possible condition on the inside as well. There are certain home improvements that can boost your potential to get the purchase price that you are asking for and if you are really lucky, you might even have more than one offer to consider.

At the top of the list of things that play a vital role in creating an outstanding impression when your buyer enters your property is cleanliness. The ideal scenario is for the buyer to see a house that is immaculately clean, full of light and spacious, smell fresh, be in good repair and easy to use.

The level of cleanliness you are aiming for is "brand new home." This is an extremely important part of the presentation of your property-and you will achieve the best results by first clearing your house of everything that is unnecessary and then hiring a professional cleaning firm to make your home spotless.

Clear the Decks

If you are like most homeowners over the period time you have lived in your house you have probably collected items that you do not use or do not want. The goal is to have every prospective buyer envision your property as the home where they live. Most buyers count maneuvering through a maze of furniture, toys and other personal items as a major annoyance. Removing clutter is a priority in order to be able to have your house cleaned professionally.

Get a head start on the moving process by sorting through the items of each room into donations and trash. This includes everything from books to kitchen items to clothing and furniture. Keep only the essential items that you need every day in a packing box that fits into a closet.

To make the display of your house easier, consider renting a storage unit for unnecessary furniture so that the furniture that remains gives buyers an idea of the function of the room. Clearing the room gives buyers the freedom to move around and view the room from different angles. The more open space you have in a room, the larger it appears which helps buyers to see how their furniture would fit in the room.

In addition to furniture, you have to also consider your closets and cabinets. Home buyers want to be able to investigate every aspect of the house, so save yourself embarrassment of things falling out of the closet when the door is opened by removing everything but the essentials in the kitchen, bathroom and bedrooms. The kitchen and bathroom are two of the most intensely scrutinized rooms in the house and also the two that you will use every day.

For every day that you will be showing your home to buyers, give it a "white glove" cleaning and organize everything that remains in these rooms neatly. The more organized and clean the house appears the more confidence the buyers will have in the sound condition of your property.

Removing items like photographs and personal keepsakes from the house will help keep your buyers focused on the property instead of you. Remember, the objective is to do everything possible to make it easy for the buyer to visualize their photos and personal items in the house.

WHERE BUYERS LOOK FIRST:

The Kitchen and Bathroom - The Two Most Important Rooms in Your House

Kitchens

The best place to start "clearing the deck" is your kitchen; this room is one of the most used in the house and as a result you will find a good amount of accumulated clutter.

The easiest way to get your kitchen clutter free in the shortest amount of time is to put everything in boxes according to category. Take everything out of the cabinets, drawers, closets and off the counters. Then sort everything according to use, get rid of everything that you do not use. Select the essential items that you need everyday and put this in a separate box. Non-essentials should go into packing boxes to take with you when you move to your new home. If you have a large amount of canned goods, use as many of them as possible before your move; they are heavy and will add weight to your moving bill.

Remember you want your homebuyers to see all the features of your home in their best light. In the kitchen they will open all your cabinets and drawers, look under the sink and inside the pantry. Beneath the sink? Yes, homebuyers will look under the sink to check for plumbing leaks. Removing all but the necessary cleaning supplies and thoroughly clean this area. Showing your kitchen with plenty of free space - clear of all but the essentials will give them a clear picture of the storage space that your kitchen has available.

The two most expensive features in a kitchen are the appliances and cabinets. You will save a lot of money if you don't have to replace them. If your cabinets are old but in good condition, consider having them refaced. This involves attaching a thin veneer to the

surface of the cabinets and replacing the doors and hardware .If your cabinets are painted, add a fresh coat of paint and new hardware.

For cabinets that are in a state of disrepair, replacement may be less expensive then getting them repaired.

If you decide to remodel your kitchen, focus on the essentials instead of the high-end improvements such as built-in chef-style stove, which are more personal choices. Of all of the improvements you can make in your home, investing kitchen and bathroom repairs or remodeling is one that will bring you a 100% return.

Make sure that your kitchen sink and faucets are in good working order; homebuyers love to see modern, sparkling sinks and features. A clean, well-maintained laminate countertop is sufficient.

Bathrooms

You can expect prospective home buyers to check all of the fixtures in the bathroom; make sure that the sinks, bathtub, shower and toilet bowl are free from hard water and rust stains. Check the water pressure and flow of the toilet and be sure that it works efficiently and as quietly as possible. Ensure that there the showerhead is leak free and all of the tiles are properly grouted, especially around the tub. Fix or replace leaky faucets and water pipes.

Kitchen and bathroom floors are the two rooms where ceramic and vinyl tiles are used the most. If you have this type of flooring, inspect the tiles and replace those that are chipped or cracked tiles. Make sure that you clean or replace the grout between the tiles. Ceramic tiles are expensive, and installation of them to improve the appearance of your home works best in small areas such as the foyer.

Check Your Walls and Ceilings

Take a walk through your house and look at the ceilings in each room because this is exactly what your prospective buyers will do. They spend time looking at your ceilings for signs of leaks from the roof as well as ceiling cracks, grease or smoke stains.

If you find problems on your ceilings or if it has been more than 6 months since you last painted the rooms in your house, now is the time to add the freshness of a new paint job, which is one of the most cost effective improvements you can make. If there are any large cracks in the ceilings or walls, start by covering them with fiberglass tape, then apply joint compound to cover the entire area and sand down to a smooth finish. Choose neutral color paint such as eggshell white or cream.

Some homes have textured ceilings, such as "popcorn" style. Unfortunately, many of the compounds used to create the sparkle affect contain asbestos and can present health

hazards. You don't want to give your prospective buyer any reason to say goodbye to your house. Removing this material is time consuming, but not expensive to do and repaint.

If you have used wallpaper in any of the rooms in your house, you should be aware that this is one of things that prospective buyers do not like to see - it's too personal. Strip the wallpaper off the walls, remove the adhesive residue and then repaint the walls.

Wood paneling is another very personal decor treatment. If your wood paneling is real or composite, you can still apply primer and paint it. If the paneling in your rooms is very old, such as walnut, mahogany, cedar and pine, it's out of style and it would be best to remove it.

Fix Your Flooring

Now inspect the flooring of your home. There are many homes that were built in the late '40s, which have hardwood oak floors and as the property aged developed squeaks. Floor squeaks are usually caused by temperature and humidity changes, which cause contraction and expansion of wood. The sub-flooring and joists dry out and warp causing a separation between the sub-floor and joist. The wood moving up and down on the pulled nail causes the squeak.

If you have wood floors, walk around the edges as well as the most trafficked areas and listen for sounds. Squeaky floors may be funny to you, but they will raise unnecessary questions in your buyer's mind that are easily avoided. Fixing squeaky floors can make a big difference when you put your home on the market. A squeaky floor can be fixed permanently with 4 easy steps. The only tools needed are a "Phillips" head style screwdriver, adjustable wrench and a squeak ender.

Wood floors are enjoying renewed popularity today, but carpet is another type of flooring found in many homes. Newly installed carpeting was used as an incentive in VA homes houses built after World War II because the cost for the carpeting was covered by the government. In the 60's, shag style carpeting became the home decorating rage and unfortunately there are many homes still adorned in the fashion although it out of style.

Check the flooring underneath your carpeting, if it is a hardwood floor, have the carpeting removed and the floors refinished, because today, most home buyers love beautifully finished hardwood floors. If the flooring is plywood, replace the old carpet with new carpeting in a neutral color.

The Big Picture

Generally, homebuyers prefer to buy a home that is ready to live in without any repairs required. Houses with newer appliances, modern conveniences, plumbing, electrical and heating/air conditioning are in high demand. Even if your house is older, you can use the

key tips in mind that have been presented in this section to get your home ready with the best "curb appeal" exterior as well as the type of interior that encourages buyers.

The best way to think of the process is to imagine how you want your home to look in photographs that you will use for the online real estate listing sites for homebuyers. Keep in mind that when you are showing your house to home buyers, every nook and cranny will be open to investigation; even those spaces that you use for storage only. Storage space is very important to prospective homebuyers, so make sure that all of personal items that you have in your basement, attic and closets are free of everything.

In the next section we will look at how to create the perfect stage for presenting your home in a showing to prospective buyers.

Chapter 8

SHOW THE POSITIVE POINTS OF YOUR HOUSE

In the previous section you completed the tasks on the inside of your home to make it shine, just as you made improvements to the exterior of your house. The goal throughout each of the steps you have taken is to enhance the appeal to the widest range of prospective homebuyers as possible.

Technically, the process you are completing is called "home staging." If you had chosen to let a real estate agent manage your listing, you most likely would have had a discussion with them about the value of using a professional home stager, but if they can do this task, so can you and by doing the task yourself, you will save approximately \$500-\$1,000.

With the repairs and refinements that you have performed on the exterior of your house to enhance its "curb appeal" and on the interior to remove clutter and the other things that turn off home buyers, now it is time to work on the aesthetic aspects of house presentation which will involve the use of light, furniture placement and home decorating accessories to draw the attention of the home buyers' eye.

To meet your goal of selling your property at the best price quickly, home staging is mandatory; there are far too many properties on the market in your house category for interested homebuyers to choose from to leave anything to chance.

Home staging accents the features of your house that make it stand out from the competition and make it unique while at the same time, minimizing any short comings your property may have. Taking a more conscientious approach to the details of selling your property puts you ahead of the many homeowners that hold the view that their property will sell regardless of its appearance.

The amount of time you spend on this phase of the process will be significantly less than the time you have spent on the previous tasks; what you are about to do can be compared to the final touches on a movie set before the characters make their entrance.

Throughout the process of home staging, the main factors have to be considered; the age of the property, its physical condition and number of properties comparable to yours all affect the marketability and extent of work required. By this point in time, you should be completely aware of the strong points as well as the weak points of your property.

Viewing your property as a buyer, look for the areas that may cause hesitation. For example, lack of storage space. How can you compensate for this? Since you have been living in the property, you should make a list of the ways you have handled this situation, should this be a matter of concern to a prospective homebuyer.

However if you do not pay attention to the presentation of your home, even the positives can be overlooked. This is why it is important not to take anything for granted; just because you see the advantage of a separate hall entry way, without a point of focus and reference, a prospective buyer may walk through without even noticing.

The purpose of this section is to give you ideas for each feature of your house. Then you can make a list of ways you would like to draw attention to them, whether it is to make their function easy to decipher or their added value more apparent. The components of your exterior and interior that are required to create the big picture of your house, one that the prospective homebuyer who views your property will consider in making their decision of whether or not to purchase. In addition to your property itself, give some thought to the advantages that your location and neighborhood offers the homebuyer.

The big question for many reading this will be: Is all this work worth the effort? What if your house sits on the market for 6 months or 1 year? The best way for you to answer the first question is to locate real estate listings in your home's category in a different section of your city, one where you are unknown, call the agent and go see how properties on the market are being presented for sale for yourself. If you find that the majority of them have gone through the home staging process as you have, then you face stiff competition.

On the other hand, if the majority of the properties have you in a state of disbelief, you are very far ahead of the game. This partially answers the second question about how long your property will be on the market. When you had your real estate broker interview, it was suggested to ask them about the number of buyers they had on file who expressed an interest in your type of home property.

The other part of the answer is related to your research with your banker in reference to the long-term interest rates for mortgages and the types of financing options that could be used to purchase your property.

If you are selling during a period where these long-term interest rates are rising, then depending on the purchase price you are asking, your field of prospective buyers may decrease. The strategies given in the previous section talk about your options in regards to incentives you can offer a prospective home buyer, i.e., reducing your purchase price by one-half of the commission fee you would have paid to a real estate agent.

There are a wide range of ways you can manage the sale of your property, much of the decision of which option is best for you depends on your future plans and what you are willing to compromise in order to sell the house. There is no cut-and-dry formula that fits every situation; there are as many variables to this situation as there are people. But if you have followed the steps throughout this book to the best of your ability, the chances of you having to take extreme measures is not very probable.

GETTING READY FOR YOUR DATE

The date of the Big Dance is getting closer; the day your first prospective homebuyer walks through your front door to see what YOUR house has to offer THEM. That is the question that people looking for a home property have in the front of their mind: "What's in it for ME?"

Now you have another opportunity to decide how your house will speak to the prospective home buyers' heart, because buying a house is an emotional as well as rational experience. To increase the emotional appeal of your house, you want to focus your efforts on making your house feel inviting, warm, comfortable and secure; all the terms that most people basically think about when they think of "home." Make a house feel like home and selling it at the same time is a balancing act. While you want your prospective homebuyers to feel so at ease that they linger, you also want them to be clear on the value of the property that is providing that reaction. Home staging is an exercise in property appreciation. After living in a house for years, it is easy to take the property for granted; homeowners notoriously procrastinate in regards to repairs. After all of the tasks you have performed to bring you to this point, it is quite possible that your perspective of your house has changed dramatically.

Now with these efforts behind you, your confidence level in the value of your property should be higher than when you started. In fact, there are some homeowners who have their property reappraised after completing the steps outlined in the previous sections; many times finding a significant increase in the market value from the appraiser's point of reference.

But whether you have your property re-appraised or not, the point here is that now you can feel secure in your purchase price. From the home buyer's perspective, the amount of confidence you express when it comes time to discuss price will be invaluable in determining how far they think they can take the haggling ritual that is inherent in most transactions.

You must continue to reinforce a buyer's mind-set throughout this process if you want to come to a successful conclusion of your property sale. While both the homebuyer and you both may know that the property is worth the purchase price, be prepared for the buyer to use tactics designed to persuade you to lower your price. Review the previous section that discusses how to incorporate a "negotiation cushion" in your purchase price, so that you can enjoy the haggling process and give the buyer the opportunity to feel that they have saved some money on the deal.

Unlike Cinderella, your house will not magically transform itself into an object of desire for home buyers just because it has a well-manicured lawn, Fido, the dog is nowhere on the premises, and the house is full of the fresh scent of new paint. You want to give your prospective homebuyers spaciousness and beauty. The spaciousness is important, the more

space they feel they are getting in the property, the more value they feel they are receiving for their money; this is the rational part of the argument. The beauty component is important because you want the prospective homebuyer to identify and connect with the property; they should be able to see how the property fits their lifestyle as well as how much happiness they will experience by living in the house. Starting with the rational part of the response, you need to address the finer points of the functions of each room in the house and how it functions as a unit.

USING SPACE AND THE SENSES

Using the example of a colonial style house with two bedrooms, one bathroom, living room, formal dining room and eat-in kitchen, each room should contain the basic furnishings to display the functionality or purpose of the room.

LIVING ROOM

The main room for social interactions, you can arrange a compact love seat and entertainment unit in the living room. Accent the room with a tasteful art print, subdued lighting and attractive window coverings. Position the furniture from a point where the room can be viewed from as many angles as possible without interfering with the flow of traffic.

DINING ROOM

Set the scene for a delicious dinner for two in your dining room. Prepare two table settings with linen and just enough tableware to make the point. Accent the table with a scented candle and a bud vase with a silk rose flower. Sheer panels for the window and a bowl of potpourri in the same scent as the candle will add elegance to the setting.

BEDROOMS

A well dress bed with a nightstand, lamp and a few books easily conveys the feeling of privacy and relaxation that people seek in their bedrooms whether they live alone or with a companion. Adding a small dresser with a bowl of potpourri or vase of silk flowers along with subdued lighting completes the scene of comfort and security.

BATHROOM

Small, scented votive candles, a bowl of guest soaps and hand towels should greet your homebuyers' inspection of the bathroom. A brand new shower curtain with liner and bath mat are all that is required to communicate how this room supports good hygiene.

KITCHEN

Two chairs placed beside a small bistro style table prepared for a friendly coffee break will immediately make your prospective home buyer see the value of the house; they have two places where they can entertain, enjoy good food and drink. If you let the aroma of vanilla and cinnamon that comes from cookies baking be the fragrance for all the scented candles and potpourri throughout your house, by the time the house tour is completed, you may see the home buyer with their checkbook in their hands.

Once you have completed these steps you will be ready to present your house for consideration by the homebuyers. In the next section you will place the advertising listing that will attract them to purchase your house for sale by owner.

Chapter 9

ADVERTISING YOUR PROPERTY

Now that you have put the finishing touches on your house, and you have all the other elements required for you sell your property on your own, you are ready to let the world of prospective homebuyers know that your house is available for their consideration.

You became acquainted with the variety of print real estate advertising publications that are available and hopefully, discussed not only their advertising rates, but also which Internet web sites were the most productive. These recommendations should serve as the starting point for your own Internet research; there are several elements that determine how productive a real estate web site may be.

In addition to house hunters using print real estate advertising, more than 50% of prospective house buyers turn to the Internet. There are real estate websites that are operated by the large brokerage firms such as Re/Max, in addition to large sites geared to "For Sale By Owner" (FSBO) market. The increase in owners choosing to sell their own property has not gone unnoticed by the large real estate business concerns; the number of these sites that now feature a "for sale by owner" section is growing daily.

It is a good idea for you to perform a search for properties in your category on both types of websites and choose the number of sites you feel comfortable handling. Be aware of the fact that in addition to the type of site management and perspective you will find, there are local and national real estate sites. If you want homebuyers from across the United State to be able to consider your property, a national real estate site will give your house that exposure. Whether you place your listing on just one web site or one hundred, keep in mind that even the smallest sites have the potential to generate hundreds of responses.

CHOOSING A REAL ESTATE WEBSITE

Many people who use the Internet to search for a new home may not venture past the first 5 pages of search result. However, the Number One web site today, may not be next week; there are several factors that determine the website position in the search results. What is more important than the website ranking, is the features it offers its visitors.

Buying a house requires moving from one location to another and whether that move is across town or across country, the person needs community information. The web sites that provide the most complete information that people need when they are moving to a new home will attract a high volume of buyers.

PREPARE YOUR LISTING

When you have selected the web sites where you want to place your listing, review their listing requirements. While registration on many real estate websites are free of charge because the website has sponsored advertising (www.fsbowebsites.net), there are others that operate as a paid subscription service to be able to provide a higher level of service to subscribers.

In addition to whether or not you will have to pay for the advertising as a whole, there are additional services that may be charged separately, such as email forwarding. Focus on the technical requirements for the size and format of the photographs you will include with your text listing; each real estate website has their own specifications on how to adjust the pixels of high-resolution photos to display properly on the Internet.

Ideally, the website you select will have "virtual tour" capability. Many of the homebuyers today will use photographs and virtual tours to begin their house hunting online. A virtual tour gives your prospective homebuyer a 360-degree view of your house. With many properties to choose from, there are many buyers who will use the lack of a virtual tour as the basis to eliminate the house from consideration. Check the requirements for creating a virtual tour of your house and submit as much video, as the site will permit.

Text, photos and video; what more could a prospective homebuyer want? The ability to download, print and e-mail the photos of your house to their family and friends is included on most real estate websites, but not all of them. Make sure this feature is available on the website you select.

Make sure that you make note of the factual information that you can provide in your text. The website that provides your prospective homebuyer with the most complete information about your house is the website you want to use.

With these facts in hand, you can use your appraisal report to obtain the technical information you will need to create your listing. Start with the complete address of your property and then list the following information:

- Total Number of Rooms
- Total Number of Levels
- Total Square Footage of the Property
- Dimensions of Each Room
- Level Location of Each Room
- Land Acreage
- Type of Construction
- Type of Design
- Type of Heating/AC
- Source of Sewer and Water
- Year the Property was Built

- Type of Roof
- Type of Flooring
- Type of Parking
- Amenities

Complete each of the relevant data fields that provide information the prospective homebuyer can use to determine whether or not they want to view your property.

Take photos that show off your house

To accent your listing, you want to add as many photos as possible to give prospective buyers a clear idea of every important aspect of your house. The quality of the photos is extremely important; posting a blurred image of your property is a disservice to all of the hard work you have done to reach this point.

If you do not own a digital camera, but have a camera phone, take a test photo and upload it to the website and check the clarity of the image online. Make sure that your photo is within the optimum size stated in the website listing requirements. If the image is as clear online as in the camera photo viewer, you can take all of the photos you need in this manner. However, if the test image doesn't give display an accurate representation of the condition of your property, ask your friends and relatives who own stand-alone digital cameras to assist you to take the photos of your house.

The first photos should be of the exterior views of your property. A wide angle shot of the front of your house to show the full size of the property as well as from the backyard. If you have a garage, carport or other free standing structure on your property, take a photo that shows the proximity of this structure to the house. If your garage is attached to your house, make sure that the front exterior photos capture the garage and house. You want to position yourself for the front exterior photos from curbside and the photos of your backyard from the back door of your house. Make sure you take these photos when the sun is at its zenith, between 11 am to 1pm to use as much natural light as possible to show the features of your house clearly enough for your house number to be legible.

For your interior photographs, you want to take a photo of each of the features you have highlighted in your text listing. The day you decide to take the interior pictures, give your house a "white glove" cleaning, arrange your furniture settings, board any pets you may have with friends and freshen your window coverings. Put everything in its place and remove trash containers in the kitchen, bathroom and bedrooms, with all of your personal items stored out of sight. Use your buyer perspective; this is house under consideration, not another person's home.

Again, you want to take your interior photos at the time of day when you have the most natural light to make your photo images clear and crisp. Start at the entryway of your home, positioning yourself to be able to photograph as much of the room as possible. Take

photos from several angles so you can compare them to see which gives the best impression. Pay special attention to the distinct features of each room. Our example home is a colonial 2-bedroom house with a foyer. This may not be as impressive as a swimming pool, but not every house has one, and even fewer have foyers with a closet. If your house has either or both of these features, count it as a plus; a photo of each room's assets will entice a prospective buyer to come and see these features.

When you have finished taking the photos of every room in your house and have selected the ones you like the best, send them to a friend by e-mail, ask them select the ones they like the best, between the two sets you should be able to choose enough photos to upload to the real estate website and place your listing.

Once you have completed placing your listing, make a note of the website address that is assigned to your house so you can include it on your weatherproof "For Sale" yard sign. Use your cell phone number or rent a pager and use that number as the contact number on your signs. If it's not possible for you to be available all day, prepare a message for your answering machine or rent a toll free 800 number to record the listing information, including your Internet listing website address. In addition, it's a good idea to write "Viewing By Appointment Only" on the sign to discourage drop-in visits.

PRINT ADVERTISING

Newspapers

The Internet has its advantages, but so does print advertising. The most effective marketing is to use a combination of as many avenues to advertise your property as possible so that your property is sold quickly at the purchase price you desire. Local community newspapers as well as the newspapers with city or statewide circulation, especially the weekend editions have real estate sections. In addition, some newspapers offer special real estate picture sections.

BILLBOARD ADVERTISING

Now that you have your property listing online, print a copy of the listing at home and take it to a photocopy center to make the 8 1/2 by 11 inch advertising flyers to use as handouts and post on community bulletin billboards. In addition to the information on the listing, it is a good idea to the website address and directions to your property. Create this flyer with tear-off strips with your contact information.

Use the e-mail feature of the website to send your house listing to everyone you know with a note asking them to do the same with their contact list. Keep in mind that you should respond to telephone and e-mail requests for information in as soon as they are received.

CALLING ALL BUYERS

You have told all of your friends and relatives about the sale of your house and placed ads in the newspapers and on the Internet. So how do you handle your first response? For starters, keep a cool head and play it safe; when prospective homebuyer calls, listen to them carefully and then ask for their name and phone number and request to return their call within then next hour. This tactic will help you screen and separate the curious "lookers" from qualified buyers.

When you return the call, make sure to answer all questions and make sure that you ask the prospective buyer whether or not they have their mortgage pre-approval letter. If they are just beginning to look for a home it is possible that they do not realize that they need this. If you insist that prospects have a pre-approval letter from a mortgage banker before they make an appointment for a viewing, you will save yourself and the prospective buyer a lot of time.

In the next section, you will meet and greet prospective homebuyers through individual appointments, by holding an "Open House" or both. Each method has its advantage and disadvantages; you have to decide how much time and energy you want to devote to the process.

Chapter 10

YOUR FIRST OPEN HOUSE

Congratulations! You have completed the steps in the previous sections to prepare yourself and the house for the big moment; now you are ready to show the prospective buyers who have pre approval letters from their mortgage banker the property you have for sale.

Your advertising efforts are beginning to bear fruit; inquiries are being sent via the Internet and received from interested people who have seen your flyers or the "for sale" sign on the front lawn. Friends and neighbors have given you information about people who want to schedule an appointment. Now all you have to decide is how you want to show the house.

The first month the house is on the market will be the busiest time. Scheduling individual appointments afford you more time to talk to each buyer as well as keep an eye on things. If you do not relish the idea of a crowd of people all over the house, this might be your best option. On the other hand, if you have 10 or more inquiries within a week, you need to consider having a group open house.

Schedule your open house during the period of the day where you have the most natural light. Make sure you prepare a fact sheet or have printed copies of your Internet listing with your contact information ready along with the required disclosures and questionnaire cards to give prospective buyers.

MANAGING YOUR OPEN HOUSE

Who is Coming To Visit?

The prospective homebuyers who viewed your Internet listing have a basic idea about your property, but there will also be people who only saw your open house signs. Many of these "walk-ins" come to an open house to see how they are conducted, because they are thinking about selling their own home.

Buyers are not the only people who may be attendance. More than likely there will be an "undercover" real estate agent-a broker who uses open home showings to prospect for new clients. If a real estate agent attends the open house and offers you suggestions, listen carefully to what they have to say; it might help you to sell your home faster.

You will probably find curious neighbors as well as curiosity seekers and malicious opportunists at your front door. On the positive side, if the curious neighbors like what they see, they will tell their friends about the house; the more word of mouth advertising the house receives, the more potential is created for a fast sale.

Remember to think about your community and safety issues; you are responsible for the property until it is sold and the last thing you need is for a disgruntled neighborhood to have the car of one of your prospective home buyers towed away for parking in their driveway or a home buyer to suffer an accident because of something on your property. Play it safe with the following tips:

TWO DAYS BEFORE THE OPEN HOUSE

- Although you have a "For Sale" sign on your lawn, it is best to inform your next-door neighbors of the date, time and duration of your open house at least 2 days ahead of time. Be polite and understanding about their concern that the influx of strangers arriving in a herd of cars. In addition, if your neighbors have pets, request that they be restrained in case one of your prospective homebuyers has a fear of animals.

ONE DAY BEFORE THE OPEN HOUSE

- Keep your buyers' thinking cap on so you can anticipate their questions regarding practical needs. Get copies of fare schedules, bus or train routes, parking, day care and school district information. Make a list of the potential improvements that could be made to the house; adding a deck in the back yard, remodeling the basement to be a recreation area or creating a screened porch may pique a home buyers interest - without any discussions of the cost of these improvements.
- Inspect your property the day of the sale to ensure that every area around your property and inside the house is free of obstructions or anything that could cause an accident, i.e., dangling cables/cords, unstable walkway tiles, loose carpet runners, etc.

OPEN HOUSE DAY

Act One-Before Home Buyers Arrive

- Place "Open House" signs along the route to the house from major directions on the morning of the open house and be sure to remove them as soon as the open house is over.
- Give your home a thorough cleaning the day of the open house, lock up your valuables, place bowls of potpourri in the bedrooms, fresh towels and new soap in the bathrooms. Arrange out-of-the-house activities for the children and hire a pet-sitter or board your pets for the day.

- Create a folder with extra house listing flyers, fact sheets, property disclosures, blank contracts and forms you need so you can be ready for the homebuyer who wants to buy the house. Every person who attends the open house should have a property disclosure, fact sheet and listing flyer when they leave.
- Make the atmosphere inviting by creating a mood; play some soft music or light a fire in the fireplace. Draw back your window coverings to let in light, if you are in a quiet neighborhood and weather permits, open the windows. Make sure that you turn on all of the lights in the house, and turn off the television.
- Put a batch of cookies in your oven to slow bake or boil cinnamon sticks in water on the stove to create a "homey" aroma of welcome. Prepare a refreshment table; select an attractive design in paper plates, cups and napkins along with some "finger food," small sandwiches, cookies, bottled water or soft drinks to encourage buyers to linger and in the process discover more details about the house.
- You can also leave the questionnaire cards and pens on the refreshment table; the homebuyers will more receptive to giving your feedback after they have eaten. Remember to provide a waste receptacle.
- Help your prospects to interact with the house; encourage them to touch by leaving doors partially open, draping a tactile fabric like silk or velvet throw across the love seat or chair in the living room.

Act Two-Early Arrivals

- Be prepared to greet "early birds," the home buyer who wants to be the first one to view the property usually has company; others who want to avoid the crowd. If you have scheduled your open house to start at 2PM, be organized and ready to start talking to prospective homebuyers at 1PM.
- Invite the homebuyers that attend the open house to sign your guest book; Although you want to be as gracious as possible during the open house, you have to protect yourself as well. You have a right to know who has received information about the house.
- It is also a good idea to ask homebuyers how they learned about the sale of the house; this will help you evaluate which form of advertising was the most effective. Make sure that you have at least one friend or relative to greet the home buyers at the door, just in case you become involved talking to an interested home buyer.
- Use notes to provide information for your prospective homebuyers as they explore the house. If there are facts that may not be obvious, print cards and post them in an area that they are sure to see. For example if you have items in the house that are

not included in the sale or if there is a room feature with a special history. In addition, you can use these cards to advise for extra caution, for example if the closet has a low ceiling or if the steps to the laundry room are steep.

- Homebuyers will ask you a lot of questions about the house, be factual but keep praise of the house to a minimum. Remember that some of your audience has seen many houses, which they will be comparing to your property.
- Keep yourself available at all times so that you can walk through the property with prospective buyers to answer their questions and offer information about local schools, parks, transportation, shopping, places of worship, etc.
- Remain calm and listen carefully to the questions and comments of the homebuyers to understand their reasons for wanting to buy the house. Focus on the homebuyers' information instead of your own; keep your personal reasons for selling the house private.
- If you appear anxious or disclose that you are under pressure to sell quickly, you may find that the prospective homebuyer uses that information against you and you may not get the purchase price you want.
- When a buyer expresses interest in buying, the first thing you need to see is their pre-approval letter from a mortgage banker. If the buyer does not have one, politely explain to them that you cannot discuss the terms with them until they have this document in hand.
- Many homebuyers attend an open house assuming that they can qualify for a certain mortgage when in reality they cannot. No matter how much they claim to want the property, technically they are unprepared, and it is in your best interests to emphasize the need for them to secure a mortgage pre approval letter before you begin discussing terms.
- For the homebuyer with a pre approval letter who is ready to negotiate a deal, sit down in a private area and listen to their offer. Remember to keep your emotions under control and assume the impartial role of a third party; let the buyer show the excitement for the house. If you remain focused and calm, it will be easier to handle all the details of the offer of sale.
- Once an offer is made, come to an agreement on the final price and terms of the sale. If the homebuyer has objections to any of the terms, listen attentively and ask the appropriate questions so that you can respond correctly. Remain responsive and flexible about the homebuyers legitimate concerns and in the case where you do not have the answer, assure the homebuyer that you will investigate the matter. Do your best to resolve any doubts that may be in the mind of your potential buyers to

keep their interest high and their offer of sale moving forward to an agreement as quickly and efficiently as possible.

THE FINALE

Act Three-Home Buyers Departure

Along with the disclosures, fact sheet and property listing flyer, remember to give the homebuyers who attended your open house a questionnaire card to encourage feedback. You should also note of the buyers who showed the most interest in your home, even if they did not make an offer. Remember to thank them for attending the open house.

When the last prospective home buyer has left the house, take stock of the events of the day; if you received a bona fide offer, the ball is now in the home buyers' court; they must secure the financing to purchase the house. However, it is to your advantage to keep a sharp eye on the process; give your homebuyer a reasonable amount of time to secure the financing but set a deadline. In addition, communicate regularly with the buyer to inquire about their process.

If the deal seems to be lingering a little bit too long, you might want to ask the buyer if you can talk to their mortgage banker to help move the sale to closing. In addition, you can suggest the options that your banker outlined to you were open to individuals who want to buy your home.

When your buyer calls with the good news of secured financing, your next call should be to your lawyer to discuss closing the sale of the home. Sooner than you realize, you will be preparing to move into your new home and when the sale closes you will be ready to hand the keys of the house to its new owner.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Selling your home on your own can be rewarding and save you lots of money. It will take your time, effort and energy but is well worth it. We hope you enjoyed the ebook and look forward to your comments. Please email us at ebook@fsbowebsites.net. The contents of this book are opinions and everyone has them. Please take advantage of our offer to list your home on www.fsbowebsites.net at no charge for 45 days. Your home will get additional exposure that you are not getting today. Good luck with your home sale.

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