

TIPS FOR SELLING YOUR HOME FOR THE MOST \$\$

Even in a seller's market, where inventory is scarce and bidding wars are common, it still pays to invest some time and energy in positioning your home to sell for top dollar. This can involve a variety of steps, from working with a real estate agent who truly understands your local market to spending some money to make sure your home looks its best for buyers. Here are 10 tips for selling your home that Realtors say will separate you from the competition — and help you bring in a higher price.

1. Find a real estate agent

Working with a skilled local real estate agent who knows your area inside and out can help you sell your home more quickly, and often, for more money. Interview several candidates before you commit to one agent — the better you get along, the smoother the process is likely to be.

2. Invest in value-adding improvements

Determining which home improvements to invest in can be daunting, and the costs can add up quickly. The key is to spend your money on projects that will provide the most return on your investment.

Minor kitchen upgrades are typically a wise choice. The heart of the home is the kitchen, and many buyers will judge a property by its kitchen. Just do not go overboard: "While a complete overhaul of this space can run into the tens of thousands, a minor update is where you can gain the greatest return. Think about resurfacing cabinets, replacing countertops, a fresh coat of paint or updating the fixtures and hardware.

Updating a bathroom is another smart investment. Renovated kitchens and baths are the 'money rooms' — those that add the most value to a home.

3. Up your curb appeal

As the saying goes, you don't get a second chance to make a first impression. "Make sure your front yard is free of debris, the bushes are pruned and the grass has been cut. Also, add some bright potted plants by the front door to make buyers feel welcome.

Some other easy updates that can improve curb appeal include:

- Touching up exterior paint
- Adding window flower boxes
- Installing a new mailbox
- Adding new mulch around shrubs and trees

4. Get a pre-listing inspection

Investing in a home inspection before putting your property on the market is another step to consider. You don't want any unexpected surprises. It's best to find out beforehand if there are any issues that you can fix, before buyers find out on their own. That would give

them negotiating power for a lower price or, worst case scenario, a reason to back out of the deal. So it may be worth a few hundred dollars for the peace of mind.

There is, however, a downside to a pre-listing inspection: Beware, because once a seller becomes aware of an existing defect and does not correct it prior to listing, they are obligated to disclose it to a buyer. Defects that a buyer learns were known but not disclosed, prior to accepting an offer, can kill the deal.

5. Highlight the positive with professional photos

Spending a bit of money on high-quality photography can go a long way toward helping your home sell for a higher price. The majority of people search for properties online, so If the photos pop, it can translate into a higher sale price — and sell faster, too.

It's OK to leave some things to the imagination when it comes to your home's online listing, though. We advise against photographing every square foot of the home. The goal of photographs is not to give all the goodies away online; it's to make a buyer want to see more — to wet their whistle enough to entice them to see it in person. If they don't come see the house, they probably aren't making an offer.

6. Stage your home

When it comes to home staging, there are two rules of thumb: less is more and keep it neutral. It's very important to capture buyers interest from the front door. Pay extra attention to the entry: Repaint; place flowers; buy a new area rug, an impressive mirror or a dramatic piece of art.

Remove objects and clutter that visually shrink a room, such as large ottomans or too many plants, and remove everything from the kitchen counters except for one or two new-looking appliances. And don't forget to stage the deck or patio, because that is an extension of the house that can make a small home feel much larger than it is.

You can do the staging work on your own or up the ante by hiring a professional stager. A pro will average around \$1,800, according to HomeAdvisor.

7. Set the right asking price

Identifying the best price for your home can be critical to your success. Setting the price too high can be detrimental and prevent buyers from walking through your front door. How do you find that sweet spot of pricing for profit but not overpricing? The expertise of your agent can be truly valuable here. A knowledgeable agent will understand fair market value in your area, how much your house is worth and how much you might reasonably expect to get for it in the current market.

Good pricing requires the expertise to thread the needle. List at a number that is lower than comparable properties, in order to draw attention to it, but not so low that you will be disappointed if you only get one offer right at list price. If enough buyers are enticed, you might even set the stage for a bidding war.

8. Remove personal items

The goal of any showing is for the buyer to envision their own belongings in the space. So, while family photos and other knickknacks might seem like they have no bearing on how much money your home commands, they really do matter — especially if you are still living in the home while you're trying to sell it.

If buyers are distracted by personal items, then chances are they won't be able to see themselves in the space, and will not end up making an offer. Buyers are thinking of their own furniture, where it will go and how it will fit. It's the house they came to see, not the items inside of it.

9. Be ready to move fast

Once your property is listed on the market, things can happen quickly. It's important to be well prepared ahead of time so that you can be as responsive as possible to potential offers. Fill out all the necessary documents, such as any seller disclosures, and have paperwork for recent repair work, home renovation costs and utility bills on-hand for any buyer requests that come in.

Sellers who are slow in reaction time or unresponsive can lose buyers, adds Severance. If the buyer feels that they are not being dealt with fairly, they are very likely to walk away.

10. Use your head, not your heart

Finally, try to remove emotion from the equation and see the process as a simple transaction — your home is no longer "home" but a product for sale. It's not unusual for prospective buyers to request credits or repairs, and it's easy as a seller to take offense, so try to have a clear understanding of what issues and items you may be willing to make concessions on.

"It's important to take emotion out of it and remember that the buyer usually doesn't expect to get everything they ask for. Take a closer look at which requests are valid and fair, and offer something. The cost to you is not in giving the concession — it's the expense of losing the buyer, putting the property back on the market, starting all over again and getting a potentially lower offer.