

Selling :: Preparing to Sell

How to Sell Your Home Fast

Just because you need to unload your home quickly doesn't mean you have to settle for less. Here's how to make a profitable sale on short notice.

You've just landed a dream job on the west coast. The only glitch? You start in two months and need to sell your home -- pronto! Here are some tips for a speedy sale:

1. Ensure the price is right

Objectivity can fly out the window when there's a rush to put your home on the market. So look carefully at the competitive market analysis (CMA) your real estate agent prepares to help you determine a fair listing price. It details how your home's size and features stack up against other properties in your neighborhood. Your home will sell much faster if it's priced in the same ballpark range that similar listings in your region have recently sold for.

2. Cut the clutter

Ever wonder what's so inviting about unpacking in an elegant hotel room? One reason may be that it doesn't contain anyone else's clutter. Knickknacks and family photos are distractions to potential buyers and reduce

their sense of being able to envision themselves in your home. So clear shelves and countertops and pack these items away for your move. Paring down will also make your home appear larger and play up its storage areas. So clear out everything from your overflowing spice cupboard to unruly bathroom vanities. If this seems too daunting a task, consider enlisting the help of a professional organizer. Hourly rates can start as low as \$50.

3. "Stage" for success

The increasingly popular art of home staging focuses on enhancing the overall appearance of a property so that it will appeal to the broadest range of prospective buyers. Studies indicate that people typically decide within seconds whether or not they're attracted to a home, so first impressions are critical. You can either hire a professional stager (often an interior decorator) or do it yourself. After assessing your home (an initial fee of \$100 is common), a professional stager might recommend such things as repainting walls a neutral color, rearranging furniture and trimming hedges for curb appeal. Pay attention to lighting -- the brighter, the better -- and subtle touches, such as setting the table in the dining room.

4. Create a flexible sales plan

You've set your listing price, but now you need to ask yourself some hard questions. What happens if there are no takers? How soon will you reduce the price? And by how much? A mental game plan will help reduce the stress of selling by allowing you to make decisions quickly but assuredly.

5. Consider offering incentives

There's a fine line between offering buyer incentives to spark interest and appearing desperate to sell. On the one hand, you don't want to give prospective buyers the impression that you're fast and easy on price. On the other, marketing gimmicks have been known to condense the sales cycle. For example, you could offer to cover their closing costs or pay for Internet access for a year or, if you're a condo owner, to pay their first year's maintenance fees. Remember, it can be a lot less expensive to offer an incentive than to drop your asking price. Real estate agents also respond to perks, so consider offering yours a special bonus if your home sells for the right price within a specific timeframe.

6. Go for picture perfect

Lastly, a picture's still worth a thousand words, so ensure online photos of your home are top-quality. This is especially important considering that, according to the 2004 National Association of REALTORS' Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers, 74 percent of home buyers reported using the Internet in their house-hunting search. If you're not a professional shutterbug, consider hiring someone who is.

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