



[www.orloffandraymond.com](http://www.orloffandraymond.com)

**Patrick J. Orloff**

(305) 726-8155

EFax: (305) 675-5738

E-mail: [orloffpat@gmail.com](mailto:orloffpat@gmail.com)

Buenos Aires: 5129-6649

**Kenny Raymond**

(786) 443-9649

EFax: (305) 675-2695

E-mail: [kennyraymond@gmail.com](mailto:kennyraymond@gmail.com)

## So You've Decided To Sell Your Home?

### Meeting With Realtors

So you've decided to sell your home and have a fairly good idea of what you think it is worth. Being a sensible home seller, you schedule appointments with three local listing agents who've been hanging stuff on your front doorknob for years. Each Realtor comes prepared with a "Competitive Market Analysis" on fancy paper and they each recommend a specific sales price.

Amazingly, a couple of the Realtors have come up with prices that are lower than you expected. Although they back up their recommendations with recent sales data of similar homes, you remain convinced your house is worth more.

When you interview the third agent's figures, they are much more in line with your own anticipated value, or maybe even higher. Suddenly, you are a happy and excited home seller, already counting the money.

### A Sales Practice Called "Buying a Listing"

If you're like many people, you pick Realtor number three. This is an agent who seems willing to listen to your input and work with you. This is an agent that cares about putting the most money in your pocket. This is an agent that is willing to start out at your price and if you need to drop the price later, you can do that easily, right?

After all, *everyone else does it!*

The truth is that you may have just met an agent engaging in a questionable sales practice called "buying a listing." He "bought" the listing by suggesting you might be able to get a higher sales price than the other agents recommended. Most likely, he is quite doubtful that your home will actually sell at that price. The intention from the beginning is to eventually talk you into lowering the price.

Why do some agents "buy" listings this way?

There are basically two reasons. A well-meaning and hard working agent can feel pressure from a homeowner who has an inflated perception of his home's value. On the other hand, there are some agents who engage in this sales practice routinely.

### What Happens Behind the Scenes

If you start out with too high a price on your home, you may have just added to your stress level -- and selling a home is stressful enough. There will be a lot of "behind the scenes" action taking place that you don't know about.

Contrary to popular opinion, the listing agent does not usually attempt to sell your home directly to a homebuyer. That would be inefficient.



**Prudential**  
**Florida WCI Realty**

806 Douglas Entrance, Suite 100 • Coral Gables, FL 33134 U.S.A.



Listing agents market and promote your home to the hordes of other local agents who **do** work with homebuyers, dramatically increasing your personal sales force. During the first couple of weeks your home should be a flurry of activity with buyer's agents coming to preview your home so they can sell it to their clients.

If the price is right.

If you and your agent have overpriced, fewer agents will preview your home. After all, they are Realtors, and it is their job to know local market conditions and home values. If your house is dramatically above market, why waste time? Their time is better spent previewing homes that are priced realistically.

### **Dropping Your Price...Too Late**

If you start out with a high sales price, then drop it later -- your house is "old news." You will never be able to recapture that flurry of initial activity you would have had with a realistic price. Your house could take longer to sell.

Even if you do successfully sell at an above market price to an uninformed buyer, your buyer will need a mortgage. The mortgage lender requires an appraisal. If comparable sales for the last six months and current market conditions do not support your sales price, the house won't appraise. Your deal falls apart. Of course, you can always attempt to renegotiate the price, but only if the buyer is willing to listen.

Your house could go "back on the market."

Once your home has fallen out of escrow or sits on the market awhile, it is harder to get a good offer. Potential buyers will think you might be getting desperate, so they will make lower offers. By overpricing your home in the beginning, you could actually end up settling for a lower price than you would have normally received.

### **Realtors Talk to Each Other**

If you start out with a sales price that is too high, there is a high likelihood you interviewed other agents. They didn't get the listing, of course. They got "aced out" by someone telling you what you wanted to hear.

If your listing agent routinely engages in "buying" listings, he has probably aced out scores of other agents in the same way. Being human, Realtors talk to each other. If they don't like your listing agent, not as many of them will be showing your home.

In short, you may have ended up with an agent who was good at selling **you**, but not good at selling **your house**. And you're going to pay them a commission for it.

It is human nature for you to want the highest price for your home. However, when you choose the agent who promises what you want to hear, it often leads to stress and frustration. Most of the time, it will take you longer to sell your home. Possibly, you will end up selling at a lower price instead.

Or maybe as a result of reading this article, you will choose one of the "good" Realtors in the first place. They **are** out there, you know.

### **Multiple Listing Service**

Your listing contract should specify whether or not the house will be listed with the local MLS (multiple listing service). It is definitely in your interest to have the house listed. This is because your sales force is

automatically multiplied by however many agents are members of the local MLS. If your house is not listed, then you only have one agent working for you instead of many.

This is where selling "by owner" generally fails.

Owners see that an agent puts a sign in the yard, prepares brochures, holds open houses, advertises in the paper and on the internet, and they think this is how houses are sold. It is easy to understand why owners believe that, but it just isn't so.

Listing agents do those things for three main reasons. First, because the owners expect them to. Second, because it shows other sellers how much they do to market a home, and it gets more listings. Third, because it brings in clients who want to buy "some" house - though it probably will not be yours.

Practically no one buys the house in the ad or a home they visit during an open house. Think about your own experiences when you bought the house you are now selling. How did you find it? Probably through your agent, who found it in the Multiple Listing Service.

The MLS is a huge network and practically every local agent is a member -- and those agents have clients looking to buy a home. That network is what sells your house.

### **Lockbox**

A lockbox is a basically a padlock with a cavity inside where a key to your home can be placed. Only someone with a key (electronic or mechanical) or the combination can get into the lockbox and access the key to your home. Having a lockbox available at your house makes it easy for other agents to get access to your house.

Without the lockbox, agents representing buyers would have to set appointments to meet you or your agent at the house so they could gain access and view the home. This would be inconvenient. Since almost every other house does have a lockbox available, if you do not allow one most agents will simply not show your property. You will miss out on lots of potential buyers.

The listing contract specifies whether you allow a lockbox or not. It is locked into place, usually on the front door and cannot be removed. Only other agents can access the key that is located within the lockbox.

### **The "Real" Role of a Listing Agent**

When you bought your home, you probably used the services of a real estate agent. You found that agent through a referral from a friend or family member, or through some sort of advertising or marketing. The agent helped you in many ways and eventually you found the house of your dreams, made an offer, closed the deal, and moved in.

For whatever reason, now it is time to sell your home and you need a real estate agent again. Many home sellers, especially those selling their first home, tend to think all agents are similar to the one that helped them buy their home.

Although real estate agents can (and do) work with both buyers and sellers, most tend to concentrate more on one than the other. They specialize. When you bought your home, you probably worked with a "selling agent" – an agent that works mostly with buyers. Because of the nature of real estate advertising and marketing, the public's main image of the real estate profession is that of the selling agent (buyer's agent).

As a result, many homeowners expect their listing agent to do the same things that a selling agent does – find someone to buy their home. After all, they do the things you would expect if they were searching for buyers. A sign goes up in the front yard. Ads are placed in the local newspaper and real estate magazines. Your agent holds an open house on the weekend. Your house is proudly displayed on the Internet.

But this is only "surface" marketing. More important activity occurs behind the scenes. After the "for sale" sign goes up and flyers are printed, your agent's main job is to market your home to other agents, not to homebuyers.

### **The "For Sale" Sign**

It seems fairly obvious that when you put your house up for sale that your agent will put a "for sale" sign in the front yard. The sign will identify the agent's company, the agent, and have a phone number so prospective buyers can call and get information.

Signs are great at generating phone calls, even if very few actually purchase the home they call about. However, you might be one of the lucky ones. For that reason, you should determine what happens when someone calls the number on the sign. Does a live person answer the phone or does the call go to a voicemail or recorder?

You want someone to answer the phone while the caller is "hot." When buyers call the number on the sign, the call should go to a live person who can answer questions immediately. A potential buyer may be on the street outside your home, placing the call using a cell phone.

Also, take a look at the sign and see if it seems more interested in generating calls from buyers, or if it seems more oriented toward advertising your agent's listing services to your neighbors.

### **Flyers and a Brochure Box**

Your agent should prepare a flyer that displays a photo and provides details about your house. There should also be a phone number so buyers can contact your agent to get additional information. The flyers should be displayed in a prominent location in your home and also in a brochure box attached to the "for sale" sign.

The brochure box is convenient for those buyers who drive by and just happen to see the "for sale" sign in front of your house. It provides enough information so they can determine if they want to follow up with a phone call or inform their own agent they are interested in your house.

### **The Multiple Listing Service**

Even before the sign is up and the brochures are ready, your agent should list your property with the local MLS (Multiple Listing Service). The MLS is a database of all the homes listed by local real estate agents who are members of the service, which is practically all of the local agents.

Important information about your property is listed here, from general data such as square footage and number of rooms, to such details as whether you have central air conditioning or hard wood flooring. There should also be a photo, and a short verbal description of what makes your house "special."

Agents search the database for homes that fit the price range and needs of their clients. They pay special attention to homes that have been recently placed on the market, which is one reason you get a lot of attention when your house is first listed. Many agents will want to preview the home before they show it to their clients.

The main point about having your house listed in the MLS is that you expand your sales force by the number of local MLS members. Instead of having just one agent working for you, now you may have hundreds or more, depending on the size of your community.

The listing agent's main job is to make sure that the other MLS members know about your house. This is accomplished through listing your house in the Multiple Listing Service, broker previews and advertising targeted toward other agents, not homebuyers.

### **Advertising in General**

Every home seller likes to be assured that their listing agent or the real estate company will run ads featuring their home. Newspaper ads could be large display ads with lots of listings or small classified ads featuring just your property. Ads may also appear in local real estate magazines and your listing will also show up on the Internet.

Of course the agents and companies will run ads featuring your house, but not for the reasons you expect.

You see, the main job of advertising is not to sell your house directly. Advertising creates phone calls and some of those callers become clients of the agents answering the calls. This builds up a pool of homebuyers looking for property in general, all represented by selling agents (buyer's agents). Multiply this by all the agents and companies who also advertise homes, and there is a large pool of homebuyers in the market at any given time – all of whom are represented by selling agents.

The agents representing those homebuyers know about your home because it is listed in the Multiple Listing Service, has been on office and broker preview, and because your agent may have also sent flyers to all the local real estate offices.

The agents match up their clients with available homes, one of which may be yours. Then they show the homes to their clients, who eventually make an offer on one. That is how your house gets sold.

Ads create a pool of clients, one of which buys your home. Ads do not usually sell your house directly.

### **Real Estate Office Advertising**

As mentioned previously, advertising your home in newspapers and magazines rarely sells your home directly. More likely than not, the buyer who eventually purchases your home will have called on a totally different house. The same thing happens with buyers who call on your house. They will probably buy something else.

You still want to be certain the real estate company selling your house runs ads in the local and major newspapers, whether they feature your house or not. The ads generate phone calls to the real estate office, and if those agents viewed your house on the office preview, they will be familiar with it. This is how your property is sold.

Or you could be one of the lucky ones – someone calling on your house may actually end up buying it.

You should also realize that when a company advertises the homes they have for sale, there is more than one objective. Sure, the real estate office wants to generate phone calls and sell houses, but the advertising also shows home sellers how effectively they market properties. This impresses not only you, but others who may be thinking of selling their home.

The advertising brings in more listings, which generate more ad calls, which produces more buyers....and that is how real estate advertising really works.

### **Individual Agent Advertising to Homebuyers**

Individual agents may advertise your home for the same reasons as companies do. They usually advertise in classified ads or in specialty magazines featuring houses available for sale.

As in other types of advertising, these ads rarely sell your home. Once again, the main goals of advertising are to accumulate homebuyers as clients, and to impress you and future home sellers with how well they market their listings. Some agents actually do sell their own listings, but not that often.

It is much more productive and beneficial if your listing agent directs most of his or her marketing efforts toward other agents. Since this is "behind the scenes" marketing that you don't actually see, it is often difficult for you to measure how hard the agent is working for you.

It is a mistake to measure your agent's effectiveness solely by counting the number of newspaper and magazine ads featuring your property.

### **Neighborhood Announcements**

When you first list your home many agents send "announcements" to all of the other houses in your neighborhood. This can be done in the form of postcards, a letter, or flyers left hanging on the front door. These are important because your neighbors might have friends who are looking to buy a house.

The announcements create "word of mouth" advertising, which is the best kind.

### **Open Houses**

An open house when your property is first placed on the market can be very important, but not for the reasons most homeowners think. Just like with advertising, most visitors to open houses rarely buy the house they come to look at. They may not even know the price of your home when they stop by to visit – they probably just followed an "Open House" sign to your door.

An open house performs a similar function to the neighborhood announcements – it lets all of your neighbors know that your house is for sale, and it practically invites them to come "take a look." Being generally nosy, a lot of your neighbors will take advantage of the invitation.

And they may tell their friends about your house, creating more "word of mouth" advertising.

Of course, there are other reasons for holding open houses, too. Listing agents who "farm" a particular neighborhood use them as an opportunity to meet with other local homeowners who will someday be selling their home. Your agent may hope to list their homes in the future.

Open houses held after your home has been on the market awhile do not usually serve a useful purpose in selling your home. Most of the neighbors already know your house is for sale and open house visitors rarely buy the homes they visit.

However, if you really want more open houses, your listing agent may allow other agents to hold it open. Open houses attract prospective homebuyers and agents hope to convince some of those homebuyers to become their clients.



[www.orloffandraymond.com](http://www.orloffandraymond.com)

**Patrick J. Orloff**

(305) 726-8155

EFax: (305) 675-5738

E-mail: [orloffpat@gmail.com](mailto:orloffpat@gmail.com)

Buenos Aires: 5129-6649

**Kenny Raymond**

(786) 443-9649

EFax: (305) 675-2695

E-mail: [kennyraymond@gmail.com](mailto:kennyraymond@gmail.com)

## Proper Pricing on New Listings

Because of the change in real estate market conditions, more sellers are competing for fewer buyers. So once again, it seemed important to challenge a long-standing "myth" of real estate.

"The initial listing price isn't that important because the price can always be adjusted down later."

Many homeowners believe this.

It is a myth.

Not true.

If most buyers first viewed your house because of a newspaper ad, a magazine, the internet, brochures, or the sign in your front yard, the initial listing price probably would not make a difference. The house would always be "new" to those seeing it.

But most buyers do NOT come to your house because of various types of advertising. That is the another myth.

Sure, buyers call on an ad, they often LOOK at that house, but not always. Once they talk to an agent, they may discover it isn't what they need (or want) at all.

However, they ARE talking to an agent. That agent knows the current inventory and will know of other property that DOES fit their needs.

Those are the properties that buyers look at, and THIS is how most buyers end up looking at your house, too. Because of other agents, not because of your ad.

Hardly anyone buys the house in the ad.

As a result, you need to get other agents interested in your property, and this is where your listing agent comes in...and why a good listing agent is extremely important. The listing agent gets buyer's agents looking at your home.

Those agents have clients who called in on other properties.

Buyer's agents are not swayed by advertising. They look at the needs of the client, where the client wants to live, location, condition, and other details of the property...



**Prudential**  
**Florida WCI Realty**

806 Douglas Entrance, Suite 100 • Coral Gables, FL 33134 U.S.A.



And most importantly....

...price.

If your house is overpriced, agents are going to show similar homes that are priced more attractively. Your listing will get passed over.

Agents pay MOST attention to homes newly on the market. There are fewer NEW listings than current listings. It is easier to keep an eye out for what is NEW, compared to the vast number of current listings.

New listings are on the "hot" sheet circulated in real estate offices. The MLS computer identifies new listings. Your listing agent may hire a service to distribute fliers to all the buyer's agents. There are office previews and MLS tours to showcase new listings. A lot of attention is focused on what is NEW.

With agent's looking at newly listed homes so aggressively, a properly priced home gets attention.

An overpriced home gets passed over.

You may be thinking, "But I'm willing to negotiate!"

Buyers aren't thinking in advance about how much you are willing to negotiate. They are comparing your asking price to other asking prices.

Plus, when your house is new on the market, you may not be willing to negotiate as much as you will later, once you've realized your error. Keep in mind that statistics show, quite often, the first offer is the best offer.

So what happens if you overprice in the beginning and get more realistic later?

You don't have all those important Buyer's Agents looking at your listing because it is NEW. A price reduction later in the listing cycle often gets overlooked. It is just one of many listings, not one of a few new listings.

As time passes, you could actually become desperate to sell because you've accepted a new job or because you have already bought a new home.

That is a recipe for receiving lowball offers, so you could end up selling for less than if you had priced the home correctly in the first place.

Agents know this stuff, but many sellers still mistakenly believe they should "price it high" because they can lower the price later, if necessary.

That is not the best strategy.



[www.orloffandraymond.com](http://www.orloffandraymond.com)

**Patrick J. Orloff**

(305) 726-8155

EFax: (305) 675-5738

E-mail: [orloffpat@gmail.com](mailto:orloffpat@gmail.com)

Buenos Aires: 5129-6649

**Kenny Raymond**

(786) 443-9649

EFax: (305) 675-2695

E-mail: [kennyraymond@gmail.com](mailto:kennyraymond@gmail.com)

## Preparing Your Home To Show and Sell

### Disconnect Your Emotions

When conversing with real estate agents, you will often find that when they talk to you about buying real estate, they will refer to your purchase as a "home." Yet if you are selling property, they will often refer to it as a "house." There is a reason for this. Buying real estate is often an emotional decision, but when selling real estate you need to remove emotion from the equation.

You need to think of your house as a marketable commodity. Property. Real estate. Your goal is to get others to see it as **their** potential home, not **yours**. If you do not consciously make this decision, you can inadvertently create a situation where it takes longer to sell your property.

The first step in getting your home ready to sell is to "de-personalize" it.

### Make Your Home "Anonymous"

If there is a new home sales tract near your home, go visit. It doesn't matter what size the homes are. What you will find are some wonderfully (but sparsely) furnished homes that anyone could live in -- with the emphasis on "anyone." They are anonymous. There may be a baseball glove in the boy's room, but no family photos on the walls.

There may be "personality" - but no person.

The reason you want to make your home "anonymous" is because you want buyers to view it as **their** potential home. When a potential homebuyer sees your family photos hanging on the wall, it puts your own brand on the home and momentarily shatters their illusions about living in the house themselves.

Put away family photos, sports trophies, collectible items, knick-knacks, and souvenirs. Put them in a box. Rent a storage area for a few months and put the box in the storage unit.

Do not just put the box in the attic, basement, garage or a closet. Part of preparing a house for sale is to remove "clutter," and that is the next step in preparing your house for sale.

### Uncluttering the House

This is the hardest thing for most people to do because they are emotionally attached to everything in the house. After years of living in the same home, clutter collects in such a way that may not be evident to the homeowner. However, it does affect the way buyers see the home, even if you do not realize it.

Clutter collects on shelves, counter tops, drawers, closets, garages, attics, and basements. You want as much open clear space as possible, so every extra little thing needs to be cleared away.



**Prudential**  
**Florida WCI Realty**

806 Douglas Entrance, Suite 100 • Coral Gables, FL 33134 U.S.A.



Take a step back and pretend you are a buyer. Let a friend help point out areas of clutter, as long as you can accept their views without getting defensive. Let your agent help you, too.

### **Kitchen Clutter**

The kitchen is a good place to start removing clutter, because it is an easy place to start.

First, get everything off the counters. Everything. Even the toaster. Put the toaster in a cabinet and take it out when you use it. Find a place where you can store everything in cabinets and drawers. Of course, you may notice that you do not have cabinet space to put everything. Clean them out. The dishes, pots and pans that rarely get used? Put them in a box and put that box in storage.

You see, homebuyers will open all your cabinets and drawers, especially in the kitchen. They want to be sure there is enough room for their "stuff." If your kitchen cabinets, pantries, and drawers look jammed full, it sends a negative message to the buyer and does not promote an image of plentiful storage space. The best way to do that is to have as much "empty space" as possible.

For that reason, if you have a "junk drawer," get rid of the junk. If you have a rarely used crock pot, put it in storage. Do this with every cabinet and drawer. Create open space.

If you have a large amount of foodstuffs crammed into the shelves or pantry, begin using them – especially canned goods. Canned goods are heavy and you don't want to be lugging them to a new house, anyway – or paying a mover to do so. Let what you have on the shelves determine your menus and use up as much as you can.

Beneath the sink is very critical, too. Make sure the area beneath the sink is as empty as possible, removing all extra cleaning supplies. You should scrub the area down as well, and determine if there are any tell-tale signs of water leaks that may cause a homebuyer to hesitate in buying your home.

### **Closet Clutter**

Closets are great for accumulating clutter, though you may not think of it as clutter. We are talking about extra clothes and shoes – things you rarely wear but cannot bear to be without. Do without these items for a couple of months by putting them in a box, because these items can make your closets look "crammed full." Sometimes there are shoeboxes full of "stuff" or other accumulated personal items, too.

### **Furniture Clutter**

Many people have too much furniture in certain rooms – not too much for your own personal living needs – but too much to give the illusion of space that a homebuyer would like to see. You may want to tour some builders' models to see how they place furniture in the model homes. Observe how they place furniture in the models so you get some ideas on what to remove and what to leave in your house.

### **Storage Area Clutter**

Basements, garages, attics, and sheds accumulate not only clutter, but junk. These areas should be as empty as possible so that buyers can imagine what they would do with the space. Remove anything that is not essential and take it to the storage area. Or have a garage sale.

## **Costs of Repairs**

Do not do anything expensive, such as remodeling. If possible, use savings to pay for any repairs and improvements – do not go charging up credit cards or obtaining new loans. Remember that part of selling a house is also preparing to buy your next home. You do not want to do anything that will affect your credit scores or hurt your ability to qualify for your next mortgage.

## **Plumbing and Fixtures**

When looking at a house, prospective home buyers often do not really know what to do. So they play with things. They flick light switches. They open everything with a handle. They turn on all the faucets and flush all the toilets. Having nice shiny fixtures makes an impression.

All your sink fixtures should look shiny and new. If this cannot be accomplished by cleaning, buy new ones. If you don't buy something fancy, this can be accomplished inexpensively. Make sure all the hot and cold water knobs are easy to turn and that the faucets do not leak. If they do, replace the washers.

It sounds like hard work, but it's pretty easy -- even for the inexperienced.

Check to make sure you have good water pressure and that there are no stains on any of the porcelain. If you have a difficult stain to remove, one trick is to hire a cleaning crew to go through and clean your home on a one-time basis. They seem to be wonderful at making stains go away.

## **Ceilings, Walls and Painting**

Check all the ceilings for water stains, whether the leak is caused by plumbing or a faulty roof. Find the leak and repair it and make sure a proper job is done. Nothing irritates a buyer more than finding out - after the fact - about plumbing or roofing leaks. They will be talking about calling a lawyer faster than your car engine starts when you turn the ignition key.

If a water stain is left after something you have already repaired, do the cosmetic work necessary to improve the desirability of your home. That means painting.

You may have to paint anyway, especially if dirt has accumulated in spots or you have an outdated color scheme. Painting makes a home look fresh and new on the inside and never fails to impress.

Painting can be your best investment when selling your home. It is not a very expensive operation and often you can do it yourself. Do not choose colors based on your own preferences, but based on what would appeal to the widest possible number of buyers. You should almost always choose an off-white color because white helps your rooms appear bright and spacious.

## **Carpet and Flooring**

Unless your carpet appears old and worn, or it is definitely an outdated style or color, you probably should do nothing more than hire a good carpet cleaner. If you do choose to replace it, do so with something inexpensive in a fairly neutral color.

Repair or replace broken floor tiles, but do not spend a lot of money on anything. Remember, you are not fixing up the place for yourself. You want to move. Your goal is simply to have few negative impressions upon those who may want to purchase your property.

## **Windows and Doors**

Check all of your windows to make sure they open and close easily. If not, a spray of WD40 often helps. Make sure there are no cracked or broken windowpanes. If there are, replace them before you begin showing your home.

Do the same things with the doors – make sure they open and close properly, without creaking. If they do, a shot of WD40 on the hinges usually makes the creak go away. Be sure the doorknobs turn easily, and that they are cleaned and polished to look sharp. As buyers go from room to room, someone opens each door and you want to do everything necessary to create a positive impression.

## **Odor Control**

For those who smoke, you might want to minimize smoking indoors while trying to sell your home. Actually, it is best to move smoking outside. You could also purchase an ozone spray that helps to remove odors without creating a masking odor.

Apologies to pet owners, but pets come with odors. You may have become used to them, but they are immediately noticeable to those with more finely tuned olfactory senses.

For those with cats, be sure to empty kitty litter boxes daily and use plenty of baking soda. For dog owners, keep the dog outdoors as much as possible, even those adorable lovable little dogs. You might also try sprinkling carpet freshener on the carpet on a periodic basis.

## **The Exterior of the House**

Most real estate advice tells you to work on the outside of the house first, but unless there is a major project involved, it is probably best to save it for last. There are two main reasons for this. First, the first steps in preparing the interior of the house are easier. They also help develop the proper mind set required for selling - beginning to think of your "home" as a marketable commodity. Second, the exterior is the most important.

A homebuyer's first impression is based on his or her view of the house from the real estate agent's car. They call that first impression "curb appeal."

So take a walk across the street and take a good look at your house. Look at nearby houses, too, and see how yours compares. Then it may be time to go to work.

## **Landscaping**

Is your landscaping at least average for the neighborhood? If it is not, buy a few bushes and plant them. Do not put in trees. Mature trees are expensive, and you will not get back your investment. Also, immature trees do not really add much to the appearance value of the home.

If you have an area for flowers, buy mature colorful flowers and plant them. They add a splash of vibrancy and color, creating a favorable first impression. Do not buy bulbs or seeds and plant them. They will not mature fast enough to create the desired effect and you certainly don't want a patch of brown earth for homebuyers to view.

Your lawn should be evenly cut, freshly edged, well watered, and free of brown spots. If there are problems with your lawn, you should probably take care of them before working on the inside of your home. This is because certain areas may need to be re-sod, and you want to give it a chance to grow so

that re-sod areas are not immediately apparent. Plus, you might want to give fertilizer enough time to be effective.

Always rake up loose leaves and grass cuttings.

### **House Exterior**

The big decision is whether to paint or not to paint. When you look at your house from across the street, does it look tired and faded? If so, a paint job may be in order. It is often a very good investment and really spruces up the appearance of a house, adding dollars to offers from potential homebuyers.

When choosing a color, it should not be something garish and unusual, but a color that fits well in your neighborhood. Of course, the color also depends on the style of your house, too. For some reason, different shades of yellow seem to illicit the best response in homebuyers, whether it is in the trim or the basic color of the house.

As for the roof, if you know your roof leaks, repair it. If you do not repair a leaky roof, you are going to have to disclose it and the buyer will want an entire new roof. If you know your roof leaks and you don't repair it and don't disclose it, look forward to hearing from lawyers at some point in the future.

Otherwise, wait and see what the home inspector says. Why spend money unnecessarily?

### **The Back Yard**

The back yard should be tidy. If you have a pool or spa, keep it freshly maintained and constantly cleaned. For those that have dogs, be sure to constantly keep the area clear of "debris." If you have swing sets or anything elaborate for your kids, it probably makes more sense to remove them than to leave them in place. They take up room, and you want your back yard to appear as spacious as possible, especially in newer homes where the yards are not as large.

### **The Front Door & Entryway**

The front door should be especially sharp, since it is the entryway into the house. Polish the door fixture so it gleams. If the door needs refinishing or repainting, make sure to get that done.

If you have a cute little plaque or shingle with your family name on it, remove it. Even if it is just on the mailbox. You can always put it up again once you move. Get a new plush door mat, too. This is something else you can take with you once you move.

Make sure the lock works easily and the key fits properly. When a homebuyer comes to visit your home, the agent uses the key from the lock box to unlock the door. If there is trouble working the lock while everyone else stands around twiddling their thumbs, this sends a negative first impression to prospective homebuyers.

## **Showing the House**

Your house should always be available for show, even though it may occasionally be inconvenient for you. Let your listing agent put a lock box in a convenient place to make it easy for other agents to show your home to homebuyers. Otherwise, agents will have to schedule appointments, which is an inconvenience. Most will just skip your home to show the house of someone else who is more cooperative.

Most agents will call and give you at least a couple of hours notice before showing your property. If you refuse to let them show it at that time, they will just skip your house. Even if they come back another time, it will probably be with different buyers and you may have just lost a chance to sell your home.

### **Try Not to be Home**

Homebuyers will feel like intruders if you are home when they visit, and they might not be as receptive toward viewing your home. Visit the local coffee house, yogurt shop, or take the kids to the local park. If you absolutely cannot leave, try to remain in an out of the way area of the house and do not move from room to room. Do not volunteer any information, but answer any questions the agent may ask.

### **Lighting**

When you know someone is coming by to tour your home, turn on **all** the indoor and outdoor lights – even during the day. At night, a lit house gives a "homey" impression when viewed from the street. During the daytime, turning on the lights prevents harsh shadows from sunlight and it brightens up any dim areas. Your house looks more homey and cheerful with the lights on.

### **Fragrances**

Do not use scented sprays to prepare for visitors. It is too obvious and many people find the smells of those sprays offensive, not to mention that some may be allergic. If you want to have a pleasant aroma in your house, have a potpourri pot or something natural. Or turn on a stove burner (or the oven) for a moment and put a drop of vanilla extract on it. It will smell like you have been cooking.

### **Pet Control**

If you have pets, make sure your listing agent puts a notice with your listing in the multiple listing service. The last thing you want is to have your pet running out the front door and getting lost. If you know someone is coming, it would be best to try to take the pets with you while the homebuyers tour your home. If you cannot do that, it is best to keep dogs in a penned area in the back yard. Try to keep indoor cats in a specific room when you expect visitors, and put a sign on the door. Most of the time, an indoor cat will hide when buyers come to view your property, but they may panic and try to escape.

### **The Kitchen Trash**

Especially if your kitchen trash can does not have a lid, make sure you empty it every time someone comes to look at your home – even if your trash can is kept under the kitchen sink. Remember that you want to send a positive image about every aspect of your home. Kitchen trash does not send a positive message. You may go through more plastic bags than usual, but it will be worth it.

### **Keep the House Tidy**

Not everyone makes his or her bed every day, but when selling a home it is recommended that you develop the habit. Pick up papers, do not leave empty glasses in the family room, keep everything freshly dusted and vacuumed. Try your best to have it look like a model home – a home with furniture but nobody really lives there.