

## 7-step approach to selling your house

Selling your house is a big decision, and sets a number of activities into motion, from repairs and refreshing your property to selecting an agent and signing a contract. Here are seven important steps in the process:

**1. Get your house in order.** Make a critical assessment of any needed maintenance or repairs. Hire a home inspector if you're not comfortable making those assessments on your own. An inspection will probably cost you a few hundred dollars, but it's money well spent to keep from being unpleasantly surprised when a buyer has his own inspection done. No one wants to find out that their roof is shot, but at this stage, you can decide if it's worth it to spend the money and fix it or to sell the house as-is, disclose that it needs a new roof and set your price accordingly. Ask your broker for a referral to a qualified inspector.

**2. Look through a buyer's eyes.** Stand across the street and look at your house as if you're a prospective buyer seeing it for the first time. If you can't be objective, ask a friend to help you. You're looking at the condition of:

- The exterior paint -- is it fading or peeling?
- The yard -- are there bare spots in the grass or overgrown shrubs? Is there trash or broken toys? Are there diseased or damaged trees that need to be removed? Are there beds that need to be weeded?
- The driveway -- is it cracked or have holes in it?
- The garage door -- is it damaged?
- The windows -- do they need to be cleaned? Are they broken? Are the screens missing, torn or broken?
- The gutters and downspouts -- are they clogged or damaged?
- The front door -- is it dirty or damaged?
- The details -- does the mailbox door fall open? Are any house numbers missing? Are there burnt-out bulbs on the porch lights? Is there fencing that needs to be repaired?

You want to do this because you have one chance to make a good first impression. What potential buyers see on that first drive-by can do one of three things (and two of them are not good): make them fall in love, make them keep driving, or give them a checklist of items they can use to try to knock down your price.

You'll do the same thing inside the house, studying everything from how it smells to how old the carpet is.

**3. Set your price.** Many sellers set a price based on the amount of money they need to get out of the deal or how much they "think" the guy down the street sold his for. That's the kiss of death. It will sit on the market and you become a target of low-ball buyers and scammers. Price it right to sell it fast.

If you're using an agent, he will help you set your price. If you're selling on your own, you might hire an appraiser, who will pull recent sales, called "comps," to see what buyers have paid for houses like yours in the last 30 days. The more detailed research you can do, the better you can price the house and the sooner it will sell at a fair market price. You'll know there's a problem with the pricing if you show the house to seven people and no one makes an offer, he says.

**4. De-clutter.** This is the top recommendation of real estate agents for making your house shine to potential buyers as they walk through the front door. If need be, rent a storage unit and move out any furniture that isn't necessary. Many people are moving because they need more space and space is what you're selling. The

more space you have, the more inviting your house will be. While you're at it, have a garage sale. You'll not only get rid of that accumulated clutter and pocket some cash, you might also find a buyer for your house.

**5. Freshen up.** With the clutter gone, you'll probably see how much the place could use a fresh coat of paint. Stick with light, neutral colors -- but not white -- that go with everything. Many buyers just don't have a 'vision' and if they see a green wall, they only remember the green wall.

**6. List and show the property.** With everything spruced up, it's time to take the plunge and tell the world about your house. Once the house is on the market, you need to be prepared to show it at any time, keeping it clean, uncluttered, and smelling fresh. When you have a showing scheduled, turn on the lights and open the drapes. Put out some fresh-baked cookies -- and a sign-in sheet with a place to offer comments and feedback. Invite them to write their comments on curb appeal, the condition of the house and whether they think it's priced appropriately. And then leave. Buyers feel much more comfortable looking at a home when the seller isn't standing over their shoulder.

**7. Consider the offers.** A listing agent is required to present all offers to you from qualified buyers, so even if he thinks it's a bad deal, he has to show it to you. You'll have a short amount of time, often 24 hours, to respond to an offer. You can decide to accept the offer, reject it, or make a counter offer. A counter offer is when you make an offer of your own. Any offer is a starting point for discussion, and everything in it is negotiable.

Before you accept an offer -- and take your property off the market -- make sure the buyer has been pre-approved with a lender, and they have shown proof of down payment and the initial deposit.

Once both you and the buyer are happy with the terms, it's time to sign on the dotted line. Congratulations! You just sold your house!