

Staging Your Home for a Fast Sale

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Some homes sit on the market for days, some for weeks, and some for several months or even years in a worst-case scenario. If you're like most homeowners, you're hoping that you'll land a contract quickly.

There is a way that you can make that happen so that your home moves off the market fast. It might surprise you to know that this strategy really doesn't involve a total renovation, either.

You can sell your home fast by staging it. Some people aren't aware of how their home appears to others because they have a sentimental value woven into the mix when they think about the value of their home. Staging helps you see through your prospect's eyes.

How Staging Can Make or Break Your Home Selling Success

There are people who are prepared to sell their home and it shows. These are people who have put the home's best impression center stage. When prospective buyers walk into the house, they can imagine themselves living there.

Homeowners who don't stage their home often look at their house through their own eyes rather than the eyes of a buyer. They think that because *they* love the home, a buyer will, too - even with any quirky issues or crowded rooms.

They believe that others can look past the lived-in atmosphere to see the true gem underneath it all. It doesn't work that way. If a buyer is turned off by what he or she sees when they walk into your house, they don't look past that to see what the home could be like if they lived in it.

What they see is a homeowner who didn't care enough to make the house as presentable as possible. When you stage a home, it makes it

look inviting. Potential buyers walk into the house and they're immediately comfortable.

The home looks like it would fit *them* rather than you. They look around the room that's obviously been well prepared to show its best features and they don't see your sofa in that space.

They picture theirs and how great it would look in the room when they invite guests over or host a family holiday. They feel like the home is one that's been loved and taken care of - and this is what you want them to feel.

Buyers won't balk at paying more to get your house if they feel like it's been well taken care of, but if it looks too well worn, they might question its upkeep. When a buyer goes through a house that hasn't been taken care of and isn't presented nicely on the inside, they start deducting zeroes from your asking price.

Staging your home can help you enjoy faster selling success because a home that's been staged to look its best can come out on top among all the other homes that are listed in your area.

Not only can staging a home for a buyer make it more appealing, but when an appraiser comes to your home, he can clearly see that the home has been taken care of, too.

Though he'll check thoroughly, your home will make a good first impression. And that can lead the appraiser to mark your home's value higher than he might naturally if the home looked too worn.

Focus on Rooms Where Staging Makes the Biggest Difference

Not every single room in your home needs to be staged. They need to be clean and well-presented, but there are some rooms in the home that don't make or break a sale.

For example, while you want a nice looking laundry room, that one doesn't carry the same selling power that other rooms do. You want to start with the entrance to your house.

Your foyer area is a buyer's first introduction to the inside of your home. Unfortunately, it's also the space where most homeowners drop everything off. Keys get tossed onto a small table, shoes get discarded here, school bookbags are left lying around and coats and umbrellas hang from the coat rack or are strewn on a bench.

While for you that's just part of everyday life, for a *buyer* it looks unkempt like you couldn't even be bothered to straighten up. The kitchen is an area that must be staged well because it's one of the rooms in the house that's a huge selling point.

If your kitchen doesn't look it's best, it can make or break the deal pretty quickly. Your home can be old, but your kitchen can't look like it. If your kitchen looks like it's stuck in the 1970s, what potential buyers are going to see is a whole bunch of expensive renovation work.

Even if you can't afford to renovate your kitchen before you put your house on the market, you can afford to spruce it up with strategic staging. It doesn't cost much to paint cabinets and add some molding.

It also doesn't cost much to put in new curtains or new window blinds. You can also update the hardware on your cabinets. If you have old appliances and can't afford to buy new ones, you can use enamel paint to make them look good.

Each one of your bathrooms should be as inviting as possible. You want to have a great looking tub, shower and countertops. If you have countertops in your bathrooms that have seen better days, you can replace the countertops and it really doesn't cost that much - but the value it will add by helping your home sell is priceless.

Your living room should not look lived in. It should look like a blank canvas that someone else can draw his or her life on. Use all neutral colors and

furnishings. Leave the curtains open because it makes the room look bigger.

Have plants and colorful accents in the living room. Group your furniture around a focal point rather than having your sofa, chairs or loveseats flush against walls just to create more space.

To stage the bedrooms for a quick sale, get rid of bulky furniture by stashing it with a friend or in a storage unit. You want the room to look sparse, but not devoid of character.

Having a lot of furniture makes a bedroom look cramped. The bed should be one of the focal points. Cover it with new linen such as white blankets and sheets. Use throw pillows that are colorful and draw out the color from other decorations.

The bed should be a great looking bed even if it's not a very comfortable one. For example, if the bed is too low to the floor, it can make the bedroom look off balance.

Settle the bed on risers temporarily to make it look taller and fuller. Remove anything you might normally store under it if it can be seen when a prospective buyer is viewing the room.

Closets are the one thing that many homeowners don't really think about because they don't think the buyer will check. They do. They want to know how much storage space they're going to have.

This isn't a situation like when you have guests in your home. Every space is fair game for taking a look at. Your closet should be neat and well organized, but not filled to the brim with your clothes or other items.

Your dining room should have a great looking table - even if you need to rent one until the home sells. This table should have placemats and be set with nice dishes - and both should be colorful.

Simply adding a bright accent rug beneath a table can help this room look inviting. Make sure there's great lighting and replace any outdated

light fixtures. Keep any wall decorations simple here so that the focus can be on the table and the room itself.

The garage is what often makes or breaks a sale when it comes to male buyers. They want a garage that they can picture themselves in. You don't want your garage to look like you're a hoarder.

Clean it out and paint it if needed. Put up hanging hooks to get items off the floor so it looks spacious in the garage. Organize everything and update the lights. Make sure the garage door opens and closes without squeaking or groaning. Clean stains off the floor and make sure there aren't cobwebs everywhere.

Start with a Deep Decluttering Process

To get your home staged for a fast sale, you need to start by deeply decluttering the rooms. When you declutter a home, you make it look bigger like it has more living space, which is something that appeals to potential buyers.

It also prepares you for the letting go and moving on process and lets you show off your home. Most people use some rooms in their homes for things they weren't intended to use the room for - and that can make a house look cramped to a buyer.

For example, sometimes people put workout machines in their living room. This not only looks cluttered, but it immediately gives the buyer the impression that the home is too small.

Start with the foyer. Since this is usually your "drop everything off" area, it will look cluttered and junky. Take out everything except a small table and a nice decorative bowl or flowers.

It will immediately give the impression of openness. In your kitchen, you need to go through your cabinets. Every kitchen has those extra storage container lids floating around that fall out when cabinets are opened.

Pare down all your containers, dishes and utensils and keep the minimum. Your cupboards need to be neat and not piled up haphazardly with dishes or food items.

The same with your pantry. Don't have a half dozen boxes of half-empty cereal and scattered bags of bread lying around. It will make the kitchen look crowded and unclean.

Use baskets or other storage containers to keep things neat. Take the magnets, drawings and anything else off the front and sides of the refrigerator. Put away the family scheduling calendar.

Take the countertop appliances off and put them out of sight. Appliances take up space and make countertops look a lot smaller than they are. Clean off the top of the refrigerator if you store things there.

If you have a lot of knick-knacks, pack them away. Don't leave potholders or any dishwashing detergent or scrubbers out, either. In the bathroom, clear the countertops of anything that you use.

No one wants to see razors, toothpaste or any other toiletry on display. Do the same thing with your shower area. Put away anything that says someone lives in the house.

It makes buyers uncomfortable even though it's an obvious fact. Put away your scale, trashcan and toilet cleaning brush. Don't have bath mats out, either. Make sure everything is sparkling clean.

Clean out drawers, closets and cabinets in the bathroom. Some buyers will take a peek. For the living room, organize any clutter. Put away gaming controllers, TV remotes, magazines and books.

If you have tons of pillows and throw blankets, minimize it. Take out any toys or baby items like swings or walkers. If you have numerous rugs, take them out because rugs can make a floor space look smaller.

Clear away the clutter from side tables, fireplace mantels and bookshelves. If you have a lot of decorations on the walls, take some of

them down. In the bedrooms, you need to take out things that cramp the space.

Not only does this include heavy or large furniture but it also includes what's in your closets. Get rid of clothes you no longer wear, pack up seasonal cloths and organize all the accessories and shoes.

Too many pillows and blankets on a bed can make it look cluttered. Pare down the bedding to make the space look less full. Opting for a minimalist look in the bedroom can make it seem larger than it really is.

Closets have become like junk drawers. Many homeowners shove things into the closet to deal with "later" but that time often never comes. Go through all the closets in your home and take out stuff that you know you're not going to use within the next few months.

Don't leave a bunch of items cluttered on the floor - especially sports equipment. Your closets should look as sparse as possible, because then a potential buyer is thinking about how much room there is rather than how much there isn't.

A dining room needs to be decluttered because it often acts as the place where the kitchen clutter spills over - especially if you have any shelves, or hutches. Clear everything off and if you have a hutch that holds plates or knick-knacks, either remove most of the items or put the hutch in storage.

Don't leave out decorations, stacks of placemats or things like salt and pepper shakers. Deep decluttering a garage means you need to take out the boxes filled with stuff to donate and organize all the seasonal items like Halloween and Christmas decorations.

Anything that's scattered around needs to be picked up and organized. Stuff for the yard like pruning shears, a weed eater, an edger or lawnmowers should be kept neatly together rather than scattered everywhere.

Start by cleaning out the entire garage because it will be easier to declutter that way. Purge what needs to go - including tools that you

have in multiple batches. No one needs five hammers. Then as you put things back, use organization products to help keep everything in its place.

Remove Personalized and Sentimental Items

When you put a home on the market, you want it to look as neutral as possible to give it the best chance of selling quickly. One of the first things that you should do before you put your home up for sale is to go through it and pack away the personalized and sentimental items.

There are those who believe that leaving these items in a home help the buyer get a feel for how lovely it will be to live in the home. But the problem with this is that they have a hard time picturing their own lives because yours is so overwhelmingly present.

You don't want the buyer paying attention to your life. You want him paying attention to the house. Leaving sentimental stuff out can hinder the selling process.

By taking out the photos and other items, you create a clean slate for the potential buyers. Plus, you keep the focus on the house rather than on your life. When buyers see photos, these can often catch their attention.

They focus on pictures and sentimental items and forget to envision themselves living in the home. By de-personalizing the home, you enable the buyer to personalize it mentally.

When a buyer walks through the house, you want him thinking about all the features of the home and imagining himself in the rooms. You don't want him thinking about the pictures of the vacation shots you took or the sports events that you were present at.

It's one thing to live in a home and another to sell it - and the two should not be connected when the home goes on the market. Sentimental knick knacks should be packed away just like the pictures.

You want to make a connection with the buyer about the house, not over your figurine collection. You need to take out any memorabilia that you have as well as anything that you collect.

For example, if you collect snowmen figurines and related décor, then you need to put those away. If you have a college diploma on the wall or anything that's personalized with your first or complete name, take that down. You should also remove any sentimental items that reference religion.

Conduct a Thorough Cleaning of Your Home

Your home needs to have a deep cleaning before you put it on the market because there's a difference between everyday clean and selling clean. You can clean it yourself if you have the time, but thoroughly cleaning a home can take you a few days to do it right.

Or, you can hire someone and figure that as part of the cost of selling your home. A professional cleaner usually has more experience with cleaning on a deeper level and doesn't often overlook the things that a homeowner will.

A potential buyer will also catch what you don't pay attention to. You need to make sure all the windows are washed on the inside and that the windowsills are clean.

Clean or replace window blinds. Wash all the light globes and fixtures. Wipe down the light switches and wall socket plates. Ceiling fans should be cleaned both at the base, on the blades and the lights.

Remove any cobwebs from the ceilings. Wipe off the tops of the door frames and all the baseboards. Clean beneath all the furniture. If you have rugs, those need to be washed or steam cleaned.

Vacuum under and between couch cushions and other furniture. Wipe down table legs and kitchen chairs. Wash the doorknobs and check and wash areas of the walls that need to be washed.

Sometimes, you may end up having to repaint a room if the paint doesn't look its best. Wash and clean out all the trashcans. Wash off the lights on the porch of your home and make sure the front door and screen door are clean.

Clean out all the cabinets in the house. Wash all the appliances down and clean out the refrigerator and freezer. Make sure the disposal is clean and smells good. Make sure that all the towel racks are dusted.

Remove any discoloration in the bathrooms and clean the mirrors. Put fresh sheets and blankets on the bed. Organize everything. Sweep, vacuum and mop the floors as needed.

If you have carpeting, steam clean it or get it professionally cleaned to remove odors. Wash all the pet bedding - and the pets! Clean all their toys and dishes. Use air fresheners or scented candles in the rooms, but not anything overpowering.

You can become immune to the scents in your home - like pet odors - so ask someone to come over and tell you if the house has a strange or unpleasant odor.

Make a Decision on What to Repair or Remodel

Few homes are in such great shape that they can go on the market without needing some repairs and remodeling. Bumps and accidents happen and these can result in dings or holes in the drywall.

Sometimes a ceiling will develop a cosmetic crack that doesn't impact the integrity of the ceiling. You'll want to repair any drywall damage so that the walls of the home are in good shape.

If you have an appliance that's not working, whether or not you fix that is up to you - but keep in mind that a good portion of buyers want to add a contingency for the appliances to be included in the sale.

If your heating and air conditioning unit isn't working correctly, pay to have that repaired before you try to sell it because this can cost you a

sale. Anything that's a big-ticket item such as a heating and air unit is something that buyers don't want to have to deal with.

If your sinks or tubs have leaky faucets, fix those. Look at the flooring in all the rooms in your house. If it looks dirty, clean it - if it's torn, then you need to repair it.

Any window frames that show any wood damage should be fixed as well as any windows in the home that might be cracked. Fix any areas of the home where there's been water damage.

If you know for certain that something in your home might not pass inspection because it's not up to code, bring it up to code. If the roof has some trouble spots, fix those - but it could be that your home needs a new roof.

You don't necessarily have to put on a new roof, but if it's clear the home needs one because the current one is old or has been repaired, then you can negotiate replacing it as part of the sale.

Just know that this usually results in calculations in the buyer's favor. A buyer will usually ask for things to be repaired. Some of them, you'll want to give on, but others, you might not want to.

If it's cosmetic, let that be the buyer's responsibility. This might include something like taking care of painting the walls a new color or replacing doorknobs they don't like or changing the landscaping.

Other repairs or fixes, you'll want to give on. If the roof is going to cost \$8,000 to replace, then you may want to pay to have it done yourself, because you'll pay more if you end up negotiating part or all of the cost of replacing it from the selling price of the house.

When it comes to knowing what to remodel, the key is to focus on what helps you sell the home. This means the kitchen and bathrooms. But there are also other repairs and renovations that can help your house sell quickly.

Insulating the attic is one of them. Adding a deck or a patio is another. Putting on new siding and windows is also a good remodeling project to boost profits in the sale. Little renovations, such as replacing the front door and the gutters, can pay you back in profits.

Add Props to Make Your Home Feel Inviting

While you might be selling a house, buyers are looking for a place that they can call home. By setting your home up so that it looks inviting, you can give someone the desire that this is the place they want to be.

If you have a lot of books, it can make a home look cluttered, but a couple of old hardback books, especially the classics, can be used as a prop on a coffee table or end table.

One home prop that you'll often see suggested is having a bowl of fruit out - such as apples. But the problem with apples as a prop is twofold. First, it's been done so often that they tend to kind of fade into the background.

Second, if you forget to keep an eye on them and the apples start to turn mushy, it can fill the space with an unpleasant odor. Instead of apples in a decorative bowl, use lemons.

Not only do you get a bright pop of color that reminds people of sunny days, but lemons can outlast apples and they look great in any room. One way to add props to a bathroom that helps it look more inviting is to check out what a spa experience offers.

Then put props in your bathroom that make potential buyers think of luxury and relaxation. You can start by adding plush towels. You can go with whatever color you'd like, but keep in mind that thick, white towels make people think of spas.

Set up a bathtub tray with candles and serenity rocks. Throughout the home, use scented candles as props that remind people of warmth - such as vanilla, red apples or mild cinnamon.

Use accent pillows - and if you're not sure what color, look at the wall art in the room for inspiration to draw from. Pillows make a home look inviting as well as luxurious.

Pre-Tour Your Home Through the Lens of Your Senses

By now, you've reached the stage where you're just about ready to put the home on the market. You think you have everything that can possibly be done taken care of and the home is as appealing as it can be.

To make sure that your home really is market-ready, you're going to want to do your own tour through the rooms to make sure you haven't missed anything. The best way to do this is by walking through the home while paying attention to your senses.

It might even be helpful to take a small notepad with you and write down your first impression of the room as it pertains to each of your senses. When you walk into a room, write down the first scent that you notice.

It could be that in the bedroom, the first thing you can smell is the fabric softener that you used on the linens or on your clothes. You want the scent to be fresh and appealing.

Some fabric softeners have a good, but common scent. You want the room to smell inviting rather than like your laundry. In the kitchen, breathe deeply to see if you can pick up on any scents from the trashcan or from the garbage disposal.

Go through the rooms and listen for what you hear. If there's anything distracting, like a loud clock ticking, you may want to take that down. If you walk across the floor and it squeaks, investigate if that's something that you need to take care of.

When you push open a door, pay attention to the sound that it makes. The way a room looks makes a lasting impression on a buyer - so when you pre-tour your home, see if it looks serene and welcoming. Look for anything that's out of place or captures attention in a bad way.

Head Outside and Spiff Up Your Curb Appeal

What's outside the home is going to be the first thing that tells a buyer if he wants to see the home. Curb appeal is something that can set your home up to sell fast - and it doesn't have to cost a whole lot to give a home this kind of help.

You want to make sure the lawn looks good and that it's edged. For instant curb appeal, have flowers in a flower bed or in decorative pots or use greenery. Put flowers around the trees instead of mulch.

Paint the shutters and the front door. Put in new hardware on the door or paint it. Upgrade the porch light. Paint or buy new house numbers and renovate or replace the mailbox.

If you have a concrete entryway, clean or stain the concrete to make it look like tiles. Add hanging plants. Ferns are always popular as are colorful flowers. Put up veneer panels to cover the concrete foundation of your house. Install a heating and air conditioning screen to camouflage the unit.

Use the Staging Results to Take Pictures for Your Promos

Once you have your home staged, you're going to want to have professional photos taken. This will range in price and some can be expensive - but what you pay out in good quality photos, you will reap by having your home sell quickly.

If you don't want to hire a professional photographer or it's just not in the budget, then you can do it yourself with a little bit of research. You need to look up tutorials for the best angles to use when taking a picture.

Keep in mind that this angle won't always be the same in a different room. When the home is completely ready to put on the market and you have the inside and outside of it staged, then you want to make sure you photograph it at the best time.

Use natural sunlight and make sure the curtains and blinds are open. Take pictures of the room from different sides to make sure you get all the best features.

You'll want to take plenty of photographs - but you won't use them all. Make sure you get low, eye-level shots. These kinds of shots look better in flat media like ads rather than high shots.

Don't tilt the camera up, down or sideways. Keep it straight. Make sure you balance the photograph. If you take a shot of the exterior of your home, you don't want the house way off to the left or the right.

Use your normal focus inside and out, and don't zoom in. Don't try to take pictures on days when the weather is bad. Your house just won't photograph well.

If you have a home with a lot of windows that let in natural light, you can play up this feature, but try photographing your home from the outside just as night is almost there, too.

Have all the lights on shining from the inside out and it will create a beautiful photo with the lights at a soft glow like the house is waiting to welcome in the buyer.



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