

TOUGH QUESTIONS FOR YOUR PROSPECTIVE AGENT

Your prospective agent should be more than ready to tell you about the custom marketing plan that has been designed especially for you. If you review three marketing plans, you probably will find much similarity. So save a lot of time and politely forgo this step. In so doing, you will avoid **the most common mistake made by home sellers**: Selecting an agent because of the marketing plan. Agents do many things to help sell a home **and** to impress the seller that an exceptional marketing effort is being witnessed. Yes, more exposure is generally better, but one also needs to consider effectiveness. It is often difficult for home sellers to separate what really works from what really sounds as if it works.

Most sellers choose an agent **primarily** because of the marketing plan. Many agents perpetuate the notion that this is a good idea because they sincerely believe it to be true. However, as an important criterion for selecting an agent, the marketing plan does not even rank among the top three. As you will see from the next set of questions, your listing agent probably will **never** show your home to the eventual buyer and the most fabulous marketing plan will be for naught. Choosing someone primarily on the basis of "rah, rah, rah; sis, boom, bah" will not lead to a successful sale.

What usually sells your listings? The MLS? Signs? Advertisements? The industry average is overwhelmingly clear: Over nine out of ten home buyers come from the computerized MLS, **not** from the direct sales efforts of your agent. Signs and open houses account for the few remaining sales. Is the candidate in touch with the market? **In our market, it is the MLS that sells.** This fact explodes the myth that personal contacts and word-of-mouth selling have measurable effects.

In what percentage of your listings were you the selling agent? Be wary of an answer that is higher than one out of ten. It can suggest inaccuracy, or worse yet, a practice of "pocket listings," not entering homes promptly into the MLS.

How many times do you expect to show my home personally each week? Again, is the candidate in tune? Most agents will welcome the chance to confess at this early stage that, with the exception of open houses and calls from signs, they *personally* will not show your home very often.

How many showings should we expect each week? If your price is in tune with the market, there should be **at least** 4 showings each week in order to sell within 8 weeks. For expensive homes, showings are less frequent and longer marketing times must be anticipated.

How many showings will we need to find our buyer? This question is another check on experience and provides valuable information so that you know what to expect. The number varies widely but a reasonable response is 10 to 30 showings. The experienced agent will know this number. It is an essential piece of information for an agent to possess whether working with sellers or buyers.

The most valuable exposure is through the computerized MLS database. It is 30 or 40 times more important than whatever is in second place. Serious home buyers do not want to waste time. They know how to find a home: Search the MLS. It's a lot quicker than attending open houses or chasing real estate signs. That is why over 90% of all homes are sold this way. No, your listing agent will not actually find your buyer directly. This means that the information entered into the MLS computer is critical to your success! Your listing agent is your **connection** to the buyer. Read on to learn where to look and what to look for in selecting an agent to put your home's best footing forward. **Your agent's computer literacy is one of the most important factors.**

Real estate agents include a diverse mix of personalities and capabilities. Some adjust to change; some fight it. Some are born computer nerds, and some will never know the difference between a bit and a byte, or between baud and bawdy. And some will never even care. A few well placed questions will sort out your special computer nerd-agent.

What sells homes? If the answer is, "The MLS," then you are off to a good start. You have an agent who understands market basics. Conversely, an agent who thinks that his or her "dynamite marketing plan" is going to do the trick is way off base and might look at the MLS data-entry job as something to finish as soon as possible with as little thought as possible.

MLS computer entry is very important. There are many critical decisions involved in filling certain fields so that other agents searching the MLS will find your home for sale. Some of these items will be hard for you to check, so remember that your agent has to think like a computer in order to enter your home in a manner that will maximize the number of times it issues forth in other agents' searches. And when your page does pop out of the computer, the information there needs to say, "come visit me." Like life, there is no substitute for experience and good judgment. Choose your agent carefully!

*This series is excerpted from David Rathgeber's **SELLING YOUR HOME in the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area** Copyright © David Rathgeber. All rights reserved.*

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