

PUT YOUR BEST FOOT FORWARD

Preparing to market your home will take time and thought. The ideas presented here are those that are most important, frequently overlooked, or unique. Read on carefully, a home that shows poorly will cost its seller at least 10% to 15% of the home's fair market value as well as require an extended marketing time, and cause needless aggravation.

First impressions are the strongest. In marketing your home, as in life, you never get a second chance to make a good first impression. So, when your prospective buyer pulls up to the curb, make it count. When visitors arrive, they will use all of their senses, with the possible exception of taste, to gain an impression of your home. The following will form their impression:

- ◆ Obvious factors and qualities such as the carpet color or the number of bathrooms
- ◆ Recognizable and definable, but not obvious, factors such as proximity to a Metro station or the existence of a community pool and tennis courts
- ◆ Indefinable, subtle, and often unspoken feelings.

Your objective is to slip into the shoes of the home buyer, a total stranger, and identify the essential elements, whether positive or negative, dealing with each, bringing the positive ones into sharp focus and eliminating or minimizing the negative ones. It will be difficult for you to identify subtly embarrassing or possibly offensive elements of your home. The importance of eliminating these factors is easy to understand: Unspoken objections, can represent powerful negatives, and can never be known, addressed, or resolved by the agent showing your home. You must identify and eliminate such problems if at all possible.

Minor repairs should always be done. Fixing that dripping faucet, the hole in the wall, and the loose front doorknob are minor expenses that will return many times their cost, not to mention those closet doors that are off their tracks or dragging on the carpet. When buyers observe minor maintenance items that have not been done, they wonder what other problems might be lurking. Also, standard resale contracts require that major systems, appliances, et cetera, to be in normal working order on the date that possession is delivered. Why wait?

The presentation of your home that you are striving for can be summarized as: light and bright; uncluttered and neat; neutral in color and pattern; impersonal and inoffensive; and clean. Of course, an entire book could be written on preparing a home for the market, its importance, and what happened for those sellers who did it right... and **to** those sellers who did not. But for now, we will just hit the highlights. Bear in mind that home buyers will be especially impressed with your home if it is neutral, neat, and clean.

To achieve "light and bright," go through your home carefully and replace the light bulb in each lamp or lighting fixture with the maximum wattage bulb allowable. Permanently installed fixtures should have labels showing the maximum watts. No penny pinching either; if a lamp will take a three-way bulb, go first class. Wash the lenses of all lamps and lighting fixtures. Remove shades, blinds, drapes, and curtains if possible, but be careful not to create a barren look or expose ugly windows or unpleasant views. Sheer curtains that you feel are needed should be taken down, cleaned, and re-hung. Have all windows washed inside and out, including the space between the windows and storm windows, which sometimes resembles an insect cemetery.

The ideal home for showing has a minimum of furniture. Identify any items that you will not move to your next home and sell, donate, give, or throw these things away *now*. Remove furniture from hallways and narrow foyers. Move any furniture that impedes entry or clear sight into any room. Pack all valuables, collections, and family photographs and store them safely for the move. Remove everything from kitchen counters, bathroom vanities, and your desk top. Replace only those items that you are sure to need in the coming week. Pack the rest. Be honest, you will never use all of those 137 lipstick colors next week. Give some attention to storage spaces, attics, and garages as well, and remove everything from the stairs: A broken arm, leg, or neck is not the way you want a prospective buyer to remember your home. Keep your home neat at all times.

Neutralize colors and patterns as best you can without spending a fortune. Can you remove wallpaper and paint the walls? If you choose to paint, remove all of the electrical switch plates and socket covers before painting and replace them with new ones as soon as the paint is dry.

The more impersonal your home, the less chance it will offend your buyer. Often buyers will not openly express their personal feelings about what they find offensive. Sometimes their feelings are not even put into words. But they rarely want to think of a home that they found distasteful, let alone see it again. Clean everywhere, but pay special attention to kitchens and bathrooms. Tile grouting and tub caulking must be cleaned and bleached white. If stains persist, consider replacing the offending material. For rust stains, look for products containing oxalic acid. Any soiled carpets must be cleaned if not replaced. Get professional help if necessary. If there is any question about your carpet, get an estimate for replacing it with modest quality, light, neutral carpet, the same in all rooms.

Try to find paint to touch up the appliances and the corners of walls where the paint has been chipped off. If your home has a forced-air HVAC system, clean the vents giving special attention to cold air returns. While you're at it, replace the air filter.

Be alert to odors. The only time you will be able to evaluate odors is during the first few seconds after you return home. Track down any odors to their source and eliminate them. The cat's litter box really needs changing more frequently than every month. Because your fireplace can produce unwanted odors, especially on rainy days, clean out the ashes and set new logs for your next fire. Use some type of "odor eaters" or air fresheners, but avoid strong scents. If your HVAC system is forced-air, consider setting the circulating fan to "on."

Set the dining room table for dinner including plates, silverware, water or wine glasses, coffee cups, place mats, and napkins for four. Finally, don't overlook the outside. Everything should be neat and trimmed. Your lawn should look picture perfect, and any required painting should be done. This is the ideal time to remove the spare plumbing fixtures and the old car (the one up on cinder blocks) that you have been saving in the front yard. If your home does not look inviting from the curb, many buyers will drive by and never come in. Elementary? Intuitively obvious? But thousands have lost millions through their own disregard and negligence. Do not join them.

Here's a checklist: <http://www.davidr.net/selltext.html#49591>

*This series is excerpted from David Rathgeber's **SELLING YOUR HOME in the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area***
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