



Real Estate Reality

PREPARING YOUR HOME FOR THE MARKET

-Debbie Yost

There are five items that impact the salability of a home: location, price, terms, condition, and marketing. If the price is right every property will sell, even if the marketing, location, terms and condition are poor. Putting a property in saleable condition is one of the easiest things to accomplish and very important in a buyer's market when the home is competing with many others, including model homes. Generally improving the condition in this type of market won't make it sell for more money than market value, but it will make it sell faster by appealing emotionally to potential buyers.

What are the steps to making a home more saleable? Here is a process I've used successfully with hundreds of home sellers over the years. It involves removing clutter, excess furniture and too many personal items; thoroughly cleaning the home; repairing or replacing broken and worn items; setting the stage emotionally inside and out, and being prepared to show the home with little or no advance warning.

Over the years of making a house a home we accumulate things that we are reluctant to throw away. We hold onto books and magazines we think we will get around to reading someday, and clothes that we will wear when we lose weight, Aunt Edna's favorite chair and lamp, and furniture that we no longer love but think is still "too good" to throw away. After living with all of our "stuff" we don't even see it anymore. When a home is overcrowded with too many things and particularly too many personal items potential buyers can't "see" the home they would be buying. All they are able to focus on is the owner's family and personal possessions and they can't visualize themselves in the home. While the process of "de-cluttering" can seem daunting at first, home sellers typically thank us when it's time to move because moving is much easier. If you have trouble deciding whether or not to "release" something, I recommend that you create three categories for items: things to keep; things to throw away, give away or sell; and items you aren't using but still feel some attachment to. Box up those things and put them in storage. Go back through them in a month or two. If they still seem like treasures keep them and check again in another month or two. Most sellers report that it is easier to keep the home clean and ready to show with fewer items in it and they tell me they actually love living with less "stuff" around them.

Cleaning the home inside and out is the next step. Spraying off dust and cobwebs, cleaning windows until they sparkle, cleaning carpets, baseboards and garages can be quite gratifying. Homes sell if bathrooms and kitchens sparkle, and if rooms seem spacious. When a potential buyer opens a closet door and it appears to have plenty of room for a normal wardrobe, they feel good. Having a clean garage with room to park the cars inside is a benefit the seller can enjoy as well as making the home more saleable. Cleaning the front door and

making it welcoming, removing dead landscaping and weeds is all part of creating good curb appeal. If the first impression from the street isn't appealing, potential buyers won't even step inside.

Repairing and replacing worn or broken items is the next step. A fresh coat of neutral paint where needed is a wonderful way to freshen a home. Repairing or replacing dripping faucets, a cracked window, or replacing a tarnished front door handle is well worth the cost. If flooring is outdated or worn, consider replacing it with new neutral carpet, tile or vinyl. If you are reluctant to do so, consider offering a flooring allowance for the buyer to select new carpeting of their choice at close of escrow. A green pool just isn't as attractive as one that is sparkling. This is the stage where many homeowners can feel overwhelmed. It's a great idea to get input from your Realtor as to what items should be repaired or replaced.

Staging the home is something that creates the icing on the cake. While there are professional staging services available, home owners can do much themselves. A new welcome mat, pots of bright flowers on the door step, fresh towels for the bathrooms and placemats for the kitchen table all create an emotional appeal that is very effective. Play soft music and burn a candle with the gentle fragrance of vanilla or cinnamon. Turn lights on in the bathrooms and kitchen and in any rooms that aren't brightly lit. I like to compare this important aspect to dating. If you were hoping to make a favorable impression on someone you were meeting for the first time, you would be showered and dressed attractively in order to make a positive first impression, wouldn't you?

Once you have completed all the items listed above, your home will be relatively easy to maintain and show with little advance notice. Surprisingly, we've found that clients report that they love living this way. They tell us that it really is much easier to live in a home without so many things cluttering their space. Parents particularly enjoy the new habits their children learn, such as making their beds each morning and keeping their bedrooms and bathrooms neat. The biggest benefit is that the homes that have been prepared for selling using this process sell faster and for more money than homes which are marketed "as is."

Debbie Yost, CLHMS, CRS, GRI is an Associate Broker with RE/MAX All Executives Casa Grande and can be reached at Debbie@Yosthomes.com.

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