

Home Selling Articles and Advice

Introduction - Emotion vs. Reason

When conversing with real estate agents, you will often find that when they talk to you about buying real estate, they will refer to your purchase as a "home." Yet if you are selling property, they will often refer to it as a "house." There is a reason for this. Buying real estate is often an emotional decision, but when selling real estate you need to remove emotion from the equation.

You need to think of your house as a marketable commodity. Property. Real estate. Your goal is to get others to see it as *their* potential home, not yours. If you do not consciously make this decision, you can inadvertently create a situation where it takes longer to sell your property.

The first step in getting your home ready to sell is to "de-personalize" it.

De-personalize the House

The reason you want to "de-personalize" your home is because you want buyers to view it as *their* potential home. When a potential homebuyer sees your family photos hanging on the wall, it puts your own brand on the home and momentarily shatters their illusions about owning the house. Therefore, put away family photos, sports trophies, collectible items, knick-knacks, and souvenirs. Put them in a box. Rent a storage area for a few months and put the box in the storage unit.

Do not just put the box in the attic, basement, garage or a closet. Part of preparing a house for sale is to remove "clutter," and that is the next step in preparing your house for sale.

Removing Clutter, Though You May Not Think of it as Clutter

This is the hardest thing for most people to do because they are emotionally attached to everything in the house. After years of living in the same home, clutter collects in such a way that may not be evident to the homeowner. However, it does affect the way buyers see the home, even if you do not realize it. Clutter collects on shelves, counter tops, drawers, closets, garages, attics, and basements.

Take a step back and pretend you are a buyer. Let a friend help point out areas of clutter, as long as you can accept their views without getting defensive. Let your agent help you, too.

Kitchen Clutter

The kitchen is a good place to start removing clutter, because it is an easy place to start. First, get everything off the counters. Everything. Even the toaster. Put the toaster in a cabinet and take it out when you use it. Find a place where you can store everything in cabinets and drawers. Of course, you may notice that you do not have cabinet space to put everything. Clean them out. The dishes, pots and pans that rarely get used? Put them in a box and put that box in storage, too.

You see, homebuyers will open all your cabinets and drawers, especially in the kitchen. They want to be sure there is enough room for their "stuff." If your kitchen cabinets, pantries, and drawers look jammed full, it sends a negative message to the buyer and does not promote an image of plentiful storage space. The best way to do that is to have as much "empty space" as possible.

For that reason, if you have a "junk drawer," get rid of the junk. If you have a rarely used crock pot, put it in storage. Do this with every cabinet and drawer. Create open space.

If you have a large amount of foodstuffs crammed into the shelves or pantry, begin using them – especially canned goods. Canned goods are heavy and you don't want to be lugging them to a new house, anyway – or paying a mover to do so. Let what you have on the shelves determine your menus and use up as much as you can.

Beneath the sink is very critical, too. Make sure the area beneath the sink is as empty as possible, removing all extra cleaning supplies. You should scrub the area down as well, and determine if there are any tell-tale signs of water leaks that may cause a homebuyer to hesitate in buying your home.

Closet Clutter

Closets are great for accumulating clutter, though you may not think of it as clutter. We are talking about extra clothes and shoes – things you rarely wear but cannot bear to be without. Do without these items for a couple of months by putting them in a box, because these items can make your closets look "crammed full." Sometimes there are shoeboxes full of "stuff" or other accumulated personal items, too.

Furniture Clutter

Many people have too much furniture in certain rooms – not too much for your own personal living needs – but too much to give the illusion of space that a homebuyer would like to see. You may want to tour some builders' models to see how they place furniture in the model homes. Observe how they place furniture in the models so you get some ideas on what to remove and what to leave in your house.

Storage Area Clutter

Basements, garages, attics, and sheds accumulate not only clutter, but junk. These areas should be as empty as possible so that buyers can imagine what they would do with the space. Remove anything that is not essential and take it to the storage area.

Or have a garage sale.

Fixing Up the House Interior

Plumbing and Fixtures

All your sink fixtures should look shiny and new. If this cannot be accomplished by cleaning, buy new ones where needed. If you don't buy something fancy, this can be accomplished inexpensively and they are fairly easy to install. Make sure all the hot and cold water knobs are easy to turn and that the faucets do not leak. If they do, replace the washers. It is not difficult at all.

Check to make sure you have good water pressure and that there are no stains on any of the porcelain. If you have a difficult stain to remove, one trick is to hire a cleaning crew to go through and clean your home on a one-time basis. They seem to be wonderful at making stains go away.

Ceilings, Walls and Painting

Check all the ceilings for water stains. Sometimes old leaks leave stains, even after you have repaired the leak. Of course, if you do have a leak, you will have to get it repaired, whether it is a plumbing problem or the roof leaks.

You should do the same for walls, looking for not only stains, but also areas where dirt has accumulated and you just may not have noticed. Plus, you may have an outdated color scheme.

Painting can be your best investment when selling your home. It is not a very expensive operation and often you can do it yourself. Do not choose colors based on your own preferences, but based on what would appeal to the widest possible number of buyers. You should almost always choose an off-white color because white helps your rooms appear bright and spacious.

Carpet and Flooring

Unless your carpet appears old and worn, or it is definitely an outdated style or color, you probably should do nothing more than hire a good carpet cleaner. If you do choose to replace it, do so with something inexpensive in a fairly neutral color.

Repair or replace broken floor tiles, but do not spend a lot of money on anything. Remember, you are not fixing up the place for yourself. You want to move. Your goal is simply to have as few negative impressions upon those who may want to purchase your property.

Windows and Doors

Check all of your windows to make sure they open and close easily. If not, a spray of WD40 often helps. Make sure there are no cracked or broken windowpanes. If there are, replace them before you begin showing your home.

Do the same things with the doors – make sure they open and close properly, without creaking. If they do, a shot of WD40 on the hinges usually makes the creak go away. Be sure the doorknobs turn easily, and that they are cleaned and polished to look sharp. As buyers go from room to room, someone opens each door and you want to do everything necessary to create a positive impression.

Odor Control

For those who smoke, you might want to minimize smoking indoors while trying to sell your home. You could also purchase an ozone spray that helps to remove odors without creating a masking odor.

Pets of all kinds create odors that you may have become used to, but are immediately noticeable to those with more finely tuned olfactory senses. For those with cats, be sure to empty kitty litter boxes daily. There are also products that you can sprinkle in a layer below the kitty litter that helps to control odor. For those with dogs, keep the dog outdoors as much as possible. You might also try sprinkling carpet freshener on the carpet on a periodic basis.

Costs of Repairs

Do not do anything expensive, such as remodeling. If possible, use savings to pay for any repairs and improvements – do not go charging up credit cards or obtaining new loans. Remember that part of selling a house is also preparing to buy your next home. You do not want to do anything that will affect your credit scores or hurt your ability to qualify for your next mortgage.

Fixing Up Outside the House

Most real estate advice tells you to work on the outside of the house first, but unless there is a major project involved, we believe it is best to do it last. There are two main reasons for this. First, the first steps in preparing the interior of the house are easier. They also help develop the proper mind set required for selling - beginning to think of your "home" as a marketable commodity. Second, the exterior is the most important. A homebuyer's first impression is based on his or her view of the house from the real estate agent's car.

So take a walk across the street and take a good look at your house. Look at nearby houses, too, and see how yours compares.

Landscaping

Is your landscaping at least average for the neighborhood? If it is not, buy a few bushes and plant them. Do not put in trees. Mature trees are expensive, and you will not get back your investment. Also, immature trees do not really add much to the appearance value of the home.

If you have an area for flowers, buy mature colorful flowers and plant them. They add a splash of vibrancy and color, creating a favorable first impression. Do not buy bulbs or seeds and plant them. They will not

mature fast enough to create the desired effect and you certainly don't want a patch of brown earth for homebuyers to view.

Your lawn should be evenly cut, freshly edged, well watered, and free of brown spots. If there are problems with your lawn, you should probably take care of them before working on the inside of your home. This is because certain areas may need re-sodding, and you want to give it a chance to grow so that re-sod areas are not immediately apparent. Plus, you might want to give fertilizer enough time to be effective.

Always rake up loose leaves and grass cuttings.

House Exterior

The big decision is whether to paint or not to paint. When you look at your house from across the street, does it look tired and faded? If so, a paint job may be in order. It is often a very good investment and really spruces up the appearance of a house, adding dollars to offers from potential homebuyers.

When choosing a color, it should not be something garish and unusual, but a color that fits well in your neighborhood. Of course, the color also depends on the style of your house, too. For some reason, different shades of yellow seem to elicit the best response in homebuyers, whether it is in the trim or the basic color of the house.

As for the roof, if you know your house has an old leaky roof, replace it. If you do not replace a leaky roof, you are going to have to disclose it and the buyer will want a new roof, anyway. Otherwise, wait and see what the home inspector says. Why spend money unnecessarily?

The Back Yard

The back yard should be tidy. If you have a pool or spa, keep it freshly maintained and constantly cleaned. For those that have dogs, be sure to constantly keep the area clear of "debris." If you have swing sets or anything elaborate for your kids, it probably makes more sense to remove them than to leave them in place. They take up room, and you want your back yard to appear as spacious as possible, especially in newer homes where the yards are not as large.

The Front Door & Entryway

The front door should be especially sharp, since it is the entryway into the house. Polish the door fixture so it gleams. If the door needs refinishing or repainting, make sure to get that done.

If you have a cute little plaque or shingle with your family name on it, remove it. Even if it is just on the mailbox. You can always put it up again once you move. Get a new plush door mat, too. This is something else you can take with you once you move.

Make sure the lock works easily and the key fits properly. When a homebuyer comes to visit your home, the agent uses the key from the lock box to unlock the door. If there is trouble working the lock while everyone else stands around twiddling their thumbs, this sends a negative first impression to prospective homebuyers.

When Your Selling Price is too High, Beware!

Meeting With Realtors

So you've decided to sell your home and have a fairly good idea of what you think it is worth. Being a sensible home seller, you schedule appointments with three local listing agents who've been hanging stuff on your front doorknob for years. Each Realtor comes prepared with a "Competitive Market Analysis" on

fancy paper and they each recommend a specific sales price.

Amazingly, a couple of the Realtors have come up with prices that are lower than you expected. Although they back up their recommendations with recent sales data of similar homes, you remain convinced your house is worth more. When you interview the third agent's figures, they are much more in line with your own anticipated value, or maybe even higher. Suddenly, you are a happy and excited home seller, already counting the money

Which Realtor do you choose?

If you're like many people, you pick Realtor number three. This is an agent who seems willing to listen to your input and work with you. This is an agent that cares about putting the most money in your pocket. This is an agent that is willing to start out at your price and if you need to drop the price later, you can do that easily, right? After all, *everyone else does it!*

The truth is that you may have just met an agent engaging in a questionable sales practice called "**buying a listing**." He "bought" the listing by suggesting you might be able to get a higher sales price than the other agents recommended. Most likely, he is quite doubtful that your home will actually sell at that price. The intention from the beginning is to eventually talk you into lowering the price.

Why do agents "buy" listings? There are basically two reasons. A well-meaning and hard working agent can feel pressure from a homeowner who has an inflated perception of his home's value. On the other hand, there are some agents who engage in this sales practice routinely.

What Happens Behind the Scenes

Whichever the case, if you start out with too high a price on your home, you may have just added to your stress level, and selling a home is stressful enough. There will be a lot of "behind the scenes" action taking place that you don't know about.

Contrary to popular opinion, the listing agent does not usually attempt to sell your home to a homebuyer. That isn't very efficient. Listing agents market and promote your home to the hordes of other local agents who **do** work with homebuyers, dramatically increasing your personal sales force. During the first couple of weeks your home should be a flurry of activity with buyer's agents coming to preview your home so they can sell it to their clients.

If the price is right.

If you and your agent have overpriced, fewer agents will preview your home. After all, they are Realtors, and it is their job to know local market conditions and home values. If your house is dramatically above market, why waste time? Their time is better spent previewing homes that are priced realistically.

Dropping Your Price...Too Late

Later, when you drop your price, your house is "old news." You will never be able to recapture that flurry of initial activity you would have had with a realistic price. Your house could take longer to sell.

Even if you do successfully sell at an above market price, your buyer will need a mortgage. The mortgage lender requires an appraisal. If comparable sales for the last six months and current market conditions do not support your sales price, the house won't appraise. Your deal falls apart. Of course, you can always attempt to renegotiate the price, but only if the buyer is willing to listen. Your house could go "back on the market."

Once your home has fallen out of escrow or sits on the market awhile, it is harder to get a good offer. Potential buyers will think you might be getting desperate, so they will make lower offers. By overpricing your home in the beginning, you could actually end up settling for a lower price than you would have normally received.

Types of Listing Contracts

There are several different types of listing contracts, but very few of them are used. The "Exclusive Right to Sell" is the most common, but there is the "open listing," the "exclusive agency listing," and the "one-time show."

Open Listing

The "open listing" is mostly used by people trying to sell their home by owner who are also willing to work with real estate agents. Basically, it gives a real estate agent the right to bring buyers around to view your home. If their client buys your home, the agent earns a commission. There is nothing exclusive about an open listing and a home seller can give out such listings to every agent who comes around.

For that reason, no agent is going to market your home or put it in the Multiple Listing Service. If your home fits the criteria for one of their clients, and it is convenient, they may be willing to show it to their client. That is all an "open listing" is good for.

One-Time Show

A "one-time show" is similar to an open listing in many respects, as it is most often used by real estate agents who are showing a FSBO (for sale by owner) to one of their clients. The home seller signs the agreement, which identifies the potential buyer and guarantees the agent a commission should that buyer purchase the home. This prevents the buyer and seller from negotiating directly later and trying to avoid paying the agent's commission.

As with an open listing, agents will not be spending money on marketing your home and it will not be placed in the

Exclusive Agency Listing

An "exclusive agency" listing allows an agent to list and market your home, guaranteeing them a commission if the house sells through any real estate agent or company. It also allows sellers to seek out buyers on their own.

This is not a popular type of listing agreement. The reason is that there is not much incentive for agents to spend money marketing your home. If you come up with your own buyer, they have spent money they cannot earn back through the real estate commission. Plus, it is too easy for a greedy buyer to go around the agent and negotiate directly with the seller.

If you find an agent willing to accept such a listing, do not expect too much from them. They will probably just place it in the Multiple Listing Service and sit around to see if something happens. A good agent would never accept such a listing, and you probably want a good agent.

Exclusive Right to Sell

Giving a real estate agent the "exclusive right to sell" your property does not mean that there will not be other agents involved. Your agent is the listing agent and part of his or her job is to market your home to other agents who work with buyers. Those agents will show your home to their clients. Regardless of who sells the home, even if you sell it yourself to a friend at work, your listing agent will earn a commission.

An exclusive right to sell is the only type of listing an effective real estate agent will accept. This is because they have a reasonable expectation of earning back any money they spend on promoting and marketing your property.

Details of a Listing Contract

Obviously the name of the seller and the property address will be included in the listing contract. There are many other things that are included, too, and you should be aware of them.

Price and Terms of Sale

When setting the terms of sale, the main thing you are concerned with is the price. You should have a basic idea of what your home is worth by keeping track of other sales in the neighborhood. Plus, you have probably interviewed at least two real estate agents and they have given you their own ideas. Exercise great care in determining your asking price, making sure not to set it too high or too low.

In addition to the price, you will disclose what personal property, if any, goes with the house when you sell it. Personal property is anything that is not attached or fixed to the home, such as washers, dryers, refrigerators, and so on.

There may be some item that is considered "real property" that you do not intend to include in the sale. Real property is anything that is attached to the home. For example, you may have a chandelier that has been in your family for generations and you take it from home to home when you move. Since the chandelier is attached to the house, it is considered "real property" and a reasonable buyer would normally expect it to go with the house.

Lockbox - Yes or No?

A lockbox is basically a padlock with a cavity inside where a key to your home can be placed. Only someone with an electronic key or the combination can get into the lockbox and access the key. Having a lockbox available at your house makes it easy for other agents to get access to your house.

Without the lockbox, agents representing buyers would have to set appointments to meet you or your agent at the house so they could gain access and view the home. This would be inconvenient. Since almost every other house does have a lockbox available, if you do not allow one most agents will simply not show your property. You will miss out on lots of potential buyers.

The listing contract specifies whether you allow a lockbox or not. It is locked into place, usually on the front door and cannot be removed. Only other agents can access the key that is located within the lockbox.

Real Estate Commission

In some areas of the country there is a certain percentage that real estate agents expect to earn as a commission. This commission amount is a certain percent of the sales price. Or, some companies will charge a set fee for their services. However, just like anything else in real estate, this amount is negotiable. When completing the listing agreement, you and your agent will agree on the amount of the real estate commission.

Are Commissions Negotiable?

In some areas of the country there is a certain percentage that real estate agents expect to earn as a commission. This commission amount is a certain percent of the sales price. Or, some companies will charge a set fee for their services. However, just like anything else in real estate, this amount is negotiable. When completing the listing agreement, you and your agent will agree on the amount of the real estate commission.

Cut-Rate Listing Commissions

With the advent of the web, a lot of agents are offering "cut-rate" commissions. Most of the time, lower commissions are tied to a lower level of service. If all you want is to be listed with the Multiple Listing Service and a sign in the front yard, then a cut-rate commission may be right for you. If you want an agent who will actively promote your property to other agents and spend money on advertising, then you probably are not going to get that level of service with a reduced commission.

At other times, the lower commissions are offered when you agree to tie in to other services offered by the broker, such as agreeing to use a specific lender, escrow, settlement, or title company. The broker (not the agent) will probably have some type of ownership or profit participation in those businesses. The problem with agreeing to tie in to these other companies is that they do not have to be as competitive in pricing their products or services.

Another common practice when you see an ad for a reduced commission is that the compensation is lowered when you agree to buy your next home through the same agent or broker. Usually, the reduced commission is not really being offered on the sale of your existing home but on the purchase of your next one. The ads are usually unclear on this.

As a result, when you see an offer for a lower commission, you should analyze what you are giving up by accepting such an offer. It probably will not be readily apparent in the advertisement. Be sure to ask **lots** of questions.

How and When Listing Commissions are Earned

Your listing contract specifies a listing price. Your agent's job is to bring a "ready, willing and able" buyer to present an offer. If you reach agreement with the buyer, then the agent has done his job and earned the commission. Once the sale has closed, the real estate broker gets paid from the proceeds of the sale.

If the buyer proves unable or unwilling to conclude the sale, the house is placed back on the market and the agent has to begin earning his or her commission all over again.

However, if the seller backs out or does not accept an offer that meets the price and terms of the listing agreement, the listing broker has still earned the commission. They may want to be paid, even though you did not actually sell your home. Therefore, it is very important to carefully consider every detail when completing your listing contract and accepting an offer to buy your property.

"Hot Market" Under-Pricing Sales Technique – Commission Issues

During a "hot market" there is a certain marketing technique which, though very effective, could cause trouble because of the way the contract is written. This is the practice of "under-pricing" the home. In a hot market, a home that is under-priced gets a lot of attention from other Realtors, and they all start showing your home to their clients. Often, you get into a situation where multiple offers are presented and the price starts going up because of the frenzy. You end up selling the house above your asking price and perhaps above what you could have received if you had priced it traditionally.

However, the technique does have the potential to backfire, so you should build safeguards to prevent having to pay a commission "just in case."

You see, the listing contract usually states that if an offer is received that meets the terms presented in the contract (including price), the real estate agent has earned his or her commission – even if you decide not to sell. A reputable agent would never attempt to collect a commission if they were using the "under-pricing" technique and it backfired, even if they are technically entitled to one. For that reason, in the "additional terms" space on the listing contract, you should specify your true target price – when the agent has **really** earned the commission.

The Listing Agent - Preliminary Marketing of Your Home

The "Real" Role of a Listing Agent

When you bought your home, you probably used the services of a real estate agent. You found that agent through a referral from a friend or family member, or through some sort of advertising or marketing. The agent helped you in many ways and eventually you found the house of your dreams, made an offer, closed the deal, and moved in.

For whatever reason, now it is time to sell your home and you need a real estate agent again. Many home sellers, especially those selling their first home, tend to think all agents are similar to the one that helped them buy their home.

Although real estate agents can (and do) work with both buyers and sellers, most tend to concentrate more on one than the other. They specialize. When you bought your home, you probably worked with a "selling agent" – an agent that works mostly with buyers. Because of the nature of real estate advertising and marketing, the public's main image of the real estate profession is that of the selling agent.

As a result, many homeowners expect their listing agent to do the same things that a selling agent does – find someone to buy their home. After all, they do the things you would expect if they were searching for buyers. A sign goes up in the front yard. Ads are placed in the local newspaper and real estate magazines. Your agent holds an open house on the weekend. Your house is proudly displayed on the Internet.

But this is only "surface" marketing. More important activity occurs behind the scenes. After the "for sale" sign goes up and flyers are printed, your agent's main job is to market your home to other agents, not to homebuyers.

The "For Sale" Sign

It seems fairly obvious that when you put your house up for sale that your agent will put a "for sale" sign in the front yard. The sign will identify the agent's company, the agent, and have a phone number so prospective buyers can call and get information.

Signs are great at generating phone calls, even if very few actually purchase the home they call about. However, you might be one of the lucky ones. For that reason, you should determine what happens when someone calls the number on the sign. Does a live person answer the phone or does the call go to a voicemail or recorder?

You want someone to answer the phone while the caller is "hot." When buyers call the number on the sign, the call should go to a live person who can answer questions immediately. A potential buyer may be on the street outside your home, placing the call using a cell phone.

Flyers and a Brochure Box

Your agent should prepare a flyer that displays a photo and provides details about your house. There should also be a phone number so buyers can contact your agent to get additional information. The flyers should be displayed in a prominent location in your home and also in a brochure box attached to the "for sale" sign.

The brochure box is convenient for those buyers who drive by and just happen to see the "for sale" sign in front of your house. It provides enough information so they can determine if they want to follow up with a phone call or inform their own agent they are interested in your house.

The Listing Agent - Marketing Your Home to Other Agents

The Multiple Listing Service

Even before the sign is up and the brochures are ready, your agent should list your property with the local

MLS (Multiple Listing Service). The MLS is a database of all the homes listed by local real estate agents who are members of the service, which is practically all of the local agents.

Important information about your property is listed here, from general data such as square footage and number of rooms, to such details as whether you have central air conditioning or hard wood flooring. There should also be a photo, and a short verbal description of what makes your house "special."

Agents search the database for homes that fit the price range and needs of their clients. They pay special attention to homes that have been recently placed on the market, which is one reason you get a lot of attention when your house is first listed. Many agents will want to preview the home before they show it to their clients.

The main point about having your house listed in the MLS is that you expand your sales force by the number of local MLS members. Instead of having just one agent working for you, now you may have hundreds or more, depending on the size of your community.

The listing agent's main job to make sure that the other MLS members know about your house. This is accomplished through listing your house in the Multiple Listing Service, broker previews and advertising targeted toward other agents, not homebuyers.

Office Preview

If your listing agent belongs to a fairly sizable office, an "office preview" will introduce your house to other agents working in the same office. In effect, they get a "head start" on selling your property. Once a week, the office's agents will get together, share vehicles, and "caravan" to all of the new listings. They generally pull up in front of your house at about the same time (some even use a bus) then file quickly through your home like some bizarre "follow the leader" game.

It can be amazing to watch.

They go through very quickly, since most of them are familiar with similar models of your house. They are usually looking for anything memorable or different and to determine if your house is one they would be proud to show their clients. Then they all pile back into their cars and move on to the next house on the tour.

But some of them come back...with buyers.

Broker Previews and Culinary Delights

Broker preview is very similar to an office preview, except it is open to all the members of the local multiple listing service. It usually occurs within the first week your house is placed on the market, just after the office preview. However, there are lots of new listings to choose from, and not all the agents preview all the new listings each week. You may not get as many agents visiting your home as there were on the office preview.

Unless your agent "entices" them to come. This is where you could provide some help, if you are so inclined.

Though it may seem funny, nothing seems to attract a real estate agent like the offer of free food. So if your agent offers "free eats" at a broker preview, you are likely to get more visitors than if nothing is offered. Realize that many agents have been on this weekly circuit for years, so "boring" food does not really accomplish much. In other words, sandwiches supplied from the local grocery chain are not very enticing.

If you want to help your agent sell your home quickly, try and help them be creative and original in the choice of a culinary treat.

Of course, some agents will actually come to look at your house, too – whether food is offered or not.

Maybe.

Office Flyers

Your agent will undoubtedly prepare flyers about your property so that prospective homebuyers can be informed about the attractive features of your house. These flyers (or similar ones) should also be sent to all the local real estate offices, too. Most areas have a weekly flyer service that delivers advertisements to all of the local offices. Since agents get these flyers every week, they do not always look at them. However, a large percentage of them do. Some agents will keep the flyer and bring buyers to your house.

The flyer should be done professionally and photocopy well. Ask your agent to show you copies of office flyers they have done in the past.

Marketing Sessions

Your agent probably belongs to a local association of Realtors and they often have meetings once a month. At these meetings there is often a "marketing session" where some agents stand up and tell about their listings and other agents stand up and tell about their buyers. Your listing agent has an opportunity to "pitch" your house at these marketing sessions.

At the same time, these sessions may not be as effective as they were in the past. One reason is that they are often more social occasions than serious business meetings. Another reason is that, as technology has expanded, local associations have tended to merge and create larger Multiple Listing Services and **The Listing Agent - Marketing Your Home to Homebuyers**

The Purpose of Advertising in General

Every home seller likes to be assured that their listing agent or the real estate company will run ads featuring their home. Newspaper ads could be large display ads with lots of listings or small classified ads featuring just your property. Ads may also appear in local real estate magazines and your listing will also show up on the Internet.

Of course the agents and companies will run ads featuring your house, but not for the reasons you expect.

You see, the main job of advertising is not to sell your house directly. Advertising creates phone calls and some of those callers become clients of the agents answering the calls. This builds up a pool of homebuyers looking for property in general, all represented by selling agents. Multiply this by all the agents and companies who also advertise homes, and there is a large pool of homebuyers in the market at any given time – all of whom are represented by selling agents.

The agents representing those homebuyers know about your home because it is listed in the Multiple Listing Service, has been on office and broker preview, and because your agent may have also sent flyers to all the local real estate offices.

The agents match up their clients with available homes, one of which may be yours. Then they show the homes to their clients, who eventually make an offer on one. That is how your house gets sold. Ads create a pool of clients, one of which buys your home. Ads do not usually sell your house directly.

Associations. Local meetings have become poorly attended gatherings.

Real Estate Office Advertising

As mentioned previously, advertising your home in newspapers and magazines rarely sells your home

directly. More likely than not, the buyer who eventually purchases your home will have called on a totally different house. The same thing happens with buyers who call on your house. They will probably buy something else.

You still want to be certain the real estate company selling your house runs ads in the local and major newspapers, whether they feature your house or not. The ads generate phone calls to the real estate office, and if those agents viewed your house on the office preview, they will be familiar with it. This is how your property is sold.

Or you could be one of the lucky ones – someone calling on your house may actually end up buying it.

You should also realize that when a company advertises the homes they have for sale, there is more than one objective. Sure, the real estate office wants to generate phone calls and sell houses, but the advertising also shows home sellers how effectively they market properties. This impresses not only you, but others who may be thinking of selling their home.

The advertising brings in more listings, which generate more ad calls, which produces more buyers....and that is how real estate advertising really works.

Individual Agent Advertising

Individual agents may advertise your home for the same reasons as companies do. They usually advertise in classified ads or in specialty magazines featuring houses available for sale.

As in other types of advertising, these ads rarely sell your home. Once again, the main goals of advertising are to accumulate homebuyers as clients, and to impress you and future home sellers with how well they market their listings. Some agents actually do sell their own listings, but not that often.

It is much more productive and beneficial if your listing agent directs most of his or her marketing efforts toward other agents. Since this is "behind the scenes" marketing that you don't actually see, it is often difficult for you to measure how hard the agent is working for you.

It is a mistake to measure your agent's effectiveness solely by counting the number of newspaper and magazine ads featuring your property.

Neighborhood Announcements

When you first list your home many agents send "announcements" to all of the other houses in your neighborhood. This can be done in the form of postcards, a letter, or flyers left hanging on the front door. These are important because your neighbors might have friends who are looking to buy a house.

The announcements create "word of mouth" advertising, which is the best kind.

Open Houses

An open house when your property is first placed on the market can be very important, but not for the reasons most homeowners think. Just like with advertising, most visitors to open houses rarely buy the house they come to look at. They may not even know the price of your home when they stop by to visit – they probably just followed an "Open House" sign to your door.

An open house performs a similar function to the neighborhood announcements – it lets all of your neighbors know that your house is for sale, and it practically invites them to come "take a look." Being generally nosy, a lot of your neighbors will take advantage of the invitation.

And they may tell their friends about your house, creating more "word of mouth" advertising.

Of course, there are other reasons for holding open houses, too. Listing agents who "farm" a particular neighborhood use them as an opportunity to meet with other local homeowners who will someday be

selling their home. Your agent may hope to list their homes in the future.

Open houses held after your home has been on the market awhile do not usually serve a useful purpose in selling your home. Most of the neighbors already know your house is for sale and open house visitors rarely buy the homes they visit.

However, if you really want more open houses, your listing agent may allow other agents to hold it open. Open houses attract prospective homebuyers and agents hope to convince some of those homebuyers to become their clients.

Showing the House to Potential Home Buyers

Your house should always be available for show, even though it may occasionally be inconvenient for you. Let your listing agent put a lock box in a convenient place, to make it easy for other agents to show your home to homebuyers. Otherwise, agents will have to schedule appointments, which is an inconvenience. Most will just skip your home to show the house of someone else who is more cooperative.

Most agents will call and give you at least a couple of hours notice before showing your property. If you refuse to let them show it at that time, they will just skip your house. Even if they come back another time, it will probably be with different buyers and you may have just lost a chance to sell your home.

Why You Should Not Be Home

Homebuyers will feel like intruders if you are home when they visit, and they might not be as receptive toward viewing your home. Visit the local coffee house, yogurt shop, or take the kids to the local park. If you absolutely cannot leave, try to remain in an out of the way area of the house and do not move from room to room. Do not volunteer any information, but answer any questions the agent may ask.

Lighting, Fragrances, Pet Control and More

Lighting

When you know someone is coming by to tour your home, turn on **all** the indoor and outdoor lights – even during the day. At night, a lit house gives a "homey" impression when viewed from the street. During the daytime, turning on the lights prevents harsh shadows from sunlight and it brightens up any dim areas. Your house looks more homey and cheerful with the lights on.

Fragrances

Do not use scented sprays to prepare for visitors. It is too obvious and many people find the smells of those sprays offensive, not to mention that some may be allergic. If you want to have a pleasant aroma in your house, have a potpourri pot or something natural. Or turn on a stove burner for a moment and put a drop of vanilla extract on it. It will smell like you have been cooking.

Pet Control

If you have pets, make sure your listing agent puts a notice with your listing in the multiple listing service. The last thing you want is to have your pet running out the front door and getting lost. If you know someone is coming, it would be best to try to take the pets with you while the homebuyers tour your home. If you cannot do that, it is best to keep dogs in a penned area in the back yard. Try to keep indoor cats in a specific room when you expect visitors, and put a sign on the door. Most of the time, an indoor cat will hide when buyers come to view your property, but they may panic and try to escape.

The Kitchen Trash

Especially if your kitchen trash can does not have a lid, make sure you empty it every time someone comes to look at your home – even if your trash can is kept under the kitchen sink. Remember that you want to send a positive image about every aspect of your home. Kitchen trash does not send a positive message. You may go through more plastic bags than usual, but it will be worth it.

Keeping the House Tidy and Neat

Not everyone makes his or her bed every day, but when selling a home it is recommended that you develop the habit. Pick up papers, do not leave empty glasses in the family room, keep everything freshly dusted and vacuumed. Try your best to have it look like a model home – a home with furniture but nobody really lives there.