

7 INSIDER SECRETS ON SHOWCASING YOUR HOME FOR A SUCCESSFUL SALE



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*Want to give your home the “wow” factor?
These proven tools make your property
the one that buyers remember—
and want as their own.*

7 Insider Secrets

On Showcasing Your Home For A Successful Sale

A Special Report Prepared by Realtor® Terry Story

Most prospective buyers make their decisions based on the emotional reactions they form upon first seeing your home. In fact, seasoned real estate professionals will tell you that even the smallest detail can be an important deciding factor, especially in a competitive market. The key to getting a buyer interested in your home — and getting them to place an offer that reflects its top value — is helping that prospective buyer feel comfortable while viewing your property. You want them to establish a connection from the moment they drive up to your home. And once they've viewed the inside, you want them to see themselves living comfortably in it.

Too many home sellers underestimate the power of this emotional response. As a result, they see competing homes down the street get the “Just-Sold” signs, while their own real estate investment languishes on the market, not getting offers worthy of its value. How can you avoid having this happen to you? Read on.

Research & Strategize

Knowing exactly what you have to work with will go a long way toward helping you form a strategy to achieve your real estate goals. First, you need to educate yourself on everything that can affect the sale of your home and which elements you can actually control. Obviously, it's impossible to control everything, but there are some changes you can initiate, and these may make all the difference.

To help you gain a realistic perspective, here are a few factors to consider when reviewing your property:

- *Property location*
- *The prevailing market conditions*
- *Whether you've hired a professional real estate agent to help you*
- *The number of desirable features within your home and how well they are displayed*
- *The overall condition of your home*

While some of these things cannot be controlled by the home seller—such as location and market conditions—other factors can. **It is important to remember that even the most subtle of differences can play an important role in properly showcasing your home so that it inspires buyers to place an offer on it.**

What is Showcasing?

When you open your doors to prospective buyers, whether at an open house or a private showing, you are showcasing your home. Your home, like it or not, is in the spotlight. This is where you want it to shine. Ideally, your home should stand out in the minds of prospective buyers. You want it to be a star. If there are five homes for sale in your immediate area, you want yours to leave the best impression.

Here are 7 simple strategies and secrets designed to give your home the edge it needs in a competitive market.

1. Curb Appeal

While you can't change your location, you can change how your home shines in that location. The more you make your home shine, the less location will play a role in the buyer's decision to place an offer for it. Why not make your front yard look like one of the best on the block? It isn't as costly as you might think, and it is extremely important that your home stand out. Your front yard will be the first thing prospective buyers see when they drive up, and it will help form the first impressions they have about your property. This sets the tone for their entire visit, so make it a good one.

Here are some tips on how to maximize your home's appeal:

Insider Secret: Add color to your walk way with a few blooming flowers to promote a fresh, cheerful feel in the yard.

- *Clear the yard of any debris.* Selectively prune overgrown trees and bushes. While you might not have the money to cut down a large number of trees, you can clear out as much of the debris as possible. Cleaning this out will give the yard a larger look and will keep the buyer from feeling like the area is chaotic and in need of a lot of work.

- *Plant colorful flowers along the walkway or up close to your front door.* Replacing your dead plant life with a few blooms will go a long way toward setting up a pleasant first impression. It doesn't need to be extensive—in fact, it is better that it not be—just add enough to give the impression of a healthy landscape with a few dashes of cheerful color.

- *Touch up the paint around your door frame and windowsills.* Cracked or flaking paint gives the impression that the house is old and in disrepair. The buyer then thinks there will be other things wrong with the property. Bigger things. Scariet things. Don't let their minds wander down that path. A buyer's perception of your home is important. Take the time to do the little aesthetic touch-ups that will make all the difference in what you get for an asking price.

- *Present an over-all neat appearance.* Sweep the walkway, remove cobwebs, clean the windows and screens, and put away all the kids' toys. First impressions count, and you want your home to have the look of a clean, welcome place to live. Take the time to walk through your front yard and look at it with a fresh pair of eyes. Pay attention to all the little details you might not notice from day to day and address anything that may look like it could trouble a buyer.

- *Ask your real estate professional for their honest opinion: Does your house stack up against the other properties in the neighborhood?* Your agent can offer you the best of both worlds when it comes to an unbiased opinion. Not only do they have that valuable third-party perspective you need, but they also have insider information on what is really important to most buyers. A professional will know what makes buyers gravitate toward a property and will share ideas of how to showcase your home's appeal.

2. Take Yourself Out of the Equation

You don't have to move out. Just be aware that effective showcasing is designed to

present the buyer with a clean slate onto which they can project their own personal style. They must be able to see themselves living in your house. The best way to achieve this is to take as much of you and your personality out of it. This is not as easy as it seems, because you've probably spent several years adding little touches and other changes that personalize your place to make it a "home."

Here are some simple, cost-efficient ways you can help prospective buyers envision their own things in your home, and inspire them to make an offer:

Insider Secret: To avoid distractions, arrange to have any pets removed from the property while you are showing your home.

- *Remove all the family photos off the walls and store them in an out-of-the-way place.* This doesn't mean you have to take them ALL down, but you should limit them to just a select few. That infamous hallway lined with pictures of the kids might be a trip down memory lane for you, but it's a roadblock for a potential buyer. For someone viewing your home, it's either an opportunity to laugh at the dated looks throughout the years, or it inspires the uneasy feeling of walking into someone's private world that wasn't meant for their viewing. You don't want the buyer to feel inhibited and possibly keep them from forming an emotional attachment to your property. Remember, the main goal in effectively showcasing your home is to provide the buyer with a blank canvas. They cannot do this if you have too many of your own personal touches placed around the house. When in doubt, ask your real estate professional his/her opinion if you should remove a picture or personal memento.

- *Don't crowd your potential buyer.* During an open house or private showing, allow them to move freely with their real estate agent from room to room without your presence. Not only does this person feel uncomfortable trudging through your home, but knowing you are on the premises makes them feel even more ill at ease. Typically, buyers like to share their thoughts and impressions with their agent and the family members accompanying them. This is good. However, when they know you're in the house, they either refrain from sharing impressions, or they feel they have to whisper or wait until they leave to talk. By then they've forgotten the points they liked about your home, or they only focus on the bad things they didn't like. The goal is to make the prospective buyer feel comfortable. Your presence in the home is in direct conflict with this goal.

Granted, when dealing with a private showing and not in an open house situation, it may not be easy to simply walk away from your home and turn it over to complete strangers.

One strategy is to make yourself scarce—that is, you might step outside in the backyard while your prospective buyer is viewing the interior, and vice versa.

- *Keep the kids and all pets out of the buyer's way.* Even if you have well-behaved children and Fido has attended obedience school, they can still be a distraction and keep the buyer from bonding with your home. If you can't arrange for them to be out on a walk, keep them busy in one room so they do not follow the buyer around as they view the property.

3. Creating A Clean Slate With Clutter Control

Sometimes, a clean house still doesn't look clean. Your home may be spotless, counters clean, corners dust-free—but if you still have clutter, it can still look unkempt to a buyer. Worse yet, you may give the impression that the living quarters are cramped and lack storage space. Remember, the buyer must be able to visualize all of their things fitting into your home.

Here are some things you can do to showcase your home so it looks its very best:

Insider Secret: Invest in a storage unit to keep extra furniture so that your home appears to have plenty of space.

Insider Secret: Store extra clothes in wardrobe boxes so that your closet doesn't look over-stuffed and devoid of storage space.

Insider Secret: Giving old tile new grout is a cheap way to rejuvenate a bathroom and increase the value of your home.

- *Don't try to pack too many different pieces of furniture into one room.* If you have items that you really don't use, you may want to invest in a temporary storage unit. You want the buyer to feel there is ample space in that room for their furniture. Arrange all furniture so that there are clear pathways and ample space to get by large items such as couches and tables. Packing it full of different chairs, end tables and decorative items closes the room in, giving the impression of a small living space. However, the other extreme isn't good either. Sometimes you have to move quickly and, as a result, the house is empty of furniture. An empty home can look just as uninviting as a crowded one. If you are able to, leave several pieces of furniture behind to add to your home's appeal.

- *Weed out all clothing that you're not wearing on a regular basis, remove it from your closet and pack it away out of sight.* You may even want to purchase several wardrobe boxes and store them in the garage or in a storage unit. An over-stuffed closet leaves buyers with the impression that there isn't enough storage space. Make sure the shelves and various other storage options are organized and clean.
- *Keep all children's toys organized with a toy box or within cabinets.* The more you can put these things away where they are not immediately visible, the better. If you can see various items packed into shelves, it promotes a congestive, chaotic feel in that room. You don't want the buyer to feel claustrophobic. You want them to only focus on the attractive comfort of your property, not to think about how the walls are closing in.
- *Refresh what once looked old or run down.* While cleaning your house and preparing it for viewing, take care to scrub out all hard water stains in the bathroom and kitchen. These make the tiles and appliances appear old or dated. Lime, calcium and rust stains can be removed by cleansers specially designed for such use, and the results are often remarkable. If you find that the grout between the tiles is severely stained or cracked and you are unable to clean it, you may want to consider removing and replacing it with new grout to give the tiles a fresher look. Nothing should look old or worn down. Fixtures that do—lights, faucets or flooring—will drive down the sale price of your home. The buyer will automatically assume they will need to put money into improving these things and will price their offer accordingly.

4. The Importance of Ambiance

Preparing for an open house or a private viewing is a bit like getting ready for a hot date. You want to make the best impression possible. This means, taking care of all those little details that make the other person feel at ease so they fall in love with your house.

Here are a few tips to put into play when preparing for potential home buyers:

Insider Secret: Place a radio in each room and set it on a light jazz station. Keep the volume low, adding just enough music to provide ambiance, but not so much that it's a distraction.

Insider Secret: Using a professional stager can give you an additional edge in a cooling market where buyers are calling the

shots. This is especially true if you are selling a luxury property.

- *Entice their sense of smell.* While scented candles are nice, they often give off fumes that can aggravate sensitive sinuses, not to mention stain the walls. A better solution would be to use a lightly-scented potpourri or cinnamon sticks. You might even consider baking cookies so that there is a pleasant, homey smell enticing the buyer when they first enter. Studies show that memories are actually stimulated by our sense of smell. So, inspiring thoughts of home, hearth and comfort with a little spice is a good thing. Just don't go overboard, or you might end up chasing potential buyers out if the scent gets too overpowering.
- *Eliminate unpleasant odor sources.* Limit pets and their litter boxes from the main areas of your home during viewings. Open the windows whenever possible to air out places where odors normally reside. Don't go overboard with odor-masking sprays, as this can backfire and call attention to the odor rather than eliminating it.
- *Add music to their ears.* Light, relaxing mood music played at a low volume can enhance your potential buyer's perception of your property. Place a radio in each room so that those viewing your house will hear soothing sounds as they move throughout. Make sure to play it quietly on a soft jazz station so that it is only an accent, and not a distraction when buyers tour each room.
- *Consider hiring a professional stager.* These are specialists with interior design skills who come in and actually rearrange your furniture. They design your home to make it more appealing to buyers. Although real estate professionals are more than capable of giving you insider secrets to sell your home for top dollar—and some even have interior design skills themselves—they also have access to professional stagers who can give your property an additional edge.

In a competitive market where buyers are calling the shots, a professional stager can help you present a polished home to attract multiple offers. Speak with your real estate professional and ask them to help you determine if hiring a professional stager makes sense within your budget. If it looks like you can make the money for hiring a stager back through a better sale price and gain a substantial profit from it, then it is definitely worth the money spent. This is especially true if you have a luxury home, where buyers will expect a high-end appearance. If luxury buyers are the demographic that will be viewing your property, you need to remember that their tastes are a great deal more discriminating. So you need every competitive edge you can get.

5. Accentuate the Positive

Chances are that, each buyer who comes through your front door is looking at multiple properties. You need to clearly and accurately set your property apart from the competition. By the end of the day, that buyer might not even remember which property had the features they really liked the best. That's why you should consider creating a brief, informational sheet that calls out all the special features within your home.

Here is where your agent's expertise really pays off. Agents are with buyers all day, every day. They know exactly what most buyers have on their wish lists, and they know what features you should call out and list toward the top of your one-page flier. Keep in mind that you don't want to list everything. What one person sees as an appealing feature, another might consider a detriment. Ask your agent to help you list just the best features to showcase.

Here are a few things to keep in mind while creating your informational flier:

Insider Secret: Work with your real estate professional to create a short, concise informational flier that displays all of your home's attractive features.

- *First and foremost, listen to your real estate professional.* Not only do they have the expertise you need to maximize your home's positive attributes, they are also a valuable source for that much-needed reality check. Your agent is with buyers every day. They know who is buying and what they are looking for. They can tell you what features your home has that will be highly desirable in today's market. The upgrades that you've made might be appealing to you, but your agent will know if they'll appeal to a potential buyer.
- *Make your feature sheet short and concise.* A buyer will not care if you spent thousands of dollars to put in the new tiles in the bathroom. They will only care that the tiles are new and a color they like. Keep in mind, those tiles might not be that buyer's taste. They may actually want to rip it out if they buy the house.
- *List all new fixtures and functional items.* If you just put a new roof on the house, installed a new water heater, updated the central air system or added new plumbing, these are things to draw attention to. New fixtures mean that the buyer won't have to worry about them breaking down any time soon. That's very appealing.

- *Don't get too attached to your decorative upgrades.* These are all a matter of taste. You can list some small details— such as crown molding, new rugs and hardwood floors—but keep in mind that a home's beauty is still very much a matter of personal taste.

- *If you are leaving the refrigerator and the washer and dryer with the house, mention that.* All of these things are a plus to a new home buyer who might not already own them. These are one less thing they have to worry about buying if they decide to purchase your house versus another that might not come with such amenities.

6. When Coloring Perceptions, Be Neutral

Everyone loves color. The problem is, everyone loves different KINDS of color. Therefore, when preparing your home to sell, you need to adjust your home's color scheme to a more neutral palette. The goal is to make it easy for the buyer to see their own belongings within your home. If you have bright walls and all of their furniture is understated, they are not going to see your home as a match for them. It just won't meet their style. Seeing a neutral color on the walls provides that buyer with the blank slate they need to imagine their own possessions within your home. It allows them the opportunity to form that important attachment.

Here are some easy, inexpensive ways to adjust the colors in your home and prepare it for sale:

Insider Secret: A neutral paint color will go a long way toward making a room look like it could accommodate any decorative style the buyer might prefer.

- *Walk through your home and take inventory of all the walls that are painted and what color they are.* Ultimately, you want to paint each room a light tan or off white, but first you need to prioritize. The first room your potential buyer will see is the first you should adjust, and the one you should pay a great deal of attention to. A can of primer and some neutral-colored paint will go a long way toward making that room look like it could accommodate any decorative style the buyer might prefer.

- *Consider Removing all wallpaper.* Yes, even the cute stuff in the baby's room. Wallpaper is a huge roadblock to new buyers because it has your personal style stamped all over it. If you're experienced in doing this kind of thing yourself, go for it. If not, hire a professional. You don't want to maul a room in the process of trying to improve it. The small amount of money you put into hiring a professional to remove your wall paper, sand down the area and paint it a neutral tone will be

returned to you in the end when you sell. You are only going to get top dollar for a home that is in top selling form.

- *Use paint to accent features you want to stand out.* If your rooms have crown molding, paint the molding a slightly lighter hue than the wall. White molding will really stand out against the contrast of a sand- or tan-colored wall. This will automatically draw a buyer's eye to that feature. Similarly, painting the area above a fireplace with a slightly deeper shade of tan will help that area really pop out to the buyer when they enter the room. This is what interior designers call making it "the focal point of a room," and it is what good real estate agents know can be a money maker for the seller.

- *Pay special attention to smaller rooms, as color and presentation there are very important.* If you've painted your small, second bedroom a deep red, this will actually make it look cramped. Dark colors tend to close in a space. A light, neutral color will actually open up the room and make it appear larger than it really is.

7. Go With A Pro

Even though today's home seller has access to more information than sellers in the past, you should still think twice when selling your home without the help of a real estate professional. Placing a home on the market is a full-time job that requires the experience, time and expertise to help make the most of that sale. According to the National Association of Realtors,[®] two-thirds of people who have sold their homes themselves say they would not do so again.

Why? Money.

Simply put, having a Realtor[®] could get you more money in the long run, even when it means handing over a small portion of the sale. Real estate professionals know what home buyers are looking for and can help your home stand out, especially in a cooling market.

Here are just a few of the reasons why you should hire a real estate expert to help your home stand out:

Insider Secret: In a competitive market, working with a real estate professional who can provide you with insider secrets gives you the additional edge you need to make the most of your home sale.

- *Let your home shine.* Getting more money for your property isn't just about knowing the market and advertising your home. It's about knowing what will make your home stand out and helping it outshine the competition. This is especially true when selling a home in a buyer's market. Every additional edge helps, and your agent can help you display your home at its best.
- *Realtors[®] know exactly what home buyers are looking for in today's market. They have a good handle on what your home can sell for and what buyers really want in a home.* Remember, they are out there dealing with the market every day. They know who's buying and what entices them into making an offer. Before placing your home on the market, most agents will walk through it with you to get a feel for any adjustments that need to be made so that your home is showcased to inspire offers. This kind of insight is invaluable, and will get you more money for your home in the end.
- *A real estate agent provides a buffer between the seller and the buyer.* Selling your home is an emotional time. It isn't necessarily a time you want to be haggling over the value of your house and all the memories you have wrapped up in it. In most cases, it's good to have someone else do the tough negotiation for you. Without their assistance, you are much like a ship at sea without an anchor. There is nothing to stabilize you and provide that needed reality check when things get emotional. A Realtor[®] knows how to keep things moving forward in a productive way, and ultimately helps you make the most of your real estate investment.

Be Prepared

Preparing your home for sale can be a daunting task, but with the help of your real estate professional and the insider secrets they have to share, it can be done quickly and easily. The most important thing to remember is that the better you display your property, the more money it will sell for. Let your agent help showcase your home so that it really stands out against the competition of today's market. Make the effort now, and you will soon reap the rewards when you cash in on your real estate investment.