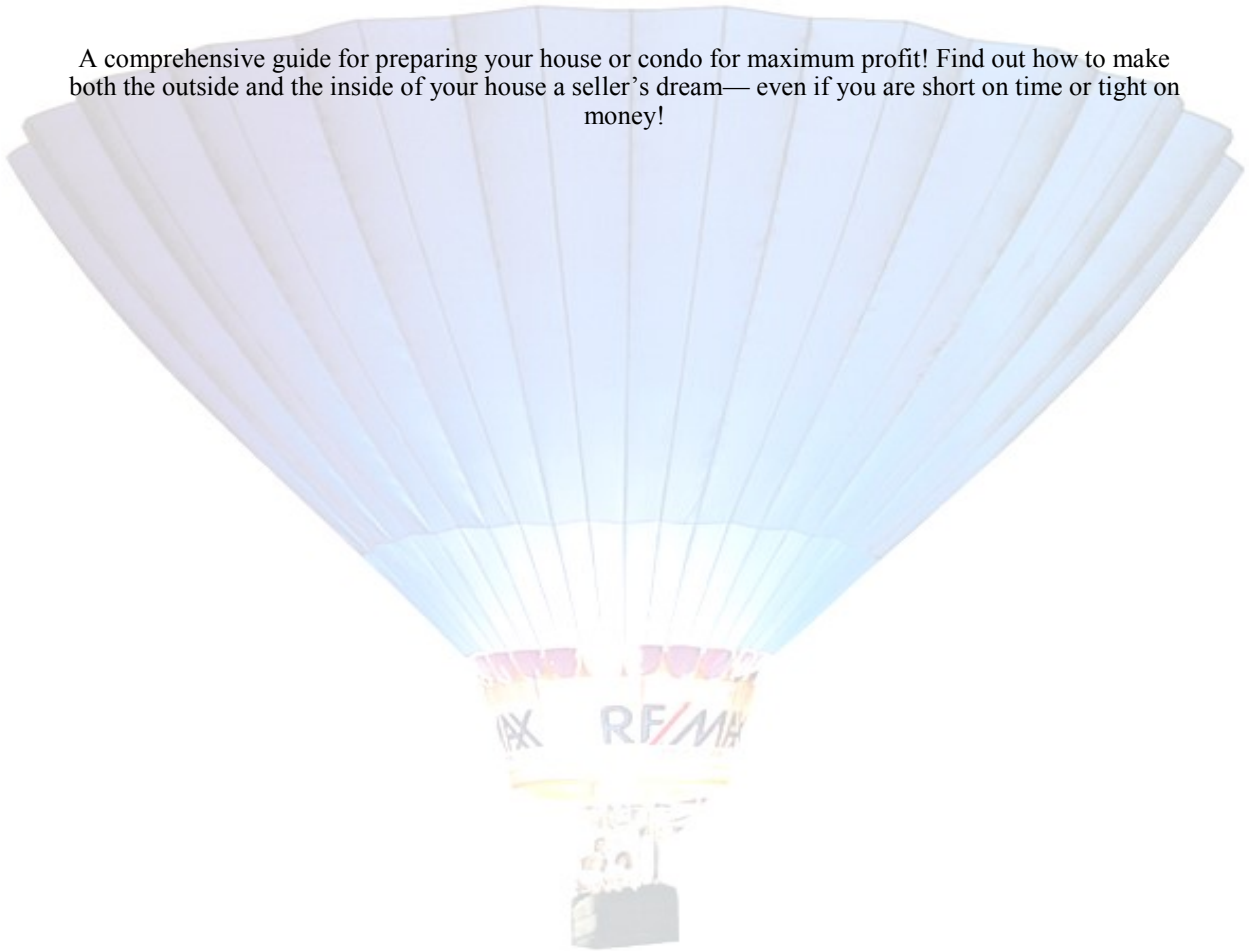
Prepare Your House To Sell

A comprehensive guide for preparing your house or condo for maximum profit! Find out how to make both the outside and the inside of your house a seller's dream— even if you are short on time or tight on money!



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I. From House Seller to Marketer

Selling your house can be a stressful and time-consuming process, and it is very easy to get frustrated if you do not get the response you want from buyers. After all, you cannot believe someone criticized your gorgeous Victorian bathroom, calling it old fashioned and dated…how dare they!

Unfortunately, developing a thick skin is a necessary part of selling your house. It can be difficult, though, especially if you are moving from a house you love. An attachment to your house makes it especially difficult to see the house's faults, but that's why we're here. It's difficult, but helpful to first condition your mind into thinking, we are selling "a house," not "our beloved home."

In the coming pages, we will walk you through all the steps you can take to make your house irresistible to potential buyers. If you really want to sell your house and have an open mind about the suggestions we have in this book, you will really benefit from this guide, which tells you how to prepare both the exterior and the interior of your house for sale.

We know your house is a valuable commodity, both financially and more than likely, emotionally. The reality, however, of selling your house is that you may not have more than one chance to impress a potential buyer.

Prepare your house to sell well, and you may be rewarded with a faster sale and higher profit. Remember, you can earn profit from the first $250,000 tax-free (up to $500,000 if you're married) – as long as you have lived in your house for two of the past five years.

So, from this point forward, consider yourself a marketer, not a mere house seller. Better yet, to eliminate the emotion undertones, consider yourself a house seller (not "home seller") and your buyers– homebuyers.

The Buyers Have Spoken: Survey Says

In the National Association of House Builders' 2004 consumer survey, "What 21st Century House Buyers Want," prospective homebuyers offered their opinions on what they most look for in a new house. You may want to see if you can accommodate their desires.

Among them:

- They want larger houses with a great deal of open space; they especially favor large, open kitchens and family rooms that flow seamlessly together without any walls or doors separating them.
- Upscale features like high ceilings and kitchen islands are popular.
- A front porch, deck or patio adds to a house's marketability .
- Laundry rooms are considered essential in new houses.
- Nearly 40 percent of the respondents said they would like a minimum of four bedrooms, though 49 percent would accept three (This is of particular note if you are thinking about turning a den or study into a bedroom!).
- Twenty-five percent of respondents said they wanted at least a three-car garage, despite the cost.
- Walk-in pantries and light wood cabinets are more desirable in kitchens.
- New bathrooms with fancier features are popular. A separate shower enclosure, water temperature control, a whirlpool tub and dressing room were features respondents positively ranked.
- Forty-six percent want a sunroom.

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Perhaps most telling is that respondents feel spaciousness is highly desirable; therefore, in decorating your house for walkthroughs, remember to keep everything open.

Buyers also like a well-lit and bright-looking houses, as well as distinctive features, such as sun rooms and bathrooms with separate shower enclosures, that can still be decorated beautifully with less expensive fixtures.

Value in Getting Ready for the Sale

Deciding to sell your house is never easy. Everywhere you look, you see memories…the stairs your daughter first climbed, the kitchen where your family used to gather before the kids moved out and the garage where you parked your first mini-van.

It is important to remember, though, that by moving, you are not giving up these memories—they will stay with your forever. You are simply selling the house—the bricks, the wood, the mortar-- nothing you cannot find in another neighborhood.

That said, it is critical that you realize selling your house may involve some concessions on your part. For example, even if you want to receive X amount of dollars for your house, a buyer may want to pay less due to the house's age or because of necessary remodeling.

You must be prepared for such concessions. Once you have decided to sell, it is next necessary for you to give your house an honest assessment.

Does your house need a paint job? A new roof? Take note of these things, as you may profit tremendously in preparing your house for sale. You get used to seeing things in your house and start accepting things because you know they're good and working properly but a person looking to invest in your house wants the best look they can get for the buck.

As a first step, if you belong to a homeowner's association, inform the directors that you are selling your house. Ask if there are any lawsuits or legal issues that concern the association, and obtain copies of any documentation.

Next, understand that having a house that is visually pleasing and technically sound will help it sell much faster. And, with a house that does not require many renovations or repairs, you are more likely to get your asking price. So, if you think inexpensive improvements can be done and you are willing to pay for them so your house value will increase, suggest these improvements. Certainly, however, we will forewarn you—preparing your house for sale is a long process, requiring more than a little hard work (but it's well worth it!). So, if you're ready, let's evaluate the outside of your house first.

Create your "Must-Do List" which includes house projects that need to be completed, jobs that we recommend in this book, as well as those that the buyer's house inspector may report.

II. Curb Appeal: The Initial Seduction

The buyer drove to your house and likes what he/she sees. Now, you want to seduce your buyer into coming inside your house—you can do this by taking some initial, do-it-yourself steps. So, let's get working on your house's exterior to establish that initial seduction!

How's the Neighborhood?

One of the best things you can do is to observe your house from a distance; for example, as you are driving through your

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neighborhood, observe the neighborhood and other houses in it. Do your neighbors keep up their houses? Are you located on a quiet, family-friendly street?

The market, of course, will dictate how well your house sells; at the right time, you may even get more than your asking price. However, it all depends on whether your house is in marketable condition, in an ideal location or surrounded by other higher-end houses.

You cannot much control your house's location; if you are in the enviable position of having a house located in a ritzy neighborhood or off a lake, you will not have to worry much about getting your asking price. Many times, people buy the location as much as the house.

However, if you live near an unsightly structure or directly off a busy road, you may have to work with your real estate agent in pushing the good points about the location. Is it close to schools and religious centers? Is there easy highway access, which reduces travel time to and from work? If so, make sure potential buyers know this.

Of course, another more sensitive issue that you might face is your neighbors. If your neighbors leave junk in their yards or do not keep up their property, it may be harder for you to sell your house, because people do not want to move into neighborhoods they perceive as old, trashy or run down.

Unfortunately, there is little you can do on this front. If you have a good relationship with your neighbors, you can possibly talk to them about your situation in trying to sell the house, as long as you handle this delicate matter with tact and politeness. (You might even volunteer to hire a grounds keeping service to touch up a neighbor's yard—but make sure your neighbors approve first). Your neighbors might be experiencing rough times right now if the head of household has been laid off.

Or perhaps the neighbors do not have time to upkeep their landscaping. Perhaps, though, they just don't care. Because there are so many reasons why your neighbors may not be upkeeping their houses/ yards, it is a touchy subject for most to broach.

If you cannot talk to your neighbors or you do not feel comfortable in doing so, you might be able to talk to the head of your neighborhood board; check to see if your neighbors are violating any established policies, and if so, ask the board to address the issue.

Your real estate agent can also brainstorm with you ways to handle the issue. Real estate agents are much like public relations spin-doctors; they know how to describe anything so it sounds good. Capitalize on that!

House Inspection before You Sell

If you really want to make sure that your house will be sold without any problems, seriously consider having a prelisting house inspection, whatever you think the condition of your house is. You do not want your buyer to request for any repair(s) later on--or worse--walk away from the deal based on an unsatisfactory house inspection. Also, the buyer will probably order his/her own house inspection and may not want to share this expense with you. Either fix the problem areas, or renegotiate your listing price or offer something to offset the repair costs.

Ask your agent or friends and families to recommend house inspectors or you can visit the Web site of the American Society of House Inspectors at www.ashi.org to find ASHI-certified inspectors. You may need to compare fees as well as the extent of the inspection. And don't forget to ask for references.
If you found any problems, either fix it or disclose. You do not want to be sued for fraud and be liable for any financial liabilities. The best policy is to be honest with any physical problems with your house.

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Outside Expectations: First Impressions?

Spend an afternoon evaluating your house's exterior, and if at all possible, ask a friend (or any third party) to join you. Together, you two should honestly, no-holds-barred evaluate what improvements may be necessary; it helps to let your friend know that you want his/her 100 percent honest feedback. (Definitely do not react harshly if he/she suggests an improvement you had not considered. Remember, you must have thick skin throughout the entire house-selling process, and your friend is only trying to help.

Consider giving your friend a little treat, such as movie tickets or a fresh floral bouquet, when you sell your house, so he/she feels appreciated for the extreme honesty you needed!). It will also be helpful if your real estate agent can join you and your friend. First, stand outside your house, and objectively think, what jumps out at me? The gorgeous front door? The impeccable landscaping? Or the frail porch or run-down steps? Any loose shingles on the roof? Sagging gutter?

Beautiful landscaping and a well-kept yard are both positives, but if anything on the outside of your house, such as rickety steps, looks dangerous, make a note to fix it. It is critical to always ask yourself, would I buy this house? Chances are, you would not move into a house that was dangerous to enter or that would cost you an arm and a leg to renovate, especially if the seller is asking top dollar for the property.

A fresh coat of paint or a new roof can also make all the difference in "curb" appeal—how your house looks to potential buyers from the outside. The color of your house can also be a great selling factor; is it a deep blue or beautiful hunter green in a neighborhood of mostly white houses? If so, a unique hue may work in your favor in the selling process (Never paint your house an unusual color, though, without first checking with your real estate agent and your neighborhood board—sometimes, there are regulations about what color you can paint your house). Make sure the color of your house matches with any detached garage, barn or tool shed.

If you happen to have an older paint job, though, you can always wash the house's exterior or dress up doors and window shutters with a more modern color. Clean the window screens and if they are worn out, remove them. Moreover, if you have older front doors or garage doors, make sure you replace them with more modern ones. While the cost here can add up, spending a little money now will help sell the house faster.

Don't re-model the house structure to the point that rather than enhancing the appearance, it may be considered an eyesore compared to other houses in the neighborhood.

Of course, if you live in a particularly favorable neighborhood, you are already at an advantage, since such properties are always popular. But never use your house's location as a reason to shortcut on making house improvements.

The Front Yard

Make sure your front yard kidnaps potential buyers with its clean look and delightful, if not impeccable landscaping. Make sure your landscaping is remarkable; plant a tree or some colorful flowers, which can add a homey touch to any house (trees also add to the value of property).

- Start by picking up any children's toys or miscellaneous junk (including lawn decorations), and remove any old cars or appliances which may be visible.
- Remove any graffiti.
- Sweep and pressure wash the walkways and the exterior of your house, if necessary. A clean front yard area is a great first step to luring prospective buyers!
- Trimmed grass, bushes and tree branches also enhance the front yard. If any tree branches are touching the roof, trim them.

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- Make sure that fences are clean (no rust, worn paint spots) and uncluttered and that gates open and close with ease. Making repairs to a fence or gate latch are fairly inexpensive, so do not forget to evaluate these outdoor fixtures.
- Make sure the mailbox is in good working order and that it looks attractive. Paint it if necessary, and have any missing bricks or cement replaced.
- Wipe clean any outside fixtures such as the air conditioning unit.
- Plant a few colorful flowers near the front door, below shrubs, around trees, and/or by the walkways and fence, even if the landscaping is all rocks. Ask your local garden retailer for inexpensive varieties such as impatiens and gardenias.
- Put in window flower boxes to create more interest. It will add charm to your house.
- Driveways should be free of grease build-up or rust.

First impressions count, so make sure EVERYTHING a potential buyer sees conveys the image of clean, well-to-do hominess! And by the way, keep that car out of your house's entrance way!

The Back Yard/Porch/Deck/Balcony

The same guidelines apply to the backyard, as well. Picking up toys (or worse, a dead refrigerator) and any trash and making sure the back yard area is landscaped beautifully will add to the curb appeal.

- You should also evaluate any stationary play sets and make sure they are in good working order. If, for example, you invested in a sturdy wood play set when your children were younger, and it is still in great condition, you can use it as a bonus-selling feature. However, if you have an old metal swing set that is on its last legs, take it down. It's better to have nothing out there than to showcase junk.
- If you have a spa or outdoor pool, make sure it looks inviting when your house is shown. Have it cleaned and free of any algae or dirt, and clean the areas where you have the motor and pool accessories. Easy fixes like this will make your backyard so much more appealing.
- Remove any laundry hanging out to dry.
- Make sure any outdoor furniture, gazebo and railings are also clean.
- Consider re-sealing your porch or deck for added appeal.
- Plant colorful flowers by fence or shrubs or set a few pots of flowering plants.

If all this sounds like too much work, you might consider hiring a cleanup crew, although you should be prepared to spend about $200 on such services. The advantages, however, are that professionals can clean the front and back yard in one day, as opposed to two or three. And with superior tools, they will probably do a better job than you can.

Outside the Budget?

Because the outside of your house is the first glimpse of the house potential buyers see, you definitely want it to be visually pleasing.

Of course, some fixes, like replacing an old porch or reroofing, are more expensive and time consuming. But you should evaluate with your real estate agent whether it is worth your time to make such fixes, especially if you are selling the house below market value or just want to get rid of it as soon as possible. (With anything that requires a hefty price tag to fix, check with your real estate agent before investing in any repairs).

Costly improvements do not always improve the resale value, and to make up for the cost of improvements, you will have to adjust your asking price (which could price the house out of the market).

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However, there are other fixes, such as cleaning windows and picking up yard clutter, that are cheap and easy (if you have any junk on a front porch or sitting in your yard, call the waste removal department in your city. A representative can give you the phone number for the office responsible for picking up larger items that belong in the garbage).

Also remember that lighting is a cheap fix. Because many house buyers drive by houses after dark, keep the attraction consistent from day to night. Turn on your outdoor lighting in the front and back yards. To enhance your nighttime appeal, you may want to consider installing lighting on driveways, walkways and around trees. You could even install an attractive light fixture on your front porch, if your budget allows.

Overall, though, when you look at the outside of your house, it should be clean, safe and inviting. Following is an outdoors checklist, which can help you evaluate which improvements are necessary. And remember--always ask yourself, would I live here?

Exterior Checklist

AREA OF CONCERN	YES	NO	ESTIMATED COST/ PLAN TO FIX
1. Is the grass neat, tidy and green?			
2. Are the flowers and bushes in good shape—watered, alive and not growing uncontrollably?			
3. Is the rest of the landscaping visually pleasing (rocks, trees, water sources, gardens)?			
4. Are other stand-alone structures (car ports, clothes lines, tool sheds) in stable, attractive condition?			
5. Are there any swing sets or play sets that are in rickety condition?			
6. Are kids' bikes, toys and plastic pools visible?			
7. Is there any "junk" on your front porch, such as furniture or appliances of any sort?			
8. Are there cars, tires or other large items housed in your yard?			
9. Are trash cans visible?			
10. Does the house's exterior look presentable (freshly painted, clean)?			
11. Have the windows and outdoor shutters all been washed?			
12. Are gutters and chimneys clean?			

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III. Inside These Walls: The Next Seduction

Just like the exterior, the interior of your house is equally as important, and you should prepare to spend a good chunk of time fixing up inside.

The easiest way to make your house appealing is to thoroughly clean it—yes, even the windows—and to eliminate the clutter, especially "personal" clutter. It is difficult for people to picture themselves in a house if it is heavily decorated with your teddy bear and Lenox collections and adorned with numerous photos of all your family and friends. Such décor sends the message, "This is MY house." The buyers are there not to buy your stuff but your house.

When you are trying to sell your house, it is the message to avoid. While you can leave generic décor, such as live healthy looking and nice artificial plants or commercial pictures, try to eliminate as many personal touches as possible. It's hard, but it can definitely make the house more appealing to others, who prefer to imagine their own personal décor as they walk through the house. Painting is one expense where you get back your money. It makes the house look clean and fresh. Painting the rooms in a neutral color may be boring but it provides for an easier sale. And, it reflects light best and makes rooms larger.

And, don't skip this step: Go to at least two open houses, and ask yourself what you would have done differently if you were showing the house as it was shown, would you buy the house? Why or why not? Watch a few decorating show on TV. What did they do that made the difference? Any latest colors, fixtures and accessories?

Home Warranties

You can give the buyer a peace of mind by purchasing a warranty that guarantees for the first year of ownership that all plumbing and electrical systems as well as appliances, pool and/or spa will operate. If something needs to be repaired, the new house owner can call for repair. The house warranties are a good incentive for the buyer. You can find a quote online by going to the following

Web sites:

Countrywide Credit: **www.countrywide.com** or **www.cwinsurance.com**
American House Shield: **http://www.americanhouseshield.com**
House Warranty of America: **http://www.hwahousewarranty.com**
HMS Home Warranty - **http://www.hmsnational.com/**

Establish Buyer's Connection to Your House

Too often, it is easy to forget why we fell in love with our houses in the first place; chances are, if you really thought about it, you would remember some emotional connection to a staircase, a bay window or a special nook that was secretly nestled in a snug corner. You probably thought about rocking your children by the window or how your daughter would look descending those steps in her ever-so-elegant prom gown. Other people look for these kinds of connections, too. When prospective buyers visit your house, they want to picture themselves living in it, having wonderful dinners with family and friends, and loving it as you do. They want to imagine their spouses, children and pets romping about. So, your goal in marketing the house is to make it as easy as possible for others to emotionally connect to your house. If your house is bare, consider renting furniture and accessories.

This means adding those extra touches, like fresh flowers, cozy, but general décor and a sense that this is not merely a house, but a home. Make potential buyers think "relaxation" when they see your bathrooms and sun room. An organized, spacious house that has been well-cared for will smell pleasant, look cozy and convey a sense of comfort.

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You want your potential buyers to immediately fall in love with your house, so go the extra mile to convey the image of this house as “their home.” Toss a log on the fireplace, set the dining table with fine china to convey luxury and elegance and make people feel as though they are walking through a happy, healthy, cozy dwelling. See checklist in the Appendix for list of items buyers want and don’t want to see and feel in your house.

To kick in more that emotional connection, why not make a short note or letter that prospective buyers can take with them? Tell them the little things that make your house special that only you, the seller and occupant, knows: caring neighbors, special times in the backyard, the pleasant after-dinner walk in the neighborhood, etc.

Let’s Go Room by Room

Certainly, preparing the interior of your house will take time and effort, so make sure you leave plenty of time for this chore. You should also enlist help whenever you can—ask your spouse, children and friends to spare a few hours to help you clean. You can always offer to baby sit or give them a gift certificate to a favorite restaurant as your “thanks.”

Furthermore, if at any time during the cleaning process, you feel overwhelmed, don’t be afraid to take a break. Get a cold drink, take a walk or go for a short car ride. Sometimes, stepping away from a big job can give you better perspective on how to tackle it when you return.

And, it goes without saying that you should not set impossible goals—that means, don’t tell yourself you have to clean the entire house in one day. That’s nothing more than an invite for disaster. You will more likely end up grouchy, frustrated and overwhelmed; so don’t do this to yourself.

Finally, enjoy what you are doing. You will probably come across old photo albums or treasures your kids made you for special occasions, and you’ll be able to enjoy a trip down memory lane. Savor these moments!

Still, do not be afraid to donate items to Goodwill or to local religious centers or other charities. If you are retired, you probably do not need your kids’ old strollers and baby gear, but someone else might really appreciate them. It’s OK, of course, to hold onto your most treasured keepsakes, but don’t be a clutter bug by hauling old junk from one house to another. Give yourself permission to let go! If all your money is tied up in your house, cover the old carpets/linoleum with nice rugs and credit the buyer later. The idea is to have a nice impression during the showing. If you can’t avoid
or replace, distract the eyes to something beautiful.

What to do with a small room?

• Place a large framed mirror opposite doors or windows.
• Scale your furniture and remove some décor to clear up the room
• Have a focal point such as a fireplace or nice window view.
• Have the same color for all walls and have ceiling painted in a lighter color, if not in white. And, as you make your way through the house, remember to check every room for: • Burnt-out light bulbs. Increase wattage of light bulbs (100-150 watt) without burning your light fixture.
• Cob-webs
• Clean doorknobs and light switches—if they need to be wiped down, do it! (Update the switch plates, if needed.)
• Loose screws or creaky hinges on doors
• Windows not working and/or broken
• Dirty filter in furnace or air blower
• Traffic flow—make sure the buyer can move around freely.
• Areas where plants or flowers could be added to make the house look more inviting.

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The Daily-Whatever Storage Box

Have or purchase one or two plastic storage boxes that you can put under a bed, which is away from the buyer's eyes. The boxes may include the daily mail you get, the kids' stuff from school, as well as little knick-knacks. Have one for each member of the family, if possible. This way, there is no clutter visible when you have your showing, and you have immediate access to any papers you need. Try to secure it if it will include any valuable and financial information (like credit card statements, health information, etc.).

Closets, Drawers and Cabinets

Storage space is one important feature that buyers are looking for in a house. How's yours? Make sure the drawers, cabinets and closets are uncluttered and organized in every room of the house– entrance, living room, kitchen, bedrooms, bathrooms, even the garage. You want the prospective buyers to see that the house has ample storage for their own personal belongings.

- Take out at least 50% of the stuff inside. Leave only the essentials that you need while you are trying to sell your house. This includes items on racks and shelves.
- Make sure the inside is clean and painted white to show light.
- Make sure the closets and cabinets don't smell. Leave fresh scented dryer sheets in closets for a clean smell.

The Front Door

The front door is the like the ribbon on a package—it is the first indicator of what the inside will be like. So, make sure your front door encourages people to come in and hang their hat.

- Make sure the house number is new and sharp looking.
- Make sure the porch light and doorbell are both working.
- Repaint the front door and buy a more modern, attractive door handle if necessary. If your budget allows, install a brand new, updated front door.
- If there is a screen door, take it out.
- Clean the windows and curtains thoroughly…the front entrance should be an invite to enjoy the rest of the house.
- Invest in a new "Welcome" floor mat, and keep it stored during non-showing times, so that it does not get messy during your family's day-to-day activities.
- Place welcoming flowers that buyers will see as soon as they open the door to your house.

The Foyer/Hallway

Many houses have an entry way or foyer, which is a gateway to the kitchen, living and dining rooms. When a prospective buyer is in this part of the house, he/she is still getting acquainted with the house's personality. Therefore, you need to ensure that guests love what they see!

- Keep the light on for a more inviting look.
- Clear away all personal clutter, such as shoes, jackets or toys.
- Consider setting out a plant or hanging basket of colorful flowers to welcome prospective buyers.
- Clear the coat closet, and make sure that it is clean. Make sure closets look spacious at all times! Re-paint the inside if walls are badly smudged with marks that will not come off

(Try the Mr. Clean Magic Eraser first, though—it's a miracle tool!).

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The All-Important Kitchen

The kitchen is one of the most daunting rooms to clean, just because of all the appliances and the fact that it is one of the most used rooms in any house. That means grease, dirt and crumbs tend to hide out in the most tightly guarded places. So, you'll have to be prepared to clean, clean and clean again in the kitchen!

- Clean the exterior and interior of all appliances, including the refrigerator, stove, oven, dishwasher and microwave. Replace any filters with new ones, and if you have overhead suction fan, make sure it is also clean and working. You would be amazed at how many potential buyers check this out!
- Put all your dishes away.
- Make sure the garbage disposal and compactor, if any, are clean and that they do not smell. To remove odors, drop a dishwashing tab down the disposal and turn it on. These tabs will leave the sink area smelling clean, fresh and new!
- Remove magnets and other decorations from the refrigerator.
- If possible, place fresh flowers or a bowl of fresh fruit on the kitchen table.
- Clean sinks and all countertop surfaces. Leave only a couple sharp looking, newer appliances and generic decorative items.
- If your faucet is older, consider replacing it. And leaky faucets should always be repaired!
- Make sure the sink is spotless!
- The plumbing under sink should be clean and not rusted.
- Polish and clean cabinets and drawers, so that they shine.

Consider painting the inside of cabinets, too.

- Keep the items in your refrigerators, cabinets, and drawers neat and organized. The buyer will open these areas to check for storage space. The grocery items should have the front labels facing out just like in the retailer's shelves. They should also be neatly arranged where the tallest items are behind the shorter ones.
- Make sure the undersink cabinet is uncluttered, clean and organized. It should not look damp. Wipe clean the pipes.
- Clean all floors and make sure rugs are clean and have a stationary back, so that potential buyers do not slip on loose floor coverings.
- Clean the tops of shelves—people look at these, too!
- Keep trash cans under the sink or in another hidden spot, and burn a lemon candle for a really clean scent.
- Wash all curtains and clean any mini-blinds. Make sure that natural light can come in—natural sunrays make any room look bigger!
- Only 2-3 items should be on the countertops and they should be attractive and clean.
- Make sure the kitchen smells good.
- Refrain from cooking anything that leaves a distinct odor, such as garlic, fish, bacon, etc.
- If possible, create a little dining area in the kitchen.
- Replace the bulbs with higher wattage or fluorescent bulbs.

The Dining Room

The dining room is actually one of the easier rooms to prepare, because chances are, you do not use your dining room everyday. As a result, it is usually in good shape. Still, make sure you spend at least an hour or two cleaning this formal room.

- Vacuum and deep clean carpets or polish wooden floors.
- Wash all windows and clean window coverings.
- Repaint and make sure walls are clean and neat in appearance.
- Make sure the overhead lighting is sparkling clean.

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The Family Room

If your house is like most others, the family room picks up the brunt of the wear and tear. Everyone in the family uses this room to hang out, drop off books and lounge about. Even pets consider this a personal hide out. So, you will need to thoroughly clean this room.

- Remove all excessive clutter and leave a few family photos. The room should look friendly, inviting and like a fun place to hang out. But, it should not look too lived in.
- Clean windows, carpets and all furniture. Make sure the room smells fresh, not like sweaty children, dirty animals or rotten food.
- If the room is too crowded, remove some furniture to open up the space.
- Old ragged couch and chairs should either be taken out or covered with a sofa cover.
- Appliance electrical cords should be neatly tight and hidden.
- If you have any aquarium, make sure that it is sparkling clean.
- Make sure the bookcases are not crowded: remove and regroup some books and put in some décor to have open space.

The Living Room

Similar to the family room, the living room is also a popular hang out in most houses. The comfy couches, the reclining chairs and the big screen television make this room very fun. Because of this, you should prepare to spend a few hours getting your living room walk-through ready.

- Clean windows, carpets and all furniture. Then, keep the lights on and curtains drawn open.
- Make sure the room is clean and that there are no smudges or dirt marks on the walls or ceiling. Watch for cracks and water stains, too.
- Try to take a minimalist approach, so that the room appears larger. Keep only a few key pieces of furniture and a couple decorative vases or wall hangings.
- Limit any excessive family photos and personal clutter.
- If you have a fireplace, light it up using Duraflame logs. It will create a homey, cozy feel for your guests. However, make sure there is no accumulation of ashes. And speaking of flames, make sure that any candles are new and nice looking.

The Bedrooms

Is there any room more personal than one's bedroom? Because most bedrooms have such personality, you basically have to strip down bedrooms to make them appear very generic. Personal items should be non-existent, and beds should be beautifully made and coordinated with matching accessories. You should also:

- Clean all windows, carpets and walls.
- Remove posters from the walls to enhance the spacious look of a room.
- Remove all clutter! This includes clothing, toys and other personal items. Pack what you can and store the rest! Leave only the necessities in dresser drawers.
- Again, use a minimalist approach so that rooms appear larger. Take out any excessive furniture that makes bedrooms look crowded.
- Make sure closet rods and shelves are sturdy. And do not forget to clean the closets! Closets should always look spacious. You might also consider installing a few shelves (available at house and discount retailers), so that closets look more useful.
- Make up all the beds with gorgeous comforters and coordinate with matching accessories.

Prepare Your House To Sell

The Bathrooms

We know, we know. You dread cleaning the bathrooms. But who doesn't? Scrubbing bath tubs, sinks and toilets is hard work. You have no, choice, however in cleaning your humble commodes. You can make the process move more quickly, though, by following a checklist:

- CLEAN toilets, sinks and flooring to get rid of mineral build-up and rust spots, mildew and any other messes. You can find any variety of fine cleaning products at Target or Wal-Mart (make sure, though, that you have plenty of ventilation when using bleach or other strong smelling chemicals).
- Make sure the lights all work. Replace any dim light bulbs.
- Replace a mildewed shower curtain with a chic coordinated neutral-colored one, and hide tooth brushes, soap and other personal items. Your potential buyers do not want to think of you grooming yourself in their future house!
- Replace faucets if necessary with attractive, newer faucets.
- Fixtures should match. If you have silver sink faucets, match the same silver on your light fixtures, towel holders, toilet roll holders and knobs on your tub.
- Make sure the towels are fresh and that soap looks new.
- Make sure you have a new roll of toilet tissue out.
- Use a fabric skirt to hide unsightly plumbing.
- If you have any sliding glass enclosures, make sure they are completely spotless.
- Remove any bath mats or kiddy stick-ons from the tub.
- If possible, use plush bath towels and rugs, and coordinate with solid colors. Match with accessories on the counter.
- Install new toilet and seat covers to replace old ones.
- For a fresh scent, place a fresh vase of flowers or a bowl of potpourri in bathrooms.
- Remove any prescription medicines from the medicine cabinet.
- Use a cute lamp or modern light fixture to enhance your bathroom's look.
- Re-grout if necessary.
- Keep the light on and windows open (or curtains open if it is too cold outside to open the windows).
- If you have a Jacuzzi or spa, make sure any needed repairs are done.

The Attic/Basement

These monster rooms can be very intimidating, especially if you are accustomed to simply tossing boxes in an attic or basement. You can surface clean these rooms, simply because people expect these rooms to be a little rough. However, you should always:

- Clean windows, flooring and walls.
- Clear the stairways.
- Clean any appliances including heaters, furnace, etc.
- Replace any bad light bulbs.
- Pack what you can and neatly straighten any remaining boxes or items.
- If either your attic or your basement is a second family room or recreation room, make sure all furniture is clean and freshly scented with Febreeze or Bounce sprays. And leave only generic decorative items on display.
- For crawl spaces, make sure there are no dead mice or other animals or pests in there. Check if there is a crawl space cleaning service in your area.

The Garage

Garages are becoming more and more modernized—some are even being used as playrooms, work out rooms or workshops. Laminate, solid surface and cabinetry are even present in newer houses. However, even with an older house, you can make your garage inviting by:

Prepare Your House To Sell

The Garage

Clearing out as much clutter as possible. Stack boxes neatly and don't leave anything lying out that could present a danger.

- Remove oil stains.
- Replace burnt-out light bulbs.
- Make sure shelves are sturdy.
- Make sure the garage door and opener work correctly.
- If possible, air out your garage by leaving the door open before a showing, so that musty smells have a chance to vanish (do the same with basements).

The Laundry Room

- Make sure the area is not cluttered. Put away nonessentials.
- Clean the outside and inside of the washer and dryer.
- No clutter should be exposed, especially dirty laundry.

Lastly, remember to apply the following checklist to your kitchen, sunroom (if you have one), dining room, family room, living room, laundry room, bedrooms and closets:

Interior Checklist

AREA OF CONCERN	YES	NO	ESTIMATED COST/ PLAN TO FIX
1. Are entrance ways clear of clutter, like shoes and jackets?			
2. Have you removed all your "personal" touches, like photos, knick-knacks and collections?			
3. Is the house well-lit? (Use windows to take advantage of natural light).			
4. Have you re-painted, re-wallpapered or re-paneled in rooms where it is needed?			
5. Have you thoroughly cleaned EVERYTHING windows, floors, walls, ceiling fans, carpets?			
6. Have you checked for creaky steps or weak hand rails on stair cases?			
7. Have you checked for leaky faucets and exposed piping?			
8. Have you cleaned sinks and toilets with bleach?			
9. Have you checked to make sure closet rods/shelves are sturdy?			
10. Have you replaced air filters to reduce the level of dust?			
11. Have you removed pet/smoking odors?			

Prepare Your House To Sell

IV. Other Little Stuff That Matters to Buyers

You have an audience. You might not have thought about selling your house like this before, but you are showcasing it to others, in the hopes that they will love it so much they cannot help but make you a dazzling offer. (The earlier section on helping prospective buyers emotionally connect to the house briefly addressed the audience factor).

Cleaning your house and decorating it tastefully are the most important chores, but there are also "little" things you can do to improve your house's marketability.

Get Rid of the Pests

Pests are just that, pests. And no one wants to move into a house where other microscopic inhabitants are already comfortably living. So, have your house inspected for termites, ants and other pests, including toxic mold. Make sure there are no cockroaches and flies either! Furthermore, clear away cob webs and dry wood rot. Your house will immediately feel cleaner!

The Pets

Pets are great if you love them, but if you don't, they can be an irritant. Non-pet people do not think cat hair on furniture is cute, and they probably won't see the humor in a large dog walking on designer carpet with muddy paws, either. That said, if you have pets, make sure they are secured or out of the house altogether when your house is shown. Also, make sure you have cleaned any litter boxes or doggy papers prior to showings. Pet wastes can have a strong odor, and it's better to err on the side of caution by assuming your potential buyers are not pet people.

Furthermore, if you keep multiple pets in the house, make sure it is undetectable. Keep all furniture animal-hair free, and make sure if you have cats, they have not defecated on any heaters or anything located above a heater—that's an awful smell that will deter anyone from finishing a walk-through. Even if someone has their own pets, they do not want to move into a house that has been destroyed by someone else's. So, remember this when hiding pet bowls and vacuuming up cat hair. If you have to lock your pet in one room during showing, have a sign posted on the door indicating that your friendly pet is inside, but should not be disturbed (you don't want them jumping on your prospective buyer, especially, if he/she is not pet-friendly). Make sure that you also lock your pet(s) in a larger closet or basement, not in a bathroom, family room or bedroom, which buyers must see. Let the buyer know that they can come back to view the unseen room, so they know you are not trying to hide problems.

The Smoke

If you smoke, you know that nicotine stains walls and ceilings. And if you don't smoke, you probably loathe the remnants of smoking altogether. Because of this, you should treat smoking like pets—it should be undetectable in your house. Shampoo carpets, wash your walls and repaint ceilings, especially if they were once crisp white, but are now off-color beige. Also, open your windows to air out a smoking house, and spray furniture with Febreeze or Bounce to mask—or even better, remove- -stale smoking odors. If it is nice outside, you can leave the windows open. In any case, it is imperative that your house smells fresh and clean—light candles or bake something like cinnamon bread to create tantalizing aromas (be careful about having too many sweet smelling diversions, though, as you don't want potential buyers to think you are hiding something). You can also us a Carpet Foam which can make your house smelling good for a couple of days. Ash trays should be empty and sparkling clean.

Prepare Your House To Sell

The Temperature Inside

This might not seem important, but it is. Keeping your house at a comfortable temperature makes it more inviting, so make sure it is neither too warm nor too chilly. Potential buyers are more likely to give your house a thorough look if they are comfortable. Extremes in temperatures can also lead prospective buyers to question whether or not something is wrong with the heating/cooling systems and/or insulation. You definitely don't want that!

A Picture is Worth Thousands

If you are showing your house in the winter, you may wish to show potential buyers photos of the patio and backyard during the summer. This is fine, except you should make sure that the pictures do not contain "extras" you would rather not show off. For example, if your neighbor, the one who likes to sunbathe by his children's kiddie pool is visible in a picture, FIND ANOTHER PHOTO. Likewise, if you show photos of the interior, such as the laundry

room, make sure piles and piles of dirty clothes are not visible.

Trading Spaces

The next step in making your house marketable is decorating it so that it appeals to the widest possible audience. You can gather all kinds of ideas about decorating by checking out house decorating magazines and Web sites. Better Houses and Gardens especially has a very useful Web site at **www.bhg.com.**

It is important to remember that while your own decorating style is uniquely "you," others will have styles that are uniquely them. So, it is better to decorate like furniture and fine department stores do—with neutral colors and decorations. Of course, if you have a house that lends itself well to a particular style—cottage, vintage, contemporary--you should feel free to decorate in that style.

Furthermore, keep everything minimalist—don't cram furniture in a room or flood shelves with too many knick-knacks. No one wants to move into a house that seems small and crowded. Plants and fresh flowers also naturally give houses life and vibrant color, but you should be sure not to overdo it, especially if you are selling your house during allergy season. A sneezing attack will not cause potential buyers to make a dazzling offer!

And don't forget about natural sunlight—open curtains and make sure natural sunlight comes through in all rooms. Sunlight creates a friendly, welcoming aura, and more importantly, makes rooms appear larger.

Finally, don't forget how color can affect people. Reds, for instance, symbolize fire, anger, passion and rage, so red screams "look at me!" Make sure that you steer clear of bright or abundant reds in bathrooms or sun rooms, where soft blues, whites, peaches and greens create a more serene, calm look.

Likewise, if you are a fan of browns, temper them so that you mix chocolate and cinnamon browns to create a warm, snuggly room, not a dreary, institutional one.

Pinks, purples and other trendy colors should also be minimized; for instance, if you have pink carpets throughout your house, consider using rugs or telling your real estate agent that you're willing to allow for a redecorating allowance. You want the house to seem inviting, so that your prospective buyer can see him/herself living in and loving the house as you have. When you take pictures of the rooms in your house for advertising purposes, make sure that the rooms are taken as if you are about to show them to prospective buyers: the rooms should look attractive and well-lighted. There have been too many Pictures posted on the Internet where you can hardly see the inside of the dimly-lit rooms!

Prepare Your House To Sell

30 Minutes before the Showing

Follow this short list of showing must-do's, and you will have your house sold in no time:

- Use an electric broom in the entry hall, bathroom, kitchen, and other rooms for a quick clean-up.
- Run the feather duster over furniture and appliances.
- Keep a box of Clorox wipes handy in the bathrooms and kitchens. Wipe clean the counters, floors, toilets, sinks, fixtures and doorknobs.
- Open windows if the weather permits, or at least keep the curtains open to let in natural sunlight.
- Turn on lights everywhere, even in the attic and the basement.
- Turn on soft, classical music in the background (but make sure you keep it low).
- Turn on fireplace, if any.
- Leave toilet seats down.
- Keep the fireplace on if it is practically possible.
- Use attractive bed spreads and comforters and coordinate bedrooms with matching accessories.
- If you have beautiful china, set the dining table for the inviting appeal of it.
- Keep the dishwasher, washing machine and television off.
- Have new, solid colored towels displayed in bathrooms.
- Fold all towels as though they were in department stores.
- Hang all clothes in the closets—do not leave anything on the floor.
- Don't cook—the smell of food could linger on.
- If you are unable to do the dishes, put all in trash bags and store them in the trunk of your car.
- Don't smoke.
- Play some background music such as Bach classical music and jazz.
- Turn pantry items so that their labels face you.
- If the weather is hot or cold, adjust the temperature inside for comfort.
- Hide excessive books or magazines, especially reading materials about politics, sex or other touchy issues. You don't want prospective buyers to leave an otherwise great showing thinking about the Playboy magazine they found in your teen son's room.
- Leave some juicer or hors d'oeurves to give a kind of nice touch.
- Leave the premises! It is difficult for prospective buyers to envision themselves in the house with you hanging around. And remove your car from your house's entrance area.

V. Other Considerations Determining Cost

At this point, you are probably thinking, "I never knew selling a house could be this complicated!" And you're right, but that's just the name of the game, to borrow a tried but true phrase. You should be prepared to spend a couple hundred dollars, at least, in cleaning supplies and paint. Given that you are leaving the house, though, you do not necessarily want to invest thousands in repairing it (the new owners will need something to do to make the house "theirs" anyway!). This can be a tricky, very subjective topic, just because everyone has their own budget.

Our recommendation is to make the less expensive improvements, like repainting and cleaning, both of which can make your property look newer. Other cheap fixes include resealing an asphalt driveway and replacing new fixtures in the living room, kitchen and bathrooms.

Make sure everything is in good working condition---and then forget it. If you are working with a real estate agent, he/she will market an older house as historical or old-fashioned—adjectives which attract those who love older houses.

We touched on this before, but you should also consider where your house is located—is it in a historical neighborhood? A trendy one? Does it face the woods? Is there a huge backyard? If so, these are added advantages that people will buy into, sometimes regardless of the house itself. So, before investing any

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big money in renovations, talk with your real estate agent.

If you know your house needs major repairs, like a new heating/cooling system or new plumbing, you might consider selling as-is. This means you notify potential buyers of all known defects, but you are not required to correct them. This can work to your advantage if you want to get rid of a house ASAP, but “as -is” houses can be a red flag for many potential buyers, too. So, it can take longer to sell your house when you sell it as-is (See Repair Disclosure from in the Appendix).

House Repair

Once you have thoroughly reviewed your house and made notes of any necessary repairs, you may need to call a house repair company. The smartest first step is to ask for recommendations. If you have friends or family members who have recently had work done on their houses, ask them who they used. And do not forget to ask if they would use the same service providers again. Beware of home repairers who knock on your door uninvited; they could be scam artists.

If you cannot get a personal recommendation from someone you trust, you can check the Better Business Bureau Web site for area repair companies that have developed good reputations. Even after you have found a repair company that seems reputable, you will still want to ask for a list of references; talk with local customers and see what others have to say about the company. And investigate at least three repair companies! This leaves you with plenty of options, should you hear anything derogatory about one of the providers.

It is also helpful to verify your contractor’s license and proof of insurance; many builder organizations even encourage you to call the insurance company directly to verify proof of insurance, since insurance policies might be outdated or have been cancelled even if a provider has an insurance card with him/her.

And never work with a company that demands money up front; a reputable contractor might ask for a percentage of the project cost up front, but he/she will never ask for 100 percent of the money. Basically, in selecting a contractor, it is important to allow plenty of time to research! Many contractors seem reputable on the surface, but show their true colors when you question them enough.

Review: Cheap, Easy Fixes

- Clean, clean and clean again! Dusting and all-purpose cleaners are not that expensive, so there is no excuse for showing a dirty house.
- Replace tattered or stained carpets with cheaper, neutral carpets.
- Replace faucets.
- Open windows, so that your house looks spacious, light and airy when potential buyers see it.
- Invest in some inexpensive landscaping, like a few potted plants or decorative shrubs.
- Remove all the clutter and dust off all surfaces, so that the house is in model shape.
- Remove old and extra furniture, de-clutter all the areas of the house, cabinets and closets included.

Oh, and Don’t Forget…

When showing your house, be customer-friendly. Try to accommodate any reasonable request from the buyer for an inconvenient showing time. Have pets stay with a friend or in the kennel. Leave while the buyers are in your house and make the buyers feel “at-home.” If they are not comfortable looking around, they will not see themselves as future occupants of the house. They will open cabinets, drawers, and whatever else they want to poke into, so give them this freedom. After all, they will be spending hundreds of thousands to buy your house. If you cannot leave your house, stay outside on the porch or balcony or in the backyard. Tuck away expensive jewelry, silver and other fine valuables as well as laptops, and CD and DVD collections. No one wants to presume the worst in people, but it’s better not to tempt them. The real estate agent will not necessarily be with people at all times when they are in your

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house, so make sure valuables are securely hidden, and preferably, locked away. Also, keep all your financial documents and other personal and private information locked away from prospective buyers.

Fix-up Money from Your Garage Sales

Once you have been through your house thoroughly, you can start also thinking about what to toss. You can donate items to charities and local religious centers, or you might consider hosting a garage sale to make a little extra money, which can help you pay for the minor repairs you may need to spruce up your house. You should be warned, though, that garage sales are quite a bit of work for the money you earn; unless you have a ton of stuff, you may not make more than a couple hundred dollars. People who make their way around the garage sale circuit usually only want to pay a tiny amount for an item. That known, if you have anything of real value, such as a collection or like-new name brand clothing, you might be better off to try selling to a consignment shop or on the shopping Web site **www.Ebay.com**.

However, if you mostly have miscellaneous items like dishes or generic knick-knacks or moderately used clothing, a garage sale is probably a better outlet for you.

To make sure your garage sale is a success, follow these tips:

- Wash all clothes and toys and make sure they are in good condition. Ripped, stained or ridiculously out
- dated clothes should go to the garbage (not Goodwill, as being less fortunate does not mean one wants to wear trashy clothing). Torn, excessively dirty or stained toys should also be tossed out. Remember, if things look dirty, garage salers will more than likely leave without spending much time perusing. And junk insults buyers, so make sure the items you feature are things you would buy.
- Fold clothes or hang them in such a way that invites people to look at them. Pair matching items and like sizes together, so shoppers can easily navigate the racks. If you have purses or costume jewelry also for sale, consider pairing them with jeans or tops that might work well with them (you can multi-sell this way!).
- If you have name brand clothing like Tommy Hilfiger, Liz Claiborne, Brooks Brothers, etc., feel free to mark it up a little, provided it is in great condition.
- Unless shoes are in excellent condition, pitch them.
- If selling antiques, know what fair market value is. Remember, garage salers historically want to pay
- pennies on the dollar for good items. And you don't want to be taken advantage of!
- Make sure your garage sale is worth attending. Don't host a sale with two measly tables of junk. Have a wide variety of toys, clothes, tools, knick-knacks and appliances if possible. This way, you've got something for everyone!
- Don't overprice! Think, if I were the buyer, how much would I pay for this? No matter how valuable
- something is to you, others will pay only so much. We've all been to those garage sales where items were too overpriced, and we just left. Don't let this happen to you!
- Use all your space! Garage salers like to dig, so don't be afraid to leave some items in boxes or under tables, as long as buyers can see the items.
- Mark all items with a price sticker. You can usually get cheap circular stickers at office and dollar stores.
- Have an electrical outlet nearby if you plan to sell any items that plug in. People want to make sure items work before they buy.
- Sell in bundles if you can…usually if you have old books, CDs, records or movies, this is a great way to
- get rid of the good and the bad ones! • Sell dishes and housewares if you've got them—people LOVE this stuff!
- Advertise your garage sale in the newspaper and post directional signs to guide buyers. Include dates, times and the address of your sale.
- If possible, host your garage sale on a Saturday, when you are more likely to get a bigger turnout.

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- Be prepared for weather of all types! If your garage sale stretches out to the driveway or your front yard, you should have a backup plan in case it rains.
- Have plenty of change on hand! People will come with everything from a bag full of nickels to a stack of one dollar bills (for your own protection, do not accept any bill larger than a $20).
- Be prepared for early risers! If your garage sale is scheduled to start at 8 AM, be ready for the 7:15 AM and 7:30 AM early birds.

Moving on Up

There will inevitably come that victorious day when your house sells—all your hard work pays off. But, then, you will get even busier preparing for the big move. Moving is definitely a great deal of work—not only have you cleaned the house you're leaving from top to bottom, but you will now have to clean a new one from top to bottom, as well—ugh!

- To prepare yourself, it is important to follow a detailed checklist:
- Get plenty of boxes, marking pens, bubble wrap, newspaper, tissue and packing tape. Consider also
- packing fragile items with bedding or stuffed toys, which can hold items snuggly in place.
- Label each box with which room it belongs, but keep all valuables with you.
- Complete a change of address form with the post office, the IRS and any credit card companies. Make sure to switch magazine subscriptions, as well.
- Let the utility companies (phone, water, gas, electric) know of your move two weeks prior to leaving.
- Double check closets, cabinets and storage areas for anything you may have left behind on moving day.
- Pack all medications with you.
- Make travel provisions for pets and infants.
- If you are using a moving company, make sure you shop around and get referrals first. Then, make sure the rate and estimated hours are written in your contract (specify that the movers are not to overrun more than 10 percent, should extra time be needed). And examine all items before signing any receipts (it's also advisable to document electronics and other valuables prior to moving day).

VI. Conclusion

We don't have to tell you that selling your house is a great deal of work. You know that, but you might not have realized all the details of marketing your house. We hope this guide helped remind you of some long-forgotten tips and taught you a few new ones. Probably the most important thing to remember is CLEAN COUNTS. Even if you are working on a tight budget, there is no excuse for showing a dirty house. If nothing else, you can use hot water and dish washing soap. Cleanliness can make all the difference when someone is deciding whether or not to make an offer.

You might think, "They can clean, the house is still very nice." While that may be true, unfortunately many people cannot get past a dirty kitchen or messy bathroom. Don't put prospective buyers in the position of trying to convince themselves your house is right for them; usually, they will only succeed in convincing themselves to look elsewhere.

Moreover, pay close attention to the provided checklists— watch the details. Surface cleaning may be OK for some things, like the garage or an attic, but you should invest plenty of time in cleaning applianc-es, toilets and bath tubs. Potential buyers will go through your house with a fine tooth comb. You should do it first. Once you have made your fixes, remember to decorate in a way which makes your house invit-ing and livable. Take the minimalist approach whenever possible, so your house does not look crowded and small. Your buyers are not there to buy your personal possessions. And clear away excess clutter, like old newspapers, magazines and junk mail.

Furthermore, it is difficult, but you should also reduce the number of personal items visible. You really want your prospective buyers to be able to picture themselves living in the house. Seeing your Elvis collection or your pet's toy corner makes that extremely difficult. Decorate with neutral whites, blacks, nudes or crèmes whenever you can, so that your potential buyers can look at the house untouched. If they want decorating ideas, they can look at house décor magazines or Web sites; you need not worry about showing them all the decorating possibilities.

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Also, in going through the house selling process, make sure you take breaks from all the chaos. Read a book, watch TV, go to the movies. Taking a break is great for relieving stress, and often times, you are more productive after you recharge your batteries. Moreover, have fun preparing your house for sale. Use this opportunity to clean out the garage, the attic and the basement. Toss old junk and donate useable items to a worthy cause. Old clothes can go to Goodwill or to local shelters, and humane societies will generally accept old towels and bedding.

Of course, if you have any valuable treasures, you might consider selling them on Ebay (garage sale shoppers usually will not give you a fair price on antiques and collectibles, so only go to the work of having a garage sale if you want to make a little spare money from selling more generic items).

With enough time, help and preparation, you will have your house sold in no time. Good luck!

. Emotional Connection Checklist

Here are a few reminders to make your buyer fall in love with your house and establish that vital emotional connection to your house. Make sure the following messages are conveyed in each area of your house, inside and outside, where applicable.

____Spaciousness
____Order and balance
____Cleanliness and bright
____Owner's pride
____Welcoming
____Relaxation
____Enjoyment
____Coziness
____Functionality and ease of use
____Your house is a refuge
____Luxury and elegance
____Charm
____Excitement
____Humor
____Resort-like living
____Cheerful
____Trendy and modern
____Color and warmth

Buyers don't like to see:

____Clutter
____Dirt and Dust
____Crowded rooms (claustrophobic feeling)
____Outdated accessories and fixtures
____Bare, colorless house
____Offensive décor and accessories
____Offensive, stale, funny smell
____Dishonesty
____Owners in the property

C. Room-by-Room Checklists

The Front Door

____Burnt-out light bulbs
____Cob-webs
____Clean doorknobs and light switches—if they need to be wiped down, do it!

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The Front Door

____Burnt-out light bulbs
____Cob-webs
____Clean doorknobs and light switches—if they need to be wiped down, do it!
____Loose screws or creaky hinges on doors
____Areas where plants or flowers could be added to make the house look more inviting
____Make sure the house number is new and sharp looking.
____Make sure the porch light and doorbell are both working.
____Repaint the front door and buy a more modern, attractive door handle if necessary. If your budget allows, install a brand new, updated front door.
____Clean the windows and curtains thoroughly…the front entrance should be an invite to enjoy the rest of the house.
____Invest in a new "Welcome" floor mat, and keep it stored during non-showing times, so that it does not get messy during your family's day-to-day activities.

The Foyer

____Burnt-out light bulbs
____Cob-webs
____Clean doorknobs and light switches—if they need to be wiped down, do it!
____Loose screws or creaky hinges on doors
____Areas where plants or flowers could be added to make the house look more inviting
____ Keep the light on for a more inviting look.
____Clear away all personal clutter, such as shoes, jackets or toys.
____Consider setting out a plant or hanging basket of colorful flowers to welcome prospective buyers.
____Clear the coat closet, and make sure that it is clean. Make sure closets look spacious at all times! Repaint the inside if walls are badly smudged with marks that will not come off.

The Kitchen

____Burnt-out light bulbs
____Cob-webs
____Clean doorknobs and light switches—if they need to be wiped down, do it!
____Loose screws or creaky hinges on doors
____Areas where plants or flowers could be added to make the house look more inviting
____Clean the exterior and interior of all appliances, including the refrigerator, stove, dishwasher and microwave.
____Replace any filters with new ones, and if you have overhead suction fan, make sure it is also clean and working.
____Put all your dishes away.
____Make sure the garbage disposal and compactor, if any, are clean and that they do not smell. To re move odors, drop a dishwashing tab down the disposal and turn it on. These tabs will leave the sink area smelling clean, fresh and new!
____Remove magnets and other decorations from the refrigerator.
____If possible, place fresh flowers or a bowl of fresh fruit on the kitchen table.
____Clean sinks and all countertop surfaces. Leave only a couple sharp looking, newer appliances and generic decorative items.
____If your faucet is older, consider replacing it. And leaky faucets should always be repaired!
____Make sure the sink is spotless!
____The plumbing under sink should be clean and not rusted.
____Clean the stove hood filter—you would be amazed at how many potential buyers check this out!
____Polish and clean cabinets, so that they shine. Consider painting the inside of cabinets, too.
____Clean all floors and make sure rugs are clean and have a stationary back, so that potential buyers do not slip on loose floor coverings.
____Clean the tops of shelves—people look at these, too!
____Keep trash cans under the sink or in another hidden spot, and burn a lemon candle for a really clean scent.
____Wash all curtains and clean any mini-blinds. Make sure that natural light can come in—natural sun rays make any room look bigger!

Prepare Your House To Sell

The Dining Room

____Burnt-out light bulbs
____Cob-webs
____Clean doorknobs and light switches—if they need to be wiped down, do it!
____Loose screws or creaky hinges on doors
____Areas where plants or flowers could be added to make the house look more inviting
____Vacuum and deep clean carpets or polish wooden floors.
____Wash all windows and clean window coverings.
____Repaint and make sure walls are clean and neat in appearance.

The Family Room

____Burnt-out light bulbs
____Cob-webs
____Clean doorknobs and light switches—if they need to be wiped down, do it!
____Loose screws or creaky hinges on doors
____Areas where plants or flowers could be added to make the house look more inviting
____Remove any excessive family photos and all clutter. The room should look friendly, inviting and like a fun place to hang out. But, it should not look too lived in.
____Clean windows, carpets and all furniture. Make sure the room smells fresh, not like sweaty children, dirty animals or rotten food.

The Living Room

____Burnt-out light bulbs
____Cob-webs
____Clean doorknobs and light switches—if they need to be wiped down, do it!
____Loose screws or creaky hinges on doors
____Areas where plants or flowers could be added to make the house look more inviting
____Clean windows, carpets and all furniture. Then, keep the lights on and curtains drawn open.
____ Make sure the room is clean and that there are no smudges or dirt marks on the walls or ceiling. Watch for cracks and water stains, too.
____Try to take a minimalist approach, so that the room appears larger. Keep a few key pieces of furniture and a couple decorative vases or wall hangings.
____Remove all family photos or personal clutter.
____If you have a fireplace and you will be returning to the house immediately after the showing, light a fire. It will create a homey, cozy feel for your guests.

The Bedrooms

____Burnt-out light bulbs
____Cob-webs
____Clean doorknobs and light switches—if they need to be wiped down, do it!
____Loose screws or creaky hinges on doors
____Areas where plants or flowers could be added to make the house look more inviting
____Clean all windows, carpets and walls.
____Remove posters from the walls to enhance the spacious look of a room.
____Remove all clutter! This includes clothing, toys and other personal items. Pack what you can and store the rest! Leave only the necessities in dresser drawers. Again, use minimalists approach so that rooms appear larger. Take out any excessive furniture that makes bedrooms look crowded.
____Make sure closet rods and shelves are sturdy. And do not forget to clean the closets! Closets should always look spacious. You might also consider installing a few shelves (available at house and discount retailers), so that closets look more useful. Make up all the beds with gorgeous com forters and coordinate with matching accessories.

Prepare Your House To Sell

The Bathrooms

____Burnt-out light bulbs
____Cob-webs
____Clean doorknobs and light switches—if they need to be wiped down, do it!
____Loose screws or creaky hinges on doors
____Areas where plants or flowers could be added to make the house look more inviting
____CLEAN toilets, sinks and flooring to get rid of mineral build-up and rust spots, mildew and any other messes. You can find any variety of fine cleaning products at Target or Wal-Mart (make sure, though, that you have plenty of ventilation when using bleach or other strong smelling chemicals).
____Make sure the lights all work. Replace any dim light bulbs.
____Replace a mildewed shower curtain with a chic coordinated neutral-colored one, and hide tooth brushes, soap and other personal items. Your potential buyers do not want to think of you grooming yourself in their future house!
____Replace faucets if necessary with attractive, newer faucets.
____Make sure the towels are fresh and that soap looks new.
____Make sure you have a new roll of toilet tissue out.
____Use a fabric skirt to hide unsightly plumbing.
____If you have any sliding glass enclosures, make sure they are completely spotless.
____Remove any bath mats or kiddy stick-ons from the tub.
____If possible, use plush bath towels and rugs, and coordinate with solid colors.
____Install new toilet and seat covers to replace old ones.
____For a fresh scent, place a fresh vas of flowers or a bowl of potpourri in bathrooms.
____Remove any prescription medicines from the medicine cabinet.
____Use a cute lamp or modern light fixture to enhance your bathroom's look.
____Re-grout if necessary.
____Keep the light on and windows open (or just open curtains if it is too cold outside to open the windows).
____If you have a Jacuzzi or spa, make sure it works properly.

The Attic/Basement

____Burnt-out light bulbs
____Cob-webs
____Clean doorknobs and light switches—if they need to be wiped down, do it!
____Loose screws or creaky hinges on doors
____Areas where plants or flowers could be added to make the house look more inviting
____Clean windows, flooring and walls.
____ Clear the stairways.
____ Clean any appliances including heaters, furnace, etc.
____ Replace any bad light bulbs.
____ Pack what you can and neatly straighten any remaining boxes or items.
____If either your attic or your basement is a second family room or recreation room, make sure all furniture is clean and freshly scented with Febreeze or Bounce sprays. And leave only generic decorative items on display.

The Garage

____ Clearing out as much clutter as possible. Stack boxes neatly and don't leave anything lying out that could present a danger.
____Remove oil stains.
____Replace burnt-out light bulbs.
____Make sure shelves are sturdy.
____Make sure the garage door and opener work correctly.
____If possible, air out your garage by leaving the door open before a showing, so that musty smells have a chance to vanish (do the same with basements).

Prepare Your House To Sell

The Laundry Room

____Burnt-out light bulbs
____Cob-webs
____Clean doorknobs and light switches—if they need to be wiped down, do it!
____Loose screws or creaky hinges on doors
____Areas where plants or flowers could be added to make the house look more inviting
____Make sure the area is not cluttered. Put away nonessentials.
____Clean the outside and inside of the washer and dryer.
____No clutter should be exposed, especially dirty laundry.

Good Seller Checklist

____ Be honest about the true condition of your house.
____Work with your real estate agent. Ask for feedback, recommendations, and opinions.
____Be creative in selling your house including any marketing tactics.
____Be friendly and accommodating to buyer requests.
____Leave the premises as much as possible

Showing Checklist

____ Have Clorox wipes handy in the bathrooms and kitchen. Wipe clean counters, floors, toilet, sinks, doorknobs and fixtures.
____Have a survey sheet asking buyers what they liked and didn't like about your house.
____Open windows to keep fresh air and natural light come in.
____Turn on lights everywhere.
____Prepare a nice tray of snack and juice for your buyers.
____Keep fireplace on if it is practically possible.
____Fluff the sofa pillows.
____Use attractive bed spreads and comforters
____Set the table with fine china
____Have new, plush solid towels displayed in the bathrooms
____Hide your personal toiletries.
____Hide all the clutter in your Daily Repository Box
____Keep all your valuables, laptops, and personal financial documents locked away.
____Take out your new Welcome Mat.
____If with pets, keep it locked away with sign outside door.
____Make a quick tour of all rooms – no clutter on floor, everything is clean, neat and organized.
____Don't cook anything with smell that could linger on.
____Make sure the backyard and front yard is clean and free of debris.

Tools You Need

____Boxes, bins or laundry baskets to store away stuff
____Pen and paper to take notes
____Storage bin to hold supplies
____Disposal gloves
____Sponges
____Paint brushes or disposal brushes
____Ziploc and trash bags
____Brooms and dust pan
____Paper towels
____Glass and wood cleaner and Clorox/Lysol wipes
____Degreaser, lime, and rust remover
____Screwdrivers
____Under bed storage boxes to keep daily papers.

Prepare Your House To Sell

VIII. Sample Feedback Letter

You can use this letter to get feedback from your prospective home buyers:

Dear Home Buyer:

Thank you very much for taking the time to come to view the house. We would greatly appreciate if you can give us any feedback about your experience while looking around. Please feel free to write in any suggestions, comments, or criticisms. Tell us what you liked and didn't like. We are always looking for ways to improve the house and the way we show the house to prospective buyers like you.

Please write down your comments below:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Thank you and Have a Nice Day!
(Your signed name here)

X. What Do You Think?

We hope that this manual has helped you solve your house selling problems and needs.

Please help us make this manual better! If it has met or exceeded your expectation, please let us know. More importantly, if you feel that we should have written other topics or have errors or typos, we would be grateful if you would let us know! Of course, any useful information and other comments are most welcome!

To thank you for your help, we will send you the updated copy of this manual when it becomes available.

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