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Market Preparation Guide



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Shining Some Light on the Atlanta Real Estate Scene

Getting the House Ready to Sell

Introduction

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

It is important to think of your house as a marketable commodity. Property. Real estate. Your aim is to get others to visualize it as **their** potential home, not yours. Failing to consciously make this decision, can inadvertently create a situation and ultimately prolong the sale of your property.

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

De-Personalize the Property

"De-personalizing" your home is necessary because you want buyers to see it as their potential home. If a prospective homebuyer sees your family photos hanging on the wall, it shows your brand in the home and can remove their personal illusions about owning the house. So, box family photos, sports trophies, collectible items, knick-knacks, and souvenirs, and keep them in a rented storage facility for a few months.

Do not store these items in the attic, basement, garage or a closet. The reason is because the next step in preparing a house to sell is to remove "clutter."

Uncluttering the House

Removing clutter can prove to be one of the hardest things to do because of your emotional attachment to everything in the house. After years of living in the same home, the homeowner may not recognize the clutter as a buyer will. Try this. Pretend you are a buyer. Have a friend help point out areas of clutter; try not to get defensive. If you're still not sure, have your agent help you.

Kitchen Clutter

Typically, the easiest place to start removing clutter is the kitchen. First, remove everything off the counters. Even the toaster. Keep the toaster in a cabinet and take it out only when you use it. Find a place in cabinets and drawers where you can put everything. If you find that you do not have enough space, clean them out. Put your rarely used kitchen items in boxes and then in storage.

Remember, homebuyers will open all your cabinets and drawers, especially in the kitchen. They are going to want to make sure there is enough room for their "stuff." If your kitchen cabinets, pantries, and drawers look completely full, it sends a negative message to the buyer and does not promote an image of abundant storage space. You want to show as much "empty space" as possible.

Remember, if you have a "junk drawer," get rid of the junk. If you have a rarely used crock pot, blender, or bread-maker, put it in storage. Go through cabinets and drawers and do the same. Create open spaces.

If you have an abundant amount of food crammed onto the shelves or in the pantry, begin using them - especially canned goods. Cans are heavy and you don't want to be hauling them to a new house, anyway - or paying a mover to do so. Let the food items on your shelves determine your menus and use up as much as you can. If that doesn't appeal to you, donate them.

Beneath the sink is also critical. Make sure the area under the sink is as empty as possible, removing all extra cleaning supplies. It is a good idea to scrub the area down, and determine if there are any signs of water leaks that may cause a homebuyer to hesitate in buying your home.

Closet Clutter

Closets are notorious for "clutter-cramming." Extra clothes, extra shoes, old athletic equipment, and even shoe boxes filled with "stuff" can typically be found there. Don't forget, you want to show as much space as possible, so box these items for a few months and send them to storage.

Furniture Clutter

Homebuyers like to see space when they visit a home. If you have a lot of furniture in a room, remember that you want to give the illusion of plenty of space.

Storing extra, bulking pieces of furniture is a good idea. If you like, tour some builders' models to see how they place furniture in the model homes, so you'll get some ideas on what to remove and what to leave in your house.

Storage Area Clutter

Garages, basements, attics, and sheds accumulate not only clutter, but junk. These areas should be sparse so that buyers can imagine what they would do with the space.

Again, you should remove anything that is not essential and take it to the storage area. Or have a garage sale and make a little extra cash.

-- The Rest of the Home's Interior --

Plumbing and Fixtures

Sink fixtures should all look shiny and new. If cleaning them isn't enough, buy new ones where needed. It is not necessary to buy fancy faucets, the inexpensive ones can do just as well, and they are fairly easy to install. Check all the hot and cold water knobs. Make sure they are easy to turn and that the faucets do not leak. If they do, replace the washers. It is not a difficult task.

Afterwards, check your faucets. Make sure you have good water pressure and that there are no stains on any of the porcelain. If you have difficult stains to remove, you may want to think of hiring a cleaning crew to go through and clean your home on a one-time basis. They will probably have better ways of getting rid of stains than you will.

Ceilings, Walls and Painting

Check the ceilings for water stains. It's common for old leaks to leave stains, even after you have repaired it. Of course, if there is a leak, you will have to get it repaired, regardless if it's a plumbing problem or a roof leak.

Do the same for walls. Looking for not only stains, but also areas where dirt has accumulated in places you may not have noticed. Not only that, you may have an out-dated color scheme.

Painting is an excellent investment when selling your home. Usually, it's not too expensive, and often you can do the job yourself. When choosing colors, base your choice on what would appeal to the widest possible number of buyers. You should almost always choose an off-white color because white helps your rooms appear bright and spacious.

Carpet and Flooring

Hire a good carpet cleaner. You probably will not want to replace your carpet unless it appears old and worn, or is definitely an outdated style. However, if you do choose to replace it, do so with something inexpensive in a fairly neutral color.

You should repair or replace broken floor tiles, but do not spend a lot of money on anything. Remember, you are not making improvements for yourself. You just want to move. Your goal is simple. Limit any negative impressions upon those who may want to purchase your property.

Windows and Doors

Check all of your windows. Make sure they open and close easily, if they don't, a spray of WD40 often helps. Make sure the windows are free from cracks and broken window-panes. Replace any you find before you begin showing your home.

The same goes for the doors - make sure they open and close properly, without creaking. If they do, a spray with WD40 on the hinges usually makes the creak go away. Door-knobs should turn easily, and should be cleaned and polished to look sharp. Buyers will go from room to room, testing doors and windows, so you need to do everything necessary to create a positive impression.

Odor Control

If you smoke, you might want to minimize smoking indoors while selling your home. Ozone sprays, such as "Ozium", will help to remove odors without creating a masking odor.

Pets create odors. You may have become used to it, but those with more finely tuned olfactory senses will notice it immediately. If you have cats, be sure to empty the litter boxes daily. You can also purchase special products that help control kitty litter odor, or use a brand of kitty litter such as "Fresh Step". If you have dogs, try keeping the dog outdoors as much as possible. Sprinkling carpet freshener on the carpet on a periodic basis is also a good idea.

Costs of Repairs

When doing repairs, do not make it expensive. Stay away from remodeling. If possible, use the money from your savings to pay for any repairs and improvements - do not charge up credit cards or obtain new loans. Keep in mind that part of selling a house is also preparing to buy your next home. You do not want to do anything that will taint your credit scores or jeopardize your ability to qualify for your next mortgage.

The Exterior of the House

It's true, a homebuyer's first impression will be based on their exterior view of the house, but unless there is a major project involved, we suggest working on the interior first. The reasons are practical. It is typically easier to start working on the interior of the house. Also, working on the inside first develops a proper mind set that is needed for selling - for example, start thinking of your "home" as a marketable commodity.

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

Landscaping

Your landscaping should be at least average for the neighborhood. If it isn't, pick up a few new bushes and plant them. Do not plant any trees. Buying mature trees will be too expensive, and you will not get back your investment. Planting immature trees will not add much to the appearance value of the home.

It's a good idea to buy mature colorful flowers and plant them, provided you have an area for them. They help create a vibrant and colorful first impression. Do not buy seeds or bulbs and plant them. You don't want a patch of brown earth for homebuyers to view.

Keep your lawn evenly cut, freshly edged, well raked, well watered, and free of brown patches. If you have problems with your lawn, it would be a good idea to take care of them before working on the interior of your home. The reason is because certain areas may need to be re-sod, and you want to give it a chance to grow so that re-sod areas are not an obvious eyesore. Also, you will want to give the fertilizer enough time to be effective.

House Exterior

To paint or not to paint? Look at your house from across the street. Does it look tired and faded? If the answer is yes, a paint job may be what is needed. It is often an excellent investment and can really spruce up the appearance of a house, adding dollars to offers from potential homebuyers.

When choosing a color, stay away from the unusual. Pick a color that fits well in your neighborhood. Of course, the color also depends on the style of the house, too. For some reason, different shades of yellow seem to attract many homebuyers, whether it is in the trim or the basic color of the house.

Now for the roof, if you know your house has a roof that is old and leaky, replace it. If you don't replace a leaky roof, you are going to be required to disclose it and the buyer will want a new roof, anyway. But if this is not the case, wait and see what the home inspector says. Why spend money if you don't have to?

The Back Yard

The back yard should be kept clean. If you have a spa or pool, keep it freshly maintained and clean. For those that have dogs, be sure to pick up after them. If you have swing sets for your kids, it probably makes more sense to remove them because they take up room.

Remember, you want your back yard to appear as spacious as possible, especially in newer homes where the yards are not as large.

The Front Door & Entryway

Because it is the entryway into the house, it is very important that the front door looks great. If the door needs to be refinished or repainted, make sure to get that done. And, of course, polish the door fixture so it gleams.

Remove any plaque or shingle with your family name on it, even if it is just on your mailbox. You can always re-hang it once you move. Also, get a new plush door mat. This is something else you can bring with you once you move.

Check to make sure the lock works easily and the key fits properly, if it does not, replace it. When a homebuyer and agent come to visit your home, the key from the lock box is used to unlock the door. If there is trouble working the lock, it could send a negative first impression to the prospective homebuyer.

Seller's Home Inspection

One last item for consideration is getting your home inspected *before* you put it on the market. There are a few good reasons for this.

First of all, it will let you know if there are any discrepancies that you will need to address, allowing you time to consider your options and take care of them before you put your home on the market. rather than rushing to find a contractor on short notice!

Next, if you address all the concerns in the report, you can show the inspection report to potential Buyers, which may influence the Buyer to purchase your home without performing an additional inspection (thus saving them some money). Often, Buyers won't place an offer on a home that they feel may not fare well during the inspection process for fear of wasting money on an inspection for a home they will not actually purchase.

It can also give you a second opinion, which may be very useful if the Buyer's inspector is fast and loose with potential defects in your home, which occasionally happens!

Summary

Keep in mind that your home is a product that needs to be merchandised properly to get the highest possible sale price.

By implementing the strategies outlined in this guide, you will help to shorten the length of time your house will be on the market, as well as maximize your selling price.