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8 Tricks to Sell Your Home Faster

By Kathryn Elizabeth Tuggle

There's no question about it, it's not a home-seller's market right now.

Previously-owned homes sales fell 9.6% to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 4.88 million in February, according to [National Association of Realtors](#). The report also showed home prices slid to their lowest level since 2002, giving home buyers the upper hand.

If you're looking to sell your home, you'll need to pull out all the stops to make your home appealing to buyers.

If your house has been on the market for a while, or even if it's just been listed, there are ways to make your property stand out from the rest. We checked in with experts to find eight things that will get your house moving.

Put Up Walls

Sometimes refreshing the look of your place can be as simple as constructing a wall to create new rooms, says Frances Katzen, managing director at Prudential Douglas Elliman in New York.

"The creation of an extra 'space' is considerably meaningful to property value," says Katzen.

Putting up an extra wall to create another bedroom or extra room can increase property value for a one-bedroom apartment by as much as a third, according to Katzen.

"Some of my clients bought a big space and broke down extra bedrooms or dining rooms to give the place an open aesthetic, but what we find is that if you put back those old walls and re-incorporate that old bedroom, you instantly up the value."

Paint the Walls

Painting your walls white is a simple and cheap way to make your home more appealing.

“I once sold an apartment where the woman loved pink, and all her walls were pink. But because buyers didn’t think that reflected their idea of what they should find, the apartment was hard to sell. Once we painted the walls white, we sold the apartment within a week,” says Katzen.

Paint really influences first impressions; prospective buyers want to imagine their new house as a blank canvas that they can fill with their own images, colors and art.

“A big component of what we understand to be open, light and airy is conveyed through the creation of open space and light. Paint is that vehicle to open and modernize a room,” says Katzen. “We encourage people to paint their walls white so they will reflect that fresh feeling.”

Up Your Curb Appeal

“First impressions are everything—even for houses,” says Fiona Dogan, a realtor with Sotheby's International Realty in Westchester.

If a buyer drives up to a house and loves the exterior, they are much more likely to want to go inside.

Home sellers should fill in any cracks in their sidewalks, replace bricks and freshen up peeling paint to get their homes moving, says Dogan.

“If you don’t do these things, the buyer will think you don’t care. It’s a subconscious thing. The buyer will think, ‘If they couldn’t even be bothered to paint or plant shrubs, what have they done with the boiler or piping that I’m never going to see?’”

If the [lawn](#) is nicely tailored, it tells a buyer that the owner truly cares about the house.

“Someone who maintains their yard is someone whose house brings them joy and happiness, and buyers can sense this,” says Dogan. “Also, for the small percentage of buyers out there who are active gardeners, it can be a big selling point.”

Once a buyer has made it up the front steps, clean (or new) windows and a nicely-painted door with solid hardware is important.

“Make sure the trim all the way around the door is done nicely with a nice accent color, and that the door is freshly painted,” says Todd Recknagel, president of [Mr. Handyman](#), the largest employer of handymen in the U.S. “When they grab that door handle and open it, if you’ve spent decent money on it, they will feel like the rest of the house has good hardware from that first impression.”

Remove Clutter

Take down pictures and remove excess books or pillows to make rooms feel modern and fresh.

Removing clutter is especially important in living spaces or bedrooms so they don’t feel too busy. If you want to go a step further, you could even rearrange furniture to make it more streamlined, suggests Katzen. “Something as simple as positioning two chairs across from one another can really warm a space up and make your living area seem less cluttered.”

If you have anything in your home that impedes a view or a window in any way, remove it—even shades or blinds.

“Don’t leave big bookshelves up that may be blocking natural light from a window, and don’t leave your shades halfway down. It looks sloppy,” says Katzen.

Don’t strip out all your personal stuff from every room—an artist’s print is a great thing to display, but when you get into thousands of pictures of your children or an entire family tree on the wall, you could have a problem, Katzen says.

Definitely put away collections of any kind that may be taking up space on endtables or shelves.

“I once had a client who had a huge collection of glass figurines all over her [living room](#). It took her a week and a half to wrap them up, but after she did, she sold the apartment within a week. People felt the space was fresh again, and that’s what you have to convey,” says Katzen.

Clean Bathrooms

“[Home buyers] want to see that the bathroom, where they spend the most intimate portions of their lives, is almost clinically clean,” says Dogan. “If there is a general impression of a lack of cleanliness, people equate it to slovenly owners who never cleaned the filters in their air conditioner or their gutters or anything else.”

If you're staging your home for an open house, Dogan suggests putting away toiletries. A half-used tube of anything is grossly unappealing and anything that is in daily use like toothpaste or hairspray should also be hidden.

"It reminds a buyer that someone else lives here, and someone else is [cleaning](#) their teeth in that sink. You have to neutralize the home so it's more like a show home and the buyer can transport themselves there," Dogan says.

If your bathroom needs more than just your moisturizer cream put away, Recknagel says you can put new knobs on bathroom fixtures or give your bathroom tile a new epoxy cote to make it shine. If your toilet has seen better days, you can buy a new one and have it installed for around \$200.

"If you've got new fixtures, shiny tile, and a new toilet, when someone walks into that bath, it might look like a brand new builders' bath," he says.

Scent the Rooms

"It may sound silly, but going that extra step with some kind of room spray or baking cookies in the kitchen really goes a long way to help people feel like it's a home and not a hotel," says Dogan.

In order to keep from offending sensitive noses, avoid stronger scents like patchouli or lavender, and opt instead for fresh scents like cotton or vanilla. But avoid incense at all costs, Dogan says, because it can sometimes be overpowering.

"A nice smell shows the seller went an extra mile to stage their home, and makes it feel cozy. Of course on rare occasions people will say, 'I hate those! I am allergic to candles!' but in general there's a positive impression."

Update the Kitchen

A redone kitchen will easily bring you two to three times what you paid for it when it comes time to sell the home, says Dogan.

"The kitchen is the heart of the house, and it needs to look the part. You don't have to fly in tile from Brazil and marble from Africa to do it right-- white cabinetry and granite countertops will be enough to help you make your money back in no time."

Psychologically, a new kitchen and new appliances can make a big difference to a buyer even if they aren't a cook, she says. Just like no one wants to think about your toothpaste in their sink, no one wants to think about your leftovers molding in their fridge.

"It might be difficult to reconcile putting \$15,000 into a kitchen in a house that you're moving out of, but the kitchen is a deficit that you need. It's got the highest payback," says Recknagel.

If you can't spend that much, then smaller things like painting cabinets, switching out old knobs and handles or topping of cabinetry with crown [molding](#) are great options, Recknagel adds.

Fix Up the Basement

"With the basement, the biggest thing is decluttering," says Recknagel. "A lot of people say, 'Oh it's the basement, who cares?' But really all you need to do is organize your junk and do some painting."

Painting your basement floor a battleship gray color to cover up stains is a good place to start, suggests Recknagel. Limit what you have on shelves, and install new shelves if necessary.

If your lighting is not up to par in your basement, consider putting in real light fixtures. A prospective buyer shouldn't have to go down five or six steps and then fumble around in the dark for a pullchain, says Recknagel.

Although a basement rec room may be a selling point for some buyers, Recknagel says not to go overboard with sprucing things up because you might not get back what you put into it.

"They just need to see a clean place and have a positive, brightly-lit experience," says Recknagel.