



Quick Start

Home Selling Guide

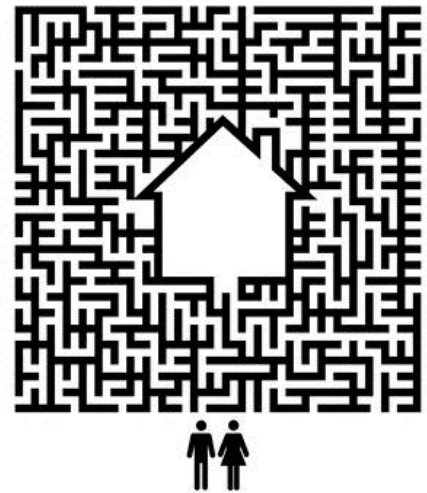


I Want to Sell My Home: How do I get Started?

The process of selling a home can be broken down into concrete steps. If taken in order, these steps lead to a successful conclusion. Skimping on any of the steps – trying to take shortcuts – may lead to problems when problems are the last thing you want to encounter – during the escrow period.

We believe in the power of the checklist and have created one especially for the home seller.

First, though, let's dig into each step and discuss its importance.



Clean and Declutter

Before you even think of having real estate agents tour the home, get the heavy lifting out of the way. If you're confused about what to remove from your home and what should stay, keep in mind that your aim is to make rooms look larger and brighter. Oversized furniture typically make a room look smaller, so store the big stuff and rearrange the smaller furniture to make the room look open and airy.



Go through each room and remove anything that doesn't fit the room's purpose. For instance, exercise equipment doesn't advertise that your office is a place to get work done, so move the treadmill into storage. Do the same with baby paraphernalia in the living room: Either move baby items to the nursery or store them while the house is on the market.

When you clean the house, clean everything, from the drapes to the rugs and carpet.

Curb Appeal

One of the more familiar real estate buzzwords, curb appeal simply describes how appealing your home is from the curb. This is the buyer's initial vantage point and typically determines whether she wants to see the inside of the home.

At the very least, give the landscaping a good cleaning and pruning, green up the lawn and keep it mowed. A fresh coat of paint on the front door creates a focal point for the buyer when she lands at the curb in front of your home.



Consider Staging the Home

Studies have shown that staging a home allows it to sell quicker and for more money. While you don't need to go all out and hire the most expensive interior decorator in town, following some basic staging advice will go a long way toward a quick sale and big bucks.

Make Necessary Repairs

To avoid bumps in the home selling road, have your home professionally inspected before putting it on the market. Yes, the buyer will most likely have it inspected as well, but a pre-sale home inspection gives you knowledge of items in need of repair that may slow down or even halt the deal.

At the very least, fix those items that you are aware of, such as dripping faucets, running toilets and holes in window screens.



Hire an Agent

Sure, folks sell their houses on their own all the time. Unless you have a lot of spare time to devote to the process, however, the marketing of your biggest lifetime investment should be left to a professional real estate agent.

Finding the right real estate agent for your situation is the biggest challenge, but we have a checklist for finding an agent to help you out.

Create a Brag Book

The brag book is something you can leave on the kitchen counter for buyers to look through as they tour your home. In it you can place your home's flyer, a page that includes the neighborhood's comparable sales, and a listing of the area's schools, parks and other amenities. Add a sheet that highlights any of the home's custom features and, finally, a list of all repairs or replacements made with copies of invoices.

Use the checklist below to remain organized during the initial phase of getting your home ready for the market.



Checklist for Preparing to Sell Your Home

Declutter

- Clear off kitchen and bathroom counters, leaving only decorative items.
- Clean out and rearrange medicine cabinet, closets, cupboards, pantry and drawers to make them look roomier.
- Remove large furniture and other items that make rooms appear small and cramped.
- Rearrange rooms to advertise their purpose (remove exercise equipment from the office).
- Remove personal items such as family photos, refrigerator clutter, certificates and awards, books and DVD collections.

Clean the Home Thoroughly

- Remove odors.
- Wash or paint the walls.
- Wash the windows.
- Launder or dry clean rugs and drapery.
- Clean out the fireplace.
- Make the bathroom and kitchen sparkle.
- Clean carpets.
- Clean baseboards.



Increase Curb Appeal

- Make the front porch look as inviting as possible.
- Fertilize, edge and mow the lawn.
- Rake debris from the beds and add fresh mulch.
- Consider new landscape plants that add a pop of color to the yard.



Next Steps

- Hire a home stager or do it yourself.
- Order a home inspection.
- Make the necessary repairs.
- Interview real estate agents.
- Create a brag book.



What Happens After I Sign the Listing Agreement?

It's done. You've chosen a real estate agent to help you sell your home, and you've signed the listing agreement. Your life is about to be consumed with keeping the house tidy and, hopefully, lots of phone calls from agents with buying clients just dying to see your home.

Behind the scenes, your agent has his hands full with a flurry of activity, from getting your home into the Multiple Listing Service database to implementing his marketing plan. While real estate customs vary across the country, here's a general breakdown of what you can expect after you sign the listing agreement.

Pre-Showing Period

Immediately after signing the listing agreement, your agent may suggest ways to improve the home's curb appeal and stage the interior to appeal to the greatest number of potential buyers. While you get busy making improvements and needed repairs, your agent has her own tasks to complete. Here is just a handful of things the agent does after you sign the listing agreement:

- Verify the square footage of the house and the lot size.
- Ensure she has the name of the homeowners association and that the monthly fees are accurate.
- Get an extra house key for the lockbox.
- Talk to you about whether your mortgage is assumable and whether you will consider some form of owner-financing.
- Discuss showings with you – how they work, how to guard your valuables and what to do with pets – and make note of any particular times that may be inconvenient to show the home.
- If the home requires no staging, she will take photos and videos for inclusion in marketing materials. Otherwise, she will come back when the cleaning and staging is complete.



After your agent leaves your house she will most likely return to her office and arrange to have the sign put in your window or yard, determine a good day to hold the broker's open house and load all the information about your home into the Multiple Listing database. Once the home is in this database, your home is officially on the market. Other agents have access to the information and will start showing the home.



While the Home is on the Market

While the home is on the market you'll be called on periodically to sign paperwork, which varies depending on where you live in the U.S. Most sellers must fill out various disclosures – forms that tell the buyer anything you know about the home that may bear on their decision to purchase. In California this form is called the TDS, for Transfer Disclosure Statement. In Connecticut it's known as the Residential Property Condition Disclosure Report.

Whatever it's called in your state, treat it with all the seriousness it demands. Seller disclosure is your most important duty when you sell your home. It may seem that by being brutally honest about known problems you may be sabotaging the sale, but you are actually protecting yourself from future liability.



Depending on how strict disclosure laws are in your state, here are some of the items you may need to disclose:

- Any death that has occurred on the property. In California, there is a caveat – the death must have occurred within the past three years.
- If the roof or windows leak.
- Problems in the neighborhood. Partying teenagers and barking dogs are two common nuisances if they happen on a consistent basis.
- Sexual predators living in the neighborhood. Some states require that you disclose to the seller how to access the state's database that lists the location of all registered sex offenders.

Your real estate agent will answer any questions on disclosure requirements in your state.

While the home is on the market, you will obviously need to keep it tidy and keep your valuables locked away. Leaving the home while it's being shown is a nuisance, but necessary if you hope to sell the home quickly.

Your agent should be communicating with you on a weekly basis during this time period, offering potential buyer feedback on the home and anything else you should know about.



The Offer to Purchase

This is the moment you've been waiting for – an offer to purchase the house. Who presents the offer to you varies according to the customs in your area. Sometimes the buyer's agent presents his client's offer, in other regions the listing agent obtains the offer from the buyer's agent and presents it for the agent. Either way, your agent will be there to answer any questions you may have.

You won't need to decide on the spot if you like the offer. Toward the back of the agreement is a clause that will let you know the offer's expiration date.

If you have more than one offer, your agent will help you sort through the similarities and differences to help you make an informed decision. Keep in mind that the highest offer may not be the best offer. Terms are important as well. You have three choices as to how to respond to an offer:

- Accept it as-is.
- Counter it with a higher price or different terms, or both.
- Reject it.

Your real estate agent will counsel you on these choices to help you make an informed decision.

Understanding the home sale process is important. Knowing the steps, and which one comes next, helps the homeowner relax through the process. Don't hesitate to ask your real estate agent for answers to any questions you may have.



How to Prepare for Your Open House

Real estate agents hold two types of open houses: one for other agents – sometimes called a “broker’s open” – and one for the public.



Preparing your house for both types of open houses is the same, with the exception of offering food at the broker’s open house. Real estate agents typically have a number of homes to view on their weekly tour so they tend to zoom through each one. Offering them food – which they love – slows them down long enough to take a closer look at your home. Ask your agent to plan and provide the food – he or she knows what works best.

The idea to keep in mind when preparing your home for an open house is that you want it to appear bigger, brighter and turnkey. Yes, it takes a lot of work, but the bonus is that the house will also be ready when it hits the market.

Open House Prep Checklist

Exterior

- Check the siding, stucco and paint. Fix any chips.
- Check all windows screens and replace or repair any with rips or tears.
- Clean out the gutters.
- Remove cobwebs.
- Wash the porch light cover.
- Ensure that the house numbers are easily visible.
- Trim trees and shrubs.
- Plant something that adds color to the landscape and front porch.
- Fertilize, edge and mow the lawn.
- Rake up all debris.
- Clean or paint the front door.



Interior

- Clean the walls and doors.
- Paint walls a neutral color.
- Declutter kitchen and bathroom counters, leaving only decorative items.
- Eliminate personal photographs and memorabilia from walls, tabletops, etc.
- Remove clutter from bookshelves, coffee and end tables, fireplace mantle, etc.
- Clean and organize all closets, cupboards and pantry.
- Rearrange furniture to make rooms appear larger.
- Ensure that each room advertises its purpose (an office looks like an office, etc.).
- Shampoo the carpets.
- Clean and wax floors.
- Wash inside and outside the windows.
- Scrub all surfaces in the bathrooms.
- Clean both the interior of the fireplace and the screen.
- Removing pet, smoking and infant odors.

Additional Considerations

- Purchase coordinating towels, shower curtains and throw rugs for bathrooms.
- Buy new rugs and curtains for the kitchen.
- Add some throw pillows for the beds.
- Consider extra lighting for dark spaces.
- Hide electric and cable cords.
- Lock up all valuables and prescription medications.
- Remove your pets from the home the day of the open house.
- Find a place for you and your family to hang out during the open house.
- Ensure that your real estate agent has flyers for attendees and that everyone signs the guestbook.
- If you don't have time to clean the house, hire a cleaning crew.
- Open the drapes and turn on all the lights the day of the open house.



The 3 Most Important Real Estate Documents You'll Sign

The process of purchasing a home can be summed up in five words: a huge pile of paperwork. Despite promises of becoming a paperless society, it seems the real estate industry hasn't yet caught up, and both buyers and sellers spend a lot of time with pen in hand.



It's easy to allow your mind to wander and your eyes to glaze over when your real estate agent sticks yet another form full of legalese in front of you. It's also dangerous – especially when confronted by one of the three most important real estate documents

in the home purchase process.

Let's take a look at these documents and why you should pay close attention to them.

Purchase Agreement

Invariably, the first question a homeowner has when handed a purchase agreement is: "How much?" Sure, the offering price is important, but there's a lot more lurking in the purchase agreement – and some of it is just as important as the money.

A few of the clauses you should scrutinize:

Earnest money deposit - As a seller, you'll want this amount to be high. As a buyer, you will want to pay as little as possible. The amount of the deposit, however, not only proves that the buyer is serious about completing the transaction, but also his or her financial solvency. As Trev E. Petersen of the Knudsen Law Firm in Lincoln, Neb. says, as a seller, would you "even consider selling to a person who does not have \$1,000 to put down on the house?" On the flip side, as a buyer: "If you cannot afford a \$1,000 earnest money deposit, should you even be considering the purchase?"

Financing contingency - The financing contingency allows the buyer to exit the transaction with no penalty if he or she can't obtain financing at the stated rate and terms. The contingency, like all of them, is time sensitive, meaning that the buyer has a limited amount of time to secure a promise from a lender. The promise is typically based on underwriting, so it is different from the preapproval process the buyer may have gone through prior to submitting the offer.



Sellers want to scrutinize the time element in this part of the contract. Since you'll be taking the home off the market during this period, ensure that it isn't protracted.

Dates - Every contingency in the purchase agreement has a corresponding time limit. There is also a stated date for closing and for possession of the home. Both parties need to pay close attention to all of these time limits, bearing in mind that "time is of the essence" in a real estate transaction.

Seller's Property Disclosure

Arguably one of the most commonly litigated real estate processes is the seller's property disclosure. Rules vary by state and even by region, but generally, a seller has a duty to fully disclose "the condition and information concerning the property known by the seller which materially affects the value of the property."



For the buyer, this form is a road map to future repairs. For the seller, if done honestly and thoroughly, it's a "CYR," (cover your rear end).

Buyers also have a duty during the process, and it's known as "due diligence." Part of this diligence involves becoming as informed as possible about the investment you are about to purchase.

This means you simply must read the seller's disclosure (or whatever it is called in your area). If you don't, and a pre-existing condition later rears its ugly and costly head, you have no legal recourse after the sale closes. Remember, that fresh coat of paint may just be a seller's way of increasing the home's curb appeal – or the paint could be acting as a bandage to cover water damage. Check the disclosures carefully.

Homeowners Association Documents

Purchasing a home that is governed by a homeowners association brings a whole new pile of paperwork to the process. The governing documents, known as the Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions, or CC&Rs for short, are extremely important reading material.

These documents will tell you if you can paint your house and, if so, what color. They contain pet restrictions, landscaping restrictions, parking rules and even whether or not you can fly a flag on your property. In essence, although you own your home, the CC&Rs dictate how you can use it.



Other documents in the package that bear scrutiny are the HOA meeting minutes, the budget, insurance information and the financial statements.

These documents don't exactly make for light, enjoyable reading, but it is vital that you read them thoroughly. Keep in mind that if the HOA isn't run properly, they may not have enough money in the reserve fund to pay for large repairs or maintenance projects. In these cases, they will levy an assessment on all homeowners. This assessment is mandatory, and failure to pay may result in fines, property liens and even foreclosure.

While every piece of paper put in front of you for your signature is important in a real estate transaction, these three deserve special scrutiny. A home is a lot more than four walls and a roof – it's an investment that requires due diligence on your part before agreeing to the purchase.



A Home Moving Checklist to De-Stress Your Move

Want to see your friends get real busy real fast? Tell them you need help packing and moving – it’s amazing the number of times you will hear, “Oh-I’m-sorry-but-I-have-to ...” So, plan on minimal help unless you hire someone. Even then, there’s a lot more to do than merely hiring a moving company.



The moving process can be downright overwhelming, but using the home moving checklist at the bottom of this page can help make the process easier.

Bins and Purge

You don’t necessarily need to run out and purchase a bunch of bins for this part of the process; big boxes will suffice. You’ll need three boxes, and if you have a lot of stuff, you’ll need three boxes for each room in the house. One box will be for items you wish to donate to charity, another for items you want to sell, and a final box for items to give away.

What to do With all Your Stuff

- **Donate:** While Goodwill Industries will pick up large furniture and appliances, Vietnam Veterans of America likes the smaller items, especially clothing.
- **Sell:** If you’ve decided a garage sale is just too much work but have items that you want to sell, consider Craigslist, eBay or Amazon.
- **Give away:** Many people and places will take items you no longer need. Consider giving blankets, sheets and towels to your local animal shelter or rescue organization. Hospitals may take old books and magazines. Homeless shelters may take extra food. Place a “curb alert” ad on Craigslist to let folks know that you’ve placed free items at your curb. **Tip:** Don’t list your phone number in your curb alert or you’ll have people phoning you to find out if the items are still on the curb.

Hire Movers or Do it Yourself?

DIY Moving

By far, the least expensive way to move your belongings from one point to another is by packing your own belongings, renting a truck, loading, and unloading it yourself. You



can also hire someone for help with part of the moving process, such as driving or loading the truck you have rented. You can find moving labor online at sites such as Craigslist, MovingHelp and U-Haul's Moving Helpers® service.

Tip: Keep in mind that many of the laborers you'll encounter on Craigslist and other sites may not have worker's compensation insurance coverage and you may be liable if they are injured on your property. Talk to your homeowner's insurance agent to determine if your policy covers this circumstance. If not, hire laborers who carry their own policies.

Hiring a Moving Company

Hiring someone to do all the packing and heavy lifting is expensive but may be necessary for a long-distance move. Finding the right moving company to fit your needs and budget may be the most time-consuming and challenging aspect of the entire move. It also happens to be the most important step.



Ask for referrals: Ask everyone you know for a referral to a good moving company. The consumer advocates at MovingScam.com claim that most of the complaints they receive are from consumers who used the Internet to find the mover. They also suggest:

- Choosing a company that has been in business, locally, for at least 10 years.
- Disregarding any company that won't give an in-person estimate.
- Avoiding moving companies that will sub-contract your job to other movers.
- Not hiring movers that give you a quote based on cubic feet.
- Avoiding any company that does not supply you with the "Your Rights and Responsibilities When You Move" booklet. It is a law that they do so.
- Asking each company for their Department of Transportation (DOT) and MC (Motor Carrier Authority) license numbers – these numbers can be used to research the company at SaferSys.org.

Request a quote: Request that the representative come to your home for the most accurate moving quote. Ask about any conditions that may cause the cost to escalate, such as additional mileage, weight restrictions, charges for homes with stairs, and add-



on costs for items such as bubble wrap and dollies. Find out how the mover deals with repairing, replacing or compensating for damaged items. Finally, ask for all of the information to be provided to you in writing.

Tip: Thursday through Monday moves, and those between June 15 and July 31, are typically more expensive.

Find references online: When you've settled on two or three moving companies, check websites like Yelp and Angie's List for reviews of local businesses written by people who have actually used the service. Also check to see if the business is listed in good standing with the Better Business Bureau.

Don't neglect checking the mover's licenses at SaferSys.org. You can even check the insurance each mover carries.

Sign the contract: Ensure that the contract clearly spells out the price you were quoted, pick-up and delivery dates, and all policies you discussed with the representative, including insurance, and that the contract is signed. Ask if they offer a tracking service and find out how to track your belongings as they are transported.

Tip: Most professional movers don't ask for a deposit up front. Never pay in full until you've received and checked all of your belongings.



Details

Tasks such as remembering to ask for time off from work to help facilitate the move; forwarding magazine subscriptions; and gathering school, veterinary and medical records for the new location can fall through the cracks during a major move. Keep a pad of paper handy and jot down these tasks as you think of them so they aren't forgotten.

Don't forget the essentials you'll need at the new house when you first arrive. This might include toilet paper, the coffee maker and coffee, pet food, snacks for the kids, toiletries, a complete place setting for each family member, towels, a shower curtain, the mover's written estimate and the lockbox you purchased for your valuables. This box should remain with you, not the movers.

Now that you know the basics, use our home moving checklist to keep you on track.



Home Moving Checklist

Two Months Before the Move:

- Create a timeline of tasks to do in preparation for the move.
- Sort through all of your belongings room-by-room, discarding, giving away or selling anything you won't be taking with you.
- Call the charity to pick up items you will be donating.
- Place ads for items you'll be selling or giving away.
- Hold a garage sale.
- Research moving companies and set appointments for them to visit and provide estimates.
- If you'll be doing the move yourself, reserve a truck and dollies and purchase boxes, tape and protective wrapping.

One Month Before the Move:

- Start using up perishable food.
- Confirm the details with your mover.
- Pack items that you don't use all the time, clearly labeling each box. Number each box and keep a separate written inventory of the contents of each one.
- File an official change of address with the post office.
- Ask your physician for copies of all medical records to give to your new health care provider.
- Arrange for your children's school records to be transferred to the new district.
- Ask your veterinarian to forward your pet's records to your new veterinarian or ask for copies to take with you.
- Call your current utility companies to have the services shut off the day after you move. Don't forget the cable company, newspaper delivery, gardener, pool person and home security company.
- Call the utility companies at your new destination to have utilities turned on the day before you arrive.

Two Weeks Before the Move:



- Purchase a box with a lock in which to keep your valuables, such as jewelry, prescription medications and the contents of your bank safety deposit box, during the move. Keep this box with you at all times – do not allow the movers to pack it.
- Notify your bank, employer, insurance company and any others who need to know of your new address and its effective date.
- Ensure that your pet is ready to travel. Will it need a crate? Gather up a leash, collar and food and water dishes if traveling by car.
- Start packing the items you won't need until you reach your new home.

Two Days Ahead:

- Defrost and clean the refrigerator/freezer if it's making the move with you.
- Assemble all the tools you'll need to take apart furniture.

The Day Before the Move:

- Pack suitcases with clothing for the first two to three days in the new location.
- Pack a box with the essentials you'll need immediately upon arrival at the new home.
- Unplug electronics so they're ready to pack. Tape each component's cords to the component so they aren't lost in the move.
- Disassemble furniture.
- Pack any remaining items.
- Purchase bottles of water for the movers, yourself and family members.

Moving Day:

- Verify that the movers are the ones you contracted to hire and that they have the correct address for delivery. Verify delivery time.
- If you are driving, give a friend or family member a copy of your itinerary.
- Arrive at the destination before the movers.

