



Preparing your home for the market



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Preparing your home for the Market

Now that your home is on the market, we have a lot of work already completed. Your agent has put together all the listing information for the MLS, taken and uploaded pictures, written descriptions, and done everything to set up the marketing campaign for your home. Now you have some work to do as well – namely, detailing and staging your home to give you the best possible chance of making a great impression on buyers.

Now you're on the market. You may feel that the hard part is over, since you've gotten all your documents signed and your agent has done all the work to get your home on the market.

Getting on the market, though, is just the start. It's like when you go on a long car ride: the first half hour is exciting and fun, and everyone's jabbering and listening to music and excited about the trip. And the end of the trip is exciting and fun, because you finally made it and the trip is over.

But that part in the middle? Not fun. That's the part where everyone gets bored and starts to nod off, except hopefully the driver, and eventually you start hearing the refrain "are we there yet???"

Selling a home is the same way. You get keyed up in the beginning, because you've finally made the decision to sell, signed agreements, and you're excited about getting the home sold. And you'll be energized at the closing too, because the whole process will be over, and you'll be eager to start the next part of your life.

But that part in the middle? Not fun. That's the part where you have to do some work getting the place into showing condition, and then keeping it that way so that you're prepared for last-minute buyer appointments. That's the part where you have to endure constant showings, allowing buyers and their agents to traipse through your home. That's the part where you have to keep on top of what's happening in the market, so that you can respond to any changing conditions. And just like the long car ride, you'll start to get impatient if you don't get an immediate offer, which does not actually happen very often. Instead of "Are we there yet?", you'll be asking your agent "Do we have offers yet?" It's not



easy. So be prepared.

What's your agent doing at this point in the process? Your agent might be scheduling broker or public open houses, sending out direct mail or email campaigns, or engaging in other marketing activities. Your agent should also be sending you weekly email updates on what's happening with the market and an analysis of the impact of our online marketing campaign. And your agent might be coordinating showings, getting feedback, and hopefully fielding and discussing offers with you.

So what should you be doing during this time? Essentially, your role right now is to be the custodian and manager of this property that you are trying to sell. You're the one on site every day, not the agent, so you should keep an eye out to make sure that the property stays in the same great shape it was on the first day it hit the market. You should also be staying in consistent contact with your agent, and

reading your weekly email updates so you can track what's happening in the market.

Conclusion: Staying Positive

Being on the market can be a very difficult time, so we want you to be prepared for it. Despite your agent's and your best efforts, you might not get a lot of showings, which is depressing. Or you might get lots of showings, which is exciting but exhausting with all the cleaning up, the strange people in your house, and the forced conversations. No one knows how long you will be on the market. Homes with professional, active agents that are priced right and look great still sometimes sit for longer than the sellers would like.

With that in mind, this *Orientation Guide* is all about trying to give you the best chance possible to get your home sold quickly, and the best experience possible during the occasionally anxious and stressful time that you're on the market.



How to “Detail” Your Listing

Last year, almost two-thirds of the sellers who listed a home for sale failed to find a buyer. One reason is that their homes did not “show well” to potential purchasers because sellers did not commit to making their home visually appealing. If you want to stand out in a crowded marketplace, you need to make sure you do everything possible to enhance the appeal of your home.

You would be surprised at the poor condition of most homes that are for sale. Some of them are truly atrocious, in a state of disrepair, filthy, or otherwise completely unsuitable for showings. But most are not that bad -- it’s just that they simply look “lived in.” After all, most of us don’t have the energy to keep our homes in tip-top condition every day. Even if we are basically clean and neat people, we’re probably not spending every weekend scrubbing tubs, washing windows, and cleaning light fixtures. And over time, we accumulate more and more things that end up filling the cabinets, closets, and countertops of our homes.

How do you do it? It’s simple, and it doesn’t cost a lot of money. Think about what you do when you’re trying to sell a car. Most days, you probably drive around in a car that is not exactly in that “new car” state: you’ve got old newspapers in the back seat, coffee stains on the dash, and a trunk full of stuff you’ve accumulated over time. But when you’re ready to sell it, you take it to the car wash to get a good cleaning, maybe a wax, and then you clean the car inside and out. You throw out the old coffee cups and papers, clean out the trunk, empty out the glove compartment, wipe down the seats and the dash, and vacuum the entire interior. You might even buff out scratches or repair dings.



It’s called “**detailing**” a car, and most car sellers will do it because they want to get the best price for their car, and they know that if they invest just a little bit of time and money they can enhance its appeal to potential buyers.

So if that’s the case, why do so few sellers “detail” their home before they try to sell it? After all, detailing a car can only earn you an extra few hundred dollars on the resale, but detailing a home can get you thousands of dollars more in your sale price, and also a potentially quicker sale.

That’s how most of us live, and there’s nothing wrong with that. But the way we live in our homes is different from the way we try to sell them. If you’re serious about selling your home, you can’t expect to impress buyers if you leave it in its “lived in” state. Instead, you need to make a commitment to enhancing its appeal so that every day it looks its best and attracts the right buyers.

Although you might not have experience preparing your home for sale, you probably have been in situations where you wanted to make a great “first impression.” When we go on first dates, we spend more time getting ready than for the average night out. When we go on job interviews, we dress a little better than the average day at the office. And when we’re selling a home, every day is an opportunity to make a first impression with our potential buyers.

Professional home sellers know this. That’s why developers and investors will always set up a “model home” for potential buyers, a home that is immaculate and smartly but sparingly furnished. They want new home buyers to imagine themselves living there, and know that most buyers cannot see through clutter or messiness.

That should be your goal – to enhance your home so that it looks like a developer’s “model home”. This doesn’t mean spending a lot of money in construction costs or new appliances. Most likely, you don’t need to do major home improvements – in fact, we advise most sellers to save their money rather than do significant upgrades, because you might spend a lot of money making changes that you like, but your potential buyers don’t.



Instead, you just need to detail your home: clean it, de-clutter it, and neutralize it. If you do that, you will absolutely see a difference in the way that buyers react to your home. And as a result, you're likely to sell your home faster, and for more money:

So move out everything you don't need for the next six months: all the clothes you're not going to wear, food you're not going to eat, supplies you're not going to use. Just clearing the clutter will make your home seem bigger, more open, and more appealing.

1. Clean it up

You would be shocked by how many homes for sale are not thoroughly cleaned. The owners are not even willing to make the commitment to do basic housework. But it's tough for a buyer to fall in love with a home that has dirty dishes in the sink, smudges on the walls, cobwebs in the front entrance, or encrusted dirt in the windows. Moreover, buyers want to know that the home was lovingly maintained by the current owners, because the condition of the home is a strong indicator of how well the owners have maintained mechanical, electrical, and other systems.

So now that you're selling the home, it's time to do a rigorous "spring cleaning" of the home. You can do it yourself, or hire professionals to do it for you, but you need to ensure that your home sparkles to potential buyers.



2. Clear it out.

Many lived-in homes are stuffed to the ceiling with too much stuff – too many clothes in the closet, too many knick-knacks on the shelves, too much food and cleaning supplies in the cabinet, and too much furniture stuffed into the rooms. Just clearing the clutter will make the rooms seem bigger, the closets and cabinets more spacious, and the home more inviting to buyers.

Think of it this way: if you're selling your home, that means you're eventually going to have to move. So if you're going to be moving, why not start right now? After all, moving can be a difficult chore, but it's much easier if you break it down into stages, the first stage being the "pre-move" in which you purge all the extra stuff you're not going to use for the next six months while your home is on the market.

3. Neutralize it.

Over the years, we collect photos and personal items that we proudly display on every shelf and wall of the house. Indeed, it's this "personalization" that makes the home ours: family pictures, religious symbols, college pennants, our kid's artwork. It takes all of us years to turn a house into a home.

But now that you're selling, it's time to turn your home back into a house (or a condo). You want potential buyers to be able to imagine living there, which is difficult if the home is too personalized. While you don't want your house to be completely vanilla, and you want to give homeowners a sense of the happy experience that you've had, you also don't want the home to be so "yours" that no one else can imagine living there.

So you need to stop thinking of your home as your home, but rather a product that you're trying to sell. You would do the same thing when selling your car, so do it for your home.

Conclusion

Detailing your home can get you a better price in a shorter time, and can help you stand out in the crowded marketplace. If you're willing to make the commitment of time, and small investment of money, you will see the difference in buyer impressions. Your Better Homes and Gardens Rand Realty agent can guide you through the process of detailing your home, and can recommend cleaning and storage professionals if you need them.



Ten Steps to Detailing Your Home

Here are some fundamental steps for clearing the clutter and detailing your home. Before you get started, consult with your agent about prioritizing what you need to do, and identifying any problem areas to address.

1. Empty the closets and leave only your “vacation-plus” wardrobe

In most homes, whether for sale or not, the closets are stuffed with clothes and the closets end up looking small and insufficient. A closet that is half-full looks a lot bigger, and sends the message that the home has ample storage space. The best way to do this is to identify your “vacation-plus” wardrobe. You know how when you go on vacation for a few weeks, you pack up just your favorite clothes, the ones that look good on you and fit well? That’s the wardrobe you should keep, plus some extras that you might need for special occasions. Everything else should go in storage or to charity.

2. Clear the knickknacks from the shelves and the countertops.

Over time, most of us accumulate knick-knacks that start filling up shelves and countertops. Ninety percent of your knick-knacks should be put into storage. You want the shelves and countertops to be clean and neat, not bulging with mementos from years of vacations and crafts fairs. Box up the knick-knacks, get rid of old magazines that no one is going to read, and box up the books that you’ve already read. You want to leave a lot of empty space, so people can imagine their own things filling the shelves and countertops.

3. Clear out the kitchen cabinets.

The most cluttered room in most houses is the kitchen. Go through the cabinets and shelves, and get rid of anything that you’re not realistically going to use anytime soon: half-empty cleaning supplies, old rags, and appliances that you rarely take out. Then open up the refrigerator and throw out the old condiments, salad dressings, sauces, and spices that you’re not likely to use in the next six months. You’ll make the kitchen seem much more usable if the cabinets and refrigerator shelves seem ample and roomy. And while you’re there, take down the magnets holding papers on the refrigerator, both because it looks messy and because you don’t want visitors seeing your personal effects.

4. Clear off the kitchen counters

Once you’ve cleaned out the kitchen cabinets, get started on the counters. Hopefully, you’ve cleaned out a lot of space in the cabinets to handle the appliances that you actually use, like your blender and your toaster. Now you can store those appliances

in cabinets rather than cluttering up the counter. Similarly, put away all the stuff that accumulates on kitchen counters, like flour canisters, spices, knife holders, radios, soap dishes, and sponges. Pull them out when you need them, but otherwise try to keep the counters uncluttered.

5. Clear out the service you don’t use.

Most people have lots of plates and cups, many more than they ever use. Unless you plan on doing a lot of huge dinner parties while your home is on the market, you don’t need more than service for 8-10 people. Clear out all the odd-and-end coffee cups, plates, service platters, and all the other various cabinet-stuffers that make your cabinets look like they don’t have enough room.

6. Get rid of non-essential furniture

An empty room looks small, which is why developers create model homes that have furniture in them. But too much furniture can make rooms seem cluttered and small. Get rid of all the extra end tables, folding chairs, bridge tables, throw pillows, and everything else that’s taking up space. You don’t want to leave a room empty, but you want your home to seem spacious and airy.

7. Minimize the Pet Effect.

Pet accessories and odors can be a major problem for many buyers. Make sure to clean your pet bedding, or even better go out and buy some brand new bedding. If you have a cat, make sure to use deodorizing litter and to change the litter every day or so. As for clutter, try to find an out-of-the-way place to store food bowls and pet toys when the home is going to be shown.

8. Clear out the garage.

Agents list a lot of homes that have a “two-car garage,” even if the homeowners haven’t put two cars in the garage at the same time in years. Over time, we tend to turn our garages into storage lockers, with boxes, bicycles, gardening equipment, and other bulky objects. No one buys a house for the garage, but it helps to demonstrate that the garage can hold two cars by actually parking two cars in it. So have a garage sale, give stuff away, or store what’s worth keeping. And don’t let the garage become the dumping ground for all the junk that’s moved from the rest of the house. Whatever is stored should go offsite. The garage should be cleared out, cleaned, and left neat and tidy.



9. Highlight your lighting

Good lighting is crucial for showing off a listing. No one walks into a home and says, “oh, isn’t this great how dark everything is?” Sometimes, the rooms are dark because owners haven’t replaced difficult-to-reach and difficult-to-find specialty lightbulbs for ceiling lights, track lighting, or kitchen and bath lighting. If you need help finding lightbulbs, ask your agent, but you need to make sure that every room is properly and fully lit, and that every light fixture has sufficient wattage.

10. Fix and Repair

If things don’t work, and they can be repaired for a reasonable price, you should fix them. This includes things like electrical outlets gone dead, fixture appliances (like dishwashers or washer-dryers) that are running poorly, lights that have died, marks on walls, or anything else that can affect the presentation of the home. We would not generally recommend making major improvements in the home,

though that’s something you can discuss with your agent, but small repairs should be completed to give buyers the impression that you’ve lovingly maintained your home.

Conclusion: Keeping it Up

Finally, once you have the home properly detailed, it’s important to keep it that way. We realize that it’s difficult to live in a home you’re trying to sell, because it requires you to live a little differently than normal: no more leaving dirty dishes in the sink, clothes on the floor, or kids’ toys strewn throughout the home. It’s not easy, but it’s worth it, and the better you keep the home the less time you’ll have it on the market. So try to keep the home in viewable condition all the time, or at least schedule a thorough review every week or before every showing. Every morning, wake up thinking to yourself that your potential buyer is going to see the house for the first time that day, and what can you do to give a great first impression.



Ten Steps to Detailing Your Home

- Empty the closets and leave only your “vacation-plus” wardrobe
- Clear the knickknacks from the shelves and the countertops.
- Clear out the kitchen cabinets.
- Clear off the kitchen counters
- Clear out the service you don’t use.
- Get rid of non-essential furniture
- Minimize the Pet Effect.
- Clear out the garage.
- Highlight your lighting
- Fix and Repair



Cleaning it Up

Now that your home has been cleared, it now needs to be clean. This is not to say that your home isn't "clean" right now. Most lived-in homes are "clean." But if you want buyers to see yours as a "model home," it needs to be as immaculate as a new car out of the showroom. It's that simple – spotless homes sell in competitive markets, and average homes do not. So either do it yourself or hire a service, but the house needs to be clean if it's going to sell. The good news is that

maintaining that clean look is not that difficult once the harder process of doing the initially rigorous cleaning is done.

Here is a simple list of suggestions for making sure that you, or someone you hire, cleans the house to a "model home" shine. Some of these suggestions include items that would not occur to most people (like cleaning light switches), and some include cleaning products or methods we recommend:

General Interior

- Clean and deodorize all the carpets.
- Clean smudges off walls using the "Magic Eraser" (you can buy it in hardware stores).
- Clean the windows inside and out (if possible).
- Wipe down window sills.
- Dust all window treatments.
- Wipe down and dust the light fixtures.
- Turn off lights and clean bulbs.
- Wipe down all railings.
- Clean all light switches.

Bathrooms and Kitchen

- Bleach out toilet stains.
- Scrub out any mildew in tubs.
- Clean off deposits on shower heads by soaking in vinegar (it works!).
- Clean all the surfaces.
- Bleach out any stains in the sink.
- Defrost and clean the refrigerator.
- Clean out the oven.
- Wipe down all appliances.

Exterior

- Pay careful attention to cleaning the front entrance, which is where most buyers enter your home.
- Sweep the exterior walkways, and hose down if possible.
- Trim and tidy up hedges to open up windows.
- Tidy up any flower beds or other exterior landscaping.
- Cut back on plants, trees, shrubs, so they don't block the house or the view.
- Store or throw away gardening equipment.
- Throw out all the stored dead plants, fertilizer bags, unused pots.





Staging Your Home

Detailing your home is just the first step in creating a great first impression. The next step is to “stage” your home to generate warmth, ambience, and to stimulate the imagination of your buyers.

You might be familiar with the concept of “staging,” since any number of cable television real estate shows have highlighted the impact that makeovers can have on home values. Staging is literally “setting a stage,” orchestrating interesting scenes in each room that attract the attention of your buyer audience and create appealing impressions.

Detailing is, of course, the first step of staging. Once you have cleared, cleaned, and neutralized your home, you can then take a step back and think about the impression you’re trying to create for your buyers. Most homes do not even need any extensive staging once the fundamental detailing work has been completed.

But if you do want to take that extra step and actually stage each room, consult with your agent about the impressions you want to create. You don’t need to be up on all the latest design fashions, or spend a fortune to stage your home. You just need a little bit of money, some common sense, and a commitment to spend some time examining your home in a different light. If you want expert assistance, then your agent can recommend a professional stager to come in and help.

The art and practice of staging could and has filled up books, but we will simply highlight some fundamental principles that you should keep in mind:

1. Accept that staging is all about style, not substance.

Staging your home requires that you think about the way your home looks, not about what it’s like to live in. It might be that the dining table is a convenient place to stack your mail and old newspapers, particularly if you never eat at it, but staging the home requires that you give up a little bit of convenience and ease-of-living to create the right impression. It’s like wearing high heels or a bow tie to a formal dance: not the most comfortable choice, but the one that creates the right impression.

If you stage your home, you have to sacrifice utility for style, and highlight how things look rather than how they fit into your life. Your buyer won’t notice that the vase of fresh flowers on the coffee table blocks the view of the television, or that there’s no garbage can in the master bedroom, or that it’s annoying to hang your coat in the foyer coat closet rather than on a peg in the laundry room. Your buyer doesn’t live there, so all she’s going to notice are the beautiful flowers in the family room, the clean lines of the bedroom, and the clutter-free laundry.

The nice part is that you’ll be living in one of those developer-style “model homes.” The downside, of course, is that no one actually has to live in those model homes, so you’re going to have to sacrifice a little comfort to create those impressions.

2. Decide what story you want to tell about each room.

The best way to stage a room is to stand at the entrance point to each room, look around the room from that vantage, and think about what story you want to tell about the room. What story will appeal to your buyers? If it’s a dining room, consider actually setting the table with your best service, along with a dried flower arrangement as the centerpiece. Everyone who comes in will know that you’re not actually having a formal dinner that day, but the impression still gets made. The story is important, because it helps buyers visualize themselves living that life, in that home.

Moreover, every room needs a center of attention. In the dining room, it’s the table already set for a dinner. In the living room or great room, it might be a fireplace or wall-mounted flat screen television. In every room, you want to highlight a great feature and draw the buyer’s eye to it. If the room does not have a great feature, then you need to create one, using some accessories you can buy cheaply. A mass market vase filled with dried flowers on a mantle can change the focus of an entire room.

3. Mix textures, shapes, eye levels, and colors (within reason) in each room.

The key to staging is consistently attracting the attention of a buyer from room to room, drawing the eye where you want it to go. And the best way to keep buyers interested is to mix their eye levels – you want them looking up and down, side to side as they go through your home. It just makes things more interesting.

The same goes for textures, shapes, and colors. From a staging perspective, furnishings and accessories that are identically sized, shaped, and symmetrical are dull and uninteresting. You want to mix it up a bit with soft and hard things, square and round things, tall and short things, to keep up the variety.

The same goes for color. You want a splash of color in every room to draw the eye and create an interesting impression. But think of color like perfume: a little bit is great, and too much can be overpowering. Bold color can be used to highlight the best parts of a room, or it can be a distraction. If you have any concerns that adding some bold color will actually detract from the impression you’re trying to make, stick to neutral colors:



beiges and light blues, reds, and greens. The same goes for patterns: don't feel that you need to replicate the latest cutting-edge styles from design shows when all you're trying to do is create a pleasing impression to buyers coming to see your home. You don't need to take risks when staging.

4. Don't forget the other senses.

Most staging involves the eye, but the other senses come into play as well. It's amazing how much the other senses can subtly affect the emotional response of a buyer, who may not even realize that the soft music in the background and the gently wafting scent of flowers is why she feels so relaxed in your home. You need to titillate those senses.

Engaging the ears of your buyers is easy. Just have soft music played during showings, unobtrusively in the background. The type of music depends on what type of response you're trying to create: soft jazz if you're trying to create a relaxing feeling, light classical (more strings than horns) if you want to send a certain upscale ambience, or even just light pop if you want things to be casual. If you don't have a good sense of how music evokes a mood, go into one of your favorite restaurants or shops and listen to what they are playing to relax their customers.

Similarly, scents can be used in a positive way, even though most of the time that buyers smell things in a home it's not a good thing. Once unpleasant smells are dispelled during detailing and cleaning, you want to use scents to evoke another

type of emotional response. Again, you want a light touch (just like perfume) so you do not overwhelm. But the use of subtle positively-associated scents -- flowers, cookies baking, even the faint scent of cleaning products in bathrooms and kitchens -- can create an enormously favorable reaction.

5. Don't spend a lot of money.

Finally, do not feel you need to spend a lot of money. Have you ever looked closely at the furniture and accessories that you find in a model home? Probably not. And neither will the buyers coming to your home. You can get great design and color ideas from a couple of design magazines that you can pick up at any bookstore, and incorporate them cheaply into your staging plan by picking up cheap items at discount stores. You're not likely to keep any of your staging props, so you don't need to spend money on them.

Should you hire a professional stager? If it were up to real estate brokers, we would urge every single seller in Westchester and the Hudson Valley to hire a professional designer to stage a home for sale. We believe in the power of staging to sell your home. Even if you want to hire a professional stager, though, we would recommend someone who will do a consultation for a set fee, and then give you a chance to decide whether you want to go further. That said, a home seller who does a great job detailing and cleaning a home is about 80% of the way to a fully staged home, so the question is more about whether you think it's worth the investment in a stager to turn a good impression into a great one.



Ten Things You Can Do To Help Get Your Home Sold

Having a home on the market isn't a full-time job, but it can seem like one. If you want to get your home sold as quickly as possible, and for the best price possible, there are some things that you, and only you, can do.

Having a home on the market can be a stressful and time-consuming process, but we want you to be aware of ten things you can do to help get your home sold for the best possible price in the least possible time:

1. Keep up the property appeal.

Given all that time and energy you spent detailing, cleaning, and even maybe staging your home for the initial marketing push, you don't want to put it to waste by allowing the appeal of the property to decline over time. Try to keep the home in the best showing condition possible: keep the house free of clutter, do the dishes every night, mow the lawn, keep the whole place clean. You should wake up every morning thinking, "This is the day that my buyer is going to come for a showing."

2. Make the home available whenever possible.

Although it's not possible to make the home available for show 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, you should try to be available for showings at all possible times. You never know when your potential buyer is going to be available. And if you have certain challenges for showings (rambunctious pets, guests, etc.), try to minimize their effect on your availability.

3. Keep up with the market

Keep track of what's happening in the market, so that your pricing and marketing stay competitive as the market changes. Make sure to read your weekly email market update, and if possible go look at the competition on the market to see what buyers are going to be comparing to your home.

4. Be pleasant and upbeat with buyers you meet.

You'd be surprised how many sellers undermine their chances of selling their home by being difficult or disagreeable with potential buyers. Anyone who walks through the door is a potential buyer, so try to be upbeat and positive with them. If they like you, they'll be more likely to give your home a fair chance. And ultimately, they will be easier to work with if they make an offer.

5. Don't reveal anything to buyer agents.

Be careful in speaking directly with buyer agents. Be pleasant and helpful, but don't reveal anything about your negotiability, your desire to close, or your timeframe. As they say on television cop shows, "Anything you say can and will be used against you" in a negotiation. Refer all questions to your agent.

6. "Manage" Your Property

Your agent is in charge of the project of selling your home, but you're the only person capable of being the "on-site" manager of the property. Be sure to let your agent know if any problems come up with your listing: if the sign comes down, if you're not going to be able to show it for a period of time, or if there is some damage to the property that would undermine the showing condition (i.e., a tree falls in the yard). If the problem is something we can correct, or help you correct, we'll do so quickly.

7. Be proactive about getting ready to close

When we do get offers, be quick to respond and communicate counter-offers through your agent. And while you're on the market, get everything you need ready for your attorney: your deed, your tax bills, and any other legal documents relating to your purchase.

8. Don't stress, or at least don't communicate stress.

Buyers can sense when a seller is getting anxious, and take it as a sign of desperation. Your posture when you meet with buyers or buyer agents viewing the home should always be that you love the home, you hate to leave, and you're not anxious to sell.

9. Let people know you're selling

Let your friends, family, work colleagues, and anyone else know that your home is for sale. You never know whether a friend of a friend is looking to move into your neighborhood. If you're on Facebook, make an announcement about selling your home, with a link to your listing. Although very few homes sell from such word of mouth, since serious buyers are already looking for homes with agents or on the internet, it can't hurt. (We understand you might be squeamish about telling people you're selling, or revealing what your home is selling for, but remember that most people find out anyway, and home sales are public records).

10. Keep in touch with your agent.

Your Better Homes and Gardens Rand Realty agent is your best resource for information and advice about the market, and should be your shoulder to lean on. Your agent should be in consistent communication with you as often as you want, but don't let too much time go by without getting in touch, even if it's just for a quick update or a short conversation. The more communication, the better.



How to Prepare Your Home For Showings

Key to getting your home sold quickly and for the best price is making it available for showings whenever buyers want to see it. It's one of the most annoying parts about having your home for sale, but it's important to accommodate buyer schedules. You never know whether the person coming to see it

today is going to be "the one." To help you keep your listing in great showing condition, and almost as a last-minute "checklist" for things that you should do when buyers are on their way, here is a short guide to preparing your home for a showing.

Open House

Open Houses are special showings, because you know that a larger group of people are going to be coming in than during a regular showing. You should not only do the regular work that you do for a showing, but try to do a little extra, such as doing some baking on open house day to give your home a warm, fresh scent.

1. Do a Quick Detailing

Just like the detailing you did when you first put the home on the market, you should walk through and make sure that you have maintained that clean, uncluttered look:

- Do a general cleaning of the home: not scrubbing, but wiping.
- Check for broken or dim light bulbs.
- Remedy any distracting or unpleasant odors.
- Make all the beds.
- Put away dirty clothes in a hamper or laundry machine.
- Do the dishes or at least have them in the dishwasher.
- Put away children's and pet's toys.
- Put away personal toiletries.
- Remove all things on front and side of refrigerator.
- Keep all pets in a contained space, or take them out with you.
- Sweep driveway and walkways.
- Clean up the yard of any toys or debris.

2. Do a Quick Staging

Staging can be as extravagant as a Broadway show, or as simple as a children's recital. Keep it simple, but do the little things that create the effect you want:

- Turn on enough lights to brighten the rooms.
- Open curtains and shades to let in outside light.
- Open the windows if it's nice out
- Keep the home in a temperate zone, with air conditioning or heating if necessary.
- Open the shower curtain to expose the shower or tub.
- Put out fresh towels in the bathrooms.
- Close all television cabinets and put away the remotes.
- Set place settings at dining room table.
- Put on some ambient music.

3. Protection Issues

Finally, remember that virtually all your visitors are legitimately interested in looking for a new home, but just in case you want to protect yourself:

- Secure all your valuables in a locked or non-obvious hiding place.
- Put away any breakable heirlooms that cannot be replaced.
- Put your mail away in a drawer.
- Put any important papers on your desk away in drawers.



How to Watch the Market

Once you're on the market, you're going to be interested in the market. You'll be reading and watching everything in sight. But information about the national market can be misleading, so you want to make sure you focus your attention on your local markets, and on interest rates.

Few people are as interested in the real estate market as those in the process of buying or selling a home. If you're actually in the market, you watch the market: you notice every "for sale" sign you pass on the street, you stop and watch every television news report about the market, and you read everything that gets published in the papers.

That's all fine. It makes sense that you're going to be interested in the market. But we want to caution you not to believe everything you read, not because the media has a bias or is presenting misinformation, but because the media presents the wrong information.

Essentially, the media is not a good resource for following the market. Most of the news that gets reported is really "old news" about homes that were sold months ago, in places far away. National home sales, which are what the media generally covers, make no difference to you. It doesn't matter to a seller in Westchester or the Hudson Valley what the national sales figures are, because real estate is intensely local. Of course, you're going to read those stories anyway, but don't let them get you anxious about the market.

That said, it is absolutely crucial that you stay on top of your market. Too many sellers, and agents, complete a comparative market analysis when they put the listing on the market, then never keep track of developments in that market. But the market is changing all the time, and you need to be aware of those changes and, if necessary, adjust your pricing and marketing strategies. Even in the short term, movements in the market can affect whether your home is well priced, even if you and your agent did a great job of pricing to the market when you listed it.

What can affect the price of your home?

- Competing homes that come on the market at significantly higher or lower prices to your listing price.
- Comparable homes that close at significantly higher or lower prices.
- Changes in interest rates.
- The strength of the economy, particularly consumer confidence and unemployment.

So given that following the market is important, what information should you be tracking?

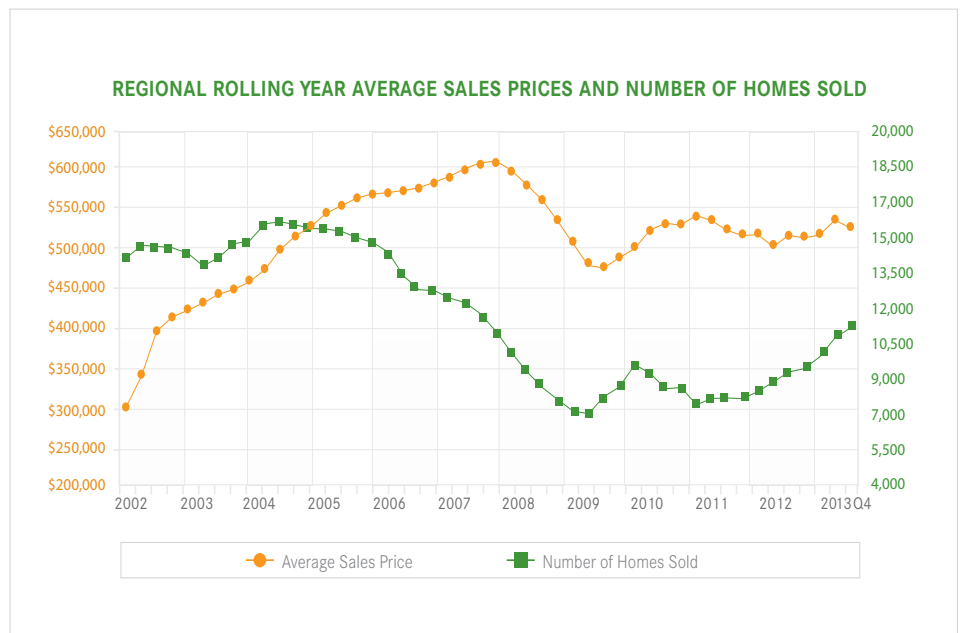
1. The Market Action Update

The best resource for you in following the market is the information you're going to get from your agent. Every Monday, you're going to get an email called the "Market Action Update" that will detail activity involving new listings that come on the

market, price changes, and closings of comparable properties. The update can very broad, pulling in sales from your local area that are not strictly comparable to yours, but that does give you a general sense of the local market, which is what you want to follow.

2. The Rand Quarterly Market Report

Also, you will get a Quarterly Market Report from your agent that will give you a much more comprehensive view of what is happening in your county and the full region, with written analysis concerning transactions, sales prices, days-on-market, listing discounts, and prices-per-square foot. This is the kind of local analysis that is helpful, as opposed to the national sales figures that are just distracting. We have been putting out the Quarterly Market Report for over eight years, and have data going back almost 10 years, so we have a very good sense of what is happening in our local markets.





3. Interest Rate Changes

Nothing will affect your home value more than changes in interest rates. If rates go up, your home becomes attractive to more buyers even at the same price. And if rates go down, your home becomes less affordable to the buyers who might be in your price range. See the chart on this page, which shows the impact of rising interest rates on buyer purchasing power. A buyer who can afford a \$2,000 monthly mortgage payment can borrow \$372,563 on a 30-year fixed rate loan at 5.0%, but as

rates go up in half-point increments, her buying power goes down significantly.

4. Economic News

Thought it's difficult to tell you what economic news to follow, the basic idea is that a good economy is good for housing. If consumers are confident, then buyers will be confident and more likely to pull the trigger. So although general economic news is not specifically related to real estate, it does have an impact.

Conclusion

Of course, throughout this process, the best resource for information about the market is your Better Homes and Gardens Rand Realty real estate agent. If you read something in the media that concerns you, or have a question about the market, reach out to get an answer. No one knows the local markets better than the agents who work in them.

Interest Rate (30 year fixed)	\$2,000 Monthly Payment		\$3,000 Monthly Payment		Percentage Loss of Borrowing Power from 5.0% rate
	Borrowing Power	Loss of Borrowing Power from 5%	Borrowing Power	Loss of Borrowing Power from 5.0%	
5.0%	\$372,563	N/A	\$ 558,845	N/A	N/A
5.5%	\$352,244	\$-20,319	\$ 528,365	\$-30,479.50	-5.5%
6.0%	\$333,583	\$-38,980	\$ 500,375	\$-58,469.90	-10.5%
6.5%	\$316,422	\$-56,141	\$ 474,362	\$-84,482.40	-15.1%
7.0%	\$300,615	\$-71,948	\$ 450,923	\$-107,922.10	-19.3%
7.5%	\$286,035	\$-86,528	\$ 429,053	\$-129,791.90	-23.2%