

50 Essential Tips to Prepare Your Home for a Speedy, Top-Price Sale

By Teri B Clark, author of 301 Simple Things You Can Do To Sell Your Home NOW and For More Money Than You Thought

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Introduction

"Home staging" was coined by Barb Schwarz back in the early '70s, and the concept has become well known as "house fluffing," "dressing to sell," and "home presentation".

The focus of staging is to make a home more marketable by creating the most appealing home to the greatest number of prospective buyers. It should be impersonal enough not to infringe on a buyer's own sense of style.

Decorating is optional. Staging, on the other hand, is essential – that is if you want to sell your house for the most possible money in the shortest amount of time.

You can make at least 3 percent more with home staging. In some areas, that number can go as high as 50 percent! Statistics also show that homes that had not sold in an average of four and a half months after listing sold within a week of being staged by a professional. Homes staged before listing were under contract more than twice as fast as comparable homes that had not been professionally staged.

As you know, your home becomes a house — a product for sale. Staging your property gives you a more competitive edge in today's market by transforming it into a marketable product. A staged property helps you sell your investment for top dollar and is the first line of defense over lowering the price. Do not settle for less at the closing table simply because you did not understand the value of staging or did not want to take the time or spend the money to do it properly.

In this world of busy buyers, a property has to be staged to appeal to their imagination. They want to be able to look at your home and know that they can live there. They want to know that their furniture will fit. They want to know that everything is in “move in” condition. That is why staging is so important. It allows buyers to imagine themselves living in your home with their stuff, not yours.

Presentation is everything and staging is presentation! The result is improved functionality and complementary space. Following the techniques in this guide will maximize your equity while reducing the market time for your home.

1. ■ Be sure that your home is staged before you or your Realtor takes the photos for the web. Over 70% of all new apartment/home searches are started on the Internet. It is imperative that the property looks good in the photos so that it can attract as many people as possible to see the real thing.

2. ■ You should not have one person look at your house until it has been staged completely. It should not go through the broker walkthrough, MLS, open houses, or anything. Stage first!

3. ■ Home staging works for all properties regardless of the price point because home staging is about preparing your home for a faster and more profitable sale and marketing your property to the most potential buyers for its target audience. A home stager who has have staged homes ranging from \$100,000 to \$10 million has had the same result — the homes sell faster and for top dollar compared with the competitors within their price range.

4. ■ Do not offer money towards painting or installing new carpeting. Remember, if you are not willing to do it, your buyer is not likely to either.

5. ■ You need to be willing to change paint colors. Paint is very inexpensive and gives you a big bang for your buck. Although a bit labor-intensive, painting is not expensive and gives your home a new, fresh, clean look. There are certain universally accepted colors and these should be used when repainting your home. Yellow or shades of gold are warm and inviting. You should also accent with yellow. Your eye absorbs more yellow and therefore sees it first. Green or blue in the bedrooms are great colors because they are restful.

6. ■ It is essential during the selling process to have the toys limited to one area and minimized to a few containers. Not everybody has children and most do not care about the new and amazing things your new baby can do. You just cannot make a home with children turn into a children's house and expect it to sell.

7. ■ Recognize that your major competition comes from newer homes. People will take a newer home over an older home if all else is equal. That is why it is essential to give an older home something that puts it above the rest.

8. ■ Don't forget about the entryway. If you have a cute little plaque or shingle with your family name on it, remove it. Even if it is just on the mailbox. You can always put it up again once you move. It's also a good idea to buy a new, plush doormat. This is something else you can take with you once you move.

9. ■ If you have dark cabinets, a light-colored handle or something in shiny gold will enhance them. If you have light cabinets, you can give them the sleek look by using handles of the same color so that they are hardly noticeable or by using brushed silver handles. With light wood, you can also use darker handles, gold, bronze, or even colors.

10. ■ Sometimes renovations are needed. However, here are five that you should avoid:

- Adding high end appliances to a modest home
- Adding hand painted tiles to the bath or kitchen
- Adding a central vacuum
- Adding air conditioning (unless you are in an area that all homes have it)
- Replacing windows with newer models

11. Be sure to check with your city or county building inspector before beginning a new project. Many departments require permits, even for things as simple as changing a dishwasher.

12. Everything in its place is a good motto to remember. Always find appropriate places to store your items. Litter boxes in the kitchen and trashcans in the pantry are just two examples of inappropriate placement.

13. Do not have any cleaning products visible. You want the buyer to think that the house cleans itself. You do not want to remind buyers that there will be work to do in this house, so put away laundry baskets and dish drainers as well!

14. Selling an empty home can be a huge mistake. Buying or renting furniture is especially vital in an empty home. Empty homes do not show well and can sit on the market for months until a buyer with a good visual imagination comes along, or until the seller drops the price so low that the home is a steal.

15. Your refrigerator will need to be cleaned, even if you are not leaving it. People will still look inside and a dirty refrigerator will turn them off. If you are taking it with you, you may as well clean it now. If you are leaving it, then it is imperative to have it sparkling.

16. Removing clutter and taking down personal items is needed, but adding back is essential, too: Each room should be embellished with accessories, artwork, mirrors, accent tables, silk trees and florals, as well as dishes, bedding, and towels so all areas look inviting.

17. Check for unusual odors in your house. They may come from a pet or even from your upholstery. For those who smoke, you might want to minimize smoking indoors while trying to sell your home. You could also purchase an ozone spray that helps to remove odors instead of simply masking the smell. And for those with pets, you will have some of the same problems as smokers. Pets have odors. You are probably used to them, but someone who walks into your house will notice them right away. This is especially true if your pet has urinated on the carpeting. The smell of pet urine can rarely be removed without replacing the carpeting. If you put your nose to the carpeting and smell your pet, even after shampooing the rugs, it is time to pull them out and start from scratch.

18. Cleaning is rarely fun for anyone, but it does not have to be a terrible chore. Play some fun, lively music. Before you know it, your adrenaline will start pumping and you will be dancing your way through the house.

19. To clean just about any stain in the bathtub (plastic, ceramic, etc) make a paste by using hydrogen peroxide and cream of tartar. Use an old toothbrush to rub the mixture into the stain and rinse thoroughly.

20. To clean the microwave, fill a paper cup with water and a few tablespoons of baking soda. Nuke it for about 30 seconds, or until you see the contents explode. Then just take a paper towel and wipe it all off. The explosion spreads the cleanser over the entire area, and you can even use the moistened rag or paper towel to wipe outside the microwave and its surrounding area.

21. Take a look around you. Do you have items in your home that are unused and have no real sentimental value? If so, get rid of them! These types of items can often be found in closets, cupboards, basements, and garages. Sometimes they are on bookshelves or even in your everyday living space. The more you are able to move out the more the next buyer will want to "move in."

22. If you do not have a plan for what to do with the stuff you no longer need, it will get put in the basement or the attic or the garage or simply stay in a pile in the room where it began. If this happens, then you really did not get rid of clutter – you just moved it to another location. When you are clearing the clutter for home staging purposes, you will have many different piles. Some things may go to a thrift store such as the Salvation Army, some things may go to the dump, some things may go into storage, and some things may be set aside for a garage or yard sale. Knowing what you are going to do with the extra clutter is essential to really decluttering your home.

23. A home for sale should always be presented in its best light and immaculate condition, which is not the reality of everyday life. Potential buyers do not want to see how you live, with your children, cats and dogs, and mess. They want to see themselves in a perfect house under perfect conditions and that is how a home on the market should always be presented.

24. If your kitchen cabinets, pantries, and drawers – even your refrigerator – look jammed packed, it suggests there is not enough room in your kitchen. The best way to change this negative first impression is to have as much "empty space" as possible.

25. If the dining room, especially a small one, has an oversized china cabinet, consider removing it. Or, if has a top and bottom, remove the top. This will open up the space considerably

26. Take a look at your bathroom. If you are like most people, you will find half-used shampoo bottles, a jumble of hair accessories, a curling iron, foam curlers, several cans of shaving cream, tub toys, lotions, medication, books and magazines, oils, candles, toilet paper, and on and on and on. The amount of stuff we store in our bathrooms is far greater than the storage capacity for these small rooms, especially, if like many

bathrooms, you have just a medicine cabinet and a very small vanity. The “stuff” that is not in use needs to be boxed up and moved out.

27. You should remove extra chairs from the tables. Unless you have a massive space, you will not need more than 4 chairs around a table. Also remove extra leaves from the table. This will make the room feel larger.

28. Buyers want to see your carpet or your hardwood floor or your linoleum. Most home stagers suggest removing all area rugs, unless you have a large area of hardwood, where one rug is acceptable. Area rugs make spaces seem more crowded. Without them, your floor plan opens up.

29. Closets are great for accumulating clutter, though you may not think of it as clutter. Perhaps the clutter is wrapping paper, or Christmas items, or an old sewing machine. Maybe you have some keepsakes, or photo albums. Then of course there are the extra clothes and shoes. None of these things is likely to be in the throwaway pile, but they should not be in your closet if you want to avoid the cluttered look.

30. Stand a few feet away from the entrance to the bedroom. What do you see? Whatever you see is the first thing that a buyer will see. Is it pretty? Is it bulky? Does it make the room feel small? Move anything from the doorway that is not inviting.

31. A spare room should be viewed as a bonus. It is a “plus” feature of your home, but only if the buyers can view it as such. For example, if your spare room is used mostly as an office, then, during the selling process, you need to make it just that – an office! Get rid of the spare bed and the extra dressers full of last season’s clothes. Get rid of the boxes of storage items in the closet. Keep the essentials of your office such as a desk, filing cabinet, bookshelf, and a nice chair in the corner with a small table and lamp.

32. Whenever possible, leave the garage free from storage. If people see that the seller does not have enough storage and has to use the garage, they will begin to wonder if the same thing will happen if they buy the house. People like to think that they might actually be able to use a garage!

33. Find out what organizations in your area pick up items. Such organizations often include Goodwill, The Salvation Army, veteran's associations, and other local organizations. Another good way to get rid of items you no longer need is to use Freecycle. Here, you can list items you no longer need and then choose someone from a list of takers to have them. The best part is the person wanting the items comes to your home on your timetable to get them. You can find a Freecycle group in your area by going to www.freecycle.org.

34. Get everything off the counters. Everything. Remove all appliances from the countertops. Even the toaster. Doing so will make your kitchen look larger and more spacious. It will also keep the buyer's eye from stopping on a particular item rather than getting a full view of the room. Put the toaster in a cabinet and take it out when you use it. Find a place in cabinets and drawers for everything.

35. Have you taken away so much that your home no longer has any sparkle? Although YOUR personality needs to be removed, the personality of the house still needs to come through.

36. One of the most important factors to consider when placing items into a room is the idea of transition. As your eye moves around the room, you do not want it jumping from place to place or piece to piece. The movement of the eye should flow – not bounce. To accomplish this, you want to avoid abrupt changes in height. Art is a great way to move the eye along the room. People tend to use little pieces of art on their walls.

Instead, use large artwork – it makes the room look bigger. Not only that, but you do not have to worry as much about the arrangement.

37. Give each room a touch of the unexpected. This can be done with artwork placed in an unusual way, using a piece of furniture in a way that you normally would not use it, or adding a dash of color where the eye least expects to find it. For instance, you might want to set a large, framed print on the mantle instead of hanging it over the mantle. You might use a ladder back chair as a small table bearing a chess set. You might want to add a bouquet of flowers in the laundry room. Be creative.

38. Follow the “like-with-like” rule of thumb. Tall with tall, small with small, wide with wide, and narrow with narrow will guide you throughout the decorating process. Mimic the shape of each space you are decorating. For example, a sofa should be accessorized with horizontal art so you are complementing wide with wide.

39. My favorite decorating tip is to look outside the box. You do not always need to use an item for its intended purpose. For example, do not just use a tablecloth for a table; make it a slipcover for your ottoman. It can save you lots of money and time when you purchase a tablecloth at a local chain versus buying yards of fabric and by purchasing the correct size it can become a no-sew project. Always keep your eyes open for new uses for everyday items.

40. Select a focal point for your room and subtly orient other furnishings and some lighting toward it. If there is a fireplace, it will nearly always be the focal point; other focal points might be bookcases or built-in shelving to house lovely collectibles, or a sofa with a striking painting on the wall above it.

41. There are two times that you can angle furniture: In a square room and if a room already has an angle in it, like a corner fireplace or a bay window.

42. In a bedroom, unless you have no other choice, you want to see the foot of the bed when you walk in. You do not want a bed to cross the doorway because it blocks the flow and makes the room look smaller. It is better to see the foot so that you can see the pretty pillows.

43. One of the easiest ways to create color is to add beautiful accent pillows to any room. Introducing a complementary accent color in a room can make a room "pop" and come alive. Accent pillows not only add color but texture and warmth as well. By adding throw pillows in a coordinating or contrast fabric to a couch chair, bench, or bed, you can transform your room and add instant warmth inexpensively!

44. One way to see if your home has curb appeal is to walk across the street and have a good look at your house. Where did your eyes go? They should be drawn to the front door and entryway. If they are not, then you need to do something about it.

45. People do not see their house as a product that you have to market and sell. However, selling your home is like packaging. People look at the outside before deciding to come in. Then they look at the inside before deciding to buy. Most of their decision is based on looks. It is packaging. You need to wrap up your product, your home, like a beautiful package.

46. Once you have gotten the front yard in shape, it is time to work on the backyard. The most important areas of the backyard are the patios, decks, and porches. Getting these areas up to date will give the buyers a feeling that they are getting bonus space.

47. New window treatments can make a world of difference. They can add value and style to your home and be something the buyers

view as a bonus – something they will not have to buy or replace when they move in. The caution, however, is that you keep the treatments neutral (keep your personality out of the room) and that you make sure they do not block the amount of light that comes into a room.

48. Many homes have the louvers of the window blinds turned down to face the floor. A more enhancing way to use blinds is to turn the louvers up to reflect much-needed ambient light onto the ceiling.

49. Sometimes, refreshing a room can be as easy as changing a light bulb. Bulbs like GE Reveal filter out yellow rays common in ordinary light bulbs, making colors, fabric, walls, and artwork appear richer, crisper, and more vivid.

50. Add pampering accessories! Things like bath bubbles, fluffy towels, and candles not only add the pampering feeling you are trying to achieve, they offer visual comfort with color and texture as well. Psychologically, we all crave that long soak with a good book, and even if we are only in the bathroom for 10 minutes to whip on some make up, just seeing those items displayed promises wonderful baths to come!

Teri B Clark is a professional writer and published author. Her most recent book, *301 Simple Things You Can Do To Sell Your Home NOW and For More Money Than You Thought*, explains these tips in more detail and offers many others. To learn more about Teri's latest book, go to <http://staging-your-home.blogspot.com>