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Inexpensive Ways To Make Your Home Leave A Great First Impression

by Michele Dawson

Once your home is listed and the for-sale sign is firmly implanted in your front lawn, all is ready for would-be buyers to tour your home. Or is it?

As anyone in the real estate industry will tell you, it's important to make your home look its best when it comes time to show it. That first impression is everything. Even if you're in a market where homes are selling quickly and for full asking price, it's still key to spruce up your home and prove that it's worth every penny you're asking. And it doesn't have to cost you a fortune.

In fact, a great first impression, coupled with the decreasing amount of time the typical home is on the market these days, is sometimes all it takes to see a speedy offer come your way.

"In 2001, the typical home was on the market for only four weeks," said David Lereah, the National Association of Realtor's chief economist. "In 1999 it was five weeks, but throughout most of the '90s the typical selling time was eight weeks."

Lereah attributes the reduction to the lean inventory.

So, if you're in a market with few available homes for sale, you're probably less likely to spend a lot of money on major aesthetic improvements. But there are a lot of simple, fairly inexpensive things you can do to make a good first impression and attract offers as quickly as possible.

Some things you can do to ensure your home's exterior lands favorable first impressions include:

- Stay on top of your lawn mowing and maintenance and tidy up your front landscaping.
- Plop a new, colorful welcome mat in front of the door.
- Embellish your door area with a nice, big potted plant to the side of the front door.
- Slap a fresh coat of paint on your door.

- Move all the toys, bicycles, and scooters away from the front of the house.
- Clean all your windows until they're sparkling.
- Invest in a new doorknob and lock - this will jazz up your door and provide greater security.
- Make sure your street numerals are polished and in place. Or, invest in a nice new set that stands out among your neighbors' standard numerals.
- Place a seasonal wreath or arrangement on your door.
- Repair any loose shingles - the last thing a potential buyer wants to worry about is the roof.
- Paint and repair your gutters.

Once the exterior wows your potential buyers, you'll need to continue to make an impact on them when they make their way inside. You can almost think of it as preparing for a formal dinner party. For starters, you can:

- Remove all the clutter - make sure kitchen and bathroom countertops are as clear as possible, try to keep toys organized in closets and shelves, temporarily remove any excess knickknacks or family photos if you tend to have a lot.
- Hang fresh clean towels in the bathrooms.
- Touch up your paint if your walls have a few rough spots. You probably already have the extra paint sitting in your garage.
- Vacuum your floor each morning. You may also want to think about getting your carpets clean before potential buyers view your house.
- Make sure all your faucets are drip-free.
- Replace any nonfunctioning bulbs in your light fixtures and vanities.
- Thoroughly clean all your appliances, including the inside of your oven and microwave.
- Place a beautiful centerpiece in the center of your dining room table.
- Eliminate odors as much as possible - place potpourri in the bathrooms, use air freshener and deodorizer, especially if you have indoor pets or there's a smoker in the house.

- Let the light in - open all your blinds and curtains. If your house's natural light leaves some rooms dark during certain portions of the day, turn on the lights if you know your house may be shown that day. If you have any decorative or track lighting, be sure it is on.
- Clean your fireplace.
- If you have too much furniture, place some of it in storage.
- Add some final touches, a couple of fresh bouquets of flowers and some nice potted plants in decorative containers can do wonders.

Basically, just use common sense. Remember that everyone has his or her own style. You're not trying to impress with your particular brand of décor. Rather, you're trying to present a simple, clean, attractive home that exudes potential - an empty, yet enticing, palette for your home's next owners.

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