

Where to Start: Begin to Prepare your Home for Showing

“You never get a second chance at a first impression.” We’ve all heard this expression before. And now, while you are preparing your house to sell, it should not be far from your mind.

While logical factors such as price and location narrow the pool of houses a potential buyer will look at, the ultimate decision to buy a particular house is fuelled by a mixture of logic and emotion. And emotion often wins out. The same might be said for the process of selling a home. Buying a home is often an emotional decision, while, when selling a house, emotion should be separated from the process.

Buyers are searching for a “home”—a place in which they will feel comfortable, secure, and happy, a place in which they can imagine settling down and raising their family. As a seller, your goal is to cultivate these feelings through the property you’re selling. Look at your house as a marketable commodity. A buyer’s emotional response is triggered early, so you want to ensure you have done everything you can to encourage a positive response to your house from the outset. Within minutes—even seconds—of pulling into your driveway, buyers have formed an impression that they will carry with them through the rest of the showing, and beyond. Keep in mind, this impression will not only influence whether or not they make an offer, but also what they consider to be the value of the property.

Use the following step-by-step guide to get your house into selling shape before you put the property on the market.

Depersonalize

This should be one of your first steps when you begin preparing your house to sell. Over the years, a home inevitably becomes tattooed with the owners’ lives, covered with touches that have made it that special place for you. At this point, however, you want buyers to be able to see themselves living in the space. When a homebuyer walks into a room and sees these personalizing touches—such as photos on the walls or collections—their ability to picture their own lives in this room is disrupted. Some will also try and figure out who you are and why you are selling. So, your first step will be to remove all the family photos, the trophies, collectible items, and souvenirs. For the time being, rent a storage space and keep these items there. Do not simply transfer these items to another place in your house as that area will look cluttered and like the home does not have enough storage space.

Remove all clutter

The next step on the list is to purge your house of the excess items that have accumulated over the years. When you have lived in a house for several years, a build-up of personal effects occurs that is often so gradual that you don’t notice the space is becoming cluttered. If you need to, bring in a friend who can be objective and help point out areas that could stand to be cleared. Try to stand back yourself and see your house as a buyer might. Survey shelves, countertops, drawers, closets, the basement—all places where clutter often accumulates—to determine what needs to go. You’ll be forced to go through this process anyway when you move, and with each box you eliminate, your storage space—and the room in general—begins to look larger. We’ve broken down the process into specific areas of your house to help you concentrate your efforts:

Kitchen

The kitchen is an ideal place to begin, as it's easy to spot and eliminate the type of clutter that tends to accumulate here. If the cupboards and drawers appear cluttered and crowded, this will give them the impression there is not enough space.

- Remove everything from the counters – small appliances can stay in cupboards until needed
- Clean out all the cabinets and drawers. Put aside all of the dishes, pots and pans that you rarely use, then box them and put them in the storage unit you have rented.
- If you, like many people, have a “junk drawer,” clear this out.
- Get rid of the food items in the pantry that you don't use.
- Remove all extra cleaning supplies from the shelves beneath the sink. Make sure this area is as empty as possible. You should thoroughly clean this spot as well, and check for any water stains that might indicate leaking pipes. Buyers will look under the sink and look for possible water damage hinting at plumbing issues.

Closets

- Go through all clothes and shoes. If you don't wear something anymore, get rid of it. Box unused items and keep them in the storage unit.
- Remove any unsightly boxes from the back of the closet. Put them in storage if need be. Get everything off the floor. Closets should look as though they have enough room to hold additional items.

Furniture

- You may want to tour a few model homes in order to gauge the type of furniture chosen by design teams to create a spacious, yet comfortable atmosphere. Note how that furniture is arranged to cultivate a certain feeling. Very large items in a small room will make the room look even smaller.
- After having armed yourself with some ideas, stand back and look at each of your rooms. What will you need to remove? These are items that you've grown comfortable with and that have become incorporated into your everyday routine. However, each room should offer a sense of spaciousness, so some furniture may likely need to be placed in storage.

Storage Areas

- Basements, garages, attics, and sheds: these are the “junkyard” areas of any given home. It is possible to arrange simple clutter into a certain order, but junk is sent packing to these often-hidden rooms. First, determine which of these boxes and items you actually need. Can some of it be sent to the dump once and for all?
- A garage sale is an excellent way to get rid of unused items – you can also donate to charities like Salvation Army or Women in Need Society.