

RISMEDIA, August 8, 2007—Preparing a home for sale requires a lot more than simply hiring a real estate professional. Staged homes sell faster and for a higher price than non-staged homes, translating to more money in commissions for you, happier clients and more business.

To sell your client's home fastest and for the highest price, sellers must be prepared to de-clutter, re-light, scrub and neutralize their home.

Your primary goal is to sell a lifestyle. A staged home should allow the buyer to imagine themselves relaxing in the den with his children or entertaining his friends on the patio.

While professional home staging can be costly, it is possible to creatively and strategically stage a home for a minimal price. Here are some considerations:

1. Clutter control. A cluttered home appears smaller and gives the buyer the sense that there is not enough room in the house for all his belongings. If the den is packed with furniture the buyer will most likely not be able to visualize where his own furniture will fit into the room. A good place to begin is to count every item in a particular room and eliminate 50% of them. Storage companies can handle large and bulky furniture that your homeowner wants to keep for his new home. Also get rid of any house plants and depersonalize the rooms by removing pictures, dolls and toys.

Less appliances and accessories on the countertops allows potential buyers to visually expand the kitchen, making the countertops appear large and clean. All of the dishes and appliances should be in their proper places. To add some life to an old kitchen table, buy some beautiful table linens and place fresh flowers in the middle.

2. Lights, camera, action. Many homeowners forget to consider that a lot of the showings are going to be at night around the buyers' work schedule. An inexpensive way to give an updated look to an older home is to replace older light fixtures with nickel and chrome. Add small lamps and plug-in nightlights to show warm pools of light that will make the home feel comfortable. Focus on the kitchen, dining room and bathrooms. If replacing light fixtures is too expensive for your client, change all of existing light bulbs for the highest wattage allowed. If the home is shown during the day, embrace natural sunlight by opening all of the drapes and blinds.

3. Scrub until it sparkles. The house may be old, but it can still sparkle. Clean the house from top to bottom. Wash the windows inside and out, have the carpet cleaned and remove any sign of pets. Scrub the kitchen and bathrooms until they shine. Clean the stovetop with a degreaser and remove any stains or discoloration on the countertops. Keep the floors immaculate throughout the listing period. Add a new shower curtain, fresh flowers or put your client's best towels out in all of the bathrooms. If there aren't attractive containers for the bathroom supplies place them in a drawer.

4. Neutralize the home. If the walls, ceilings or trim of the house are painted in contrasting bold colors, consider having the seller repaint with crisp neutral colors to appeal to the greatest number of buyers. Keep adjoining rooms in the same color palette to make the home appear larger.

Make sure that when you're staging a home you look at its features as objectively as possible. Maximize what's structurally attractive and buy, borrow or rent what you need to present the best first impression. The buyer is looking for a home he can imagine living his lifestyle in so highlight the positive selling features of the home to advertise what the house has to offer.