

Holding an Open House

Everything you need to know to make your open house a success

Purpose

An open house serves a number of purposes. The primary one for the seller is to have your home available during a specified time period when anyone can come in and see it without an appointment. Some potential buyers prefer this low-key approach where they can just stop unannounced and take a quick look around. You will get neighbors and other “curious George” people stopping in as well, but so what; you’re trying to sell your home and if that’s what it takes then that’s what it takes. Realtors like to hold opens for two reasons; they may find a buyer for that house, and they may find a buyer for a completely different property once it becomes apparent that the home they’re holding open isn’t what the potential buyer is looking for.

Advertising

Holding an open house is a fair amount of work and it’s the same amount of work whether prospective buyers show up or not; advertising will hopefully increase your traffic. Even up to last year agents and FSBO’s would run Open House ads in the local newspapers, but this has rapidly diminished as the internet has taken hold. It only makes sense; why spend \$40-\$45 on a single open house ad when you can run one electronically for free? Here in the Twin Cities the Regional MLS now accepts entries for open house events; this data then cascades through to all real estate company websites and Realtor.com so that potential buyers can search and see if any homes meeting their requirements will be “held open” this coming weekend (or whenever). This is a great feature and should be utilized whenever possible. I wouldn’t spend time or money on any other form of open house advertising.

Preparing the Home on “The Day of the Open House”

Preparation of the home “The Day of the Open House” assumes that your home has been properly prepared for market to start with and all that remains to be done are simple “tweaks”. In other words we’re not going to be discussing the importance of an attractive entryway, neutral décor, or cleaning out your rain gutters; that should all have been taken care of already.

Exterior –

1. Summer: Mow the lawn and sweep/blow the grass off of walkways.
Fall: Sweep leaves off of the same walkways and the deck.

Winter: Sweep or shovel the snow off the walkways and your deck (nothing is more depressing than having 2' of snow on your beautiful deck). Put down salt on walks and steps so nobody slips.

2. Make sure all exterior lights are turned on (and the bulbs are good).
3. Walk around and pick up any toys, litter, etc from the area around the home.
4. Bring in any sheets from the literature tube; you want people to come into the home, not just stop and grab.

Interior –

1. Set the thermostat; keep the temperature comfortable in both summer and winter.
2. Turn on all lights; check to make sure everything is as it should be while you're walking around doing this.
3. Open all window coverings (except where you're trying to screen an unattractive view).
4. Air the place out; open the windows and turn on exhaust fans for a few minutes to get rid of stale odors (Don't fry anything for breakfast or lunch the day of the open, please. I truly hope you're not smoking in the house either, for more than one reason).
5. Clean the litter box, clean up the dog's food area, and put both Fluffy and Fido in their kennels or at the neighbor's house.
6. Make all the beds, clean the kitchen and baths really well and vacuum/dust/damp mop all floors.
7. Have a fire in the fireplace during the fall/winter months.
8. Have everyone except one adult leave for the duration of the open.
9. Turn a radio on to a light rock station to provide some background noise.

Documents

Make sure you have all necessary documents available and attractively displayed in the designated "Sales Material Area" (ie, kitchen counter, dining room table, etc). I recommend having the following:

1. Black & White 1-page report from MLS (one per person expected during the open house)
2. Color feature sheets (no more than 10)
3. List of improvements and upgrades (stapled to the back of the color feature sheet; give these only to people you think are good prospects).
4. Required inspection reports (5 copies)
5. Seller's disclosure (5 copies)
6. Association documents, if townhouse or condo (just your 1 original copy)

Signage

Put your Open House signs out at the designated start time. Put one at the end of the sidewalk/driveway and then another at the intersection of your street and the next busier one. Continue this until you get out to at least a collector street; this is your “sign path”. Every situation is different but what you’re trying to do is inform people traveling on highly-traveled streets that you’re having an open house and then showing them how to get there (that’s why Open House signs have arrows on them). Maybe you’ll want to bring cars in from two directions, or maybe you’ll have to post intermediate signs because the distances are too great between signs otherwise. Some homes only require one sign, others require six; it all depends on the location.

In the winter months you can just stick the legs of the signs into the snow; in the summer try to push them a little into the grass. If it’s windy out you’ll want to ensure that the legs will dig into something or the signs may blow right over. I’ve spent more than one open house wondering why nobody was showing up only to find that all of my signs had blown over! In fact, if it is a windy day you may want to check on your signs periodically. Don’t forget to pick your signs back up after the open house is over with.

Entryway Practicalities

During the summer it’s usually fine to let shoppers keep their shoes on and walk through the home; just ask them to wipe their shoes off. But if it’s raining or during the winter however, you’ll have to ask them to remove their shoes. It’s a good idea to have a temporary entryway mat or rug to set the shoes on so you don’t get little pools of water everywhere.

Personal Presentation & Greeting the Prospect

Most people out looking for a new home on Saturday or Sunday afternoon are going to be dressed in jeans, Dockers, sweaters, etc., and that’s exactly how you should be dressed as well. I usually hover in the kitchen/great room area so that I can see and hear someone opening the door or knocking. I have a few of the black & white 1-page reports in my hand. I approach them, smile and introduce myself, and say something like “Thanks for stopping. This report has a lot of good information on this home and you’re welcome to take it with. Would you like me to summarize it for you?”

Most people will say “sure, go ahead”, so have about a 1 minute description ready to go (bedrooms, bathrooms, special features, price, etc). After that say something like “There’s more information on the kitchen counter (or dining room table, or wherever) for you to look at. Go ahead and look around and I’ll be here to answer any of your questions”. And then leave them alone, at least for a while. Don’t follow them around from room to room trying to convince them of the merits of your property; people want to look, open closets, and talk among themselves. If they are still there ten minutes later you

can try and approach them again with something like “Well, what do you think?”, but don’t be pushy. No one likes a pushy salesperson. Most of the time a prospective buyer will know within the first few minutes weather the home is a potential candidate or not and will have left anyway. If they’re still there and asking questions, the open house has done its job!

Scheduling

Open houses are typically held on Sunday afternoons for 2-3 hours; 1-3pm, 2-4 pm, or 1-4pm are the standards. I also like to ensure that my open houses will not be at exactly the same time as an important local sporting event (ie, Vikings game); try to have your open start at least an hour before the game or run at least an hour after the game ends. Some people and agents have had success with opens on Saturday; I never have and don’t recommend them. Some agents like holding opens during the week, for example on a Thursday during the evening “drive time”. These are typically non-advertised so it’s crucial to have your sign path start out on a fairly busy street. Evening opens will only work of course while it is still light enough at 5pm to see your open house signs!

Finally, don’t over-do your open house scheduling. Once every other week is ample.

Good Luck!

Right Properties, Inc. copyright 2008