



Sell Up – Smarten Up

Think like a buyer and offer more than they expect

It should go without saying that selling is an art. Buyers are looking for the best deal and true value for their money. Small items often sell themselves. If someone wants them, as long as the price is fair they'll buy; if not they won't – it's generally as simple as that. A vehicle sale might be a better example of what this article is about. Unless the car is no good for anyone other than a scrap dealer, a fair bit of effort goes into making it look presentable. The outside is washed and polished, the inside detailed so that it appears neat and gives the impression of a careful owner. Even the engine compartment might be treated to a steam-clean. All of this counts for nothing, of course, if it runs like a sick pig; but initially the looks attract prospective buyers.

When it comes to property, a number of factors have to be considered to ensure what's on offer is an attractive buy. People wanting to purchase a house are guided by price and location; but they can be tempted to stretch their comfort zone if something pops up that is too good to refuse. Here's where research needs doing to compare prices in the immediate neighbourhood and surrounding suburbs. Irrespective of any renovations and additions that might have been effected over the years which may improve the appeal of a dwelling, buyers aren't interested in how much the seller has spent to get it looking that way. So, if a price is loaded in an attempt to recoup these costs, the extra could easily put it way over the top of others in the area that are pretty similar. As far as appearance and price goes, if the latter is unrealistic, the outside has to be something special – a genuine come-on.

Unless an area is up-market with architect-designed properties, homes in other neighbourhoods tend to mirror each other and nothing makes one in particular stand out from the rest; not at first glance, anyway. A smart seller, however, will find ways to change this. Tatty front gardens, dead lawns and broken fences are instantly off-putting and in need of a make-over; but this should be done well in advance of advertising for sale. A quick prune, a few new plants and some ground mulch right at the last minute simply isn't good enough – the garden should at least look established and cared for. An outside re-paint may be necessary, perhaps even a roof renovation. Certainly these all cost in terms of money and time; but if your home looks brighter and newer than the other houses in the street, buyers are less likely to drive straight past. You want them to stop and come inside.

The same rules apply to the interior as far as re-decorating goes. Avoid outlandish colour schemes, sticking to cheerful pastel shades that brighten up the place. Don't forget that fresh paint gives off a smell that hangs around for some time, a dead giveaway that a place has only recently been tarted up. In this regard, special attention needs giving to previous or existing damage, particularly by water. Obviously the cause should be fixed;

but stains on walls and ceilings may require an efficient sealer to prevent them eventually re-emerging through new paintwork. This pre-priming should also be applied over marks perhaps made by the kids – wax crayons, felt pen and blue-tack will leach through soon enough. Attention to ceilings may not seem important, but it is. Generally, no-one notices what's overhead, unless marks and discolouration hint at problems above and beyond. These will be spotted, have no doubt. Window treatments and flooring shouldn't appear worn or shabby; if they are they ought to be cleaned if possible, or replaced.

Not all buyers are imaginative and they prefer to view a home rather than just a house. Any furniture will give them an idea of what their own will look like in situ; and it also lends to that comfortable lived-in appearance. Too much, however, detracts from the appeal. Any items that create clutter should be removed, leaving just sufficient to give the illusion of space; especially if rooms are actually on the small side. Sellers who are intending moving their furniture out prior to putting a home on the market might like to reconsider and leave a few items to display potential. Agents will often hire furniture just to change the stark emptiness of a property and give it a homely look.

Like ceilings, back yards are important. These are most likely the last part of a property which buyers will view and should reflect the attraction of the front gardens that sparked their interest. A tangled mess or a weed-infested sandpit could have them thinking twice; whereas a pleasant garden and patio area might just be the icing on the cake that prompts their final decision. As with the interior of the house, any outbuildings such as garages and sheds should look in good condition; and whatever is stored inside needs to be tidy.

All of this probably seems a lot of hard work and unnecessary expense, but trying to do as little as possible while expecting to get an inflated price rarely works. Those who are prepared to begin early enough will not only see the benefits of a fresh makeover, but they will have time to appreciate it themselves for a few months before they eventually sell. Then they really will be making a smart move.

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