



10 must-do sale preparation tasks — regardless of market

Buyers are stretching their budgets more than ever, and they want the best their money can buy. If sellers want to capitalize on their homesale, they'll have to put in the work. Here are 10 seller must-do's and why they matter to buyers

BY [CARA AMEER](#)

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There's been a lot of talk of a cool-down as of late, after a white-hot market where sellers barely had to put forth any effort to [prep their home for sale](#), only to result in multiple offers, bidding wars and a final selling price way over asking for many. That experience, of course, varies from market to market.

As markets are starting to wane, prep for sale is becoming all the more crucial. Although sellers have largely been sailing along, throwing a property on the market with very little preparation, that approach is a wild card, no matter what the market is doing.

After a year of consumers hearing about (and hoping to cash in on) this intense seller's market, agents face a significant challenge getting sellers back on board with proper seller preparation.

Set the expectation by focusing on ROI

It's essential to set the tone when meeting with prospective sellers in today's vastly changing climate and discuss what they need to tackle before putting their home on the market.

Sellers don't always have all the details, and they often get it wrong. They sometimes base their decisions on sales they heard about that are the exception, not the rule, using it as reasoning not to lift a finger.

Because they likely have faulty seller preparation expectations based on what their friends have told them about their sales, you need to convey that the market sets the price, and the market is changing.

All markets are local, and they can change in a matter of weeks or every couple of months with a new batch of closed sales. What a home down the street commanded two months ago might not be the same today.

The best way to motivate sellers is to demonstrate the return on investment (read: cash in their pockets) on proper sale prep: higher selling prices, shorter marketing times and [multiple-offer](#) potential.

With real estate prices significantly up in nearly every market in the country, buyers are stretching their budgets more than ever at *all* price points. And they are more apt to respond to well-maintained and extremely clean homes with enthusiasm. Simply put, the better the house looks, the more interest and potential for offers and [bidding wars](#).

10 seller prep to-dos

Here are 10 things that sellers should do — regardless of market conditions — and why they matter to buyers right now:

1. Paint

[Painting](#) is one of the easiest ways to freshen up the look of a home, both inside and out. A fresh, neutral paint color will have broader appeal because buyers will be able to envision themselves in the space.

Having the exterior painted or touched up can amp up the home's [curb appeal](#), which is critically important, especially as the property hits the market as a new listing.

The home will pop in photos and video and send the buyers running right now. A professional paint job can help clean up the nicks and dents of everyday living, and that freshly painted smell creates an inviting environment for a new homeowner.

2. Landscaping

If people don't like what they see on the outside, they won't want to check out the inside — no matter how low inventory is. Because most buyers begin their search online (and exterior pictures are usually first on that online listing) creating strong curb appeal is where it's at.

Overgrown bushes, jungle-like clusters of long-neglected plants and view-obstructing trees that haven't been trimmed in years don't exactly motivate [buyers](#) to get their checkbooks out.

That's why paying attention to the exterior of the home before putting it up for sale is key. Cut back overgrown landscaping, remove plants that block the view of the house, and give trees a good trimming. Given the widespread use of drone photography and video, ensuring that a property's landscaping looks good can create a warm welcome for potential buyers looking online as well as those driving by in person.

3. Appliance refresh

Why should a seller even bother? Well, new appliances can update the look of even the most dated kitchens. If timing permits, having these in place before putting the home up for sale will be well received by buyers.

There's a huge demand for [appliances](#) right now, which is causing delays in delivery times. Buyers will be relieved not to deal with those challenges, and they'll be grateful for the convenience of having everything in place once it's time for them to move in.

4. New countertop and sink

If your sellers haven't done much to their [kitchen](#), encourage them to consider updating the counters to what's on trend right now — like marble-style quartz that will do well to freshen up the space.

A new large rectangular or farmhouse-style sink will help complete the look. This will also help offset any further updates a buyer may want to make.

5. Flooring update

If your sellers have dated or worn carpet, they should consider replacing it or installing luxe vinyl [flooring](#) instead. Buyers typically don't want to inherit a seller's worn carpet, and it is one of the first things they often ditch before they move in.

Luxe vinyl plank flooring has been a huge hit with buyers for its durability with everyday living and stylish appearance. New flooring goes a long way in conveying value with buyers, as they won't have to worry about trying to coordinate installation during move-in time.

6. Roof

If your sellers' roof is nearing the end of its life, it is going to be difficult to get away with not replacing it when they prepare to sell. No matter how a home is priced to offset that repair, the challenge is that insurance is becoming increasingly more difficult to obtain. It's also quite costly, particularly in hurricane-prone areas like Florida.

Buyers getting a mortgage are required to have insurance, so trying to buy a home with an old roof is going to be a next-to impossible feat. A cash buyer will also have the same concerns, as they need insurance as well.

Buying a home with an older roof is a big turnoff for buyers. It's expensive to replace, and not to mention, securing costly insurance is stressful (even if they were to replace the roof within 30 to 60 days of closing).

A sale will go so much smoother if a seller is willing to replace an old roof before putting the property on the market or before closing. Coordinating with contractors to time a roof replacement with a closing date can often be a difficult task, and it can lead to stressful delays for everyone involved, which is why it is better to have the roof replaced before putting the home up for sale.

7. Heating and air-conditioning

At the very least, sellers should have their HVAC serviced and cleaned before putting their home on the market. HVACs are commonly flagged on inspection reports. If the air-conditioning system is at the end of its life, sellers should strongly consider replacing it before putting their house on the market.

Old air-conditioning systems can cause buyer hesitation, and they can often become a [renegotiating](#) point once the house is under contract, which will just eat up precious time. Furthermore, if the buyer is getting a loan, the uncertainty of an appraisal often looms in the background, and that result is typically not known before inspections are done.

Sellers may end up granting a substantial concession to the buyer for an old or poorly functioning HVAC, but they may also get hit with the property not appraising subsequently thereafter.

There are no guarantees that the buyers would be willing to pay the difference or agree to that up front, especially going into a negotiation where they may know the HVAC is old. While this can be a costly expense to replace, it will help your sellers command stronger offers from buyers willing to buy with confidence.

8. Handyman fix-its

Updating old plumbing fixtures in bathroom sinks and kitchen, along with changing lighting to brighter light bulbs, updating light fixtures in kitchen and dining areas, and replacing old ceiling fans will help give your sellers' home a newer, more stylish look.

Encourage your sellers to have gaps in countertops caulked, along with areas around showers and sinks. Consider regrouting the [bathroom](#) tile if needed. Another update buyers will surely appreciate? Changing

old-school toggle light switches to rocker-style switches and adding [dimmers](#) for new chandeliers or pendant lighting.

9. Deep-cleaning, decluttering and organizing

If sellers do nothing else, they should invest in a deep-cleaning of their house by a professional cleaning crew. No matter the market, buyers still expect a clean and sparkling home — even if the home doesn't have a lot of updates.

Now is the time to have every nook and cranny scrubbed, dusted and mopped. Don't forget to clean dusty vents along with the dryer vent where years of clogged lint may have built up.

This is also a great time to clean furniture like couches and chairs, making sure to vacuum between the cushions and steam-clean to make everything look crisp and well-maintained. Ditto for bedspreads and comforters, especially if your sellers haven't washed those in a while.

The same goes for any window treatments. Curtains and drapes along with blinds can be professionally cleaned. Steam-cleaning tile floors and professionally cleaning the carpets can help eliminate dirt and odors that have been building up for years.

And don't forget the outside — pressure-washing the driveway, walkways and pool deck will help give the house a glowing, fresh appearance that says your sellers are serious about selling.

Decluttering and organizing never go out of style. Buyers are buying a space to live — not other people's clutter. Now is the time to get rid of unnecessary stuff in closets, the garage and the attic. A seller is going to have to deal with it before closing anyway, so it is best to get a head start.

10. Windows

When was the last time your sellers had their windows cleaned — both inside *and* out? I'm also talking about the tracks that often build up with dirt and dead bugs over the years.

No one likes to lift the blinds or open the curtains to find dirty windows. Having these professionally cleaned will make the house truly shine. If there are any fogged window panes, consider having those replaced before the home hits the market. This is often an checklist item that buyers want to have addressed post-inspection, and depending on the timing of glass orders, it can interfere with the ability to close on time.

Properly preparing a home for sale instills trust and confidence in buyers. When buyers feel those two things when viewing a home, they are less likely to hesitate about making an offer.

When they do make an offer, it is more likely to be strong and decisive with less chance of it falling apart due to the condition of the house, which is something that sellers are always in control of.