



Preparing, Maintaining, and
Showing Your Home to
Sell In Seconds!



Prepared by
Sebastian "Seb" Frey
Lic. 01369847
408.458.7348

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What's that you say? Prepare and Maintain your house to sell...in seconds? That's *outrageous!* No house is going to sell in seconds!

Well, that's true. It often takes days, weeks, and months to get a house sold - between inspections, repairs, upgrades, landscaping, cleaning, and so much more...getting a home ready to market can take a very long time.

The interesting thing is that the actual sale itself - when a buyer says **YES, I want to buy this house!** - often does happen in a matter of seconds. It starts when a buyer pulls up to the curb of the house and says **Ahh, this place looks great!** But the magic happens really within the first few seconds after opening the door, when the home calls to them and the buyer knows - **knows!** - your home is meant to be theirs. That's when the magic happens, and **it happens in seconds.**

The fact it happens in seconds is usually no accident. It's often because the seller has spent a great deal of time and effort preparing the house to connect with as many buyers as possible. And, let's remember - the more buyers that have that connection to your home, the more who will write offers, and the more you will ultimately be able to sell your house for.

The good news is that we don't recommend spending a lot of money on granite countertops, new cabinets, appliances, etc. Home improvements of this type rarely provide a good return on dollars spent. Some real estate agents advocate spending a lot of your money without any supporting evidence that you'll sell quicker and for more money. For example spending \$15,000 in a kitchen might only bring in an extra \$8,000 at resale. In some parts of the country swimming pools, spas, and upgraded appliances add no value at all, according to the appraisers.

While we are not going to go over expensive home improvements in this guide, neither are we going to get into any kind of significant repairs which your home may need. We generally advise sellers to take care of any deferred maintenance prior to selling their homes - such as repairing termite damage, wood rot, leaky roofs, and any other items which might cause a problem when a buyer tries to get a loan on your property. In some cases (e.g. short sales) it is not cost effective or desirable to do any of these repairs, but most "traditional" sellers would be well advised to take care of deferred maintenance prior to marketing their home.

Aside from upgrades and repairs, in most cases, it's the simple, inexpensive (but time-consuming!) stuff that is going to make the biggest difference in terms of shorter time on market and higher net proceeds. Without further ado, let's dig in.

Exterior Preparations

Let's start where the buyer starts - outside your house. Curb appeal is that ineffable quality which, while it might not make a sale, can often cause one not to happen at

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all. Your goal should be to have your house looking from the street like it's something straight out of *Sunset Magazine*.

The **yard** should be free of debris, toys and clutter. Nice flowers can brighten up any area! Coil your hoses. Put tools away. What can you do to make the yard more appealing - a table and chair under a shade tree? Repainting the swing set? New mulch or flower beds? Tree or shrub trimming? Here's a checklist of things to go over.

Exterior Items - Checklist

- ✓ Make sure that the front of your home is spotless all the way up to the front door. Repaint and replace light fixtures if necessary. Often times the buyers spend a lot of time there why they wait for their real estate agent or you to open the door. First impressions are hard to modify.
- ✓ Make sure that all of your walls and outside exterior are washed down. No flaking paint. No wasp nests, no cobwebs.
- ✓ Consider filling in any foundation cracks in the sidewalk, patios, driveway, or walls.
- ✓ If you're going to be showing your home at night - outdoor lighting is going to be crucially important, make sure to replace any burned-out bulbs and that the lights are not blocked by vegetation.
- ✓ Remove dead trees and shrubs. It's a good investment, especially in the front yard, to add new trees and shrubs or replace the old dead branches.
- ✓ Everybody loves flowers, keep yours blooming. The cost of replacing flowers is usually minor in comparison to the perceived value it gives your home.
- ✓ Make sure the doorbell works. You can replace it with a wireless one if needed. A broken doorbell is a bad start to any showing.
- ✓ Try to get up the oil stains on your driveway or in your garage. Most hardware stores have concrete cleaner.
- ✓ Have your mailbox repaired or replaced if not in great condition.
- ✓ Paint, paint, paint. Nothing freshens a home up more. If you don't have the time or budget for a complete exterior paint job, consider painting just the trim to give the home a fresher, sharper look.
- ✓ Clean the gutter. Replace downspouts. Make sure there are no running trails of water erosion in your yard.

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- ✓ Re-stain wood decks if necessary. Replace any rotted wood.
- ✓ Make sure all stair railings are tight and secure.
- ✓ Mow the grass. Trim all the edges and hedges of your yard.
- ✓ If you have a fence - make sure it looks good. Paint it, replace broken boards etc.
- ✓ Repair or replace all doors, closet doors, and windows and screens if there are holes, cracks, or rips.

Interior Preparations

It is so often the case that a buyer pulls up to a home, takes one look, and says “This place isn’t for me.” It won’t matter how great the property is inside, or how much potential it has - it’s nearly impossible to get that buyer to take a second look at the property. Having the home look inviting from the inside is absolutely critical.

What comes next, though, is equally as important - the first impression from when they open the door, and the few seconds or minutes which pass after that. Let’s now take a look at what needs to be taken care of on the inside of the home.

Cleaning and packing *stuff* away is the most important of all the basic preparations. Rooms, closets and garages need to look neat and clean and as roomy as possible. Cluttered rooms and closets full of boxes and “*stuff*” make the home look smaller and buyers wonder if their stuff will fit.

The solution to the clutter is to simply get rid of it. Everything that you don't use on a regular basis (which means every other day at least), put in storage or at least out of plain sight. Seriously - get rid of a lot your things by packing them away, or **consider having a moving sale**. Who knows, *just having a moving sale may provide the kind of marketing that will get your house sold*, before you go through a lot of additional trouble!

Kitchens are the number one spot in most homes for clutter. Quick, count the appliances and other items on your counters. How often do you use that juicer, really? A few weeks of inconvenience in getting them out and putting them away or doing without them is well worth it. Now go through each of your cabinets in your kitchen, all of the counter space, and all of the cupboards to make sure all are clean and neat of “unnecessary stuff.” For example, a good idea is to put away about 2/3rds of all the coffee mugs and glasses into a box and storing them.

Remember that in your **bedrooms** less stuff is more appealing. Pack away your clothes and shoes; only save the 25% to 35% that you’ve actually worn recently. You want your closets to look capacious, not small and crammed full of clothes. Take a

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close look to determine what can go. Pack away the books, toys, and gadgets you have lying around. Make sure there is plenty of light in each bedroom; curtains and blinds open, freshen the air if needed. Make sure all nooks and crannies are clean and dust-free.

Bathrooms: clean out under the sink and the medicine cabinets (people will nose around) make sure there is plenty of light and they are spotless. Do you need to re-caulk the tub and sinks? No mildew allowed. Air fresheners might also be in order.

Living rooms, family rooms, and dining rooms: pack away the stuff. Make them well-lit and immaculately clean.

Interior Items - Checklist

- ✓ Clean or re-paint all nicks and scuffs. The newer Magic Erasers sponges work wonders on minor scuffs and may preclude the need for repainting.
- ✓ If there are too many nicks or scuffs, or if the colors in your home are not neutral or too bold - you will definitely want to repaint the walls to make them fresh, bright, and inviting.
- ✓ Oil or WD40 any squeaky hinges or doors.
- ✓ Repair any leaky faucets in the bathrooms and kitchen.
- ✓ If your appliances look out of place in the home - e.g. a nicer, updated kitchen with an old, rusty dishwasher - consider swapping out the older appliances with something you can find on Craigslist, a used appliance store, or at a liquidation/closeout sale somewhere.
- ✓ No drafts. Fix or caulk all windows and doors.
- ✓ If there are any interior indications of a leaking roof, make sure the roof leaks have been addressed, any rot repaired, and the signs of leak damage inside have been remedied. ***Even though damage has been repaired, make sure to disclose any previous leaks to the buyer.***
- ✓ Eliminate all pet odors, especially cat urine and dog hair. This is usually much easier said than done, but pet odors are often a deal killer.
- ✓ Eliminate all other strong odors, especially tobacco or any other kind of smoke, as this is a major turn off for lots of buyers.
- ✓ Professionally clean all the carpets in your house. You may need to replace them, and if you do, it is money well spent.

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- ✓ Clean and wax all appropriate floors.
- ✓ Clean the curtains and window coverings. Replace them if they are worn, broken, or too soiled to clean completely.
- ✓ Make sure any wallpaper is secure to the walls. Peeling wallpaper is a turnoff. Consider removing the wallpaper and painting, as wallpaper has limited appeal and may turn off a number of buyers.
- ✓ Gather the operating manuals and warranties for all major appliances and fixtures and put them in a binder or envelope.
- ✓ Replace any loose, chipped, or broken tiles in the bathrooms.
- ✓ Replace shower curtain with a new, clean, bright and fresh one.
- ✓ Make all beds - this seems obvious but it's amazing how many homes I've shown with the beds not made and the rooms a mess. You may have to bribe a teenager to keep their room clean. Pay them.
- ✓ Keep all stairways uncluttered, especially as stairs are already a tripping hazard.
- ✓ Have the furnace cleaned and inspected if you haven't done it in over a year, make inspection report available to buyers.
- ✓ If your garage or basement is jam-packed full of "stuff" - rent a storage facility and move all the "stuff" to it.
- ✓ If you have an automatic garage door opener - makes sure it works.
- ✓ Remove/replace any "distractions" - these are items which may cause the buyer to identify the home as *yours, instead of theirs*. *This includes custom ornamentations, for example, your family's name on a plaque by the door or some custom decorations such as quotes and bible verses artistically painted on the walls.*
- ✓ Check that your doors don't stick or have loose knobs. Make sure your cabinet drawers have no loose knobs as well.
- ✓ Any cobwebs, wasp nests, termite pellets, ant hills etc. should be removed.
- ✓ Organize closets and remove stuff which is not necessary and put it in storage. Large closets sell houses; well-organized closet looks much bigger than one crammed with clutter.

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- ✓ Remove excess extension cords, especially those in traffic ways.
- ✓ Open doors to the areas you want the buyer to see such as walk-in closets, pantries, etc. Make sure those areas are neat.
- ✓ If you have hidden features, like a stairway to the basement, consider making a sign that spells out that feature.
- ✓ Ensure that all light fixtures are cleaned (dust chandeliers; clean out bugs from overhead lights; and lamps, etc.), and that there is a light bulb in every socket.
- ✓ Clean all windowsills. Windows should be in good repair with no cracks.
- ✓ Any paint on windowpanes should be removed with a razor blade prior to cleaning.
- ✓ Install high wattage light bulbs so that there is a lot of light.

Showing Advice / Preparations

Prepare the home when you can for each showing, dust, clean, spruce up, put out fresh flowers, turn on all the lights, and leave the home - with your pets - if the buyer is accompanied by a professional real estate agent. If the buyers are on their own, be prepared to answer questions honestly but don't get emotional if they speak poorly about your house; it's possible someone has told them they can get it for less if they "tell you" why your house will never sell at the price you're asking.

Be sure that you go through each room before a showing or an open house. Remember that each buyer when they first come through the door is "new." They haven't seen your home before - first impressions are critical.

When someone is coming by to see your home, we suggest a few practical preparations such as:

- ✓ Keep a binder on the kitchen counter with all the pertinent disclosures for your home, such as improvements you've made, inspections and reports, and anything else a buyer or buyer's agent might need to know when they are seeing the house.
- ✓ Place your property brochures/flyers in a conspicuous place; you could place a small sign asking agents to leave their business card. (This is for your safety and it allows you to track who has shown the property and call them for feedback).
- ✓ Keep all doors unlocked within the home. Buyers want to see all the rooms (and closets); if they can't, it slows up or even stops the buying process.

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- ✓ Never leave valuables that could be easily “pocketed” (watches, jewelry, smaller items of emotional value) out in plain view. Unfortunately there are some unscrupulous types out there. Also never tell “prospects” your schedule; when you’re not home etc. You never know who might be casing your house out. If you must turn down a showing simply state that it’s not possible at that time.

Lighting

- ✓ Keep the window coverings open at all times during showings unless you are hiding an outside eyesore or very close neighbor. In this case, consider some window coverings or screens which allow light but block sight.
- ✓ If any part of your home is not brightly lit by sunlight, make sure the lights are on. For a night or evening showing, turn on all of your inside *and* outside lights, create a glowing warmth around your home as the potential buyers drive up.

Kitchen

- ✓ Make sure the sink is clean and free of dirty dishes.
- ✓ De-clutter the countertops: they appear more spacious when clean and uncluttered.
- ✓ Make sure the floor is swept, or better, freshly mopped.
- ✓ The stove should and counters should be free of any food or cooking detritus.

Bathrooms

- ✓ Put out fresh towels in the bathroom, and make sure no damp or wet towels are left lying on the floor or towel racks.
- ✓ Make sure the sinks and toilets are sparkling clean.

Mood

- ✓ Leave *soft* music playing - softly. Turn *off* any blasting television or radio.
- ✓ Place some potpourri strategically throughout the home to help make it smell fresh and clean.

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- ✓ Create a positive mood. If it is a cold day, make sure your home is heated, and if it is summertime, keep your home cool. Snacks and drinks might also be offered at an open house.
- ✓ Add a special accent to make your house appear comfortable and inviting: an open cookbook, cut flowers in a vase, or something baking in the oven (or bread maker).

During the Showing

- ✓ Keep pets out of the way when showing, preferably out of the house. Some buyers get annoyed or are allergic or are scared and another gets their attention diverted and can't remember anything about your house except for your pet.
- ✓ If at all possible, don't have more than one set of buyers present during a showing, since another set of buyers may feel like intruders and want to hurry through your house.
- ✓ When asked questions you hadn't been prepared for, such as, "Is that staying with the house?" don't rush into committing yourself one way or another. Neutral responses such as "it's negotiable" or "I'll need to think about that" are best. Your goal should be to get them to spend as much time in your home as possible so that they can "see how it could be their new home" and that you are open to reasonable negotiations.
- ✓ If they have a real estate agent, ask if they have any questions when they first arrive, then take a short walk with your children and pets so the buyers can relax and "snoop around." If the buyer is not with an agent, walk them through your home but don't be overly chatty. Do not have guests over during the time a showing is scheduled, if at all possible.

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Everyday Checklist

- ✓ Remove any and all toys, bikes, tools, trash, and animal waste from your yard
- ✓ Keep all steps clear of hazards—old newspapers, laundry, toys, pet toys, etc.
- ✓ Wash dishes
- ✓ Put away clothes
- ✓ Straighten up newspapers, etc.
- ✓ Make beds
- ✓ Open the draperies, pull up the shades and let in the sunlight.
- ✓ Remove “clutter” from each room. Remove things such as coats, shoes, clothing, pet toys, pet food, pet food bowls, trash cans, toys, child safety barriers. (Rooms with no clutter look bigger.)
- ✓ Dust and vacuum floors
- ✓ Wipe showers after each use
- ✓ Water and prune indoor plants
- ✓ Wipe down the bathroom counters. Make sure towels are hung up, and the bathroom rugs are straightened.



[Book a Call Today!](#)

Seb Frey
408.458.7348

sebfrey@sebfrey.com

Lic. 01369847

