# TAMPA HOME-SELLING SECRETS

SELL YOUR TAMPA HOME FAST, FOR THE BEST PRICE, & HASSLE FREE




STEPHEN DISPENSA

# INTRODUCTION



## TAMPA

FLORIDA

Hi, I'm Stephen Dispensa and I'm excited to hear you've decided to sell your home here in Tampa. I hope you're not going too far as Tampa is truly a spectacular place to live, work, and play. As of Spring 2017 Tampa is one of the healthiest real estate markets in the country and you've picked an opportune time to sell. However, the selling process is tricky and shouldn't be navigated alone.

I wrote this guide to hopefully help everyone trying to sell their home in Tampa. Whether you're trying to sell the home yourself, using another Realtor, or hiring me as your listing agent I want you to get the best price possible for your home. So why am I giving away all my best secrets? Because a rising tide lifts all ships. A healthy real estate market is good for you, for me, for my neighbors and friends and family. Rising home prices are a cornerstone of a healthy market. By following the tips and tricks in this guide I guarantee you will see an increase in your home's market value.



So, who am I? How did I learn all of this stuff? Well, for starters I never wanted to become a real estate agent. Never in a million years did I think I'd be doing any of this. Let me tell you a bit about my background.

I spent many years working in the TV and Film industry. I directed TV shows, feature films, and commercials. I had a very "can do" attitude and would often take on all aspects of the production myself. I had a small production company based up in NY and was doing quite well producing regional commercials for small businesses in the area.

In the summer of 2013 I was hired to travel to Europe to produce property videos for a real estate agent attempting to sell some luxury properties.

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# INTRODUCTION (CONT)

I created videos that were like nothing people had ever seen before. I used all the cinematic techniques that I had honed from years in the business, combined with emotional music and narration. The properties were suddenly selling like crazy. Foreign investors were watching the videos and showing up to purchase multiple properties in a single weekend.



Shortly after that the same client informed me he was starting a brokerage in NY and he wanted me to come on board as the firm's media director. I decided to take the job and immersed myself in learning everything possible about real estate. I got licensed right away and set out to work. The first year wasn't easy, but after a while I started experiencing similar results. The property videos were a smash hit and buyers were showing up already feeling connected to the homes. I was getting offers that homeowners had never thought possible. I smashed records in every neighborhood I worked in.

It was during this time period that I traveled to Tampa for the first time. A good friend of mine was getting married and he was holding his bachelor party here. Now, although I may have been under the influence of one or more adult beverages that weekend, I knew immediately that I needed to move to Tampa. I loved the city, the weather, and most importantly the people. It was everything I had ever been looking for. So I closed out my deals in NY, and headed south with whatever I could fit in my car.



Now I'm here in Tampa, helping homeowners and homebuyers complete their real estate transactions. My specialty will always be marketing homes with video, but it's been an incredibly rewarding experience helping buyers as well.

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# INTRODUCTION (CONT)

This guide is divided into three sections. These sections reflect the different stages of the home selling process. In each section, I go over tips and tricks that are essential whether you're working with a Realtor or trying to sell the home yourself.

In the first section, **Preparing The Home**, I discuss everything you need to do BEFORE your home goes on the market. From how to properly price your home, to making minor upgrades, and depersonalizing the space. I'll show you everything you need to do to make your home more attractive to buyers.

In the second section, **Marketing The Home**, I go over everything I do to bring buyers in the door. From my inside tips on real estate videos, to social media marketing on Facebook and more. You'll learn how I expose your home to the widest possible audience.

And then in the last section, **Showing & Closing The Sale,** I go over everything you need to do to get the most out of your time on the market, as well as how to ensure your closing goes smoothly.

I hope you enjoy this guide and I have no doubt that you will find the information contained within useful in your process. If at any time you have a questions or would like to schedule an appointment, I've included my phone number and email address at the bottom of every page. Feel free to call, text, or email at any time and I'll help you out in any way that I can.

So if you're ready to sell your home fast, for the best price, and hassle free, let's get started. We've got some work to do.




- Stephen Dispensa

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# SECRET #1 - PRICING THE HOME



Your home is your most valuable asset. Besides being a place for you and your family to live, it is likely you have more money invested in your home than in your bank account, your business, or your retirement account. So when it comes time to sell, it is of utmost important that you get the best price the market will bear.

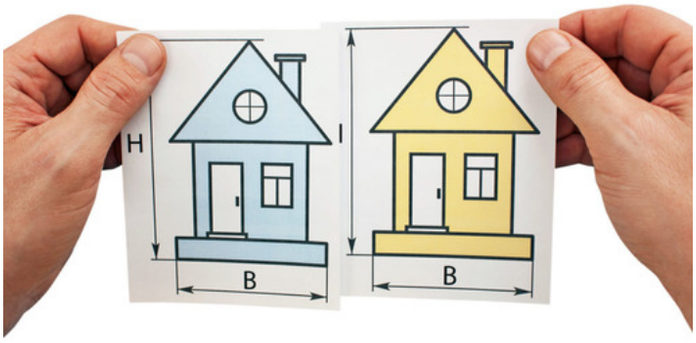
However, it's also important not to price your home so high that it may discourage buyers or cause problems during the appraisal process.

So the first thing we need to consider when listing a home for sale is the price. It's extremely important that we think about this step carefully, as everything we do from this point forward will be to JUSTIFY the price we have set.

In the Real Estate industry, we live and die best on Comparable Properties, or **Comps** for short. These are houses similar to yours that are in the same neighborhood. We use comps for everything from pricing the home for sellers, making offers for buyers, and appraisals for mortgage financing.

So there are a few approaches we can take to valuing your home. The first is looking for direct comps. **Direct Comps** are homes that are extremely similar or identical to yours. If you're in a planned community with 4 or 5 different model lines of houses, look to see homes that are EXACTLY like yours that have sold within the last 6, 12, or 18 months.

If you can find three homes exactly like yours that have sold recently you should have a pretty good idea of the value of your home.




***"Comps"*** *refer to prices paid for recently sold homes that are comparable in size, style and location.*

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# #1 - PRICING THE HOME (CONT)

The second method we have to price the home is to look at **Adjusted Comps**. Here we compare homes that are reasonably similar but have some differences. Let's say you have a ranch house in a particular neighborhood with 3 bedrooms and 2 bathrooms. Recently two ranch style homes sold. However, one of these homes had a pool and the other had 4 bedrooms. We have to assign a value to the features that those homes had and yours does not. From there, we can find an average value and adjust it accordingly to find a list price for your home.






Another option is to look at the average price per square foot. Look at some homes that have recently sold in your neighborhood. Add up the total sales prices from the three most recent sales, and divide it by the total square footage of those three homes. That should give you an average price per square foot. Once you have this value, multiply it by the total square footage of your home and you have the AVERAGE price your home could sell at. Now, from here, you need to decide if your home is average, below average, or above average and raise or lower the price accordingly.

The one thing we DON'T want to do when pricing a home is look at that evil Z word. Yes, I'm talking about the dreaded **Zestimate**. Homeowners love to go on Zillow and check on the "value" of their home, but be warned this number is in no way an accurate reflection of the value of your home. The average Zestimate is off by $14,000! And that's just the average! So how is the average homeowner supposed to know the value of their home?




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# #1 - PRICING THE HOME (CONT)



The best thing you can do to price your home is contact a real estate agent. They are experts in the pricing trends of your neighborhood and have access to data that you may not be able to access easily. In fact, I'd recommend getting a pricing opinion and a Comparative Market Analysis from several Real Estate Agents so you can get a feel for what your home is worth. Agents won't charge you for this, as it's their opportunity to pitch you to list your house.

I personally believe in a pricing strategy that is aggressive but realistic. I have been in Real Estate for years and I've never had a listing not sell. In fact, I've been on listing appointments and been told by homeowners that I was pricing their home way too high. Imagine their surprise when I got them a full price offer on their second day on the market!

The reason I'm able to price houses so high and get sellers their price is what this guide is all about. All of the tips and tricks in this book are designed to justify your price and help you get the most money for your home. That way you can move on to your next home without leaving any money on the table.

If you're ready to find out what your home is worth send me a call, text, or email and I'd be happy to present you with a free pricing analysis of your home.

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# SECRET #2 - DEPERSONALIZE THE HOME



When bringing your home to market, it's incredibly important that potential buyers can **PICTURE THEMSELVES** living in your home. However, what if **YOU'RE** still living in this home? Well there's quite a few things you can do to keep the house depersonalized and give your buyers the best chance to picture themselves living in it. I'm going to take you room by room and give you some suggestions.

**Kitchen**

Kitchens are the centerpiece of homes and oftentimes the most important room for buyers. There's a number of upgrades we're going to discuss in the next chapter but for now let's just keep it simple. Keep all the kitchen surfaces clean. Clean out any burners if you have a gas stove. Keep the refrigerator clear of magnets and any personal papers. Counter space should be clear save for some small appliances (toaster, coffeemaker, etc.) It's important to keep things simple, neat, and clean. Make sure your kitchen floor is clean and ready to show at all times. Empty your garbage pail daily to make sure there's no lingering odors in this important room. Your pantry and cabinets should be kept organized and neat. Donate any non-perishable food items you won't be using to clear up some space in your pantry and make it appear larger. Make sure your sink is kept empty at all times. Dry dishes by hand and put them away rather than leave them out on a drying rack.



No



Yes

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# SECRET #2 - DEPERSONALIZE THE HOME

**Bathrooms**

Just like kitchens, your bathrooms should be kept extremely clean and neat. Put all personal affects away in medicine cabinets and vanities. The only exception should be hand soap and possible a tissue holder. Toothbrushes, hair combs, medicine, and any other personal items should be hidden from view. Make sure to keep tubs and toilets clean. It may be worthwhile to hire a professional to come and clean once a week while you're on the market to take some of the pressure off of you.



No



Yes

**Living Room**

Living rooms are an important space in the home as they are where families tend to gather and spend quality time together.

Preparing a living room for market can be tricky. I actually believe this is one space where we should leave a little bit of your family's touch. A few pictures in this space can help suggest a loving atmosphere that buyers will want to live in. Just make sure not to overdo it. Knicknacks and other personal items should be placed into storage out of site. A few exceptions are coffee table books, plants, and items placed on a mantle. The balancing act in this space is to show that the room has warmth, but not overdo it with any one item.



*A bright and cheery living room with personal touches but not overbearing.*

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# SECRET #2 - DEPERSONALIZE THE HOME







*Cluttered vs neat walk-in closet*

**Bedrooms**

Beds should be made every morning in case a last minute showing comes up during the day. DIrty clothing should be placed in hampers. Surfaces should be kept as clear as possible. Keep your closets half full. It's important to not have cluttered closets as they can mislead buyers into thinking the storage space is smaller than it actually is. Take any clothes you no longer wear and donate them. If you have seasonal clothes you're not using, hide them away in storage to clear out more space.

If you have expensive jewelry or other valuables, I strongly recommend hiding it in a fireproof safe hidden from view while your home is on the market. Although the vast majority of home buyers are honest and good people, you simply never know who you are letting into your home. You can cut down on this liability by using a real estate agent who will pre-screen applicants before they are allowed into your home.



*Depersonalized bedroom with valuables removed*

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# SECRET #2 - DEPERSONALIZE THE HOME

**Pets**

This is a tough one. I, like most people, love our four legged friends. I've had dogs my entire life and I've never met a pup that I didn't get along with. However, not everyone one loves pets. In fact, some people are allergic, or even worse, have fears of animals. If there's any possible way to keep your pet out of the home while it's on the market, I highly recommend it. Perhaps there's a friend or neighbor that wouldn't mind taking them in for a few weeks? As much as we love our pets, there are odors, dander, and hair that are associated with them. The presence of pets can turn off some buyers. I know It's difficult to send your pet away for any period of time, but making this small sacrifice now can help you provide an even better home for them in the future.



*Wait, where am I supposed to go?*

A great way to figure out what work needs to be done to get your home depersonalized for market is to speak with your Realtor. During your listing presentation, they should be able to go from room to room with you and discuss what little things you can do to prep the home for market.

I always do a walk through with my sellers and take notes of little things they can do to make the house show ready. In fact, while I'm shooting video of the home I'll often work directly with them to declutter things as we go along. If you're interested in listing your home with me, I'd be happy to show you how to depersonalize the space to get buyers excited about buying your home.

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# #3 - MAJOR VS MINOR UPGRADES

When you're bringing your home to market, you may be tempted to do some major renovations to try to sell your home for more money. However, you may find a better return in some simple fixes that bring maxium value to your home. Once again, let's go room by room and look at some options.

**Kitchen**

Let's start with the kitchen. Kitchens are the most important room and they oftentimes are the deciding factor in buying a home. Some easy solutions to update an old kitchen are to put modern hardware on the cabinets. Also, if you consider updating one or two of the appliances, it makes it easier for your buyers to see the potential of the kitchen.

Now, I know it's expensive, but counter tops are a huge selling point. Old Formica counter tops are very much out of style. Consider upgrading to granite, or use a composite stone like quartz for a great modern look. If there's one room in the house you're going to invest in, it should be your kitchen. Sometimes it's not practical to replace your whole kitchen, but if you do decide to upgrade before you sell, make sure you modernize your counter top.






Cabinetry is a big expense in every kitchen. However, you can actually get a modern look from older cabinets simply by painting them and replacing the hardware. This is much more cost-effective than installing all new cabinets.

And the easiest change of all to your kitchen? Paint! A coat of light colored paint can brighten up even the smallest kitchen and make them feel larger.

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# #3 - MAJOR VS MINOR UPGRADES

**Bathrooms**



Bathrooms are the second most important rooms in the house after the kitchen. Check all the faucets to make sure they're tight and working properly. Any leaky faucets should be fixed. You can usually do this yourself with just a wrench, or a handy man or plumber can help you.

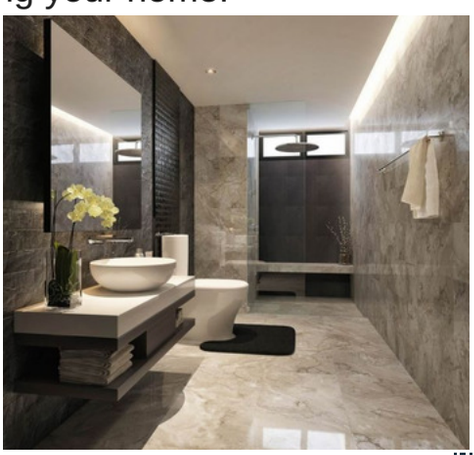


Clean out the grout on all the tiles, especially around the shower area. Fill a spray bottle with a solution of half vinegar and half warm water. Spray it on the grout, let it sit for five minutes and scrub with a stiff brush.

If you're considering a major renovation to both your bathroom and kitchen, buy one large slab for all your counter tops. It will not only save you money, but allow you to tie in your kitchen counters to your bathroom counters.

There's plenty of design choices from simple to elegant that can be used to upgrade your bathroom. Whether you go with simple subway tile and vinyl flooring or a clean modern look, upgrading your bathroom will pay back dividends when selling your home.







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# #3 - MAJOR VS MINOR UPGRADES

## Living Rooms

Try to rearrange your living room to make it feel more open and spacious. Hardwood, laminate, or wood-look tiles tying your living room are a great investment. Tying rooms together using the same floor can really help with the flow of your home.

Keep rooms feeling open and spacious to highlight the size of your home. This may mean reorganizing furniture. Really consider the flow of the house as buyers come to see it.

Painting can be an inexpensive option to make the house more appealing to buyers. Simple, neutral colors are a perfect solution in any room.





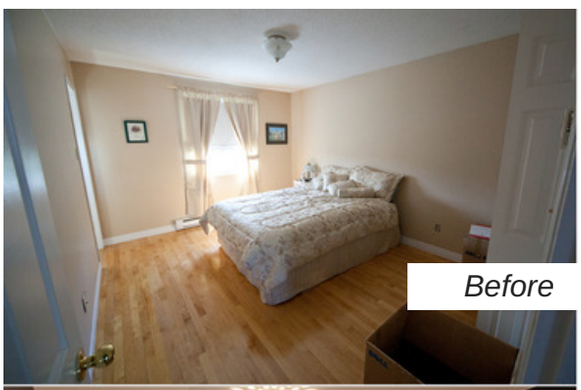


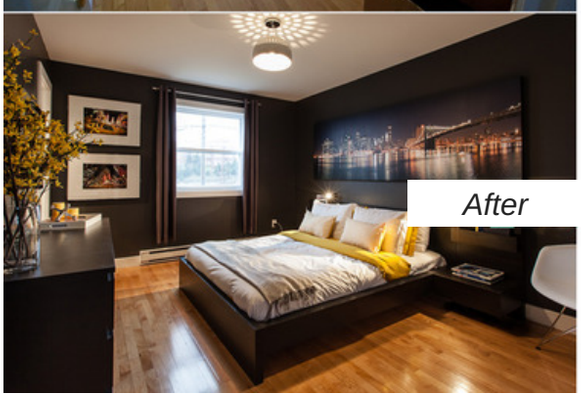
## Bedrooms

Paint bedrooms or change the flooring for a modern look.

Use neutral colors to create an inviting space, or experiment with darker tones to create a seductive bedroom. Decorate to make these rooms inviting to potential buyers.






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# #4 - CURB APPEAL



You never get a second chance at a first impression. And when selling your home, curb appeal is always the first thing your buyers will see. The presentation of the outside of your home sets the tone for every showing and is an area that should not be overlooked when preparing your house for market.

The basics of curb appeal are largely common sense. Keep your lawn well maintained and make sure your front yard is free of overgrowth, weeds, or fallen leaves. The summer months here in Tampa get particularly hot, but try to keep your lawn watered (provided there are no water restrictions in effect). If you have trees on your property, be sure to prune any overgrown branches, A 2 – 3 inch layer of mulch at the base of your tree can help regulate soil temperatures and keep your tree looking healthy even in those hot summer months.



*Look at the difference some simple lawn maintenance can make on the curb appeal of a home.*

If the exterior of your house has siding it's always a good idea to power wash it prior to going on market. This can remove any buildup of dirt or moss that may be on the siding.



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# #4 - CURB APPEAL

Make sure you have working light bulbs on all exterior lights. Shutters and exterior window frames should be in good condition and painted if necessary.

If the exterior of your home is stucco or brick you can power wash it first and then paint it to give it a fresh look. Painting bricks in light or neutral colors is becoming a very popular choice nowadays to give older homes a more modern look.

*Before*



*After*



*Look how these curb appeal changes update the look of this home.*

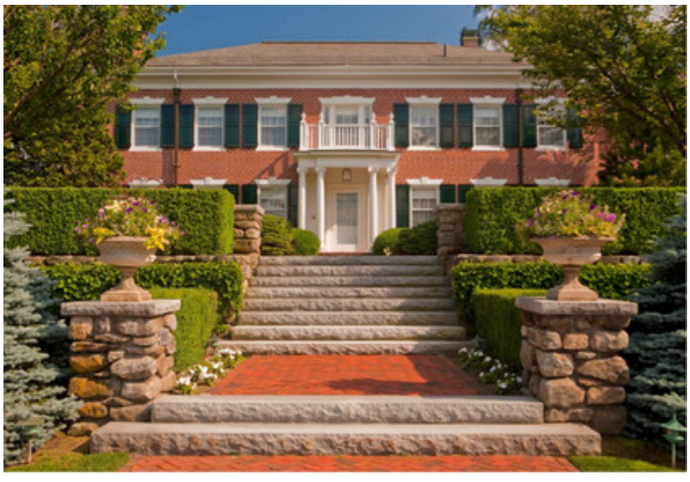
Landscaping is a fairly advanced topic and it's usually best to consult a professional. However, if you want to give it a go yourself, try to keep things simple. Use basic design principles to layout your landscaping. Add some variety with different shapes, textures, foliage, and flower colors but don't sacrifice simplicity too much. As things get busier it tends to overwhelm buyers.

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# SECRET #4 - CURB APPEAL

Consider balance when approaching your landscaping. **Formal Balance** is when your landscaping is a mirror image on both sides. **Asymmetrical Balance** is when both sides have similar sizes, but are not exactly the same.



*Formal Balance*

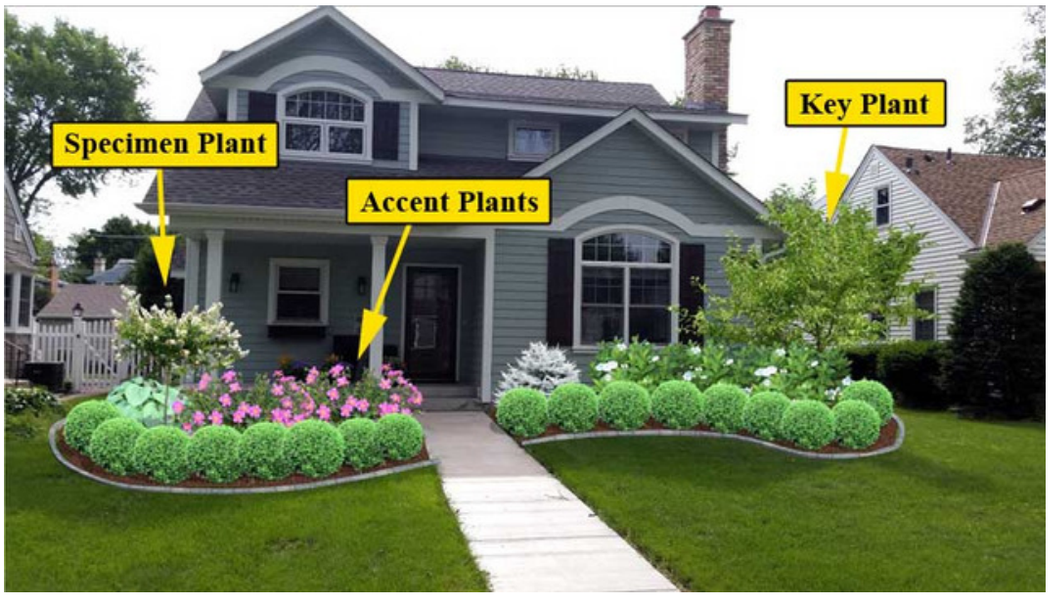


*Asymmetrical Balance*

When choosing plants, there are three types used for different purposes. **Specimen Plants** are usually planted alone to call attention to a specific area like the front door or to serve as a focal point in the overall landscape design.

**Key Plants** are often used to soften or cover features like corners, fences, or transitions in architecture. Think trees or large bushes.

**Accent Plants** are usually planted alone or in groups of three to provide interesting effects like flowering at certain times of the year.




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# #4 - CURB APPEAL

There are other issues to consider when landscaping, such as scale and sequencing of plants. However, these are more complex and normally require more time than you have while preparing to sell a house. However I'd highly recommend speaking with landscape professional and coming up with a plan to create an incredible landscape and boost your curb appeal.

I'm happy to give curb appeal suggestions for every home that I list. If you'd like some ideas on how to make the exterior of your home as impressive as the inside, call me today to arrange a free consultation.



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# #5 - TAKE GREAT PHOTOS

Photos are probably the most important thing that people are going to see when they're shopping for your home. Whether it's searching on Zillow and Trulia, receiving MLS updates form their Real Estate Agents, or seeing a social media ad for your house, visuals sell.

So how do we take great photos? Well the first thing to do is take out your smartphone and get a roll of tape. Electric tape is perfect for this, but duct tape will do. Now take a small 1 inch piece of tape, and place it directly over the lens on your smartphone's camera and leave it there. Because we are not going to be using our smartphones to take pictures of your home.



If you have a real estate agent and they show up with a smart phone to take pictures of your home, fire them. Immediately. Photos of your home should be taken by a professional with a reasonably decent professional camera. I worked as a professional photographer for many years before becoming a realtor. I always bring my professional equipment to shoot any house that I'm listing. Any DSLR by Canon or Nikon will do. I personally love some of the new Sony Mirrorless Cameras.

Look at the difference between a smartphone photo of a listing and a professional shot (captured by yours truly on the following page)



*Typical smartphone photo of a home shot by a real estate agent*

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# #5 - TAKE GREAT PHOTOS



*Professional photograph of a kitchen captured by the author of this guide using proper camera and lighting.*

As you can see using the proper equipment and understanding the fundamentals of photography can create a huge difference in the quality of photograph you can capture.  Here's a few basic suggestions for taking better real estate photos:

Try to balance exposure between daylight coming in windows and the interior of the room. Ideally, both the inside of the room and the outside of any windows should both be exposed equally. This may be difficult without extra lighting equipment or using a process like HDR imaging in Photoshop to combine multiple exposures. One way around this is to shoot later in the day when the sun is lower in the sky and there is less direct light coming through the windows.



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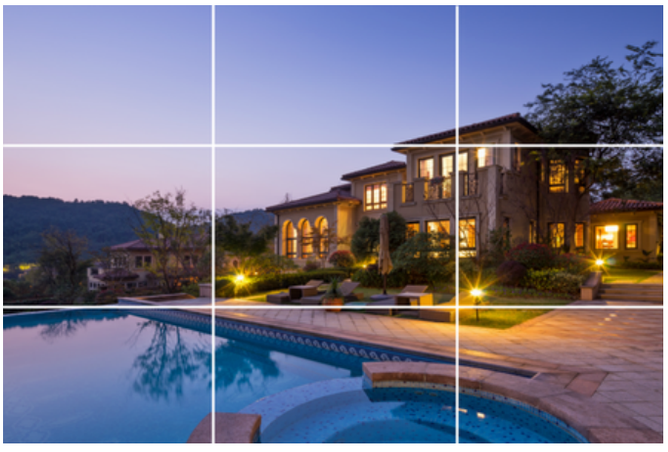
# #5 - TAKE GREAT PHOTOS

Use a wide angle lens for entire rooms. Using a wide angle lens will not only make your rooms feel larger in photos, but it will allow you to keep more of them in focus.

*The picture on the right was captured with a 17mm lens, making the room feel spacious*



Use the rule of thirds. When setting up the shot imagine your picture as if a tic tac toe board is laid over it. Place the most important elements in the shot where the imaginary lines would meet.



Use doorways as natural frames. A great technique to draw attention to something is to use the “frame within a frame” technique. If we think of our entire picture as a frame, when we shoot through a doorway or halfwall, it’s as if we have another framed picture inside our picture.



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# SECRET #5 - TAKE GREAT PHOTOS

Keep the camera low and slightly angled upwards. There's two reasons for this. Firstly, angling up will always make your rooms feel larger in the photos. Secondly, it's usually more important to show off your flooring that it is your ceiling. Keeping the camera closer to the floor will create natural vanishing points in your images and give your potential buyers a good idea of the flooring in your home.





*A long lens limits depth of field and creates focus on a feature*

Use a long lens to focus on special elements. I like to use an 85mm f1.8 lens to shoot special details such as high end hardware on sinks, lighting fixtures, and impressive countertops.

When you consider the value of your home, hiring a photographer is a minimal expense compared to the value you'll get out of it. What's even better is if you use a Realtor, they'll almost always pay for your photos.

I've spent years working as a photographer and I still shoot all the photos of my own listings to this day. One thing that I feel I can bring to your home photos that other Realtors can't is that I'm approaching your entire listing and your photo set with the same focus. I know both real estate and photography inside out.

If you're interested in selling your home with the best possible photos, call me today. I'd be happy to showcase your home with professional photos to help you get top dollar.

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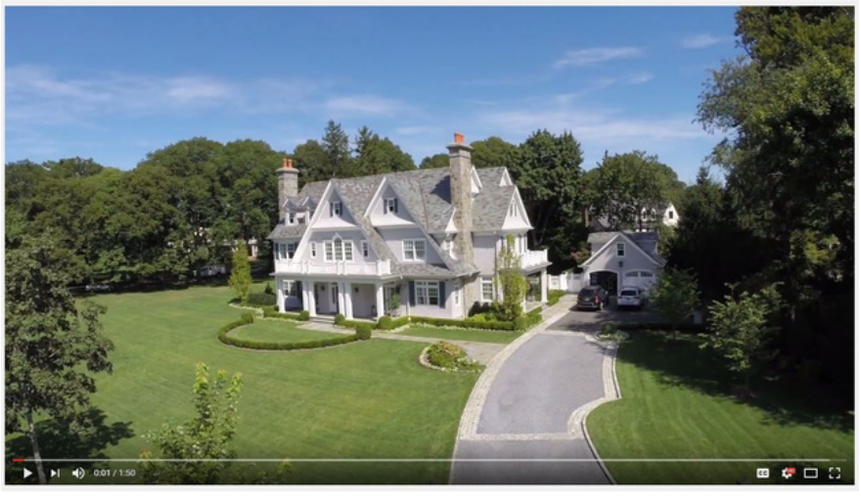
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# #6 - VIDEO IS THE KEY

What if I told you there was a way to get buyers to **WANT YOUR HOME**, even to feel an **EMOTIONAL CONNECTION** to it before they ever step foot inside it? What if I told you one simple process can turn your average house into a prestige property that stands out from all others on the market.

I'm talking about video. Done right, video can stir positive emotions in your buyers that will lead to them putting in higher offers on your home. The trick is to not just shoot a quick video tour like so many agents do. You need to create a short "film" with music, narration, and cinematic techniques to take viewers on a tour of not only your home, but your neighborhood. **Click the link or the picture below to see a sample of how video can help sell your home.**



*Link: https://youtu.be/pcV71y9CiOA*

I use a lot of the same principles for my videos as I do for my photos. I try to balance exposure, use lower angles, and shoot through framing. I also use cinematic moves like "dollies" and "trucks" to give a sense of depth to each shot. You'll notice I often start the camera outside a doorway and then use a smooth track to reveal the room.

I tend to open and close my videos with tilts on the exterior of the house. It's a great lead in to the home and provides an easy transition to titles and information cards.



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# #6 - VIDEO IS THE KEY

One shot that I love to do is a push through, whether it's a doorway or a fence. It's a great way to reveal an impressive room.

I find in larger spaces like backyards or open living rooms, wide pans are the best way to show off as much of the space in a single shot as possible.



*Pushing through a fence to reveal front entrance*

In kitchens I usually try a combination of shots. I use wide dolly shots to grab the entire room, but will also truck in with a longer lens on specific details like kitchen hardware. Tilt shots work well to reveal kitchen appliances such as refrigerators, stoves and hoods.

Bathrooms are a challenging space to shoot because they tend to be confined. I usually start with a dolly past the doorway. Once inside I usually use a tilt to show off shower stalls and hardware. Bathtubs can be challenging but may look good with a dolly shot or tilt. I also like to take care to show off details in the tiling and flooring. **Click the photo or link below to see a sample video using all these techniques.**




*Link: https://youtu.be/qZ2aiGCAs6U*

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# #6 - VIDEO IS THE KEY

Music is an important element in all of these videos. I usually use royalty free stock music from websites like Audioblocks. The trick is to pick instrumental pieces that have some emotional weight to them and match the house. I usually use only one piece of music per video.

Narration is probably the most overlooked element in real estate videos. I've seen so many other agents create videos. However they almost never utilize narration. I believe that's a big mistake as narration can be used to create mood the same way music does. I like to do my own narration. Years of broadcast training have provided me with the ability to do voiceover work that creates a warm guide to every video. It also gives me the ability to call attention to key features in the house.

I also sometimes utilize aerial (drone) video if it's appropriate for the home. These shots are great for large luxury homes where the drone can show off the vastness of the property.



*Captured with a drone*

Editing is also very important. I use dissolve transitions between most clips to create a dreamlike tour where the camera is always moving and one shot blends seamlessly into the next. I try to keep the length of the videos short, 1 and a half to two minutes max. I also end each video with a title card with information on the house: address, bedrooms, bathrooms, square footage, list price, and agent contact information. I also create an "unbranded" version of each video that doesn't have my contact information on it. This allows buyer's agents to send these videos to their buyers and not worry about losing a customer.

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# #6 - VIDEO IS THE KEY

The last thing that I do which I never see other agents do is I go and film the surrounding community. Is there a shopping center nearby? I film it. Are you close to The Riverwalk and Bayshore Drive? I film that as well. Is there a Publix less than a mile away? I go and film that too. I like to give buyers a true feel for the neighborhood when viewing these videos. When a young couple sees a video where there are kids out on the street riding their bicycles, it helps show off the "family feel" that they're looking for. **Click the link or picture below to see a video that shows off the community near a condo I recently sold.**




*Link: https://youtu.be/epJxlAssOIg*

So now you've got my whole playbook for creating killer video. If you've got the equipment and the know how, you can create those same videos yourself. Or you can call me. I create these videos for every house I list, free of charge. If you're ready to get the most money for your home, call me today and we can get started.

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# SECRET #7 - DESCRIBE THE HOME



No matter where your home is being listed, you need an enticing description to get buyers excited about the house. Whether a realtor is listing your home on the MLS and Zillow, or you're selling yourself through newspaper classifieds and craigslist. Ad copy is the most viewed element next to pictures for most listings.

When we're writing copy to try to sell a home, there's two distinctive parts of the home we're going to describe: features and benefits. All too often, real estate agents and homeowners only focus on the features and not enough on the benefits. So what's the difference?

Features are simply the description of your home, from the number of bedrooms and bathrooms to the size of the yard and the location.

Benefits describe the advantage this home will provide to buyers. Let's look at the difference.

Typical home description that focuses only on features:

> *New to market! Beautifully updated 4 bedroom 3 bathroom pool home in South Tampa! Modern kitchen with center island and gas range, stainless steel appliances, and plenty of cabinet space. Luxurious family room with lots of natural light. Backyard features gunnite pool with heated spa, outdoor kitchen and gas fire pit. Large master suite with walk-in closets. Master bath features dual vanities, tiled shower and jetted tub. Located in Plant HS district and close to all! Don't Wait!*

See how this type of copy only focuses on the features of the home?

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# #7 - DESCRIBE THE HOME

Now there's nothing inherently wrong with the description on the previous page. It's professionally written and sounds like a nice house, but let's look at how this same house can be described if we focus on the **benefits** instead of just the features.

> *Impress your friends with this spectacularly updated 4 bedroom 3 bathroom pool home in South Tampa! Cook like a master chef for the whole family in this modern kitchen with spacious center island, gas range, stainless steel appliances, and plenty of cabinet space. Relax after work in the luxurious family room featuring plenty of natural light. Imagine spending your weekends in your backyard with your very own in-ground pool with heated spa? Picture the parties you could have, cooking for your guests on your outdoor kitchen? After a long day of entertaining, late night is the perfect time to gather around the gas fire pit cozied up next to someone special. When you're finally ready to retire, you'll find a peaceful rest in your luxuriously appointed master suite. Dual walk-in closets provide all the space you'll ever need to build up an impressive wardrobe collection. And your master bathroom offers a tranquil escape from your day-to-day life with dual vanities, tiled shower, and this relaxing jetted tub. You'll never be far from the shops and excitement of South Tampa in this centralized location. With restaurants, food markets, shopping, and schools just mere minutes away. It's time to live the life you were born to live, in South Tampa.*

Can you see the difference between these two ads? The first one gets the basic information out in a professional manner. But the second one paints a picture of the type of life a person can have while living in this home. It still explains all the necessary information, but does so in a way that will get buyers excited and start to feel a connection to the property.

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# #7 - DESCRIBE THE HOME



I realize not everyone is a gifted writer. That's why it's so important for you to work with a Realtor who takes the time to describe your property in a way that is both accurate and enticing for your potential buyers. I work hard on every one of my listings to create unique ad copy that will help sellers get the most money for their home in the shortest time.

If you'd like to work with a real estate agent who can create exciting copy to bring you the best buyer for your home, contact me today. I'd be happy to talk with you about an overall strategy for selling your home.



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# #8 - MARKET THE HOME ONLINE



There are a number of ways to market your home on the internet. Whether it's listing your home on Zillow or Trulia, or building a website specifically for your home, there are plenty of places to market. Let's look at some of the routes you can take and the advantages / disadvantages of each.

**MLS /Zillow / Trulia**

These are the traditional sites in which most home buyers search for their home. If you're working with a Realtor, most likely they will be listing your home on the local MLS. In Tampa, the most popular MLS is My Florida Regional MLS, which has a direct feed to Trulia and Zillow. This means if you work with a Realtor in the Tampa area, your home will automatically be added to Zillow and Trulia.

However, if you're trying to sell your home yourself, you'll have to setup an account on Zillow to post a "For Sale By Owner" listing. It's not difficult to do, however you will have to write your own ad copy, upload your own pictures, etc. Also, be forewarned as soon as you list a home For Sale By Owner, you'll most likely be bombarded by calls from inexperienced Realtors "prospecting FSBOs." Most brokers encourage new agents to reach out to For Sale By Owner properties to try and convince them to list. These calls/visits can become extremely irritating and distract you from the real goal of selling your home.

Still, Zillow and Trulia are the two most popular sites where buyers search for homes. Whether you're selling yourself or using an agent, you need to be on these sites.

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# #8 - MARKET THE HOME ONLINE

**Craigslist / Internet Classifieds**

craigslist

A lot of home sellers trying to sell by themselves use craigslist or internet classified sites to try and sell their home. Again, it's a relatively easy process to set up an ad, however the results are usually pretty shaky. While you may find a real legitimate buyer from these sites, beware they are often the hunting grounds of scamsters and thieves. I'd be extremely weary of allowing anyone into my home that came off of craigslist.




Even worse, these sites are one of the places wholesalers search when looking to buy homes below market value. Wholesalers are the guys that put up the yellow "We Buy Houses for Cash" signs that you'll sometimes see on the side of the road or highway. The way it works is you'll get a call from a buyer offering you cash for the home for usually less than your list price. However, the buyer will be able to close within a very short time frame, sometimes 2 weeks or less. You agree and hastily sign a contract, and receive a deposit from the wholesaler.

Now, once the wholesaler has this contract, he goes and shops it to his investors. Normally he'll sell that contract off for $10,000 or more than the agreed upon price, putting that money in his pocket. We call this "assigning the contract." Now there's nothing inherently illegal about this, and it's a common practice among investors. However that $10,000 is money you could have put in your pocket if you had sold directly to an investor without the wholesaler.

Furthermore, if a wholesaler is making an offer on your home it's often well below market value. That's usually tens of thousands of dollars extra that could have been yours had you placed the home on the market through a Realtor. Even after paying real estate commissions, you'll typically make more money working with a Realtor, and have none of the stress.

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# #8 - MARKET THE HOME ONLINE




**SEO / Google Ranking**

It's very difficult to get your individual home to show up on the first few pages of search results on Google. However, there is a sneaky little workaround that I use that almost always gets my client's homes to the top of results.

Because I film video for every home that I sell, these homes always rank higher in search results. We've found on average listings with videos rank 4 times higher than listings without video. More importantly, I **geotag** every video on youtube to the home's address, which means it will come up higher in search results for people looking in that area. Furthermore, that home video may pop up as suggestion if a potential buyer is just browsing on youtube after searching for homes in your neighborhood on google.




Search rankings are a complicated topic, but just know that properly used, video will push your home to the front of the line in any internet search.

**Email Marketing**

This is one that the typical home seller won't be able to do on their own, but it's very effective. For a real estate agent, our most valuable resource is our database. Current clients, past clients, potential clients are all sorted and we keep their contact details there. I personally maintain two separate mailing lists, one for buyers and one for sellers. Now the information I send to these lists is usually very high end content that I give away for free to help them sell their home in the Tampa area.

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# #8 - MARKET THE HOME ONLINE

However, when I have a new listing hitting the market, I always make sure to send it out to my buyers list a few days before the listing hits the MLS. I do this to give them a little “preview” of what is to come. In a market like the one we’re experiencing in Tampa as of 2017, this is invaluable. Low inventory has created a massive demand for homes. Buyers will go out of their way to get their hands on a property before anyone else does. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve been able to get a full price offer before a property even hits the market using this technique.




Managing an effective email marketing database is crucial for any real estate agent selling your home. If you’d like to learn more about how internet marketing can help get you the best price possible for your home in the fastest amount of time, call, text, or email me today!

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# #9 - USE SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook and Instagram really are the secret sauce when it comes to pulling a home marketing strategy together. For my business, all of my marketing starts on one of these two channels. If you're reading this guide, there's a good chance you found it through one of my Facebook pages.







There's a difference between a regular Facebook page and a Facebook business page. To market a home properly on Facebook and Instagram, we need the latter. My recipe is pretty simple, I usually create a simple ad for the home once it is on the market. Facebook's ad engine lets me target anyone who is looking to purchase a home in the area. I set a budget for the ad and then let it run. Usually I include some pictures and the property video in this ad.






I also create a "geotargeted" ad for any open houses that I'm holding. I set a target area so that any home buyers that are out looking at houses on the day of the open house within 5 miles will see the ad. The idea is to get people to ad your home onto their viewing list even if it's the last moment. The more people that see your home the better.

Social media marketing is a deeply involved subject that takes time to learn and is consistently changing. If you're looking for a Realtor that knows how to leverage social media to sell your home for top dollar, contact me today.

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# #10 - ALWAYS BE READY TO SHOW



Once your home is on the market, if you've followed the steps above things are going to move rather quickly. If the home is priced correctly and well marketed, demand for the home should spike immediately once it is put on the market. Because many real estate agents use automatic MLS updates for their customers, you will often start receiving requests within an hour of the home being on the market.

From the minute your home goes on the market, till you have a signed contract, and sometimes even after that, you need to be ready to show at all times. This isn't as much work as you might think, but some simple measures make sure that the home is in prime condition to show at any time.

- *- Make all beds every morning and keep neat.*
- *- Place all dirty clothes in a hamper and keep covered and out of site.*
- *- Keep all bathroom surfaces clean at all times. A simple way to do this is to keep some bleach wipes in each bathroom and wipe down surfaces after use.*
- *- Keep couch pillows and cushions fluffed and neatly arranged.*
- *- Discard old newspapers after reading.*
- *- Keep the kitchen sink empty. Either clean dishes and immediately place on a drying rack or place inside the dishwasher.*
- *- Don't let mail pile up. Immediately discard junk mail and file important correspondence out of site.*
- *- Keep common areas neat.*
- *- Keep bedrooms organized.*
- *- Put any childrens toys away inside a chest or closet when they're not playing with them.*
- *- Vaccuum/Sweep/Mop all surfaces at least once a week.*
- *- Use scented candles to cover lingering odors from pets and cooking. Yankee Candles are great but can be expensive. Search Target, Walmart, Big Lots, or even your local "Dollar Store" for inexpensive alternatives.*
- *- Make sure your lawn is always cut and rake and dispose any leaves that have fallen onto your property.*

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# #10 - ALWAYS BE READY TO SHOW

Remember, you've only got one shot at a first impression. If you follow all of these tips you'll be ready to show at any time. I realize it's a lot to keep track of, but do your best to follow as many of these as possible and you'll reap the rewards of selling your home faster and for the best price.

I give this list to every one of my clients before they hit the market. As someone who has lived in a home while it was being sold, I know it takes some work to always be show ready. But if it helps you sell the home faster, that means you only have to be show ready for a short period of time.



Less like this



More like this

As a Realtor I'd be happy to help create solutions to keep your home show ready at all times. If you'd like to get your home ready for market call, text, or email me today.

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# #11 - OPEN HOUSES

Open Houses are the bread and butter of real estate transactions. Actually walking through a home tells you so much more about it than just seeing pictures or video ever could. Buyers can know everything about a house, but until they walk through it they'll never understand the flow of the home.




I love open houses for a number of reasons. First, they're a low-pressure environment for buyers to see a home. Buyers who might not normally have scheduled a private showing will have no problem dropping into an open house.

Second, they help drive up demand for a home. By putting a bunch of buyers in a room together, it shows there's a lot of interest in the home and will generally cause buyers to up their offer as they don't want to be outbid. Third, it provides an opportunity to show off one of the best assets of a house: the ability to entertain.



You see, many Realtors don't like open houses. They feel they're a ton of work and just bring in a bunch of nosy neighbors. This is the wrong attitude to have. I look at an open house as if I'm throwing a party. I get to invite a bunch of people somewhere and have the opportunity to meet and get to know them. It helps relax them and make them feel more comfortable with their potential purchase. And those nosy neighbors? They're the BEST people to have at an open house. I go OUT OF MY WAY to chat them up.

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# #11 - OPEN HOUSES

Why do I spend so much time chatting up the nosy neighbors at an open house? Well think about it. They live in the neighborhood. If they've lived there for any amount of time, they most likely enjoy living there. Chances are, they're always telling people about how great it is where they live. I'd even be willing to bet they try to convince their friends and family to move nearby. Now, what better place to move than this great house that just went on the market?

When I run my open houses, I do more than just open up the doors and serve some coffee and pastries. I make sure that every person that enters your home signs in. At a minimum I collect a name and an email address from them. I like to show them around a little then give them a chance to explore on their own. Before they leave I make sure they get a copy of my business card and any flyers or printouts I have created for the house.






Here's the important part. 30 minutes after the open house has ended, they automatically get an email from me thanking them for coming. That email also has a copy of the video I've made about your home. The video serves to reinforce the home they just saw, and helps your house to stand out from every other home they saw that day. Imagine you're out looking at homes. You visit 5 or 6 open houses. But at the end of the day you get sent a professionally produced movie with music and narration about one of them. Trust me, that is the home that will be front of mind when you're considering putting in an offer.

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# #11 - OPEN HOUSES

There's another kind of open house, called a "Broker's Open". You may have seen these on many of the Million Dollar Listing shows. These are open houses where only Real Estate Agents (and sometimes their clients) are invited. The idea is to showcase the home for agents who may have a buyer. They can be effective when marketing high end homes. The reason being that homes priced over $1 million tend to have a much smaller market than those below $1 million. Because there simply aren't enough qualified buyers, we need to concentrate on them by going after the agents who may be representing them. Opening the house to the general public in these cases may just result in a lot of "looky loos" coming by.



*Typical broker's open house. Only truly effective for high-end properties with large price tags.*

When I list a home, I hold open houses until it's sold. It's not uncommon for me to do 5 or 6 open houses in a single weekend. I love them and they're the best way to sell your home. Open houses are an opportunity to tie in every marketing technique that I use to sell your home in a fun environment.

If you're ready to use an effective open house strategy to sell your home fast and for the best price call, text, or email me today! I'll hold as many open houses as you'll let me until your home is sold.

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# #12 - PRIVATE SHOWINGS

Unlike open houses, private showings are when a Realtor brings a client to see your home on their own. There are some logistical solutions that our industry has come up with to keep the scheduling of these showings simple.

First, we have lockboxes. A lockbox is simply a box placed outside your home with a key to the house inside it. We have traditional lockboxes which utilize a combination lock to release a chamber with the key inside. We also have electronic lockboxes. In the Tampa area we mainly use “Supra” iBoxes. Real estate agents have a program on their cell phones that allows them to open the box automatically and get the key inside.




*Traditional combination lock box*




*Supra iBox with app*

We also work on scheduling the showings. Typically, we utilize an app called “Showing Time” along with “Centralized Showing Service.” Here’s how the process of showing your home works.

- A Realtor has a buyer who has requested to see your home at a certain time
- The Realtor contacts Centralized Showing Service and puts in the request
- Centralized Showing Service calls you to see if the home is available to show at that time.
- If you confirm the appointment, Centralized Showing Service will notify the Realtor they are confirmed to show.
- If you deny the appointment, the Realtor can select another time.

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# #12 - PRIVATE SHOWINGS

Once you've confirmed a showing time, it's important to be out of the house for the showing. There are a number of reasons buyers and sellers should never be in the same room together until closing. Mainly, we don't want to see personal feelings towards the other party cloud judgement in the negotiating process. Perhaps a seller meets a buyer on their way out of the house and simply doesn't like them. The seller rejects a quality offer just because they didn't like the particular buyer. Or perhaps a seller really likes a buyer and doesn't negotiate hard enough for their own position and winds up losing out on money. It happens all the time, which is why as brokers we prefer to keep buyers and sellers away from each other until they're sitting at that closing table.



Being prepared for the private showing process is key to getting your home sold. It can be a time consuming and inconvenient period, however following all the other tips in this guide will ensure that it goes as quickly and smoothly as possible.

If you're looking for a Realtor who can simplify the private showing process to make it as convenient as possible for you, don't hesitate to call, text, or email me today.

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# #13 - CLOSE THE SALE

If you've followed all the tips in this guide so far, you shouldn't have any problems closing. You've hopefully been able to pick the best offer from a handful of qualified buyers. However, there are a few issues that commonly come up that can hold up a closing. Here's some common issues and the solutions for them.



**Closing Issue #1 – The House Doesn't Appraise**

This is a common issue that can cause a big problem regarding financing. Your buyers were preapproved for a certain amount, made their offer, and you accepted. However, after a bank appraisal the lender disagrees with the valuation on the home and denies the loan. To simplify it, the bank isn't going to lend $300,000 on a house that they believe is only worth $275,000.



**Solution**

If you priced the house properly with your Realtor, go back to the original comps you used to price the home. Ask the appraiser to show you which comps he used. With my listings, I sit every appraisal and give the appraisers a copy of my comps. They're not required to use the ones I picked out, but at least I know they're not missing comps that I think are relevant. Your last line of defense may be to accept a lower purchase price or see if your buyers can bring more cash to the table.

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# #13 - CLOSE THE SALE

**Closing Issue #2 – Open Permits / Unpermitted Work**

This one can be a real disaster. Oftentimes you or even a previous owner may have filed a permit to do work on the property but forgot to get a final inspection done. Even worse, sometimes it's discovered that work was done on your home without a permit. When the title company does a search on your property this may come up and cause all sorts of issues related to closing. See the story in the final chapter of this book to see what it sometimes takes to solve these issues.




**Solution**

Speak with your Realtor about any open permit issues that may exist on your home. I always visit the building department on every listing I take to check the file and make sure there are no outstanding permits or violations. If you run into a problem, your Realtor should be able to connect you with a contractor who can help you fix these problems, the key is getting started sooner rather than later as these things do take time.

**Closing Issue #3 – Probate**

This one is extremely common especially here in Florida. When someone dies, their estate enters a process called probate. During this time, a court reviews any last wills and testaments of the deceased. If a person died with a will, they usually will have named heirs and an executor. The executor is the person in charge of distributing the person's assets (homes, money, personal belongings, etc.)

If a person died with a written will filed with an administrator (normally an attorney) this process should move quickly. However, if a person dies intestate, meaning they did not have a will, this process becomes much more complicated. Typically, the court will need to appoint an executor based upon sworn statements from descendants and relatives of the deceased. This process takes a long time and can hold up the sale of inherited property.

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# #13 - CLOSE THE SALE

**Solution**




Hire a lawyer immediately. If the deceased died with a will in place and an administrator they should be able to help you navigate the process with relative ease. However, if there was no will, you will definitely be needing their services to help settle the estate.

It may be best to avoid putting the house on the market until you can clear up any probate issues, as they can make it very difficult to close. Consider renting out the property to cover holding costs in the meantime. Speak to an attorney as soon as possible to come up with strategy.




Closing issues are sadly a reality in many real estate transactions. However, you can prepare for them and minimize their impact by working with a qualified Realtor. Call, text, or email me today and I'd be happy to help make sure your home sale closes on time.

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# #14 - WORK WITH A REALTOR



You've heard me say it throughout this guide over and over, the best way to sell your home is to work with a qualified Realtor. Whether you hire me or one of my many qualified colleagues throughout the Tampa Bay Area, a Realtor is the best person to get your home sold for the best price as fast as possible.

An important thing to understand about hiring a real estate agent as a seller is how the agent relationship works. The agent you hire will be your "listing agent". They will be responsible for preparing the home for market, marketing it, and managing the showings once it's listed. However, there is often a second agent involved in a real estate transaction. This is the "buyer's agent." You see, all of us real estate agents in our industry cooperate to sell your home, regardless of what firm we work for. By putting your home on the MLS, we are agreeing to split our commission with any agent who can produce a buyer.

This is the best part of listing with a Realtor. Not only do you get the services of your listing agent, but you also get the services of every buyer's agent working in the state. The most important thing in helping you get the best price is exposing your home to the largest number of potential buyers. Working with a Realtor will allow you to do just that by getting your home onto the MLS.

I realize that paying out 6% in commissions at closing can be expensive. However, let me give you a quick case study to show you how a Realtor can help you save money in the long run.

One of my first listings was a home that belonged to a friend of mine in NY. He asked me for a pricing opinion on the home. I told him I thought he could get $530,000 for it. He decided to sell the home himself.  After two months on the market as a for sale by owner, he had only gotten one offer for $450,000.

He decided to list the home with me. The second floor of this home was a master suite with a large bathroom, two walk-in closets, and a master bathroom. Roughly half the square footage of the house was in this master suite. I noticed he didn't have a Certificate of Occupancy for the second floor bathroom. I told him he would have a hard time closing without it, and to file a permit application. He did as I suggested.

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In the meantime, I got to work holding open houses and secured him a buyer at $530,000 within 3 weeks. We entered into a contract and everyone was happy. However, during the final inspection for the upstairs bathroom the local inspector discovered that the staircase leading up to this space was not to code. The local municipality demanded that he tear out the upstairs bathroom and that the second floor could not be classified as living space.

Now, this would have been a disaster for him. Losing the entire master suite would have devalued the house by almost $100,000. However, I wasn't content to just let my client lose money like that. I started researching the building codes. Believe me when I tell you I am not an expert in engineering or construction. However, I learned that the state could issue a variance in matters like this for buildings that were constructed before the Certificate of Occupancy process was put into place.

I took measurements, I cited multiple codes that stated my client should not be held to this standard, I found tax assessor records dating back to the turn of the century, I provided photographic evidence, and I used the state assessment manual's standards to show that the master suite had always been classified as living space and could not be held to the modern building code regarding the staircase. After pulling multiple all-nighters gathering this information, I prepared a 12 page request for a variance. I composed an email and clicked send as it went off to the state engineer.

I held my breath and waited. I am not an engineer and I don't have a background in construction or reading building codes. The next morning I received a reply.

> *"Good morning Stephen, I have read your request for a variance regarding your client. I have to say, this is the most detailed and well constructed application for a state variance that I have ever received in twenty years on the job. You make a compelling argument, I'll begin the process immediately."*

Within two weeks the variance was approved and the state engineer was able to compel the local building department to work with us to close out the permits. Although our closing was delayed a few weeks, he was still able to sell his home for the full $530,000. Now the $25,000 he paid in real estate commissions was certainly more affordable than the $100,000 or more he might have lost had he not hired me.

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I don't tell this story to brag about my accomplishment, but to make a point. When you hire me, you're not just getting someone who puts a sign in the yard, posts your property on the MLS, and prays we find a buyer. I work with you throughout the transaction to handle every deal point. There is no limit to what I will do to see you succeed in your goals as a home seller. I take personal pride in seeing you get the most out of selling your home. I am willing to go the extra mile every time and won't stop until I get your transaction to close. I don't know the meaning of the phrase "that's not my job". Anything you need during that home selling process I will make sure to take care of so that you can focus on moving on to the next phase in your life.

I have a simple phrase I came up with when it comes to selling your house, and it encompasses everything I've spoken about in this guide. *"Every home has a story, let me help write your next chapter."*

Whether it's telling the story of your home through words, pictures, or video. Whether it's or running open houses to let your buyer's experience that home or taking buyers on private tours. Whether it's helping you to prepare the home for market or navigating complicated permit processes to get you to close, I'm in it for the long haul.

Regardless of what course you take to selling your home, I wish you nothing but success. I hope you've found this guide useful. And if there's anything I can do to help you in your process, don't hesitate to contact me.

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