

Real Estate Monthly

Grace Glastonbury

Sales Representative

Office: (613) 725-1171 Fax: 725-3323

graceglastonbury@royallepage.ca



Image Is Everything: Creating a Positive First Impression is Key to Selling Your Home

The old adage that you only get one chance to make a first impression rings true for sellers showing their homes in today's competitive market. With the spring market quickly approaching, many homeowners are wondering what they can do to help get their homes ready to sell. A poll of potential buyers just released today by Royal LePage Real Estate Services found that sellers ought to do more than just look after required renovations before showing their homes. In fact, decor improvements help make a strong impact on buyers and can ultimately affect a home's market value.



boost a home's value but that too much of a unique style can sometimes be detrimental when it's time to sell.

"First impressions are key in real estate, as buyers often make up their minds about a home within the first few minutes of entering the front door," said Dianne Usher, Senior Manager, Royal LePage Real Estate Services. "As the real estate

market begins to moderate in many markets across the country, the need to impress buyers becomes even more crucial. A combination of the right renovations with modern and tasteful decor is the best way to do that."

Usher added: "A contemporary and minimalist space with neutral coloured walls and a limited number of personal items appeals to most buyers and ensures the best results when

selling a home."

Other poll findings:

- 58% of buyers surveyed revealed that they were willing to make a decision after viewing 10 homes or less, while only 11% of buyers thought that they would have to view over 20 homes in order to feel comfortable making a decision.
- 27% of those polled were looking to purchase a home or condominium in the next five years.

Eye on Ottawa Real Estate

According to statistics just released by the Ottawa Real Estate Board (OREB), 983 homes were sold in February, bringing the total so far this year to 1,632. There were 920 sales in February 2005.

The average price of residential properties sold in February in the Ottawa area was \$248,133, an increase of almost 4% over February 2005.

"Favourable mortgage rates, confidence in the local economy and the weather are all factors in the number of sales for February," said OREB's President. "Our inventory levels continue to be slightly higher than the same time last year, giving buyers more choice."

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The 2006 Royal LePage House Staging Poll (conducted by Maritz Research) revealed that renovations can often

Percentage of buyers who would pay a premium for the feature

- Renovated kitchen .. 79%**
- Renovated bathroom.....73%**
- New windows.....70%**
- New flooring62%**
- Updated decor.....36%**

Real Estate News

Take this quiz and find out your personalized tips for preparing your home for sale.

1) After finishing dinner, do you:

- Leave everything on the table and come back to clean up later.
- Take the dishes off the table, put away the leftovers and pile the dishes in the sink or dishwasher for later.
- Clean the table, put away the leftovers and wash the dishes right away.

2) Your home office has a desk that is:

- Covered with papers, receipts and random objects.
- A pile of stacks. There is enough free space to do your work and you can still find what you're looking for.
- Clean and neat. Everything has its place and papers are filed right away.

3) You've just finished your laundry. You:

- Leave the clothes in a pile on a chair. It's easier to find them later this way.
- Fold and put the clothes in any drawer with available space.
- Fold and put away your clothes in their appropriate drawers.

4) In your household, you have:

- A dog or cat that is allowed indoors.
- A smoker who often/always smokes indoors.
- None of the above.

5) How do you accessorize your home?

- I like to display personal mementos, souvenirs and family photos around my home.
- I love decorative accessories and like to feature eclectic ethnic artifacts and antique items around my home.
- I prefer clean and tidy surfaces and display few decorative or personal items around the house.

6) Which of the following best describes your home?

- My home is eclectic and fun with bright colours and accessories throughout.
- My home is traditional with warm paint colours and lots of dark wood.
- My home is in a modern and simple style with neutral colours and few accessories.

7) Spring has arrived and your yard is in need of some maintenance. You:

- Rake the yard and generally get rid of debris.
- Clean the yard of debris and mow the lawn.
- Clean the yard of debris, mow the lawn, clear the weeds, apply fertilizer and plant new flowers.

8) Which best describes your home?

- I haven't had the time to properly decorate most of my home and a couple of the smaller rooms are used only for storage. Some minor repairs are still waiting to be done around the house.
- The main areas of my home are decorated and furnished, but I never got around to properly decorating and furnishing the basement or guestroom. Some minor repairs are still waiting to be done around the house.
- I have taken the time to properly furnish and decorate every room. I have also undertaken several renovation projects throughout the years.

Give yourself a score of 1 for every "a", a score of 3 for every "b", and a score of 5 for every "c" answer.

If your score is between 8 and 16, you need to roll up your sleeves and get working to prepare your home for sale. Based on your responses, your home will need deep cleaning and de-cluttering before showings start.

Deep clean your home by making sure each room and surface is spotless. Make sure to remember your appliances and windows too.

Get rid of the clutter to allow buyers to properly see your home. Pack away unnecessary items and make sure counters and tables are free of appliances and personal items. If any rooms are used for storage alone, pack away the items and properly furnish the rooms. Don't leave them empty as buyers will have a hard time visualizing living in a space without any furniture.

Put away collectibles and family photos to help de-personalize your home. Buyers will be able to imagine themselves in your space better without your personal items around.

Although your fun sense of decor and colour may suit your personality, go neutral for the sale. Adding a fresh coat of neutral paint and getting rid of unusual accessories will ensure that your home appeals to a larger pool of buyers.

If pets or smokers reside in your home, remember that you probably won't notice the smell if you're around them all the time. Have a trusted friend give you an honest opinion and deep clean to get rid of the odour.

And lastly, don't forget curb appeal. First impressions count, and buyers begin to form an opinion as soon as they pull into your driveway. Keep your yard tidy with your lawn and shrubs trimmed and flower beds weeded. Store away your toys and garbage bins, and give the exterior of your home a good wash or a fresh coat of paint.

If your score is between 17 and 32, there are a few easy steps that you can take to make your home more appealing to buyers.

Clean your home from top to bottom, making sure you pay special attention to kitchens and bathrooms. Make sure to de-clutter and reorganize your home. Remove any excess furniture to enhance the feel of openness and space. Storage space is a top priority for buyers, so clean and organize your closets and storage areas. Get rid of anything that you don't need and make sure that your closets are not overflowing with items.

Brighten and lighten up your home with a fresh coat of neutral coloured paint. Soft neutrals such as pale yellows and grays can give a house a nice sophisticated look that appeals to most buyers.

Store away your eclectic accessories and create more room on your counters and tabletops. Your unique items may be an expression of your personality but they might also make it hard for buyers to visualize themselves in the space.

And last but not least, fix that leaky faucet and do any other minor repairs that you've been neglecting around the house.

If your score is between 33 and 40, your home is in top shape and will only need a little bit of work to bring in that sale.

One great way to stimulate buyers' imaginations is to set the scene. Put fresh flowers on the mantle and set the dining room table for a formal dinner. If it's a cold day, light a fire in the fireplace. Look at your home through the buyers' eyes and create an atmosphere that will help them envision themselves living there.

To further enhance your home's curb appeal, spruce up your flower beds with new flowers and ground cover to give the home additional touches of colour.