



You Can Do It: Sell It Yourself For Sale By Owner (FSBO)

A Seller's How-To Guide

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The task of selling a home can be daunting, but following some important steps can help you gain an edge in the market and earn the maximum return from your investment.

Determining the Value

Establishing value is one of the most crucial decisions, gleaned from various sources.

Comparing active homes on the market, homes that have recently sold and listings that have expired without selling is a key way to determine value, and a method many real estate agents use. The information is available online at ajchomefinder.com under Recent Home Sales.

Another pricing strategy, says Atlanta Realtor Dana Bauguss, managing broker with Re/Max Greater Atlanta, is to examine tax records providing the square footage of homes that have sold to determine a price per square foot.

Although there's a lot of attention on the national real estate market, Pat Vredevoogd Combs, president of the National Association of Realtors, points out that value should be based on several local factors.

Consider these questions:

- What's sold in past six months, and how much did it sell for, in relationship to assessed value and its listing price?
- How many houses are you competing with?
- What are the prices of the pending sales in your community, and how long were they on the market?

The asking price could impact how quickly your home sells. Bauguss, vice president for governmental affairs with the Georgia Association of Realtors, notes that the best selling time is the first 30 days on the market. "If it's overpriced, then it's going to stay on the market even longer," she says.

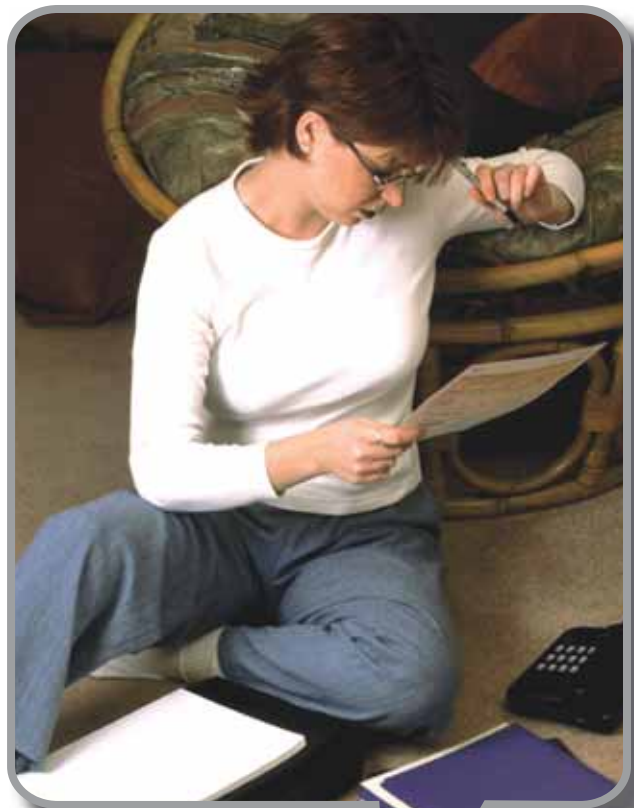
The price should not exceed market value by more than 5 percent. And don't overshoot – set a price at the lower end of your realistic price range.

Bauguss and Vredevoogd Combs say sellers shouldn't be overly concerned about putting a house on the market at a particular time of year. People think that spring is the best time to sell, but that doesn't mean your house won't sell in December. In fact, that may be a good time, because people relocating with children are trying to move before school starts in January. Much of that also depends on the location.

Bauguss says there are three reasons why houses don't sell: price, location and condition.

"If location is fine and it's priced right, if the house is not in top-tip shape, it's going to take longer to sell," she says.

One rule to follow is to get your house ready for at least two weeks before you begin showing it.



Preparing the House to Show

Hiring someone to conduct a pre-sale home inspection as well as a termite inspection can head off any necessary repairs that would need to be made later in the sales process. The only danger, Vredevoogd Combs says, is that you may spend money fixing something that a buyer may also be made aware of during their inspection, but may not care whether it's fixed or not.

Some sellers bring in professionals to help stage the home, which can be a worthwhile investment.

It's important to try to look at your home through the eyes of a buyer. Think about the attributes that you raved about when you purchased the home.

Vredevoogd Combs says buyers get the most bang for their buck making renovations to the kitchen and master bathroom. Some changes don't have to be budget-busters, such as painting cabinets, replacing hardware or adding new fixtures.

"When a buyer walks through the door – and if this is the house for them – it's a wow," Vredevoogd Combs says. "That's what we're trying to create, for a buyer to walk in the house we've got listed and go, 'Wow,' and then everything sort of fits into place."

On the outside, don't neglect the front door. That's part of the introduction to your house, so consider repainting or replacing it, and even polish the doorknob and house numbers.

"Curb appeal is so important," Bauguss says.

Other exterior tips:

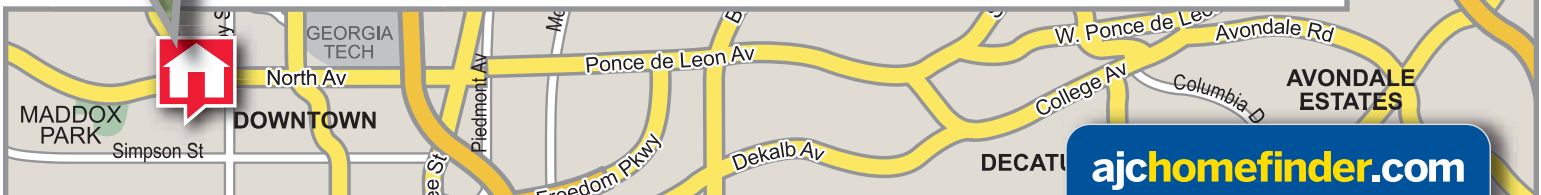
- Keep the landscaping neat, getting rid of weeds and trimming hedges.
- Paint the exterior trim, if needed.
- Make sure the garage door isn't crooked and closes properly.
- Tone down the color of the house, if it's too bright.
- Repair fences and any cracked windows.
- Pressure-wash the driveway and sidewalk.
- Pick up toys and lawn equipment.
- Clean the gutters.
- Make sure the doorbell works.
- Wash the mail box.
- Give the porch a light, and sweep it, too.



Interior preparations can involve everything from removing furniture to show off a room's spaciousness to doing a heavy cleaning to repainting. Vredevoogd Combs recommends determining which pieces of furniture can go and renting a storage unit, instead of filling up your garage.

"Most of the time it's a good idea because most people have way too much stuff," says Vredevoogd Combs, who has been an agent for 35 years. "Often what happens with all the stuff you have, it detracts from how a buyer can look at the room."

Also, store out-of-season clothing to make closets look as big as possible, and arrange them neatly. It's also OK to box up items in a garage or basement because it signals to a buyer that you're ready to move, Bauguss says.



To make your house sparkle and shine, Bauguss also recommends:



- Wash windows and screens.
- Wipe smudges and fingerprints off light switch plates and walls.
- Replace light bulbs with higher wattage bulbs to make rooms, especially those in a basement, seem lighter.
- Clean the stove and refrigerator.
- Clean carpets, rugs and drapes to eliminate odors.
- Wax the floors.
- Repair items such as doors that stick, torn window screens, dripping faucets, tears in wallpaper, loose banisters and cracked woodwork or outlet plates.
- Replace moldy shower curtains.
- Clean ashes out of the fireplace.
- Throw out or file stacks of newspapers and magazines.
- Limit the number of family photos on display, especially on the mantel, which needs to look as big as possible.

Marketing the Home

The Internet is the name of the game now, says Bauguss. Get the home on as many Web sites as possible, as statistics show that the majority of buyers go to the Internet when they're starting their search.

From the Internet to print ads to holding an open house, there are numerous ways to market your home.

Don't underestimate the power of photos and videos, and provide multiple pictures and/or virtual tours to accompany the Web listings.

Still, signs are important, as potential buyers often spend free time driving around searching for their dream home. If your county regulations allow it, place your ajhomefinder.com directional sign at the main entrance to your subdivision or on the nearest main road, to point prospects towards your home for sale. The ajhomefinder.com yard sign should be placed firmly and prominently in the front yard of your home.

The sign should be clean and include details such as a phone number that's easy to read. Other options are providing a number with a recording giving details about the home, or having residents tune into a radio station with property information. You can include a brochure with more details such as the price and home features – sometimes those brochures are sent to agents in the same area, for example.

Another smart idea is to prepare a booklet of information about the community, schools and nearby shops and restaurants for buyers to peruse when they're touring the home.

Print advertising still works in some instances, Vredevoogd Combs says, such as for open houses. In Atlanta, open houses in particular are worth having in intown neighborhoods like Morningside and Virginia-Highland, Bauguss says, while it's a gamble in the suburbs because you're not sure the type of crowd the event will draw.

Showing the Home

Impromptu showings can ruffle the feathers of schedule-driven people, but it's important to be flexible when people are interested in seeing your home. Bauguss says that, although it may be difficult to have your house ready to show on the spot, it may result in a sale.



Make the home light and bright, Vredevoogd Combs says. Every room should be well lit, and remember to turn on the lights, especially in areas where the light switches may be tricky to find.

Here are other sure-fire ways to tidy up a home before potential buyers visit:

- Make the beds.
- Put out fresh towels.
- Take out the garbage.
- Open the windows to air the house out.
- Add a touch of color, with fresh or silk flowers inside, or planters on the front porch.
- Put valuables away.
- Set the mood with some low music playing and baking cookies or bread to make the house smell good (but don't overdo it so that people will wonder what smell you're covering up).
- Send pets to the neighbors, or put them in a crate. If you have to leave a cat, for example, in the house, be sure to include a note asking visitors not to let the cat out.



And most important, get out of the house. Don't hover, because it makes buyers uncomfortable, especially if they're discussing the house with another person or their agent.

Managing the Transaction

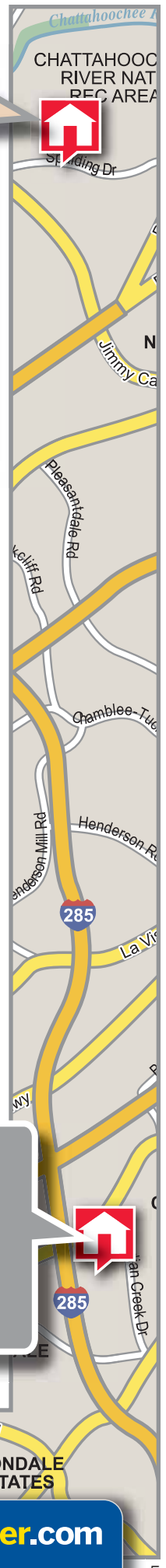
A neutral party is needed to get through the negotiation process. "It's very difficult for a buyer and seller to negotiate between the two of them successfully," Vredevoogd Combs says.

Buyers need to be prepared by deciding in advance what terms and prices they will accept, Bauguss recommends. But there needs to be some flexibility, especially if the home has been on the market for more than 30 days without an offer.

Contracts in Georgia are required to be in writing, which outlines the purchase price, description of the property, inspection terms and other factors, including:

- Closing date.
- Date of possession.
- Earnest money (look for the largest deposit possible).
- Fixtures and other items buyer expects to remain with the property.
- Repairs (Determine whether you willing to make the necessary changes or will you lower the cost by the amount of the repairs.)
- Contingencies (Factors such as inspections, selling another home, mortgage, review of contract by an attorney that the buyer wants met before the contract is final.)
- Contract expiration date.

Remember that the price is not the only thing to consider in an offer. You may accept an offer that's less money but a better possession time or fewer costs involved in the transaction, Vredevoogd Combs says. Evaluate each offer based on how it benefits you and what makes the most sense in your situation.



States require various real estate forms dealing with purchase offers, sales contracts and disclosure statements. For information about forms needed in Georgia, visit ajchomefinder.com/legalforms

