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Sellers Could Lose Waiting for Buyers to Make Offers

by M. Anthony Carr

One of the biggest mistakes sellers make in a buyers market is trying to price their houses with a "cushion" in the asking price for negotiation room. In the current market where most sellers find themselves, it's all back to price, condition and location.

Pricing the house from the start is the first offensive strike the seller possesses in his arsenal. The best way to determine price in our market is to start looking at two categories of real estate: solds and actives.

Properties that have sold in the last 30 days provide you a picture of what price range pulled in offers 60 days ago. By looking over those properties, you'll know if you're headed in the right direction with your price. Then, after seeing what's pulled in offers, look at where the competition is priced -- and price lower than the lowest price. If the trend is headed downward over the last 12 months the motivated seller will get in front of that price trend and sell for less than everyone.

This can be an emotional ordeal for sellers. The seller who approaches the sales price of a house like the asking price of a used car -- where negotiation and give-and-take is expected -- will also be calling the movers sooner and get through the transaction with the least amount of emotional turmoil.

Condition is the second part of this equation that sellers have control over in today's market. Folks -- it's got to look new. Period. Here are the steps that **MUST** be taken for a successful sale.

1. New paint. Everywhere. Don't leave one room unpainted. Paint is the cheapest, yet most effective way to give a house a face lift.
2. New carpet/flooring. This addition along with No. 1 makes people drop open their mouths with, "Wow."
3. Replace the small things. It's the attention to detail that can make a big difference for the buyers. New faucets throughout, new hardware on the doors, and new switches/plugs/plates take the house from just "cleaned up" to new.
4. Deep clean. I always have to mention this because a lot of sellers still just don't get it. It's still amazing to me how many people will leave a house in the "un-" condition. Unvacuumed, undusted, unwashed. Invite friends over for a deep cleaning or hire it out. This is a must, no questions asked.
5. Do you do windows? Well, somebody better. Get all the windows cleaned and caulked. The house may look great from the inside, but if you can't look outside because of the dusty film over the glass, steps 1 – 4 could be for naught.

Finally, location is what buyers are looking for. I saw a listing the other day that was obviously connected to a realistic agent and seller. It was a lot of house for the price with the 1-plus acre lot -- and it was "priced for location," because the house backed to a very busy 4-lane highway. The comps in the neighborhood were nearly \$100,000 more.

While you may not be able to do anything about the location of your listing, you can definitely spin the benefits of where it's located. Near commuter routes means the house is next to big highways, but for some shoppers they just want to get home quick after work and this is going to be a benefit -- but only if you market it that way.

Sell the lifestyle of the house as much as the amenities of the house itself. With prices dropping in some areas, headlines

such as "Quit Commuting," "Walk to Everything," and "Cut Your Gas Bill" are becoming more and more enticing. The third- to one-acre lot doesn't look as good after the 75-minute commute. Some commuters are looking to move back in to the work centers.

Market to buyers outside the community who would find your neighborhood attractive. It's amazing how many buyers don't mind a busy 2-lane street -- when they've been overlooking the Beltway for years. Remember to market the benefits that you liked about the house when you bought several years ago.

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