

Good To Know

Dream Home Athens Tips & Guides

Hosting an Open House That Make Buyers Say “Wow!”

An open house is their opportunity to give your house a whirl. To wiggle the light switches. To admire the crown molding or awkwardly ask to use the bathroom. (Which, by the way, savvy buyers will totally do — because they will want to test how the water pressure holds up when they give the toilet a flush.)

For you, the seller, an open house is a chance to throw open the doors. To dazzle buyers with the big reveal. To make someone fall head over heels for your charming abode. These tricks can help you make your open house a massive hit.

And, Oh Yes! there are few words that get home buyers more excited than these two – OPEN HOUSE .

Time It Right

Your agent will typically hold an open house for two to three hours between 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays, when buyers have time and flexibility away from their jobs. To maximize your foot traffic, avoid having your open house during holidays, big community events (marathon days, for example), or unofficial “holidays” like Super Bowl Sunday.

Let your agent take the lead

In your own personal Open House Show, your real estate agent has two roles. To you, they are the director, giving you instructions on how to prepare for open house day, and what to do during the event. To buyers, your agent is the host. They will welcome viewers, introduce your home’s impressive features, and take questions from the audience.

Your job is to make your house look like a million bucks or more like \$300,000, depending on your price range. (Tips on cleaning and spiffing up your home in a moment.)

The job of your agent, an expert on your local real estate market and what makes buyers tick, is to take care of the rest. That will include:

- Staging your home, or recommending a reputable stager that you can hire
- Hosting the open house
- Communicating with home buyers and buyers' agents
- Receiving feedback during the open house and communicating that feedback to you

Your agent will also recommend that you should probably leave while they show off your house to strangers, who will look under your sinks and peek into your closets. Why should you heed that advice? Because it makes good business sense for you.

- 1. A homeowner's presence can make it awkward for the buyer.** Buyers want to make assessments on their own, without worrying about how the seller might react or try to influence them.
- 2. Buyers may have trouble picturing themselves living in the house** when the owner is right there, say, serving lemonade in the kitchen.
- 3. Sometimes sellers say too much.** You might point out something that you think is a nice feature or amenity of your home, when it is something that might turn off a buyer. (That busy arcade bar down the block may have been your favorite place to meet friends and play Pac-Man during weekends, but it could be a deal breaker for a buyer looking for a peaceful block.) You might blurt out something that could tip your negotiating hand, like how motivated you are to sell (soon!), or that you always wanted to update the retro kitchen — but just never got around to it.

The last things you want buyers to think after the open house is, “This place needs work,” or “This seller is desperate — I have the upper hand.” So, let your agent take the lead. This will not be their first rodeo. They know the nuanced ways to show your home in its best light so that buyers will OOOH and AHHH. They also know how to strategically answer questions from buyers to help set you up for success later, during negotiation.

Your agent can also stage a broker's open house on your behalf. Unlike standard open houses — where buyers can stop by — at broker's open houses, only real estate agents and other industry professionals are invited to attend. Generally, a broker's open is held within the first few days of a house being put on the market.

A complimentary lunch is often served as an incentive to get more people to show up.

There are two main benefits of having a broker's open house:

- 1. It gives your listing more exposure.**
- 2. It allows you to get feedback from real estate agents on your home.**

If your house "shows well," as they say in the industry, the agents who toured your home may recommend it to one (or more) of their buyer clients. If your home does not get rave reviews, your agent will relay that feedback to you, and may suggest improvements before the next open house, such as staging certain rooms.

Try Some Simple Staging

You want your home to look its best while it is on the market — especially during the open house. Many agents say the best way to primp your home for its big day is to stage it.

Depending on what your agent recommends, staging may involve renting new furniture or decor for certain rooms in your home. There are also some easy staging tricks you can try on the day of your open house. Consider displaying a bouquet of fresh flowers in the entryway, setting your dining room table to make it look inviting, or turning on your outdoor sprinklers shortly before visitors arrive to make your lawn sparkle.

Clean Like Crazy

When your home is on the market, you need to keep it in showing shape — not only for the open house, but also for any scheduled showings with buyers. Even though you've already (hopefully) cleaned and organized your home for its listing photos, there is a good chance you have let clutter or dust pile up again, especially if you have children or pets.

Make sure appliances, windows, and mirrors are fingerprint-free. Clean and organize your closets, cabinets, and under the sinks (during the open house, buyers can be nosy). Clear every bit of clutter and get rid of it or put it in storage.

Do not have the bandwidth to do a deep clean? Hire a house cleaning service to do the work for you. A professional cleaning service costs around \$115 to \$230 on average. If you are not sure about which service to hire, ask your agent to recommend cleaners.

Do a Smell Check

If buyers get a whiff of something funky, they are going to run — not walk — out of your open house. A week prior to the open house, ask your agent or a neighbor to do an honest, no-holds-barred smell check. Some possible smell solutions:

- If your house has the aroma of your beloved pet(s), deep clean the carpets, relocate the litter box, and take steps to eliminate all olfactory traces of Fluffy.
- If the basement is dank and musty, buy a dehumidifier to remove air moisture and run a fan to circulate the air.
- If the kitchen drain stinks, drop in a cup of baking soda, then two cups of white vinegar. Enjoy the bubbling, then let the mixture sit for 20 to 30 minutes. Finally run hot water for 15 to 30 seconds to flush the odor.

Put Your Pictures (and Valuables) Away

You want your home to feel cozy and inviting, but not like someone specific (you, for example) is living there. Personal belongings such as family photos, awards, and religious art can distract home buyers and make it harder for them to imagine themselves living in your home. You do not have to go overboard — the idea is not to eliminate every trace of yourself — but consider temporarily hiding some pictures and personal effects out of sight during the open house.

There is a safety element to stowing your personal belongings, too: Though your agent will be at the open house, you are inviting strangers into your home.

- Securely store checkbooks, jewelry, prescription medications, family heirlooms, and other valuables.
- Alert your neighbors to your open house date — as a courtesy, but also to ask that they let you know if they notice any suspicious activity, in the unlikely event suspicious activity occurs.
- Make sure your agent signs visitors in and asks them to show I.D., so that you have a record of who was in your house. (Bonus: With the sign-in sheet, your agent can follow up with buyers to find out if anyone is interested in making an offer.)
- Lock windows and doors after the open house.

We are not suggesting that visitors have any intention other than potentially buying your home. It is just a good idea, generally speaking, to keep your home secure.

Let the Light In

Light does not only (literally) brighten up your space. It also makes rooms look and feel larger. On open house day, open all curtains and blinds to let natural light in. (And in the week before the open house, make sure curtains and blinds are squeaky clean.)

Replace every single burnt-out light bulb in and outside the home — buyers should see a working light every time they flip a switch.

Give Your House Some Extra Curb Appeal

Buyers will judge your house on its outsides. So, make last-minute improvements to turn up your home's curb appeal. Cut the grass, prune the trees, and trim the shrubs. Touch up porch fixtures and furniture with a little paint. Heck, paint the whole porch, if your budget allows. Plant new shrubs or set out potted flowers.

Small, relatively low-budget outdoor enhancements will make your home look more enticing to buyers — and can add some last-minute value to its price.

Draw Attention to Your Home's Best Features

After your agent signs in and welcomes buyers to your home, they typically will have some time to wander around on their own. Even though you will not be there, you can still draw visitors' attention to features in your home that you would like to highlight.

Prior to the open house, post (friendly, aesthetically pleasing) signs around the house with calls to action such as, "look down, new hardwood floors," or "gas fireplace, push this button." Buyers will likely appreciate the help, and that they are working with a conscientious seller.

Serve Refreshments

Serving warm cookies or freshly baked brownies at an open house is one of the oldest tricks in the book.

That is because it works: Buyer's love being greeted with a sweet treat and a cold or warm beverage depending on the time of year. Refreshments also give people a reason to stay longer: No one will rush off because they are hungry or thirsty.

Your agent may even have relationships with a local cafe or bakery, which might offer snacks for free advertising at the open house.

What to Do During and After the Open House

Once you have done everything you can to make your house look and feel amazing to buyers — and your agent is on site to assume their hosting duties — the time during your open house is yours to enjoy. Go to the park, get a three-course lunch, do whatever you like if you are free to take calls.

Your agent may need to get in touch with questions, so make sure you are available and have good cell phone reception. (A movie, for example, is not a great activity for you during the open house for that reason.)

After the open house ends, your agent will share with you what questions buyers asked and any comments they overheard by visitors. Buyers' remarks will likely run the gamut, including some that could be negative. ("Why is the closet such a mess," for example.)

The important thing is to stay open to buyers' feedback, and to follow your agent's advice about how to respond. Based on buyers' reactions, your agent may recommend that you make certain repairs, do some painting, or invest in additional staging before your next open house.

Whatever they advise, it is not personal — it is just the business of selling your home.