

Emotions Sell!

3 Simple Steps to Setting the Scene and Getting the Home Sold

by Sandy Dixon, Interior Arrangements, Inc.

Within seconds of walking into a house, prospective buyers form an impression and know whether they want to buy your house or not. In some cases, they won't even get out of the car, based on what they see from the outside. This initial reaction can make the difference between a swift sale and a house that languishes on the market.

The old adage that 'location, location, location' sells a house may still hold true, however just as significant to the buying decision is 'emotion, emotion, emotion.' The human mind loves images and emotion and buyers in particular, are extremely visual when it comes to deciding on the ideal property to purchase.

Capturing the interest of buyers can be as simple as creating visual 'cues' or scenes both inside and outside the property that will trigger a positive response to what they are seeing. Real estate staging is a unique 'design to sell' technique that uses existing furnishings, artwork and accessories to create a *visual* experience and a feeling of emotional warmth that will appeal to the widest range of people.

Prospective buyers only know what they see, not the way it could *potentially* be—which makes staging or 'setting the scene' even more critical in marketing properties. We want them to imagine themselves living in the house, to picture their furnishings placed in the rooms and not be overwhelmed or distracted by collections, memorabilia or decorating preferences. The ultimate goal of staging is getting the house sold at the best possible price in the least amount of time. **Any house, regardless of price or location, will show better when staged.**

It's as simple as 1-2-3...**PLAN- POSITION-PROMOTE**

#1 Plan!

Besides the obvious deep cleaning and de-cluttering, the staging process involves moving and removing furnishings—less is best.

- Remove anything not used on a regular basis.

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- Re-hang artwork: alternate walls. Don't hang artwork on every wall.
- Hang pictures at a comfortable viewing height from a seated, not standing, position.
- Re-accessorizing: the secret to success is 'neutralizing' or stashing away personal items. The wall of family photographs will not encourage buyers to visualize their wall of photographs or artwork.
- The living room sofa with the torn upholstery doesn't come across as a lived-in sofa to buyers. Instead they start thinking, "If these sellers don't take care of their furniture, what condition is the rest of the house in?"

Stay true to the function of the space. Buyers get confused when rooms are not used for their intended purpose. If it's a dining room, make certain there is dining room furniture and not office, game or toy-related items taking over the space. Master bedrooms need to look like master bedrooms and secondary bedrooms should not take on the function of a storage room.

Less is best! Sellers tend to lose their objectivity after living in a home a long time. They become oblivious to what surrounds them. It is imperative, if buyers are to envision themselves living in the property, that the seller's 'imprint' be removed. IN order to eliminate sensory and visible overload, everything that is not used on a daily basis, is obsolete or redundant (multiple tables, chairs, etc.) should be removed from all rooms—and don't forget the outside of the property.

I worked with a husband and wife who were selling their home that was bursting with memorabilia, personal photos and collections from their travels around the world. It was truly spectacular—so much so that it was difficult to pry my attention away and admire the architectural elements of the home and to witness the spectacular view out the family room window. They were anxious to sell their home as they had purchased another and were eager to move. Upon hearing my first hand experience about how I felt when I first arrived—that I paid more attention to their possessions than to their property—they wholeheartedly joined me in removing and packing up their 'me museum'. That strong personal imprint that identified the property solely with them would have made it difficult for buyers to mentally place their own things in the home.

Remember, first impressions are lasting!

#2 Position!

Ambiance is the goal. Freshly painted walls, sparkling windows and light fixtures, carpets that are cleaned, uncluttered surfaces and fresh scents all contribute to creating a positive first impression. However, going one step further and creating a 'call to action' by adding some well thought out props will help the buyers feel connected to the property and envision themselves living there.

Top props for setting inviting scenes:

- Fresh flowers near entry, on dining room table or on bedside table

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- One or two books on a chair or ottoman, bedside table or on a chaise lounge overlooking a pleasant view
- Teacup and saucer w/napkin on a chair side table or on a tray that can be placed on an ottoman or bed
- Bath salts and candles on a tub surround
- Afghan draped across a chair near a fireplace
- Bowl of fresh fruit on kitchen counter or table
- Bottle of wine and glasses on a tray by a fireplace
- Attractively wrapped candy in a decorative dish
- Battery-operated candles (that flicker!) on the mantel
- Full place settings (placemats, napkins, dinnerware) on dining tables—inside and outside
- Soft background music
- Game board set up on table in family room

For one particular client who owned a home perched high on a mountain with an extraordinary view of the continental divide, I strategically placed a telescope in front of the window facing the beautiful vista. The potential buyers couldn't miss it when entering the room and immediately were drawn to this much desired feature that the home presented. In addition to a cue card next to the window that identified the mountain range, I laid two books relating to the continental divide and hiking 14ers nearby.

Vignettes tell a story. A vignette is a 'mini scene' or themed arrangement and is used frequently to create a specific mood. They are quite useful when it comes to helping buyers see the potential of a property. A vignette can be as simple as a music stand with sheet music opened and a violin propped up against it—and don't forget to have soft, classical music playing in the background. More frequently vignettes are comprised of one or two chairs, a small table in between with a lamp, a couple of books and some greenery. For an added burst of color and texture, an area rug can be added to the arrangement. If there is a view to highlight, position one or two chairs, ottoman, floor lamp and greenery along with two wine glasses and bottle of wine to visually help the buyers imagine relaxing and enjoying the view. Bottom line, determine the best features of the property and set the stage to highlight them.

#3 Promote!

Photos and virtual tours:

Buyers' emotions can also be triggered with eye-catching visuals in the marketing materials. Include scenes you've set in various areas inside and outside the property. Look at other online virtual tours to see what your first reaction is—positive or negative? In most cases, this will be the same for prospective buyers. Learn to see through their eyes and encourage that the property be photographed accordingly.

Open houses:

Have a fire burning in the fireplace in the fall and winter (only when someone is present); open windows and patio doors to let the outdoors in whenever possible. The sound of water coming

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from indoor and outdoor fountains elicits a comfortable and inviting feeling to visitors. Fresh scents like ‘clean linen’, ‘green grass’, and ‘ocean breeze’ are welcoming, yet not overpowering.

Computer program or cue cards:

If the property is challenged with a confusing floor plan or has rooms that can be used in a variety of ways, S-P-E-L-L it out for the buyers! Use ‘cue’ cards in those areas to suggest the multiple uses for a room and post the cards where they are easily visible in the room.

A more dramatic and highly effective tool would be to use a computer program to draw one or two possible remodeling floor plans and attach to the door of the problem room. Buyers can’t make changes mentally and tend to think remedies might be impossible until they see potential layouts visually laid out for them.

Use paint color CDs available at most paint stores to digitally paint the outside and inside of the home to help buyers see their favorite colors on the walls.

Several real estate agents I know go an extra step and put together a property-specific binder of information for buyers to look through when visiting the house. They not only include information on schools, libraries, health clubs, grocery stores, etc., but show photos of the property at different times of the year, views that might not be seen by buyers on a rainy day or at night, wildlife that roam nearby and interesting history about the home and/or neighborhood. This is an excellent way of emotionally connecting the potential buyers to the property.

‘Seeing is believing’ and ‘what you see is what you get’ both address the fact that our visual intake has a direct effect on our emotional assessment of things, which in turn determines the actions we take. The National Association of Realtors statistics show that the longer a home is on the market, the less it sells for...which should send a strong message to sellers. Take action up front and do everything possible to help buyers not only see the best features of the property, but to emotionally see themselves living there.

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