

To be.....or Not to be.....(Open, that is.)

Ah. The age-old question confounding Realtors from the very start: Open Houses. Do you hold them....or not?

Some Realtors will tell you that the open house has gone the way of the cassette player, now that we're solidly in the digital age. Jump on the Internet and you can see photos and videos of every single square inch of a home. Although statistics show that 77 percent of buyers do research on line, they also appreciate the chance to take what they've found on the internet and see the homes first hand. No matter how many pictures and videos, nothing can replace our senses of sight, smell, touch, hearing and taste. Yes, it's a pretty picture of the backyard garden. But have a prospective buyer sink into the sun-warmed cushions of the patio couch, let them listen to the hypnotic gurgling of the fountain, have them close their eyes and feel the warm breeze and smell the mouth-watering aroma of a neighbor's backyard barbeque just getting underway. Let them hear faintly on the wind the sound of little children playing at the nearby park. *That's* when their decision is made.

Yes, statistics show that less than 4 percent of home sales have been through an open house. But you can work those odds. If your plan is to stick on open house sign in the front yard and show up with the latest Stephen King novel and a box of Ranch flavored Wheat Thins, you might as well stay home. But here are some helpful hints to hold a *successful* open house:

1. Pick a home that is in a central location – easy for the public to get to and easy to sign. That way, you guarantee traffic, if not a buyer.
2. Take advantage of technology and *advertise*: Zillow.com, Realtor.com, Trulia.com, portals on Yahoo, Google and Facebook. Hit them all.
3. Now, go low tech and purchase riders for your For Sale signs that advertise: Open Sundays from 1 -4. Especially if your home is in a non-gated, drive through community, potential buyers coming home from work may not register the Realtor's name and number, but they should remember the home is open every Sunday.
4. Be neighborly and *invite* the neighbors. Many Realtors view neighbors as pesky "look-loos," but they have friends and family and may very well want them to be down the block from them. Think about hosting a private open house just for neighbors an hour ahead.
5. Primp the house as if it's over forty and going on its first date in a very long time: lights on, music on, clutter gone, drapes open, windows and doors open (weather permitting), clean and polished and ready for an offer. First impressions matter.

6. Timing is everything. Most open houses are from 2 until 4 or 3 until 5. You might want to choose an off hour or add an hour: 1 until 4 or 2 until 5. If prospective buyers are looking at a lot of open houses, opening up first or staying open longer could make a difference.

Even if that statistic holds true, (that only 4 percent of home sales have been through an open house), if you're one of the lucky ones – you will be a believer for life!