How to Sell Homes Fast for Top Dollar

How a two-time champion Houston broker prices, stages, and markets homes to sell fast — for more.

WRITTEN BY

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2× Battle of the Brokers Champion · $145M+ Sold · 4.9★

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

> Find the one buyer who simply cannot walk away from your house — and get them to pay top dollar.

For most families, the house is the biggest thing they own. So when it comes time to sell, you are steering the largest and most complicated deal of your life. New vocabulary, bigger numbers, and financial decisions you do not face every day all show up at once.

And then there are the feelings. The home where you raised your kids and built your memories feels like it should be worth more than its walls and roof. That is natural. But emotion is also where most pricing battles go sideways, so part of my job is helping you separate the heart from the math.

Here is the real goal: find the one buyer who simply cannot walk away from your house, and get them to pay the most for it. That happens when your home outshines the competition and a shopper feels, in the first few seconds at the curb, that they are walking up to their own front door, not somebody else's.

Hi, I am Alan. If this book reached you, you are probably thinking about selling, and you may be dreading it. That is exactly why I am here. After more than 17 years in this business, I have collected the insider moves that help sellers get the most money in the least time, and I am handing them to you.

When a friend sells an ordinary house in an ordinary neighborhood for way over market, that is not luck. It is usually a great agent at work.

In these pages you will get:

- A clear walk through the selling process
- Strategies to sell for more
- The common mistakes that cost sellers money
- Marketing that top agents actually use
- How to appeal to today's buyers
- The upgrades with the best return
- A negotiation playbook

You can run these plays yourself, but I would rather run them for you. Either way, my hope is that this book helps you sell quickly and for the best price. When you are ready, I am here with a free market analysis and a marketing plan that fits your budget and your life. Reading this is your first step.

CHAPTER 2

First Steps to Home Selling

Market Value	Appraisal Value	Assessed Value
What a fair, open, competitive sale should bring	A licensed appraiser's estimate at a moment in time	The figure the county uses to set your taxes

You have heard it forever: location, location, location. It is still the single biggest driver of price. But pricing a home is not one clean formula. Plenty of factors feed into it, and throughout this book you will see near-identical houses that sold for very different numbers, with the reasons spelled out. The number a home should bring is rarely the number a seller imagines, and that gap is exactly why overpricing leaves so many homes sitting unsold.

Three terms are worth knowing so you can price with confidence:

Market value: the most likely price your home should fetch in a fair, open, competitive sale. Think of it as an informed opinion of what your house should bring in your neighborhood.

Appraisal value: a professional appraiser's read on what the home is worth at a moment in time. Lenders lean on this. When a loan exceeds 80% of value, the bank usually requires mortgage insurance.

Assessed value: the figure your local government uses to set property taxes. It often does not match market or appraised value. In fact, roughly 60% of U.S. homes are assessed higher than they are actually worth.

What Is Your Home Worth?

A house is not a can of tuna with a fixed shelf price, and it is not a stock that trades at a published number every day. Every property is one of a kind, so its value has to be developed, not looked up. There are a couple of solid ways to get there.

Professional Appraisal

An appraiser estimates what a reasonable buyer would pay a reasonable seller. Sellers use it to price, buyers use it to shape an offer, and lenders use it to decide how much to loan. The main things that move an appraisal:

- Type and age of the dwelling
- Design, materials, and how it was built
- Improvements made
- Size and condition
- Location and neighborhood
- Recent comparable sales
- Depreciation

Condition and location carry real weight. You cannot move your house, but smart upgrades can absolutely lift its value.

Comparative Market Analysis

This is where I come in. A CMA from a real estate professional is free, and it beats any automated online estimate. It lays out every home that has sold in your area over the past six months with its final price, plus everything currently for sale with its asking price. Those active listings are your competition. With that picture in hand, we price your home realistically. (See the last page if you would like a free home valuation.)

Selling for More: It Takes Effort

Since there is no exact formula, the seller's own time and effort become the deciding edge. Your willingness to get the home truly ready, and to keep it that way until it sells, has a huge effect on both how fast it goes and how much you get.

A quick word on timing. When homes typically sell within six months, the market is balanced. Something big, like a major employer moving in or out, can tilt it. In a hot seller's market a home might sell in about 30 days; in a slow one it can drag on for nine months. Anything under six months generally favors sellers.

Living in a Fishbowl

While your home is listed, you are living in a showroom. Expect calls at odd hours, last-minute showing requests, repair and inspection appointments, and photographers. Showings come thick and fast at first, and the right buyer might knock right at dinnertime, so keep the place show-ready.

Kids and pets are distractions for shoppers. Plan to have children out of the house, pets crated or leashed, toys put away, dishes done, and the kitchen sparkling.

Here is the catch: you will show the home to far more lookers than serious buyers, and a single showing can eat an hour or more. Chasing every casual "Sunday window shopper" burns you out. The fix is planning, organization, and a good agent who screens for the buyers who actually intend to buy.

CHAPTER 3

Pareto's Principle

The 80/20 of selling

A small share of the right prep — pricing, presentation, marketing — drives the large majority of your final result. Spend your effort there.

Alan sharing his playbook on stage.

There is an old observation that 80% of your results come from 20% of your effort. We call it the Pareto principle, after the Italian economist who noticed in 1906 that a fifth of his pea plants produced most of his pods, and then that a fifth of Italy's population owned most of its land. The ratio is never exact, but the lopsidedness shows up everywhere: a small share of salespeople drives most sales, a small share of customers drives most profit.

Applying the 80/20 Rule to Your Home

Here is how I use it: stop trying to sell the whole house. Find the roughly 20% of features that make your home special and put those front and center in your photos and showings. The other 80% still matters, so do not neglect it, but it is not your headline. And your headline is never the stuff your home shares with every other listing. It is the distinctive feature that grabs the buyer who has been waiting for exactly that.

A quick example. One couple searched nearly a year for an ocean view. The home they finally chose was dated and tired, but the moment the husband stepped onto the third-floor balcony off the master and saw the water, the peeling paint stopped mattering. That view, the 20%, sold the house.

It cuts both ways for sellers, too. One family's home sat on an unpaved road but offered a secluded, country feel: nearly two acres ringed by pastures and old oaks. A nearby comparable home had similar updates but sat on a busy street. The buyer chose seclusion. That single standout feature won the sale.

Find and Spotlight Your 20%

Lead buyers straight to what makes your home different. Do not waste breath explaining how a storage room could become a bathroom; walk the dog owner to the fenced run in your oversized yard. If your home has the exact feature a buyer wants, putting it at the center of your marketing pulls in people willing to pay your price.

Not sure what your standout is? Look for things like:

- A hilltop or elevated view
- Unobstructed sunrise or sunset views
- A patio, deck, gazebo, or dog run the neighbors lack
- A private, tree-screened, or corner/cul-de-sac lot
- A large or fenced backyard (if it can be fenced and is not, consider doing it)
- A finished basement, big garage, or pool

Play to that feature and you show less to tire-kickers and more to motivated buyers. You field fewer lowball offers, too. So take the time to compare your house against the neighbors, pinpoint what stands out, and make it shine.

One last story shows the power of this. A brand-new custom home sat unsold for over seven months with zero offers. A sharp agent visited, hunting for the one thing the competition did not have, and found it: a five-acre lot in an area where everyone else offered one or two acres. Bigger and more private. He rebuilt the marketing around those five acres, and interest finally took off. That is the 80/20 rule doing its job.

CHAPTER 4

Creating Curb Appeal

> You never get a second chance at a first impression. Curb appeal sets the ceiling before anyone steps inside.

A great first impression is not love at first sight, but it is an invitation to take a closer look. Nowhere is that truer than in selling a home. First impressions set the tone, and sometimes they are everything, so always think about what a buyer feels as they pull up to your house for the very first time.

Picture curb appeal as your shop window. Just like choosing where to grab lunch on a busy street, shoppers decide in a glance whether to step inside. You do not have much time to win them over, whether they are scrolling online photos or rolling past in the family SUV on a Sunday drive. A neglected exterior makes buyers cruise right by, even ones the listing description had excited; a sharp one pulls in buyers the description never reached.

So try this. Walk out to the street and really look at your home as a stranger would. Is it crisp and well-kept, or are there repairs you have been putting off? After years of living somewhere, none of us see it clearly anymore, so listen to your agent, your friends, and what buyers tell you. Then drive your neighborhood and notice which for-sale homes appeal to you and why. The ones with trimmed bushes, groomed lawns, and a welcoming entrance always beat the ones with patchy grass and a peeling front door.

The outside has to invite people in. A buyer who sees dead shrubs and worn siding assumes the inside is just as neglected. Roll up to your own curb and inventory everything that needs attention. Cheap fixes carry real weight here: power-washing the house and concrete, repainting trim, pulling weeds, washing windows, and adding a little landscaping. Bigger repairs cost more but tend to show up in your final sale price. Remember, unless you plan to sell below market, most buyers do not want a project.

Make a written list and work it:

- Trim shrubs, weed the beds, tidy walkways, tend the flower gardens
- Clear all trash, cans, clippings, and clutter from the yard
- Get every outside fixture working and looking sharp: door and yard lights, garage door, porch rails
- Refresh patio furniture and the deck with paint or stain

It is real work, but anyone can list a house; not everyone sells fast and for top dollar. Do this, and buyers will be eager to see the inside.

Creating a Grand Entrance

Even a modest house deserves a grand entrance. You want shoppers to feel welcome, safe, and secure the moment they reach the door, and that is more than a welcome mat and a couple of plants.

The doorknob is the first thing a buyer touches. A loose or flimsy handle makes people uneasy, often without knowing why. Replace a worn handset; consider a heavy deadbolt-and-knob combo. For under $100 your home feels more secure, and security sells.

The front door is a focal point, so make it pop with a fresh coat of color that complements the house. Swapping a wood door for a steel one is well worth it, returning about 91% of its cost.

More Ways to Build Curb Appeal

- Keep things symmetrical; lopsided landscaping or uneven bushes throw off the whole look
- Replace a dated or shabby mailbox; it is cheap and it matters
- Add outdoor lighting for both beauty and a sense of safety
- Use flower boxes and raised beds for instant, inexpensive color
- Refresh landscaping by weeding and adding mulch; it signals a cared-for home
- Add molding around the door or windows for architectural punch
- Keep shutters, trim, fences, and gates clean and freshly painted
- Clean gutters and downspouts and touch up any rust
- Keep the path to the door clear and welcoming
- Repaint or, cheaper still, power-wash the house, walkway, and driveway
- Add stone or stone veneer to the facade if it suits the design
- Install a smart video doorbell (around $200); most home doorbells are outdated, and security-minded buyers notice

Curb appeal is one of the biggest levers for selling fast and well. Spend a little cleaning up the outside and far more buyers will want to see inside. It draws them in, holds their interest, and sets you apart, sometimes for a home they did not even know they were looking for.

CHAPTER 5

Staging with Purpose

> Stage for the buyer you want, not the way you live. Every room should sell a feeling.

When I talk about staging, I mean dressing up the inside of a home so a buyer walks in and instantly pictures their own life unfolding there. In my experience, nothing you do pays off quite like helping someone fall for a space before they've done the math.

A lot of sellers skip this part because it takes effort. I get it. But the results speak for themselves, and I've watched staging move the needle on price again and again. It works in a hot market or a slow one, and it works whether you're selling a single-family house, a condo, a townhome, or an apartment. Done right, staging:

- Sets your home apart from everything else for sale
- Pulls stronger offers out of buyers
- Gives you a clear visual advantage

A Real Side-by-Side Comparison

I want to show you the most convincing proof I have, because plenty of folks doubt that something as simple as staging can make one home sell for more than its twin.

So I went looking for two nearly identical homes that sold for different prices, where staging was the only real variable. I found a perfect case in a development of 200 matching townhomes. Every unit is three stories with three bedrooms, three baths, and the exact same floor plan.

Two of them sold within a month of each other. Townhome A closed in late August. Townhome B, just five doors down, had closed a month earlier for 40,000 dollars less. I know this neighborhood well and have walked these properties myself. The lots were equally desirable. Both had matching kitchens, the same cabinets and tile, hardwood in the living room, and carpet in the bedrooms. On paper, they were the same house.

So what created a 40,000 dollar gap? Two things. Townhome A was professionally staged, and its agent shot far better photos. That's it. Those two moves convinced buyers to pay tens of thousands more, simply because the home was presented with care.

Why Staging Carries So Much Weight

The numbers back this up. Surveys from Coldwell Banker and the National Association of Realtors found that staged homes:

- Sat on the market half as long as unstaged ones
- Sold for more than 6% over asking
- Returned 8% to 10% on a staging spend of just 1% to 3% of the asking price
- Sold 79% faster when staged before listing rather than after

What Buyers Are Looking For

Most shoppers are dreaming about a fresh start, and your job is to make that dream easy to see. I call it interior curb appeal: the eye gets pulled toward light, inviting spaces, and standout features. Every room needs an obvious purpose. The home should feel current and low-maintenance, with a clean, simple, modern tone. Fresh paint, updated fixtures, and getting rid of stained carpet and popcorn ceilings can swing saleability by as much as 75%.

Keep It Neutral

The goal here is to strip out your personal taste so buyers can drop their own taste in. When your style and your belongings dominate, they become a distraction.

The simplest fix is neutral paint throughout, anything from a soft gray to a warm beige. Fresh paint reads as new, brightens everything, and makes rooms feel larger. Carrying one color across rooms you can see into at once gives the whole home a smooth, connected flow. Matching window coverings to the walls adds to that sense of space. Dark, bold colors tend to shrink a large room, though a single accent wall can work now and then.

Furniture: Less Is More

A staged room should feel open and inviting enough that a buyer can imagine living in it, and the way you get there is by minimizing. Since you're moving anyway, you might as well start clearing out now.

Buyers love light and room to breathe, and they're turned off by cramped, cluttered spaces they can't move through easily. Space and storage rank high on every buyer's wish list, so:

- Pull out any furniture you don't need and store it while you're listed
- Clear and organize every closet, pantry, and storage area so the space itself shows off
- Use placement to your advantage, grouping chairs by a fireplace to highlight it
- Pull seating away from the walls into warm conversation groupings
- Give every room a clear function. That junk room full of boxes becomes an office with a desk, a reading nook with a lamp and recliner, or a workout room

Make sure traffic flows so buyers can drift from room to room without bumping into anything.

Add a Little Emotion

Once each room has a job, atmosphere is what makes a buyer linger. Greenery, fresh flowers, a stack of coffee table books, and well-placed wall art bring a room to life. A bed with a single pillow looks bare and lonely; add a nightstand with a lamp and a rocking chair with a throw blanket, and suddenly it feels lived-in. Repeat a color, shape, or texture to tie the room together, and save your boldest splashes of color for the spots you want eyes to land.

Find the balance between staging and actually living there. You can even decorate for the season without hurting your odds, as long as the home stays clean and clutter-free. Small touches add up to real dollars at closing. You can stage yourself or bring in a pro, and if you'd like a referral, I'm happy to share one.

Stay or Go?

Sellers often ask whether to keep living in the home while it's listed. There are trade-offs either way.

Moving out has real upsides. With an agent handling calls, scheduling, and showings, an empty home is almost no work for you. Buyers' agents also tend to favor vacant homes because they can grab the lockbox and walk in without booking an appointment. And you escape the constant grind of keeping everything showroom-perfect, which is a lifesaver if you've got young kids.

The downside: an empty house can whisper "motivated seller." I once saw a buyer online admit he lowballed a vacant home by 30,000 dollars, assuming the owner was desperate, even though he loved it and would gladly have paid more. The empty rooms started the haggling far below where it needed to.

CHAPTER 6

Upgrading with ROI in Mind

Upgrades run the gamut from swapping a front-door handle and freshening the paint to gutting a whole kitchen. The real question is always the same: which improvements actually earn their money back?

In real estate, return on investment usually lands under 100%, so my rule is less is more. My honest advice: make your upgrades while you're still living there and enjoying them, not in a panic right before you sell. You'll get the pleasure of using them, and you'll spend less scrambling at listing time. Plenty of nice improvements simply won't return their full cost at sale, which is all the more reason to enjoy them along the way.

Say your home is worth 275,000 dollars and you sink 25,000 into a kitchen redo. Don't expect that to lift the value dollar for dollar; you'll likely recoup around half. Small swaps like dated fixtures are worth it. Full-blown remodels purely to sell usually aren't.

That said, you can't ignore the real problems an inspector or lender will flag, like a leaking roof or old wiring. Fix those before listing, or plan to hand the buyer a concession.

Start with the Basics

Every listing should clear the bar any buyer expects: a sound roof, working gutters, a crack-free foundation, functioning heating and cooling, solid subflooring, and safe wiring. With lender-required inspections, you may have to cure these issues anyway just to get the buyer financed.

Remember too that your value is set by what comparable homes nearby have recently sold for. If similar houses sold around 275,000, that 25,000 kitchen won't push you to 300,000. Your kitchen needs to match the neighborhood standard, not beat it.

Don't Skip the Mechanicals

It's easy to obsess over the pretty stuff and forget the boring-but-critical systems:

- Electrical boxes and wiring
- Gas lines
- Plumbing
- Heating and air conditioning

If any of these are old or failing, your appeal and your price drop with them. The NAR found heating and cooling costs were the top environmental concern for recent buyers, with 83% rating them at least somewhat important. Buyers want a home that's safe and sound; faulty wiring feels dangerous, and leaky plumbing raises fears of mold and sewage. Neglect these now and you'll pay for it at inspection and appraisal.

Having pros certify or repair these systems helps the sale, and a clean inspection report is a strong marketing tool:

- Have a licensed plumber check the water system, plus well and septic if you have them
- Bring in an electrician to verify the wiring
- Schedule a full HVAC service
- Ask your gas supplier to check the tank and lines

If juggling all those calls sounds like a headache, a certified home inspector covers most of it in one visit and flags trouble spots. Since many buyers hire one anyway, you may be saving them a step. And if you sell as-is with known issues, expect to negotiate.

Appliances

New appliances genuinely move buyers. An NAR buyer survey found:

- Buyers were generally interested in homes with new appliances
- 41% would pay more for stainless steel
- The biggest factor was simply that appliances were included
- Buyers who couldn't get the appliances they wanted said they'd have paid nearly 2,000 dollars more for them

Buyers want appliances included and will pay extra for them, especially newer ones. New appliances can be the thing that beats the listing across the street. If new is out of reach, make sure what you have is spotless and works perfectly.

Update the Hardware

Look hard at your kitchen and bath hardware. Worn, dated pulls and fixtures won't speak to a buyer the way fresh ones will. You don't have to replace everything, though. Unless a piece is broken, you can wash, sand, and refinish it with spray paint made for hardware and get a like-new look cheaply. Pay close attention to:

- Towel bars
- Toilet paper holders
- Door handles
- Dated light fixtures

The aim is a polished look without overspending, and there's no shortage of DIY videos online if your budget is tight. If a set is broken or worn out, replace the whole set, and paint old and new to match if needs be.

Bring in the Light

Light, natural or artificial, is one of the best ways to show off a home. Harsh light flatters nothing and dim light makes everything feel dingy. Walk each room and note where you need more. Rooms with big windows shine during daytime showings; smaller-windowed rooms need help. A good rule is roughly 100 watts per 50 square feet.

There are three kinds of light, and using all three brings out the best in a home: general overhead light for ambiance, pendant light for tasks like cooking or reading, and accent light from lamps or sconces. An entry can wow buyers with a dramatic fixture, a chandelier if ceilings are high or wall sconces in tighter spaces. You can often update existing fixtures rather than buy new.

Kitchens and baths can make or break the sale, so light them well. Under-cabinet track lighting lets counters shine, and the light over the sink and stove should be bright and working. Bathroom light should be strong but not harsh. In bedrooms, skip harsh overheads in favor of well-placed lamps for a restful feel, but keep closet lighting bright. One more thing: even light-painted rooms need enough light, or they read as drab.

Flooring

Buyers do look down, and worn floors will cost you while floors in great shape can earn you more. Start with the cheapest fixes, repairing and deep-cleaning. Move furniture, inspect every floor, and note what needs cleaning, repair, or replacement. Carpets often steam-clean back to life; if they're path-worn, swapping to another flooring type carries a reasonable return. Laminate takes well to repair kits, and worn or water-damaged hardwood can usually be refinished. Talk to a flooring pro, because real wood adds a quality laminate can't touch.

Kitchen and Bath Tips

Know what counts as a smart investment versus an overreach, and lean toward broad appeal. One seller I know spent 4,000 dollars adding a backsplash and cabinet space, updating appliances, and refinishing the oak floors. Keeping the price in line with the area, they sold for 27,000 over asking when buyers got into a bidding war. The lesson: you don't have to blow your budget to win, you just need mass appeal, and kitchens are the heart of it. Worthwhile moves include:

- Neutral paint
- A new kitchen backsplash
- New countertops if yours are dated or below area standard
- New multifunctional kitchen faucets
- More cabinet or pantry storage
- Updated bath vanities; pedestal or trendy cabinet sinks have wide appeal
- New toilet seats, or a new toilet if needed

Two Energy Upgrades Worth Considering

More buyers want homes that trim their utility bills. Two easy wins:

- A smart thermostat (under 300 dollars) that cuts energy costs
- Solar attic vents (500 to 700 dollars) that push out summer heat

The Case for Storage

People accumulate stuff and crave a place to put it. The NAR reports most buyers wish for more and better closet and storage space. Buyers said they wanted:

- A laundry room — 93%
- A bathroom linen closet — 90%
- Garage storage — 86%
- A walk-in kitchen pantry — 85%

Give buyers great storage and you've won them over. If you're handy, adding a closet isn't hard, and it's a real edge in older homes where closets run small. If your rooms are already tight, don't steal square footage; upgrade the closets you have instead. No skills or budget for that? Organizers stretch the space you've got:

- Companies like ClosetMaid let you design a custom kit online
- Hardware stores carry inexpensive prefab options
- They won't enlarge a closet, but maximizing vertical and horizontal space is a solid alternative

Don't stop at closets, either. Organize your cabinets, and add shelving in the laundry room and linen closet for a big, cheap impact. Wherever you can add tasteful, affordable storage, do it.

Bottom line: upgrade with ROI in mind. Compare your home to what today's buyers actually want, improve accordingly, and never spend past what comparable homes in your area command.

Features Most Buyers Want

- Energy Star appliances — 94%
- Laundry room — 93%
- Whole-home Energy Star rating — 91%
- Bathroom exhaust fan — 90%
- Exterior lighting — 90%
- Bathroom linen closet — 90%
- Energy Star windows — 89%
- Ceiling fans — 88%
- Garage storage — 86%
- Eat-in kitchen table space — 85%
- Walk-in kitchen pantry — 85%

These aren't guaranteed money-makers, but they signal where buyer interest sits.

Features Fewer Buyers Want

- Master shower with no tub — 51%
- Two-story family room — 43%
- Wine cooler — 42%
- Wet bar — 41%
- Laminate countertop — 40%
- Laundry chute — 32%
- Outdoor kitchen — 31%
- Game room — 31%
- His & hers baths — 31%
- Glass-front cabinets — 31%

CHAPTER 7

The Three D's

1	**2**	**3**
De-clutter	**De-personalize**	**Deep-clean**
Clear surfaces and closets so the space reads bigger	Remove personal photos so buyers picture themselves	A spotless home signals one that was cared for

Staging comes down to three habits I drill into every seller: depersonalize, declutter, and deep clean. The whole point is to help a buyer picture their life in the house, not yours.

Depersonalize

While your home is listed, treat it like a model home, because that's exactly what it has become. Take down the family photos, the trophies, the souvenir shelves, and any decor that reflects your taste. I promise you, almost nobody else loves your beer-can collection or your wall of records the way you do, and those personal touches only pull a buyer's eye away from the house itself.

Box up the things you treasure and get them out of sight. A short-term rental storage unit until you close is money well spent.

Declutter and Discard

Your goal is a clean, neutral canvas where any visitor can paint their own future. Yes, living without your "stuff" feels like camping in a hotel for a while, but it's part of the price of getting top dollar.

Extra furniture, stacks of books and magazines, hobby gear, and knickknacks all add visual weight and shrink a room. Even a charming collection reads as clutter. The roomier and emptier a space feels, the more a buyer wants it, so strip things down and let the house speak for itself.

Work from a simple plan:

Walk the house and note the clutter in every room, closets included.

Tackle one room at a time, smallest job first.

Keep only the essentials in each space.

Donate or toss what you no longer use.

Box the keepers and move them to storage.

Keep all surfaces clear.

Room by room, the takeaways are the same. In the kitchen and bathrooms, clear the counters down to a few items, hide soaps, towels, medicines, cosmetics, and small appliances, and never use the oven or microwave as storage. In closets and bedrooms, hang only the clothes you actually wear so the space looks generous; most of us live in about 20% of our wardrobe anyway. Clear flat surfaces in dining and living areas down to one quiet accent. Organize the office, linen closet, and laundry room into neat, minimal shelves and bins. The garage is the big one, so use it as a chance to purge what you haven't touched in years. And put pet bowls, beds, and litter boxes out of sight.

Deep Cleaning: Spotless Wins

A thorough cleaning pays off the same way it does on a used car, you simply get more money. Once the place is depersonalized and decluttered, scrub every room top to bottom, and hire a professional service if it makes sense. Buyers open cabinets, pantries, and closets, so nothing is off limits.

Hit the whole house: clear cobwebs, dust fans and fixtures and blinds, wash the walls (do this before any repainting and save yourself a step), shine every glass and wood surface, wipe down leather, make the appliances gleam, and scrub sinks, toilets, tubs, faucets, and grout until they're spotless. Clean the window treatments and wash the windows so natural light fills the rooms, then vacuum, shampoo carpets, and mop.

Pour your energy into the kitchen and bathrooms. The kitchen is the heart of the home, and grime, odors, or trash there will sink a deal fast. Bathrooms matter just as much. A buyer might forgive a messy kid's room, but a questionable kitchen or bath can cost you the sale.

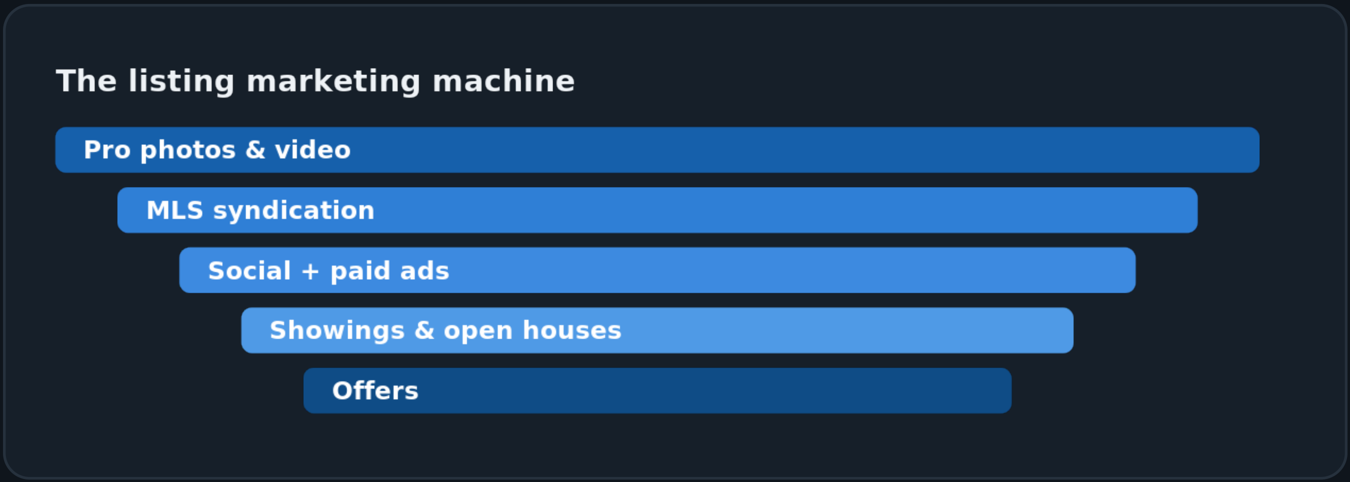
A Word on Pets

I love animals, but buyers want to see your home without them. Dander and odor don't help, some visitors have allergies or simply dislike pets, and at minimum they're a distraction. Tuck pets and their gear away, in the yard or crated, during every showing.

With staging done, you're ready to list. Next we'll talk pricing, where a good agent is your best guide to selling fast without slashing the price.

CHAPTER 8

How To Market Your Home



Alan out and about in Houston.

So far this book has covered the language of real estate and how to prep a home for its best possible showing and price. Now let's figure out what actually determines the market value of your home.

Don't get hung up on the phrase "buyer's market." In a real sense it's always a seller's market too. People need homes, and real estate stays a sought-after commodity no matter what. Your house is also one of a kind, with whatever character you've built into it setting it apart from the neighbors.

There's no perfect season to sell, either. People take new jobs, get transferred, and move for family reasons all year long. Your home's value rests on what similar homes have recently sold for at the moment you list. In the end, you set the asking price, ideally with a professional's help.

Getting the Price Right

Buying a house is like buying anything else, perception of value drives the deal, and perceived value is not the same as market value. You have to price strategically and correctly from day one. Homes that sit and go stale end up selling for an average of about 11.5% below their original list price.

Two truths to keep front of mind as you set the number:

First, sentiment has no dollar value. You're attached to the home; the buyer isn't. Most buyers don't expect yours to be the one, so keep emotion out of the price. Buyers read your motivation, so don't hand them clues.

Second, money you sink into upgrades doesn't translate dollar for dollar into price. A $25,000 kitchen remodel won't lift a $275,000 home to $300,000. Don't tack the cost onto your asking price and end up the nicest but priciest house on the block.

Sale Price vs. Market Value

When a qualified, ready buyer agrees to a price you'll accept, that's the sale price, an objective fact. Once it closes, it influences market value for everyone else nearby.

Market value is what a property would fetch given its features, the competition, and current supply and demand. You may believe your home is worth more than a buyer will pay; a balanced market eventually pulls value and price together.

Perspective matters too. You might love your mature shade trees, while a buyer who hates raking leaves counts them against you. You might expect credit for that new $10,000 roof, but buyers simply assume the roof works. On the other hand, proximity to schools, transit, or hospitals genuinely adds value for the right buyer. Buyers chase a deal, but what they'll pay and what a bank will finance both have ceilings. Strategic pricing is your single best tool.

A Pricing Example

Say a home's market value lands somewhere between $290,000 and $300,000, with plenty of competing listings. Three common approaches:

- Leave room to negotiate. Stretch to $305,000 and you mostly make the comparable homes look like better deals; yours likely won't sell quickly or at that number.
- Price it to worth. Set it at $295,000, dead center, and buyers lump it in with similar listings, feeling no urgency.
- Underprice to spark interest. Drop to $280,000 and you may trigger a bidding war, but you've abandoned the goal of selling for more.

The Comparative Market Analysis

Pricing off real, comparable sales is what makes the sale. The Comparative Market Analysis (CMA) is essential to pricing strategically. When your agent prepares one, read it, ask questions, and make them explain. A solid CMA gives you a strong list price and lowers the odds of a low appraisal. Price it well and you should be showing within days and fielding offers within weeks.

Perceived Value

The more a buyer's perceived value outweighs your price, the more eager they are to buy. As price and perceived value converge, urgency fades. Your agent can identify a buyer's hot buttons so you tailor your marketing and presentation to match.

Sell By Showing Off

Before the internet, buyers flipped through the MLS book, all tiny grainy photos with the real information printed below. Today it's the opposite, the photo is the bait. Roughly 93% of buyers shop online before they ever call an agent. They browse, fall for a home, then reach out.

Beautiful, bright, inviting photos make the first impression, so listing photography is one of your most powerful marketing tools. Show off the standout features, big rooms, great views, striking architecture, and stage the spaces to feel open and light without faking what isn't there.

Maximum Targeted Exposure

A good agent puts your listing everywhere buyers look, Zillow, Realtor.com, their own site, and their social channels. Zillow alone pulls about 29% of all real estate web traffic in a typical month. Make sure whoever you hire is current on online marketing and can deliver:

- Visual mapping like Google Earth
- Floor plans, including 3-D
- Video tours
- Regular buyer-activity updates
- Electronic documents
- A mobile app
- Social media exposure
- Virtual staging for empty homes

Selling fast and for more takes work. Stage it right, use every tool, and partner with an agent who values great photography and runs an aggressive internet campaign that brings ready buyers to your door.

CHAPTER 9

Common Seller Mistakes

> Most money is lost before the first showing — in the price, the prep, and the photos.

Pricing a home isn't as simple as it looks, which is exactly why people make the same costly errors over and over. Here are the ones to dodge.

Pricing Mistakes

Guessing instead of researching. Pricing off what the neighbor listed at isn't reliable. Nothing scares buyers away faster than an overpriced home, and the price cuts that follow make you look desperate and invite low-ball offers. But don't underprice either; you might shave a little time off the sale while leaving thousands on the table. Lean on the CMA and your agent. If a nearby home sold cheap, don't assume yours is worth the same, it may have had problems or a rushed seller, and yours may offer more.

Hiring the agent who quotes the highest price. Picking an agent just because they floated the biggest number is a trap. A great agent delivers real data and a real marketing plan, knows the area, is trustworthy, and answers your questions fast. Interview several and choose the one with solid sales numbers and a strategy, not the loftiest guess.

Pricing with your heart. Selling is a business deal between you and a qualified buyer. Years of memories are priceless, but they don't add a dime to the price, and neither does the sweat you put into the place. Stick to the CMA and stay all business.

First-day high-price blues. The first ten days on the market are everything. Price too high and buyers skip right past you; by the time you lower it, they've moved on. A home that lingers makes everyone wonder what's wrong with it. Price it right out of the gate to draw attention and sell faster.

Testing the market with a high price. Even if you're in no rush, "let's see what happens" pricing backfires. Serious buyers watch for fresh listings, not stale ones, and betting the market will swing your way is risky. If prices are sliding, you lose.

Planning to drop the price later. Listing way above the comps and intending to cut after three months can work in a stable or rising market. In a declining one, you'll be forced to chase the falling market with even bigger cuts. Price competitively from the start and keep reassessing with your agent.

Other Seller Mistakes

Zillow keeps a running list of don'ts. The big ones:

Selling before you're qualified to buy. Your finances may have shifted, and you could end up unable to buy the replacement home you want. Get pre-approved first, study prices where you're headed, and have a plan in case you have to move quickly.

Wasting time on unqualified buyers. Showing to someone who can't actually buy is pure waste. I've seen a seller spend two weeks and $1,000 tearing out an old shed and meeting repeatedly with an acquaintance, only to learn the buyer couldn't get a loan. A good agent screens buyers before you ever lift a finger.

Hovering. Leave during showings whenever you can. A lingering owner makes buyers nervous; they rush, stay quiet about what they'd change, and can't picture the place as theirs. If you must stay, keep out of the way and answer only when asked. Don't insist your own agent attend every showing either, it limits access for the buyers' agents.

Waiting it out. Wait, and you'll be standing in line with every other seller who waited. When they finally jump, you're already late. If you want to sell now, sell now.

Throwing back the first quick offer. An early bite makes sellers giddy, sure the big fish is still out there. So they toss back a perfectly good offer, and that first one is often the catch of the day. Don't.

Getting too friendly with the buyer. Be warm, but skip the long personal conversations, personality clashes cloud deals, and offhand remarks about the house or neighborhood can plant doubt.

Underestimating closing costs. Sellers fixate on the sale price and forget the rest, agent commission (or your own advertising costs if selling solo), attorney and closing fees, any excise or gains tax, prorated taxes, HOA dues and utilities, plus the odd appraisal, inspection, or buyer cost you agree to cover.

Spending the earnest money early. That deposit isn't yours until the deal closes and records. Plenty of sellers spent it, then had to fight for a refund when the deal fell through over financing or inspection. An agent holds the funds neutrally and makes sure your contract spells out what happens if it doesn't close.

Forgetting utilities and insurance. The moment a contract is signed, call your utilities and insurer, ask how much lead time they need to switch or cancel, and circle back once your closing date is firm.

Letting emotions run the show. Stay calm, especially around the inspection. Assume issues will surface and that you may pay for a repair or two; don't let a small fix blow up the deal. At the same time, never promise a big repair like a new roof unless you're sure you can handle it financially and emotionally.

CHAPTER 10

Learn From Others' Mistakes

> Someone already made the expensive mistake you're about to make. Learn on their dime, not yours.

The fastest way to avoid leaving money on the table is to learn from people who already did. Here are real, costly mistakes, including ones made by banks, and a final example showing why pricing right the first time matters in a shifting market.

Underpricing: The Easiest Way To Lose Money

The number one reason sellers lose money is underpricing, simply guessing what a home is worth, listing it, and selling below value without ever realizing it. That's why you have to truly understand what your home is worth today.

Consider the couple who sold three acres for $80,000 when it was worth around $300,000. They lived 30 miles away, hired an agent who didn't know the area, and never grasped the land's potential. The buyer did. He'd researched the zoning and found the parcel approved for high-density condos, plus a new county road planned along the edge. The sellers didn't learn they'd left $200,000-plus behind until the condos went up.

A Bank's Costly Error

Banks assume an unsolicited offer is usually below market, and one bank let that assumption cost it over $30,000. Two cash-ready buyers wanted the same standout property, and either would gladly have paid its $100,000 market value. But the bank refused every offer and, through an oversight, listed it at just $67,000.

Mistake one was underpricing by $33,000. Mistake two was sloppy marketing: the MLS listing had errors, the address was wrong so it never appeared in agent searches or on map-based websites, and there was no sign on the land. Both eager buyers waited for the listing to surface, never found it, and gave up. The property sat, drew no interest, and went into foreclosure.

A man who lived down the road and drove past it daily knew the bank was foreclosing. He checked the courthouse, confirmed the foreclosure, hunted online until he found the badly underpriced listing, offered the asking price, and the bank accepted. The land was clean raw pasture with nothing wrong with it. He saved $33,000 purely because the bank's agent underpriced and under-marketed it. Had they done their job, the two original buyers likely would have bid the price up to full market value.

Price Adjustment Errors Are Expensive

Sometimes you do need to adjust price, but timing is everything. Take Tim and Sue. At listing, their home at $345,000 sat right in the middle of the comps, which ran from $329,000 to $368,000, perfectly competitive.

A month later the market shifted hard. The top comp expired, two others cut their prices into the $330,000s, one sold, one went pending, and three new listings came on between $319,000 and $326,000. Suddenly Tim and Sue, still at $345,000, owned the highest-priced home in their range and the worst value on the market. Most sellers never expect the market to move that fast, which is exactly why you price right the first time.

Why These Stories Matter

Do you see how crucial it is to know your home's true value? Anyone can lose money in real estate, and a seller who doesn't track the ever-changing market risks selling too low or losing the sale to bad pricing, usually without ever realizing it. Knowing your value is what protects you.

Home Sale Horror Stories

Any deal can go sideways through ignorance, mischief, or outright fraud. A real estate professional brings the knowledge and action to keep it from costing you.

Buyers moving in too soon. An agent-represented seller in a small Washington town accepted an offer, moved out, and was waiting to close, then discovered the buyers had moved in early. The agents stepped in to explain that the buyers shouldn't have had keys and couldn't occupy or transfer utilities until escrow closed. The buyers didn't fully understand why, but they complied.

Fraudulent buyers. After months on the market, sellers were thrilled to get a $400,000 cash offer backed by a brokerage proof-of-funds letter. The buyers even brought their extended family to the inspection like an open house. Then the brokerage revealed the letter's signature was forged, and the buyers vanished. That agent now verifies every proof-of-funds and pre-qualification letter.

A home nobody researched. In a deal with no agents involved, a woman bought a rural house, only to learn two years later, when she went to sell, that it had once been a meth lab. She was legally required to decontaminate it before reselling, to the tune of $16,000.

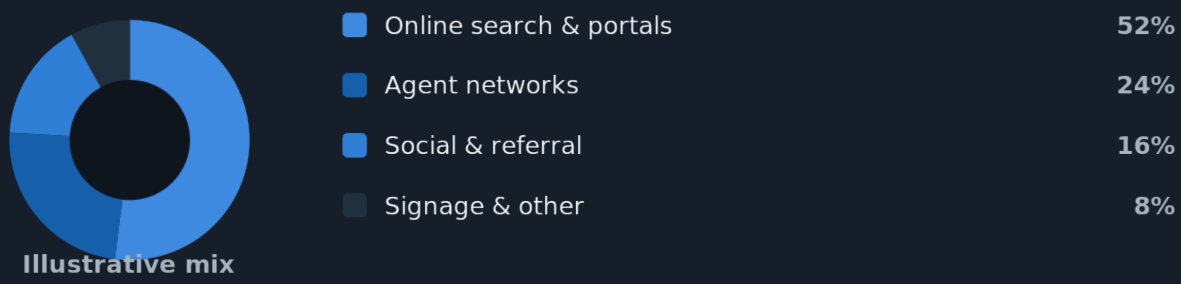
Pressure from your own agent. A couple selling a D.C. starter home in the late 1990s asked $235,000. When a $226,000 offer came in demanding $6,000 in closing costs, their own agent pushed them to take it, and they sold at $228,000 while covering the costs. Years later those homes sold for $650,000 to $700,000. As the seller put it, he felt like he'd been negotiating against three people, the buyer, the buyer's agent, and his own.

A big deposit that delayed closing. Three days before closing, buyers dropped $8,000 cash into their account, a gift from a father for furniture. The mortgage company flagged it and demanded a gift letter, but the father had left for a fishing trip and was unreachable, pushing closing back two weeks.

CHAPTER 11

Finding Buyers

Where today's buyers come from



By now you know that pricing matters and that today's market runs on technology. So where do the buyers actually come from? Honestly, the two tools I lean on most are the ones we've already covered: a smart price and a hard-charging marketing plan. The recent NAR numbers back this up. Almost everyone, around 95 percent, searches online before they buy, and the vast majority still close the deal with an agent.

Here's the thing, though. Just being visible online isn't a strategy. Anyone can throw a listing up and hope. What I do is put your home in front of the right people. Good buyer-facing sites let people filter by what actually shapes their decision, such as school zones, neighborhoods, and subdivisions. Folks aren't just buying square footage, they're buying a way of life. So your listing needs to surface details like how close you are to schools, shops, restaurants, and nightlife. When someone's narrowing down where to plant roots, you want your home showing up in that search.

Matching the home to the right buyer also screens out the wrong ones. A quiet retirement street with no school bus stop isn't going to suit a family with young kids, even if the house checks every other box. A single guy probably isn't hunting for a two-story with a big garage near a playground. Your agent's job is to get your listing onto the platforms that connect homes with the lifestyle buyers are after, so the tire-kickers fall away.

Give Your Home a Video Tour

A walkthrough video on YouTube lets a buyer picture what life inside your house actually feels like, and it links right into the major search engines. If you go this route, don't just post it and forget it. Push it. Send the link to anyone who's shown interest, and make sure your agent does the same and gets it onto the brokerage's site. Two out of three buyers begin their hunt online, so you want that video working for you everywhere. If you're not comfortable promoting it yourself, hand that off to your agent.

The best move is to sit down with the agent who wants to list your home and talk through their online game plan. I'd want proof they have real social media reach and current tools, not just a sign in the yard. The goal is maximum exposure aimed squarely at your target buyer. Pair a sharp price from the CMA with a strong online presentation, and the interested buyers will come to you.

CHAPTER 12

Be a Power Negotiator

> Leverage isn’t about being aggressive. It’s knowing your numbers cold and never needing the deal too badly.

Negotiating your sale doesn't have to rattle you. Once you understand how these conversations really work and you have a few proven moves in your pocket, you can hold out for the price you want.

Buyers Often Know More Than You

Negotiation comes down to two things: motivation and skill. The buyer is motivated to land the best deal, and you're motivated to land the best price. A skilled negotiator, on either side, knows how to work the pressures of competition, time, information, and communication.

What pushes a seller? Usually it's time on the market, a relocation, the grind of keeping a house show-ready, or emotional strain, which runs especially high during something like a divorce. Selling has a lot of moving parts, and the danger is letting those pressures rattle you into accepting less than your home is worth. Carrying a mortgage on a house that's sat for six months, or needing to move out of state, wears people down. Sharp buyers know this and will push right to your limit.

When the Pressure Is On

When you're across from an informed buyer, remember this: whoever has the most options wins. A buyer may have studied how long your home's been listed. If you've relocated, they may assume you're desperate and lowball you. But if that same buyer believed three other people were waving higher offers, they'd have to step up or walk. So pay attention, learn whether this buyer has other homes in play.

Perception drives everything here. If a buyer thinks you've already turned down higher offers, you hold the cards. Flip it around, and a buyer who mentions they're eyeing other houses is trying to pressure you. The trick is to stay calm and focused so you don't make an expensive mistake. Understand what's motivating them without revealing what's motivating you, and the edge is yours.

Let Time Work for You

Time pressure is everywhere in sales, from auctions to construction bids to car lots, and it's a powerful lever. Agents tell buyers that a seller under the gun gives the best deal, so smart shoppers dig up everything they can about your situation.

Picture a seller facing foreclosure who has to sell before losing the house. A buyer who learns that knows the clock is the seller's enemy, and they'll lowball hard. They might even go quiet, slow-walking calls and texts to crank up the seller's panic. Buyers hunt for exactly these time-sensitive situations: people behind on payments, the recently retired, or someone already under contract on a new place that depends on this sale closing. They'll ask casual questions to sniff this out, and any eagerness to please reads as desperation.

Buyers also just wait you out. The longer a house lingers, the more flexible they assume you'll be, and the longer they drag out the back-and-forth, the better their odds of getting their number. They'll invest time building rapport and trust so you'll bend toward their terms. The upside for you? Once they've put in that effort, they often don't want to leave empty-handed either. Patience protects your position.

Knowledge Is Power

Information is the whole game. The more a buyer pulls out of you, the more leverage they gain, and the more you understand about them, the stronger you stand. The deeper their insight into why you're selling, the harder they'll press.

Don't dodge questions or come off cold, but remember this is a professional deal between strangers, so don't volunteer more than you need to. When a buyer fires off a pointed question, stay composed and don't let your reactions show. A simple trick for a tough question is to answer with a question of your own. Asked if the home's been listed a while? "Not long," then calmly, "How long have you been searching?" Their reply may hand you their pressure points.

The same goes the rest of the way. Asked why you're selling, keep it vague and bounce it back. Asked how soon you want to move, say you're flexible even if you'd love to be gone tomorrow, then ask their timeline. Steering questions back to the buyer keeps you in control of the information. And what you originally paid has nothing to do with today's value, so don't share it.

Price questions are easy if you've done your homework. If your number came from professional market value, say so, and point to recent comparable sales and the improvements you've made. If they ask whether other buyers are circling, just say there's interest but "nothing on paper" and leave it there. If they ask why it hasn't sold, tell them you're holding out for the right buyer, like them. When they ask for your lowest price, say you haven't given it much thought and turn it around, "What did you have in mind, as long as the offer's negotiable?" Answer thoughtfully but lightly, and always try to get the other side talking first.

One more thing. A buyer's agent may try to pull sensitive details from your agent. Talk this through with your agent up front so you trust them through every stage of the sale.

CHAPTER 13

The Dos and Don'ts of Negotiating

DO	DON'T
✓ Know your walk-away number	✗ Reveal how motivated you are
✓ Keep emotion out of it	✗ Counter out of frustration
✓ Respond fast and professionally	✗ Accept the first number blindly
✓ Get everything in writing	✗ Nickel-and-dime the buyer
✓ Let the agent hold the line	✗ Negotiate without your net sheet

Alan with the Houston Battle of the Brokers championship belt.

Selling your home is a business deal. It may feel deeply personal after everything you've put in, but at the end of the day it comes down to a price, and you have to keep that front of mind. Opinion, emotion, and ego will all try to throw you off course. Don't let them. The more you understand about negotiating, the fewer needless detours you'll create.

Do Let the Buyer Speak First

Be patient. Don't blurt out what you'd accept, because it might be lower than what they were ready to offer. Every buyer walks in with a number in their head, even at a yard sale. They might've happily paid 200 dollars for the lawnmower, but if you jump in and say 125, you just gave it away. Let them make the offer first. That's why it's called an offer. Either it's one you can take, or it tells you exactly where their head is at.

Don't "Meet in the Middle"

Splitting the difference feels natural, and that's the trap. Say a buyer offers 150 and you were hoping for 200. Most sellers counter at 175 and call it fair. Instead, counter at 220, which keeps your target of 200 as the new midpoint. The buyer may take it, or land at 205, a hair above what you wanted in the first place. Counter in small increments and resist the human urge to meet halfway.

Don't Accept Lowball Offers

Buyers love a deal. Think how fast you'd pounce on a perfect, move-in-ready home priced under market. It rarely happens, but that won't stop buyers from trying. The funny part is, if they've decided your home is the one, they may suddenly shift all their energy toward paying less for it. But here's the logic to lean on: if they truly like your home better than everything else, why would they pay less for it? Stay focused and negotiate from there.

Do Be Quiet and Listen

Whether it's the buyer or their agent across the table, staying quiet is one of your sharpest tools. Getting too chummy can pull you off your goal of selling fast and fair. People who get uncomfortable with silence tend to fill it, and what they fill it with is often exactly what you need to know. The more you learn about them, rather than the reverse, the better you're positioned.

Don't Be Rattled by Awkward Silence

When an offer lands, don't feel you have to answer right away. Ten seconds or ten minutes, let them speak first. They may read your silence as disappointment and sweeten the offer or toss in a concession just to fill the gap. Experienced negotiators use this exact move to walk you down to lower and lower numbers without you ever countering, so don't fall for it.

Do Learn What Motivates the Buyer

Buyer's agents will often try to learn why you're selling, because they know sellers want to go through escrow only once. A common play: the agent advises their client to offer full asking price, knowing small flaws exist, then circle back after the inspection to demand reductions that quietly chip the final price down. Knowing this happens, don't let the grind wear you out and don't compromise just to keep escrow moving. I always tell my sellers to get a home inspection before listing so these surprises don't become bargaining chips later.

Don't Freely Give Out Your Information

When you've got multiple offers, price isn't always the bottom line, and what you reveal can shape what comes next. Say you have two buyers. One offers full asking but needs a few months to finalize financing and inspections. The other offers 10,000 under but will close fast with no financing or inspection contingencies. The first looks like more money, but if you're up against a deadline, the second one just solved your biggest problem. Know what actually matters to you before you talk.

Do Get the Last Concession

Staying calm through the counteroffers is how you win the final concession. Every time the buyer comes back asking for something, ask for something in return. Do that consistently and they'll stop floating the nonessential demands.

Don't Get Buried in Concessions

Unless an offer is genuinely great, bring a counter to the table, whether on price or on terms like a shorter closing, modified contingencies, or incentives. As you review their offer, flag anything that's a flat no for you. A counter lets you accept most of what they've proposed while reshaping the rest, and there's no cap on how many times you can go back and forth. Make them wait for your response, too. Rushing back reads as desperation and hands them leverage.

Do Keep It Businesslike

Keep reminding yourself of the goal: best price, shortest time. Buyer-seller relationships come in every flavor, but no matter what unfolds, this is a legal, documented transaction. Selling has a way of sneaking into your emotions. If a buyer acts like an arrogant know-it-all, don't let it land. And if they're the sweetest, most down-on-their-luck person you've ever met, don't let that pull you off a fair deal either. Stay sharp even when things are sailing along smoothly, because a too-easy deal can sometimes mean the buyer's about to bail. A little healthy back-and-forth keeps them from jumping ship and keeps you from second-guessing whether they'd have paid more.

Don't Let Your Ego Take Over

At some point you may flash back on every hour you poured into this, all the cleaning, staging, and showings, and wonder if it was worth it when a buyer turns critical, demanding, or just plain rude. Firing back in kind can blow up the whole deal. Stay objective, and don't let your ego cost you a good outcome.

CHAPTER 14

Bargaining Chips

> Price is only one chip on the table. Terms, timing, and repairs often win more than dollars.

Selling is the name of the game. In the negotiation chapters we saw that buyers often ask for personal property like appliances or window treatments, because those things are expensive to replace and they'd rather have them stay. Well, that street runs both ways. You can use extras as bargaining chips too, throwing in appliances or other perks to nudge a buyer toward a higher price. This works especially well when demand in your neighborhood is soft and prices are down.

So decide upfront what you'd happily part with to sweeten a deal and what's strictly off limits. Items worth considering as leverage:

- Major appliances: washer, dryer, fridge, stove, dishwasher
- Window coverings: drapes, curtains, blinds, shutters
- Custom built-ins like shelving sized for a specific spot
- Outdoor features: barbecue, fire pit, patio furniture, planters
- A garden shed
- Yard equipment: mower, power washer, leaf vacuum
- Recreation gear: pool table, ping-pong, above-ground pool, trampoline, swing set, hot tub
- Prepaid taxes or closing costs
- A year of landscaping, pool cleaning, or maid service

The call is pretty simple once you weigh how often you actually use the movable stuff and what it would cost to replace.

Buyers may also ask for incentives, and that's all part of the dance. Common requests or seller sweeteners include:

- Knocking down the asking price
- Seller-paid points
- Help with the down payment or closing costs
- A fast close
- Including or transferring a home warranty
- A year of prepaid property taxes

- Covering HOA fees or landscaping and pool upkeep
- A mortgage buy-down

Get creative and the list goes on, but run each idea past your listing agent before you commit to anything with a buyer.

NOTE: Agency laws can restrict what your agent does, and lenders cap buyer credits, which also must be properly disclosed. Stay inside the legal lines.

Understand Why Homes Don't Sell

Homes that sit for months are almost always priced too high or simply pricey for the area. Strategic pricing is, and always will be, the number one reason a home actually sells. Other common culprits:

- Too much clutter. Piles of stuff turn buyers off.
- A dated interior. Old finishes, trim, or flooring drag down interest.
- An inflexible seller. Plan ahead so the kids, pets, and you can clear out for a showing anytime.
- A location in a stalled or abandoned development.
- A weak marketing plan from the agent.
- A botched CMA, so the home was never priced strategically in the first place.

CHAPTER 15

Why Hire an Agent?

Pricing	FSBO: Guesswork	With Alan: Data from $145M+
Marketing	FSBO: A yard sign	With Alan: Photo, video, MLS, social
Negotiation	FSBO: On your own	With Alan: A 2× champion at the table
Reach	FSBO: Your network	With Alan: A 55+ agent team

98.9%	$145M+	4.9★	2×
close rate	sold	147 reviews	champion

This book is packed with how-to. You've got the basics now on listing price, online marketing, staging, and negotiation. So isn't that enough to go it alone? A lot of homeowners ask exactly that, wondering if they can sell on their own.

Try this comparison. Somebody gives you a book on investing for your birthday and you read it cover to cover. The market's at record highs, but politics and business headlines have it lurching around, up 300 points one week, down 400 the next. So, are you ready to manage your own portfolio? Do you have the expertise, and can you stomach watching thousands swing in and out by the day? Selling a home is a lot like that. Without a pro in your corner, there's a real chance you won't sell at all, and even when solo sellers do close, they typically net less than those who hired a Realtor.

Selling a home today pulls in a lot of people with different skills across many steps from start to finish. For most sellers, anticipating and coordinating all of it is overwhelming. A seasoned agent who knows every phase makes it manageable, and you don't need the expertise yourself if you hire someone who has it. No matter how long you've lived in your house, a local pro knows far more about price history and trends than you do. And since they're paid a percentage of the sale, they're motivated to price it right, high enough to earn a strong commission, but realistic enough to actually sell in good time.

A good agent is also wired into a network of contractors and service providers, with references and reputations they can vouch for. They know your area cold, or they know exactly where to dig, and they can pull comps and demographic data the average person can't. You might know the house down the block was listed at 300,000. A pro will know it had upgrades and actually closed at 265,000 after 45 days. That kind of data, average price per square foot, median sale prices, days on market, list-to-sold ratios, shapes every decision you make. Doing all this yourself takes serious effort, resources, and hours of organizing.

An agent's whole career rides on their ethics and relationships, so the good ones won't cut corners on marketing or pricing. When you're hiring, look for someone who is:

- Current, on top of the latest housing trends
- Connected, with inspectors, service pros, brokers, and county contacts
- Knowledgeable, able to price strategically and highlight what sets your home and neighborhood apart
- Organized, attentive to your needs, and fast on follow-up
- Personable, the kind who goes the extra mile with a smile
- Passionate, treating real estate as a calling, not a side hustle
- Tenacious, with a real work ethic and smart use of time-saving tools
- Honest, with a reputation built on high standards
- Self-motivated, working hard because what helps you helps them
- Creative, in showcasing your home and solving marketing problems
- Tech-savvy, with a strong web and social presence, easy search tools, sharp photos and video, and maybe even an app

A good agent wears a lot of hats: marketing, negotiation, consulting, legal, taxes, and above all earning your trust. The right one is well worth the commission. The big advantage is distance. Unlike you, an agent can step back from the emotion, and they negotiate well because they do it constantly. They're not just messengers running offers and counters back and forth. They're trained to lay out your options and consequences, present your case in its best light, and keep your information confidential from the other side.

An agent also acts as a buffer, keeping things professional and at arm's length, which matters most during negotiations when emotions run hot. They screen out the bargain hunters and lookie-loos, field scheduling calls, and handle showings and follow-up questions. In short, they save you time and hassle while pushing serious buyers to write an offer.

Serious Considerations

Deciding to sell means seeing the whole picture, beginning to end. By now you understand what selling quickly and profitably takes. Let me leave you with a few things to talk through with a trusted agent so nothing trips you up:

- Selling before you're qualified to buy your next place. Finances and loan rules change.
- Guessing your mortgage payoff. Check for penalties.

- Underestimating closing costs. Add up the fees, taxes, and commissions.
- Spending earnest money. Know what happens to it if the deal collapses.
- Getting too friendly with buyers. Stay discreet when they want to be your buddy.
- Worrying about a low appraisal. You'll have options if it happens.
- The strain of showings, repairs, cleaning, and calls. Let your agent carry most of it.
- Inspection requirements. Know what your home needs to pass.
- Closing prep. Your agent and attorney should tell you what to expect.
- Staying show-ready. Plan so showings don't run over your family life.
- Letting buyers tour without you there. They prefer to critique freely, and your agent handles the questions.
- Screening out unqualified buyers. If they can't finance it, even creatively, it wastes everyone's time, especially yours.

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About This Book

Are you ready to tap into the best-kept secrets of successful home sellers? You can sell any home in any market when you know these secrets. This book reveals 122 most effective tactics to get the most money out of your home in the shortest amount of time. These strategies have helped sell thousands of homes, and now, you have them all at your fingertips.

The strategies in this book have been thoroughly tested and proven effective time and time again. Don't miss out on this opportunity to learn tips and tricks employed by the wealthiest home sellers!

In this book, I've provided an effective guide for you to have the most successful real estate transaction possible. If you don't have time to implement all of the strategies discussed in this book, I'd be more than happy to provide my expertise and services to help you buy or sell your home.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

About the Author

Alan Hernandez, REALTOR®

Alan brings enthusiasm, passion, and over 17 years of real estate experience with a results driven attitude to the Houston market. He believes in doing what you love and is on a mission to share his vision of financial freedom with the world. His optimistic energy is contagious and his commitment to helping those that surround him is his key to success.

Professionally, he is a licensed Broker, a Director for Texas Realtors (on a state level) and an active Real Estate investor with experience in renovations/flips, raising private money and the creation of passive income opportunities. As the broker/owner of White Picket Realty, he serves as a mentor to his agents and a consultant to his clients. In his personal life, he enjoys mountain biking, fine dining, funny movies, salsa dancing, reading, healthy living and most of all, creating memories with his friends & family. With his uncompromising commitment to the success of those around him, you are assured to be working with one of Houston's best.

This sums up the kind of agent Alan is, and the type of agent he continuously strives to be for his clients. Alan was taught at a young age that if you want something in life, you have to work for it. So that's what he's built his business on and teaches to his agent.

Throughout his career, Alan has earned numerous accolades, including:

- Bachelor's Degree in Business Management and Marketing from FSU
- Director of TAR - Texas Association of Realtors 2019-Present
- Featured agent for Realtor.com and spokesperson for 2018 campaign
- President for NAHREP Houston (National Association of Hispanic Real Estate Professionals) 2017
- Top 1% of Realtors in Texas - Consistently closes over 300 properties per year
- Award Winning In-House Marketing Team, Home Designer and In-House Sales Team
- Recognized Real Estate Agent Continuing Education Instructor

Alan aims to provide the highest level of service to his clients and takes deep pride in helping them achieve their real estate goals.

REVIEWS

Testimonials

Testimonials & Reviews for Alan Hernandez.

Here's a list of people whom I have helped buy or sell a home, and what they said about working with me:

Highly recommend Alan Hernandez and his team. They are very professional, experienced, helpful, and very quick to respond. His negotiation skills are top-notch and were able to put our rental property under contract in 32 days. They worked very smoothly with our tenants coordinating showings, survey, inspection, appraisal, etc. We are extremely happy that the house was vacant for only a couple of weeks from the time the tenants left until closing. Once again guys, Thank You very much.

- Banzer H Perdomo Ramirez

Only one word can describe this team of professionals. AMAZING! This team will get your house sold. They will go above and beyond to make sure you are satisfied. Alan and his team will make sure all your needs will be met. I will be forever grateful for Alan and Brandon. They got my home sold! A million thanks team!

- Marylynn

I can't say enough good things about our experience with Picket Fence and our Realtor, Alan. They went over and above to sell our house fast, at a great price, and got it done at the slowest time of year. Very knowledgeable, great communicators and honest. Thanks, Alan!

- Kelly Barrera

Imagine being surrounded by an elite team of real estate professionals with a highly tuned and effective process to help you reach your goals. From the initial consultation to the final closing, you are taken care of and supported every step of the way. This is what you will receive with the White Picket team.

I have worked with and entrusted Alan and his team for close to a decade and they have been nothing short than amazing, even during downturns, whether buying or selling. From my first home to investment properties, their expertise and guidance has been invaluable in my real estate journey, and I cannot thank them enough.

- Jeisen Hernandez.

Find Out What Over 100 Happy 5 Star Review Clients Have Said About Working With Alan and His Team Here: