

Pet Tips For Sellers

Psssst! It's about your dog -- he could be the reason your house isn't getting sold. Or maybe it's your cat. Or Larry the iguana.

Sure, we love our pets. But sometimes that affection makes us oblivious to some of their lessendearing traits, such as the way they routinely kick cat litter onto the floor or how they gnaw on the baseboards. Then there are the odor issues. Perhaps their presence just intimidates potential homebuyers.

Seriously, folks, some people just aren't as enamored of the little friends as you are. Home sellers need to please as many potential buyers as they can. This means that, as inconvenient as it might be, you're going to have to take some steps to minimize the "pet factor" when marketing your home.

"Real estate agents should present their sellers with a list of ways to get their pet-friendly home ready to sell," said Rhona Sutter of Naples, Fla., who runs PetRealtyNetwork.com, a referral service for people looking for "pet-friendly" agents and properties. She suggests the agents even wrap the list around a bottle of Febreze as a gentle reminder about pet odors. Five things to know about turning for-sale properties into pet-neutral territory:

1. Think long and hard about whether the animals could find a new home while the house is on the market. Sutter realizes that these days, homes might be for sale for months or even years, so boarding the animals long term wouldn't be practical. But if there's a possibility of a flurry of showings in the early days of the listing, boarding or keeping the pet temporarily at the home of a friend or relative might be something to think about, she said. Failing that, consider short-term solutions.

"If you're serious about selling the house, you will either take the pet with you (during showings) or put them in doggy or kitty day care for the day," Sutter said. "Get a neighbor to take care of them." But don't stick them in another room with a sign that says, "Dog here. Don't open door," she said. "There's nothing more distracting than when people put their pets in the garage or the laundry room and someone is going through the house and they hear this great barking or meowing in the garage. A lot of buyers want to see what's in the garage anyway."

2. The real estate agent should put notes in the multiple listing service and on handout marketing materials about the presence of pets on the property, both to prepare them for the possibility and to reduce the chance that an animal will escape outside during showings, she said.

3. The traditional advice about making the house clean, clean, clean goes double when it comes to your animals.

Before the house is listed, you'll have to face what's often collateral damage in pet ownership: scratched floors (buff them or repair as needed, Sutter said) or chewed moldings. Take a look at the walls in long hallways, she said. There's a good chance that if you have a dog, there's a long, gray line along the walls from where "man's best friend" has rubbed against it. "If the baseboards are chewed, people are going to wonder what else you're trying to hide," she said.

Removing odors might entail shampooing rugs and repainting entire rooms, she said. If you're shy about repairs to certain areas because the pet is likely to undo them in short order (Sutter mentioned the interesting way that some cats love to claw window screens), the homeowner might punt on this issue by promising in writing to make those kinds of repairs by the sale's closing, she said.

Vacuuming is nobody's favorite sport, but if the furry pets are going to remain in the house during the listing period, face the prospect that you might have to do it every day in order to remove fur and pet dander that trigger some people's allergies -- a sure buyer turnoff, Sutter said. "You need to take a Hoover and really go at it," she said. "These are nitpicking things that show the appearance of your house."

4. Find a new home for the feeding bowls, litter box, toys, etc., if possible. Putting them in the basement might not be convenient, but then they won't be distracting, and you can avoid trip hazards, Sutter said. Plus, she said, animals can be messy eaters and users of their litter boxes, and you just don't want the, um, "particulates" strewn about an otherwise clean floor, she said.

5. Your yard is for sale, too, and you should expect that homebuyers will want to stroll around. This, of course, means that there should be no land mines for the unwary. "You don't want to put people off, and I guarantee you, stepping into dog poop is a sure way to do it," Sutter said.