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# Why isn't my home selling?

By Meghan Diemel, For USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin Published 7:25 a.m. CT April 17, 2016



(Photo: Hemera Technologies, www.jupiterimages.com)

In real estate in the last year, the national conversation has focused on improving markets and the turn from a buyers' market to a sellers' market. The changes have been felt in the Fox Cities as well, explains Karen Cain, Realtor with Coldwell Banker The Real Estate Group.

"During first quarter of 2013, home sale prices in Outagamie, Winnebago and Calumet Counties averaged 97 percent of asking price with [an average of] 168 days on the market," she said. "During the same time frame and region in 2016, homes sold at 98 percent of asking price with an average of just 103 days on the market – a significant reduction in days on the market and at a better price."

With homes selling about two months faster than just three years ago, this can lead to a frustrating experience for home owners who aren't seeing their home move as quickly. Though supply has tightened in a more aggressive sellers' market, states Heather Gossen, Realtor with Keller Williams Realty in Appleton, three main reasons can prevent a sale from happening.

"It's either going to be location, price or condition, that causes a home to sell or not sell," she says. "Location you can't really do anything about. But price and condition you can."



(Photo: Getty Images)

## When it's time to decrease the price

Gossen says that if a home is lingering on the market, she shows her clients other homes that may be their competition, making suggestions about how to present the home differently so it stands out from the others.

"If it is something like location, which you can't change, sometimes the only thing you can do is reduce price," she said. "There's always a buyer for everything, and if something is affordable enough, someone will buy it."

Cain handles her tough-to-sell homes in a similar manner. She says she can usually pinpoint the reasons why a home isn't selling, whether it's an unusual floor plan, condition and/or the aesthetics of the home. The best defense she has, she says, is to understand what features of the home the seller has loved over the years and make that appeal to the market.

"Particularly in this robust market, simple cosmetic changes are the first thing I recommend," she said. "If there is nothing more that we can do to improve a property, then, yes, price reduction is discussed."

## First impressions count

The appearance of the home is crucial to a quick sale. If a potential buyer walks into a home and it's dirty or needs new paint or carpet, says Gossen, subconsciously that buyer may equate "dated and dirty" with "rundown."

"They may think, 'Well, they haven't taken care of their carpet and they haven't cleaned, so what else haven't they been keeping up? Have they had their furnace checked every year? Have they kept up with other maintenance issues?' While they're not always one and the same, buyers sometimes make that leap," Gossen said. "Often times, by just spending a couple thousand dollars on updated paint, or flooring, or staging, it can really garner a seller more money in the long run."

Cain suggests taking a look at the outside of the home with fresh eyes as well.

“Trim trees and bushes, freshen paint – especially on trim,” she said. “New light fixtures are relatively inexpensive and make a big impact. Put a potted plant and new welcome mat on your front stoop.”

Asks Gossen, “Think of it this way – if you’re going on a job interview, wouldn’t you want to brush your hair, dress appropriately and iron your clothes? It’s no different selling a house. You want to put your best foot forward.”

### **How has it been marketed?**

Coinciding with the appearance of the home, sellers need to pay close attention to how the home is marketed through online sites.

“Quality pictures are a must,” stresses Cain. “Your agent must have a good eye and understand how to best represent your home to online viewers. Basically, all home sales start with an online search. If you don’t have something great to show them about your home with impressive pictures, buyers will move on to the next listing.”

The problem of poor images is more typical of for-sale, by-owner situations, said Gossen.

“[Realtors] are professional marketers; it is our job to present the home in the best way we can online, because we know the home search for most people begins online,” she said. “When someone sells by owner, they may not understand that, or hire a professional real estate photographer, or know how to stage the home or take video. That’s important too; people want to know how one room leads into the other and what the flow of the house is. We are in an information age and people want as much information on the home as possible.”

### **Remember to treat the experience like a transaction**

There can be a lot of emotion attached to the home-selling process. It could be the first place a couple brought their children home from the hospital, or the home that holds many wonderful holiday memories. It can also be difficult for those downsizing to smaller spaces as they prepare for the next stage in life. But that emotion can interfere with the sales process, says Gossen.

“I help educate the sellers to understand it is a transaction – it is not emotional, it is not personal anymore,” she said. “They’ve made the decision to sell. I try to focus them from what may be an emotional sales process to moving on to their next place and the positive side of why they are selling and why they are moving.”

### **Zill-No: Why online apps aren’t always accurate**

Realty-related apps and online sites are popular stops for those selling and buying homes. But, in a market like today’s – where homes are selling within days of being listed – internet sites sometimes have a challenge keeping up.

“Many of my clients have become interested in a home they’ve seen online, only to find that there is an accepted offer on the home and they are too late,” said Cain. “An agent is the best resource to find timely listings and to help you move forward in the right direction without wasting your valuable time.”

Some sites are also based off of averages that are inaccurate. Zillow, for example, does not have a physical person walking into homes and comparing them to other homes on the market, says Gossen.

“Your home may have granite countertops and updated features and you may have done a lot of work to your home to really set it apart. And your neighbors may have the same floor plan, same rooms and same size, but don’t have any updates to it,” Gossen said. “Zillow doesn’t know that. That is the problem we run into.”

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