



FIRST-TIME HOME SELLER GUIDE

HOW TO WIN IN ANY MARKET WITH THE DIVA DIFFERENCE

The Divas clearly remember when we sold our first house.

There is nothing more nerve wracking than selling your first home. We agonized over every detail and hoped that we would find a great buyer.

Since that time we have used our own experience and our years of expertise to help countless sellers achieve fabulous results on the sale of their home.



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The Diva Difference **First Time Home Seller Guide**

The following is our comprehensive Diva guide to help you navigate selling your home like a pro and avoid the pitfalls.

- STEP 1** How to Find a Professional Real Estate PRO
- STEP 2** Fix What's Broken
- STEP 3** Make Your Home Pretty
- STEP 4** Keep the House Market Ready While It is Listed
- STEP 5** Market the Heck Out of the Home
- STEP 6** How to Find the Right Buyer for Your Home
- STEP 7** Managing the Transaction
(Inspection, Appraisal, and Final Walkthrough)
- STEP 8** Signing and Closing
- STEP 9** Handing the Keys to the Buyer!
- STEP 10** Go and Celebrate!!!

STEP 1

Do Yourself a Favor: Hire a Real Estate *PRO*!

There are way too many agents and sellers who still think they only need to do the bare minimum to sell a home because **“the market is so hot, the house will sell itself.”**

A perfect example might be the For Sale by Owner (FSBO) sellers or sellers who choose a non full service real estate broker/agent to sell their home. These agents/sellers often miss the nuances of real estate contracts, presentations, commissions to attract top brokers, etc... As a result they often do not make the best choices for themselves.

When we work with these sellers and agents our team is often able to negotiate as much as 5% off the listing price and this is in a market where properties are selling on average for 2-5%+ over asking. We are able to negotiate well for our buyers because of the inexperience of the person on the other side of the transaction. Unfortunately, part-time, limited service brokers often are not willing to make the investment in their career and skills to be the best negotiators or they simply do not have the full breadth of expertise it takes to work through challenging issues that may come up during a transaction.



PRO TIME:

Do yourself a favor and hire someone with hustle. Choose an agent that works full-time and is committed to their profession and, to providing you with superior service. Every time!

A real listing pro knows how to go the extra mile. They'll create a plan for you to make your house look awesome, and then market the heck out of it until it sells!



How to Find a Pro?

- Ask your friends, family, or coworkers for a referral.
- Find agents who listed and sold well-presented homes for top dollar in your area.
- Check online. Go to places like Yelp and/or Zillow for reviews.

Questions to Ask When You Hire a Real Estate Listing Pro

- Do you have a professional personal website and a blog?
Having a site with blog content means great SEO for your listing when it's on the market.
- Do you provide professional videos? (A photo slideshow with music is not a video.)
- Do you take professional photographs and if so, how many? (You want a minimum of 25 photos. The MLS allows 25 and any extra photos can be uploaded to Zillow and Trulia.)
- What is your pricing strategy?
- Do you help with re-staging and/or do you have access to a high quality professional stager?
- Do you have access to professionals that will help me fix what's broken?
- What is your online strategy to sell my home? (If the only thing they are going to do is put it on the MLS you are not going to reach enough people.)
- How are you going to use Social Media to sell my home?
Paid Facebook Ads, Twitter, Instagram, Blog, etc??
- How do your homes sales compare to the city average?
Are they matching or exceeding the city average? (Do they even know this information?)
- How do you communicate with your clients? (Does it match your style?)
- What happens in case your home doesn't sell in the first week? Listen for whether or not they are going to communicate with you honestly and on a regular basis. What is their long term marketing process in case of a slow sale. Are they going to have the strength to talk to you about pricing or presentation if your home is lagging on the market?
- What does it cost to sell my house? (Do they break down broker commission splits, excise tax, and title and escrow? There might also be costs for staging and/or repairs you need to consider.)

IMPORTANT!

Anyone willing to **discount their commission** to get the listing is not likely to pay for the full breadth of marketing for your home or negotiate for you strongly during the transaction.

STEP 2

Fix What's Broken

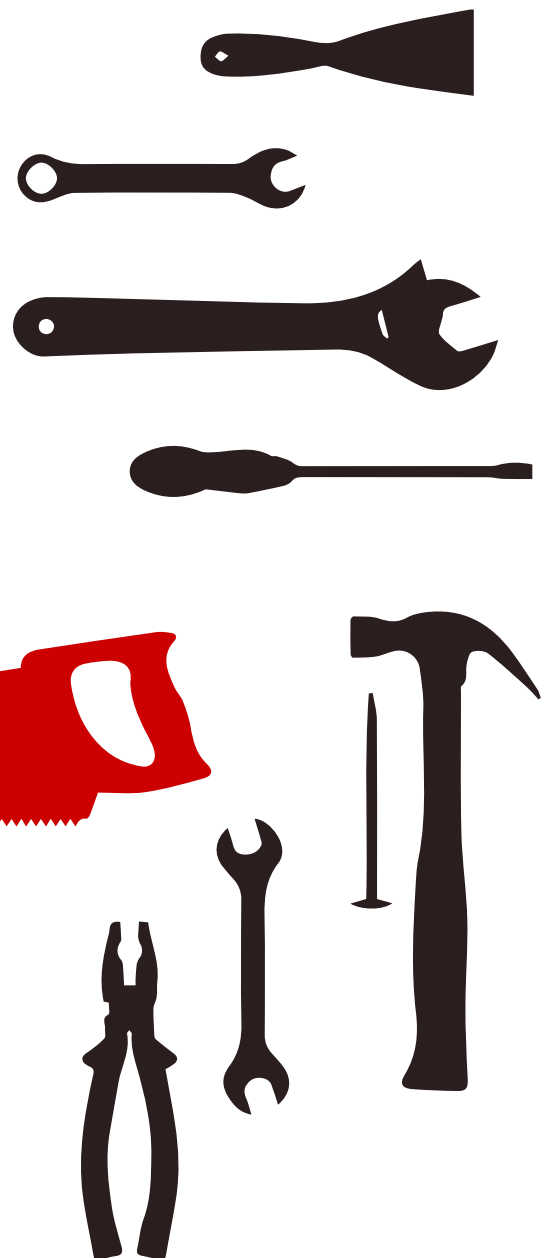
It's always best to fix what's broken **BEFORE** you list the home.

We've seen first hand how certain issues can impact a home sale - even in a hot market!

This past winter, on occasion, Team Diva is called in to help a seller who went through some serious angst with their first agent. In one instance our sellers first agent was so convinced the house was going to sell in the first week that he did not push his client to do the most possible to prep the home. Even though there were known issues in the home, the agent told them to just let the buyers negotiate during the inspection.

So instead of fixing these issues up front - our client took this agent's advice.

Guess what happened? **The buyers walked after the inspection.** They didn't even try to negotiate. All of this could have been avoided at the beginning if the sellers had fixed what was broken BEFORE listing the home. In the end, we were able to step in and get their home sold quickly but their first agent cost them months of stress.



Fix What's Broken

- ☐ **Sewer** Issues? Scope the sewer and find out if you need repairs up front.
- ☐ **Gutters & Downspouts**
- ☐ **Roof** - Does it need to be replaced? Repaired? Do it!
- ☐ **Moss on the Roof** - Have it Cleaned
- ☐ Rotted Wood or **Siding** Damage
- ☐ **Exterior Paint** That is Chipped or Bubbling
- ☐ **Weather Stripping** Replaced
- ☐ Do you need to update the **appliances**?
- ☐ **Loose wires** or bad wiring anywhere
- ☐ Low **Water Pressure** in Pipes
- ☐ Service the **furnace/boiler** and make sure it's in good working condition
- ☐ **Leaky faucets** - this is an easy one
- ☐ Failed caulking in kitchen and bathrooms
- ☐ Install **CO2** Detectors and **Smoke Detectors** on Every Level (appraisal requirement)
- ☐ Deck or Patio Power Washed and/or Repaired
- ☐ Broken **Windows** or Window with Failed Seals
- ☐ Address Any **Basement Water** Issues
- ☐ Repair Cracked Walkways
- ☐ Knob and Tube Certification for **Old Wiring**

When you call Team Diva for a pre-listing consultation, we will provide you with our best advice on what needs to be fixed or addressed before listing and work with you on developing an actionable and achievable punch list.



Before



After

Fix What's Broken (Continued)

- ☐ Any other electrical issues like a Zinsco Panel, hot wiring, ungrounded outlets, etc..?
- ☐ Install GFCI Protected **Outlets** in Bathrooms, Kitchens, and Exterior
- ☐ Replace Missing Handrails
- ☐ Rotted or Falling Down **Fences**
- ☐ Old **Garbage Disposals**
- ☐ Clean Out Electric Heaters or Replace if Old
- ☐ Seismic Strapping on the Hot Water Heater (appraisal issue)
- ☐ **Hot Water Heater** - anything over 10 years old will be called by an inspector.
- ☐ Attics and Crawl Space Clean of Debris
- ☐ Good **Insulation** in the Attic
- ☐ Pest Issues (Ants, rats, squirrels, etc.....)
- ☐ Non-working Ceiling Fans or Light Fixtures
- ☐ **Bathroom and Kitchen Fans** - Make Sure They Exhaust to the Exterior
- ☐ Rotted Wood on **Decking**
- ☐ Is the **Alarm System** Fully Functioning
- ☐ Active Oil Tank - Get PLIA Insurance & Transfer to Buyers
- ☐ Non-Active Oil Tank - Have Decommissioned
- ☐ Do you have **permits** for work?
- ☐ **Do you know about any other issues? Fix them!**



Before



After

STEP 3

Make it Pretty

The goal for all of our listings is to have the buyers visualize themselves living in the home. We want them to literally, fall in love with the home, from the moment they see it online to when they open the door and walk inside. Your house needs to lure the buyers in from every aspect of its presentation. As selling agents, Team Diva loves to take advantage of poorly presented homes. We can negotiate better prices for our buyers and the sellers lose out on their top dollar.

Want to be a winner in this market?

Make your home a pretty show pony and you will be!



Before



After

Make it Pretty

HOW TO MAKE YOUR HOME DIVA-RIFFIC PRETTY

- First Step - **DECLUTTER**. Purge and Pack. Closets, counters, drawers, rooms, bathrooms - everything!
- **Front Yard** - black mulch and fresh flowers will make the photos pop
- Beautifully planted flower pots strategically placed makes it look like you went the extra mile
- Update old light fixtures or **update fixtures** for continuity of design
- **Bathroom** - add an orchid to the counter to give the space a little extra spa like feeling
- **Fresh Towels** - If you can't decide on a color - go with white
- Reorganize bookshelves
- *Go to Cost Plus and get yourself some throw pillows*
- Minimize all of the **artwork** to some strategic and cohesive pieces
- Remove the dead or lack luster plants
- Make the **master bedroom** luxurious
- Update outdated bathroom and kitchen fixtures
- Set the dining room table (if appropriate)
- Clean all of the **windows** inside and out
- Re-do the **caulk around the tub**, toilets, sinks
- Clean and/or Replace the Carpets
- Refinish **hardwoods**, if possible



STEP 4

Keep the House Market-Ready Throughout the Listing Time Period

Congrats you are officially on the market.

Now to prep for those eager buyers.

Let's be honest, buyers and their agents are going to tear through your home. They might leave doors and windows open. They might get too personal with your things if you are still living in the home. Their kid might decide that your kid's toys would make a great play thing and walk off with that troll doll or Star Wars action figure you just bought them for Christmas. And, of course, they WILL call you last minute for a showing.

Buyers don't mean to be this way, they are just on a mission - to find a home that works for them and see if your home is "the one."

The best approach is to **be patient, understanding and flexible**. But also - you may need to spend some time each night or day getting your home back to "show ready" state.

A Daily Checklist to Keep Your House Market Ready

- ☐ Hide all of your valuables, expensive toys, prescriptions, credit cards, jewels, etc. (We would hate for something to go missing at a crowded open house!)
- ☐ Keep your schedule flexible so you can be out of the home as much as possible – **OR**
- ☐ Leave your home for at least the first week or weekend the home is on the market.
- ☐ Furry pets out of the home for the week or taken with you during the day
- ☐ Keep all of the lights on
- ☐ Keep all of the blinds up
- ☐ Mow yard if necessary
- ☐ Dishes in the dishwasher
- ☐ Counters cleared & cleaned
- ☐ Home dusted
- ☐ Beds made
- ☐ Throw pillows fluffed on couches and chairs
- ☐ All garbage thrown away each evening
- ☐ Bathrooms fresh smelling & wiped down
- ☐ Toilet seats down
- ☐ Floors vacuumed and/or mopped
- ☐ Drawers, closets, and cabinets kept tidy
- ☐ House smelling clean and inviting (no plug-ins please!)
- ☐ Laundry hidden from view

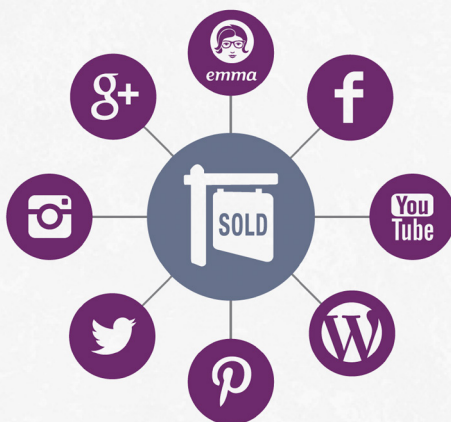
STEP 5

Market the Heck Out of the Home

Your job is done for now. You finished the hard work and now it's up to your listing agent (Team Diva, *of course!*) to market the heck out of your home. Our **Diva Dwellers** know they are getting the best marketing possible when they hire us.

Not only has Team Diva been recognized for having one for the top 100 real estate blogs by Feedspot but we teach social media marketing to other real estate professionals. Here is our extensive marketing list below - all part of what we call "The Diva Difference."

The Diva Difference in Real Estate Marketing



- Listed on our Mothership Coldwell Banker Bain Site and syndicated to over a 100 Listing Portals - Including Zillow, Trulia, Redfin and Realtor.com
- Every Last Detail is on the MLS to Help Get Anxious Buyers in the Door
- 25+ Professional Photos
- Custom Lifestyle Video of the Home and Neighborhood
- Custom Listing on Team Diva's SEO Rich Wordpress Site
- Detailed Blog Post Targeted Towards Potential Buyers
- Detailed Neighborhood Profile in the Listing and the Blog Post
- Professionally Printed Flyers
- Professionally Printed Marketing Inside the Home (Silent Talkers, Top 10 list, etc).
- Targeted Email Marketing to other Real Estate Brokers
- Targeted Email Marketing to Team Diva's Followers
- Facebook Promoted Posts and Ads for the Blog, Listing, Photos, Open Houses, and Video
- Instagram Posting for the Open House, Blog, and Video
- Twitter Postings for the Listing, Blog, Open Houses, and Video
- Two Open Houses Hosted by Team Diva or another experienced Coldwell Banker Bain Broker
- Follow Up Communication to Showing Agents in Preparation for the Offer Review Day

STEP 6

Finding the Right Buyer

Getting the house into contract with a buyer who will close the transaction is an art. And this is where having a tenacious and experienced real estate professional is critical. Every market has a factor that is important to evaluate any potential buyer. In a hot market is that buyer going to bail and get buyer's remorse? In a slow market is that buyer going to torture the seller during the inspection. Regardless there are some key parameters to help you judge if the buyer is going to get the deal done.



Here are some key points to consider when reviewing offers on your home:

- Is the buyer pre-approved with a reputable lender?
- Has the buyer gone through the full underwriting process?
- Does the buyer have enough money to close the transaction?
- What if the appraisal comes in low? Does the buyer have "extra funds" to make up the difference?
- Is the buyer working with an experienced selling broker?
- Does the buyer have short and reasonable timelines on their contingencies?
- Do they love the house?

SPECIAL NOTE

How to evaluate offers in a multiple offers situation visit:

www.teamdivarealestate.com/seller-education-evaluating-offers-during-multiple-offer-season/

STEP 7

Manage the Transaction

There are three critical portions the seller needs to prep and manage for during the real estate transaction.

- Inspection
- Appraisal
- Final Walkthrough



The smart seller is prepped and ready to problem solve at each one of the phases. The less savvy seller takes the “my way or the highway” approach and often loses that good buyer.

Let's make sure **you are the smart seller!**

Inspection Prep and Guide

How much time does an inspection take: Anywhere from 2-5 hours depending on the size of the home.

What are they inspecting: Major mechanics, signs of pests, sewer line, roof, foundation, appliances, and the overall building condition.

Couple of items to prep for the inspection:

1. Make sure access to the major mechanics of the home are available (Hot Water Heater, Electrical Panel, Attic Access, Crawl Space Access, Sewer Clean Out, etc)
2. Make sure any significant records of repairs for the home are available (Roof, sewer, construction, oil decommissioning certificate, appliance manuals, etc).
3. Make sure you, family members, and pets are gone during the inspection.
4. Be available to answer questions.

How much time do they have to inspect the home before providing a response: Although the times can vary, in our market buyers have 1-2 day to do their initial inspection if it is a competitive situation and maybe 5-7 days if not. Plus, they may have an additional 1-5 days, depending, to conduct further investigations on specific issues that may arise during the inspection.

How can the buyer respond? The buyer has four options once their initial inspection is completed.

- Take the Home As Is - Yippy!
- Get Out of the Transaction - Earnest money is returned as long as they respond within the timeline designated in the contract.
- Ask for additional inspection and invoke those extra few days to do so. In this case, they have to provide information regarding the issue(s) and what other type of inspections they may want to conduct.
- Ask for money back from the sellers for closing costs to cover repairs OR for the sellers have the repairs done before closing. At this point we would want to get as much detail as possible and get our own bids for the work.

How much time do we have to respond once we get the inspection response? You have 2-3 days.

Seller Response: The biggest risk to getting top dollar for a home is to have a transaction fall apart during the inspection phase. This means we have to put the home back on the market and will have a lower probability of getting a full priced offer. Majority of buyers will ask for repairs to be completed or cash back towards closing costs. The smart approach to take during this phase - should the buyer ask for a major repair - is to keep the lines of communication open and counter any bids they might have with bids of our own. The savvy listing broker will work closely with you during this phase to keep the deal moving forward.

Please read our inspection blog that we give to our buyers as reference.

<http://www.blog.teamdivarealestate.com/2012/02/15/inspecting-your-new-diva-dwelling/>

Appraisal Prep Guide

Next up is the buyer's lender's appraisal of the home. The appraiser is coming to look at the home to evaluate the condition and purchase price. As you may know a lot of things changed during the recession as far as the appraisal process is concerned. The appraiser is now an independent entity and no longer tied to a lending institution. They are also way more uptight about the process and critical on getting accurate pricing.

How long will the appraisal take: Usually about an hour.

What you need to do to prep: Keep in mind 90% of homes do not have any issues at this phase. Work with a savvy real estate pro to make sure you are not in the 10% range.

- Make sure the home looks perfect at the time of the appraisal.
- Make sure you, family, and pets are away from the home during the process.
- Make sure a CO2 detector is installed on all floors (most common appraisal item called).
- Make sure seismic straps are installed on the hot water heater (also an appraisal item that will be called)
- All of the lights on.
- Easy access to all of the mechanicals (think inspection).

What Team Diva does to prep for the appraisal: Majority of appraisers are testy about the real estate broker meeting them at the home. Regardless it is important to manage the process to protect the seller's equity.

1. Have a list of comparable properties in the home and if possible, hand them directly to the appraiser.
2. Provide a spreadsheet showing the list of potential buyers who submitted a bid on the home (if this was a multiple offer). Unprecedented over asking prices are sometimes hard to appraise. But if we have a spreadsheet showcasing all of the buyers it does help to prove value.

Final Walk Through

Final step before closing the buyer has a right to comeback 3-5 days before closing and do a walk-through on the home. And in the case work was completed on the home the buyer has the right to reinspect the items completed.

How long will the appraisal take: Usually about an hour.

What you need to do to prep:

- Inspection items completed and receipts and warranties for the work available for the buyers.
- All appraisal items completed (CO2 detectors, hot water heater straps, and anything else that might have been called).
- Everything in good working order (appliances, hot water heater, plumbing, sewer, etc.). Seller is still responsible for the house until it closes.
- Make sure you, the family, and the pets are away from the home during the process.
- All of the lights on.
- Easy access to all of the mechanicals (think inspection).

What Team Diva does to prep for the appraisal: Provide receipts to the buyers representatives and schedule the final clean.

STEP 8

Signing and Closing

The closing process is typically easy for the seller. They only have about 10 different items to sign. To make sure you are prepared there are a couple things the seller should do in advance of signing.

1. Turn in all of your disclosures to escrow as quickly as possible.
2. Make sure escrow has any outstanding invoices you want to have paid through escrow.
3. Make sure you have all outstanding liens resolved or prepped to be resolved at closing.
4. Resolve any outstanding title items (divorces, liens, name changes, etc...)
5. Know which account you want your proceeds from sale to be deposited in.
6. Be flexible for your signing appointment. It might happen at the last minute. Best to be ready at a moment's notice.
7. Review your closing disclosure and verify that the amounts are correct.
8. Yes - there is excise tax. It will be a chunk of change.
Washington State does not have an income tax and pays for roads, schools, and healthcare through home sales. We can discuss how to make this right over coffee!

You are signed!

STEP 9

Hand over the Keys to the New Buyer

Closing day has arrived.

Per the contract the seller is required to give the buyer any and all items below unless it was previously in writing that the seller is taking it with them at closing. And we added a few items that are nice to pass on to the buyer after closing:

- Keys
- Garage Openers
- Security Codes
- Door Codes
- Anything attached (cabinets, light fixtures, wall units, curtains, blinds, curtain rods, mirrors, bathroom fixtures, smart home devices, etc.)
- Outdoor Plants
- Appliance Warranties and Manuals
- Other Warranties (roof, sewer work, etc.)
- Anything Written into the Contract.
- All Appliances
- Contact all your utility folks and close out your account
- Provide contact information for the neighbors (optional but a nice thought)
- Provide contact information for anyone who has worked on the house (also optional but helpful)

STEP 10

Go Celebrate Your Diva Dweller Success Story!

WhooHoo!

The house is closed.

Your cash is in the bank.

Time to buy a new house AND see your tax accountant. If you are a Diva Dweller (which we assume after reading this - you will be!) you get some extra love and goodies. Oh and invites to **ALL of the DIVA parties**. Lots and lots of parties.

Congratulations!!!

