

LISTING ABCs

What does it take to convince skeptical sellers that you are the right salesperson to market their home? You need disciplined research and preparation skills to analyze the market, assess pricing options, and plan an effective marketing campaign for the home.

By G. M. Filisko, Realtor Magazine

Any real estate pro will tell you that listings are as good as money in the bank, even these days when property inventories are often plentiful in most markets. But there's an important distinction to make with today's listings, says Tom Ferry, CEO and head coach at [TomFerry-yourcoach](#) in Newport Beach, Calif. "The key now is taking salable listings, managing sellers' expectations, and doing smart marketing to generate buyers," he explains.

So what does it take to convince skeptical sellers that you're the right salesperson to market their home? You need disciplined research and preparation skills to analyze the market, assess pricing options, and plan an effective marketing campaign for the home. Sound daunting? Putting all those elements together is easier than you think. Here are the resources you need to get started:

[A Step-by-step guide to get you from the appointment to the signed listing agreement](#)

[Listing tips that will give you an edge](#)

[Presentation money-savers: Ideas for cutting your budget without skimping on quality](#)

[Listing scripts: How to confidently respond to common seller concerns](#)

The Listing Appointment: A Step-by-Step Guide

Listing success requires self-confidence and selling savvy — the ability to listen to sellers' concerns, to think on your feet, respond effectively to any objections, and not to shrink from asking for the business.

Step 1: Lay the groundwork before the appointment.

You've prospected like a pro, and a potential seller indicated a willingness to meet with you. Gain an early advantage by using your appointment call to accomplish two other goals. First, ferret out if the sellers are motivated. Start with basic prequalifying questions. Why are the sellers moving? How soon do they need or want to make a change?

"The intention behind prequalifying at this early stage is to discover a client's real motivation and give you information to tailor your presentation to their concerns," says Ferry. You want to answer questions such as: What are the prospects' concerns about selling their home? Are they financially strapped? Do they need to move to a new job quickly? Are they selling because of an addition to the family? Are they simply

downsizing and thus willing to wait until the price is right?

The whole goal on the appointment phone call is to get information so that when you go out on the listing appointment, you know the areas you need to cover.

A prelisting phone call is also a perfect time to find out what sellers want from you, ask, what are the top three things you'll be looking for from me as your sales associate?' That gives you the opportunity to focus your presentation on those main points, For instance, if they say it's important for a sales associate to deliver the lowest closing costs, be sure that'll turn into a commission question during the presentation."

A big question that will eventually come up in every listing presentation is price. So knowing what the prospects think their home is worth before you visit can be very valuable. "If sellers tell you what their house is worth before the listing appointment, you know what to expect. "If they say \$500,000 and you know it's \$400,000, be prepared to address that."

On a logistical note, Floyd Wickman, founder of the [Floyd Wickman Team LLC](#) in Easton, Mass., says it's important to try to ensure you'll have enough time for your listing presentation. "You can say, 'I've got an earlier appointment, and I don't like to rush anyone. Do you expect to be home all evening?' If the answer is yes, say, 'OK, expect me between 6 and 8 p.m.,' and get to the appointment at 6 p.m."

Also, ask if all of the decision makers — all owners, plus any family or friends that must be consulted — will attend your presentation, advises Wickman. Without all the players present, you won't be able to get the listing agreement signed at the appointment.

Step 2: Prep listing materials for the appointment.

Once you've prequalified sellers, your next step is preparing a presentation that will make any seller ready to sign with you. Although there's not one right answer about what to include in a winning listing presentation, Ferry recommends the following:

A brief introduction explaining your services to sellers and how a real estate practitioner adds value to a transaction

- ✓ A summary of your qualifications and those of your team and your office
- ✓ A sample marketing plan for the home
- ✓ A marketing piece that shows how you're different from competitors, including your track record for closing sales.
- ✓ Other possible additions are testimonials from past clients, a sample marketing piece for the home, and tips for sellers on preparing their home for sale. (For ready-to-use tips that you can customize, see [Handouts for Customers](#))

Include a lot of information on what you will do to get the home sold. I include samples of places they'll find their home on the Internet, an explanation of the marketing you'll do in the first 180 days, information on preparing the home for sale, and an explanation of how you'll stay in touch with sellers. Include information on your team members and their roles. Include documents you'll need sellers to fill out before their home goes on the market, such as a seller disclosure form.

One component that's essential to almost every listing presentation is a competitive market analysis. This compilation of market data about what homes similar to the prospective listing have sold for and how long those sales took is vital for educating sellers about pricing and days on market. Your CMA should feature a snapshot of several similar homes on the market, the average price per square foot of each, pending and recently closed transactions in the area, and days on market to close a sale. In markets with long days-on-market stats, you may also want to provide information on expired listings to remind sellers that if they're not realistic about pricing, they could end up on that list.

Most sales associates still rely on data from their MLS and public records along with their company's statistics and trend reports for pricing data. Other options are valuation sites such as Zillow. Know what they say, even if you don't agree with the estimate. Your sellers will certainly have been there.

Step 3: Present your case.

Finally, it's showtime. Since first impressions are a big part of how sellers feel about you, try to relax and begin your presentation on a positive note. "I give the sellers a nice handshake and a warm greeting, introduce myself, and compliment them genuinely on something about their home," Goldwasser says. "I'll say, 'I love your front yard.' Or 'I love the white stone on your home.'" Occasionally, finding a sincere compliment is a challenge. Once, Goldwasser says, he walked up to a home that was a wreck, but he thought fast and greeted the sellers by saying, "I love your corner lot."

Next, ask for a tour of the home so that you can build rapport and assess its salability. Ferry recommends asking sellers what they consider the most desirable feature of their home, what they might change, and whom they think is the ideal buyer for their home.

The tour is also a perfect place to learn more about sellers' opinions so that you can incorporate new ideas into your presentation. You want to get from sellers as much information as you can so that when you sit down at the table, you know where you need to spend your time. You'll use the tour to confirm their goals and ask again what they think the house is worth. Try to learn whether they've had other sales associates give listing presentations. If so, you know you'll have to present a good case for your pricing since some salespeople will overprice the house to get the listing..

After the tour, ask if you can sit down and talk about the sellers' plans. Wickman recommends asking the sellers for permission to explain how you like to work so they're not chomping at the bit to discuss price. "You can say, 'Before we begin, I'd like to explain how I like to work. Would that be OK?'" Part of your explanation should cover what you'll do to market the home, why your approach is better than other alternatives, and why the sellers should choose you to represent them. Ferry recommends saying something like, "Here's how I'll expose your home to the highest number of potential buyers."

Explain your qualifications, but don't oversell, say experts. "Sellers don't care about you, but about whether you can sell their house."

When you get to "the P word," pricing, handle it professionally but firmly. Use the following dialogue: "I know you told me you think your house is worth \$500,000. With your permission, I'm going to show you some data to help us determine an accurate price for your home. Then goes through each comp, asking for the sellers' agreement every third or fourth home: "This house is two blocks over with your same floor plan, and it recently closed for \$405,000. Do you see that house?"

If sellers claim their house is nicer, don't back down. Say, 'I understand your house has some nice upgrades. However, that house had similar upgrades. I'm going to mark this as a star comp, very similar to your house within the last 30 days.'" Take care not to be derogatory about the sellers' home, but be sure to point out pluses and minuses of their home's location and condition compared to other homes that sold — and didn't sell — recently. Also, explain to sellers that other factors, such as the sale's terms and timing, will affect the price they can expect to receive.

If you've done your job well, they'll ask what you think their home should be priced at, and I'll give them my number.

The other big stumbling block for many sales associates is commission. Although the practitioners we interviewed say they're getting far fewer challenges to their commission than they did when markets were stronger, you need to be prepared for that question and have a response ready. Your answer is simple. Tell sellers, 'I'm a full-service sales associate, and I get a full commission. If you want a salesperson who will work for less, I can refer you to some.' "

Offer a range of services and fee structures, few sellers will take you up on the less costly options. "Usually, you just say, 'I'm full service. I get the results I showed you in the beginning by marketing aggressively and getting people to the property.' If they push, tell them I have a variable commission program. Then explain the different levels of service and their costs. "Once they see that we take services out to lower our costs, you will rarely have anybody go for anything other than full service.

Once you have agreement on price and fees, ask for the listing. Be direct and don't make your request too complicated. Say, 'You have a lovely home. I'd love to do business with you. If it's all right with you, can we get started on the paperwork. (See "[Listing Dialogues that will Get you the Business](#)" for more tips on what to say when.)

Take one more tour of the house to point out work that needs to be done to get it ready for sale. "Be direct," says Wickman. "I recommend saying, 'If you'll show me around your house, I'll look at it from the buyers' point of view while taking some notes. If I see anything that needs updating or repairs, do I have your permission to bring it up to you?' Sometimes you don't have to say anything. You can just fuss over a defect, and sellers will say they have to fix it. You can then say, 'I would.'"

Knowing your listing ABCs is essential in today's market, but so is one other crucial element. Your positive outlook will go a long way toward showing sellers you're the best person to sell their home.

"The most important thing you can do to get a listing is to have a good attitude. Be confident and show them that you can get the job done and that you'll be there for them through the entire process. You'll get the listing.

3 Listing Tips That Will Give You an Edge

Tip 1: When you can, present last. When you can, present after your competitors, advises sales coach Tom Ferry, especially if you don't consider your listing skills to be top-notch. "Being the last presenter gives you the opportunity to say something like, 'Now that you've interviewed a few other great sales associates, we can talk candidly about what you liked and didn't and what you feel will cause your home to sell based on what you've learned.' You can become the counselor rather than the salesperson."

Tip 2: Send stuff ahead. Most practitioners and trainers favor sending a prelisting package before your appointment. Where opinions diverge is over what and how much to send ahead. "One group says the more information you put in, the better. Personally, I'm not a fan of that idea. I've heard of clients who were overwhelmed by huge prelisting packages," says coach Tom Ferry. Floyd Wickman agrees, recommending that you leave sellers wanting more. "I include a teaser, such as 'I've got a five-step program that will get your house sold,' " he says.

Tip 3: Build in a preset price reduction. While all our practitioners agreed that arriving at the best price the first time is the goal, sometimes you have to be a little more flexible, especially if you're in a market where prices are in decline. Try including an addendum to your listing agreement that includes an automatic price reduction in 30 days. The agreement needs to be contractual, because you are spending your money and time.

Money Savers: Listings on a Budget

Although you should never skimp on business tools that may help you earn more money, there are ways to save money and still get a top-notch listing presentation.

Print it yourself. A good laser printer from Dell, HP, or Canon, which can cost as little as \$300, will save you big on third-party color printing of brochures and other glossy elements of your listing packages without sacrificing a professional look.

Save on those stamps. Sending your listing presentation via e-mail not only saves money on a courier or your time and gas but also demonstrates your tech skills. You'll need a copy of Adobe Acrobat 8 (\$299 for the standard version) to create PDF versions of your listing package, but the expense is worth it to preserve the look and layout of elaborate elements such as brochures. You can also post the PDF on your Web site.

Use what you have in a new way. If you don't want to invest in new software to create listings, you can still go high tech by using your current software programs creatively. For example, some contact management software programs come with listing templates. Presentation programs such as PowerPoint also can work well for presentations that incorporate lots of graphs and charts. With a little patience, you can create color charts and headlines with even a word processing program.

Choose substance over flash. "Even if you have nothing but a yellow legal pad and statistics on your market, you'll be OK, Listings aren't about the show. They used to be, but not today. Today, they're about having the facts and knowing your market.