

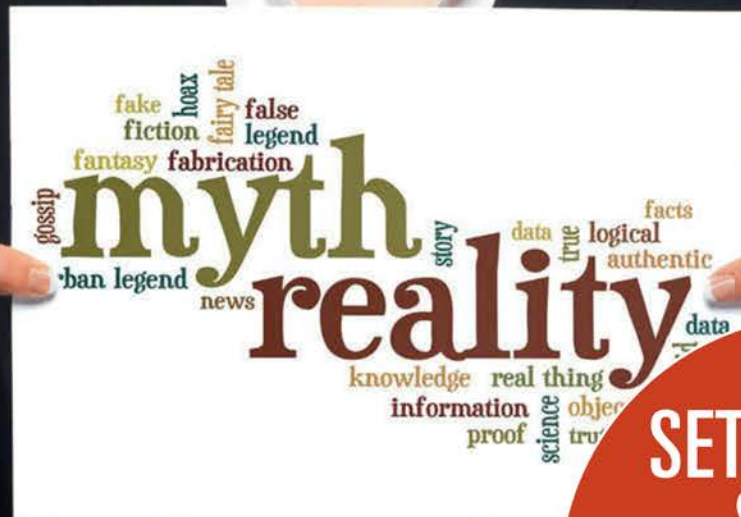
NEW YORK REALTORS® CAPITALIZE ON NAR GRANTS TO SUPPORT LOCAL COMMUNITY PROJECTS

NEW YORK STATE REALTOR®

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE NEW YORK STATE ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®

MAY/JUNE 2015

**Mythbusters:
Dispelling
common
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**SETTING THE
STAGE
FOR
SOLD**

Setting the stage for SOLD

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The National Association of REALTORS® recently released its *2015 Profile of Home Staging*, the first study of its kind from NAR. According to the report, 81 percent of REALTORS® find that staging helps buyers visualize the property as their future home, with 45 percent saying it positively impacts the value of the home.

For those who have never used the services of a home stager for a listing, you might think it's not necessary or right for you. Leona Piro, owner of Act Two Home Staging in Mendon, NY, said the two biggest misconceptions about staging are that it is expensive and that it is only for high-end homes. In many cases, she said, much of what the seller already owns can be used, and most stagers offer consultations that provide instructions for homeowners on how to stage on their own. Lower priced homes benefit from staging because the same basic aspects still apply—cleanliness, maintenance, neutral décor, depersonalization and the absence of clutter. “Additionally, when a home has fewer selling features, it becomes even more important to play up the positives through home staging,” she said.

According to a study by the Accredited Staging Professionals, a national staging trade organization, 95 percent of homes that are staged by professional home stagers sell, on average, in 35 days and for near the asking price.



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Non-staged homes, on the other hand, sell in an average of 140 days.

Tori Toth, president of Tori Toth International and owner/lead designer of Stylish Stagers, Inc. based in Howard Beach, NY, said while home staging is an added cost, it also adds value to a home. If a seller thinks painting, redoing a bathroom or changing a carpet seems too high an expense to sell their home, imagine what the potential buyer will think when they walk into the space. “The buyer will exaggerate repair costs in their mind and most likely provide a low-ball offer, if they offer at all,” Toth said.

Both Toth and Piro said the rule of thumb among home stagers nationwide when estimating the cost of staging is between one- to three-percent of the asking price, but that it can vary by location and condition of the home. “I always tell my clients you have to spend money to make money,” said Toth.

REALTORS® who make the decision to hire a home stager, or recommend a home stager to their client, will often be a big part of the staging process. Toth said she likes to have all parties involved at the consultation, ensuring everyone is on the same page from the beginning. “I get a better idea of what the seller can live with or without while on the market, the budget and talk to the agent about what they’d like to see.”

Piro said it is important to know the demographics of the area and the neighborhood, and that is where home stagers and real estate agents need to work hand-in-hand. “The type of staging does change with different markets and different style homes.” For example, she said a home with a large kitchen, dining and living rooms, but relatively few bedrooms is likely staged for entertaining, while a four-bedroom home close to a school would be staged with

children in mind. “Good staging portrays a lifestyle,” she said.

“First impression is key,” said Irene Bennett, an associate broker for Nothnagle in Pittsford, NY, who has worked with Piro to stage her listings. “Just like a storefront, if you walk in the door and everything is neat and organized you’ll continue to look.” Bennett said that in her experience, properties that are staged can drive a higher price and show better.

“It’s more than just putting a sign out front, anyone can do that,” said Bennett. “But to truly market a property it takes work and effort.”

And while it may be tempting to dive right into rearranging furniture, Piro said that staging first starts in the front yard. “Many homebuyers will do a drive-by before calling to schedule a viewing,” she said. If the landscaping and exterior of the home are not well maintained, they might move on. “Curb appeal is crucial.” A fresh coat of paint on the front door, an attractive new welcome mat and shiny new hardware and lighting go a long way in forming a good first impression.

Toth agreed with this sentiment and has a specific plan of attack depending on the season. For winter, she suggested removing snow, salting driveways and walkways, and strategically adding a few white lights in the landscaping to make the yard shine. Spring calls for power washing the siding, awnings and driveway to make everything look like new, while adding colorful flowers and repairing any damage from the winter. Summer is all about maintaining the green grass and decks/porches, while fall calls for a major focus on leaf control.

“Regardless of the season, you want a well-manicured yard with easy access to the entrance,” said Toth.

After getting through the front door, the entryway and rooms that can be seen as you initially enter a home are the most important, according to Piro. This is where buyers form their first opinion of the home’s interior. The kitchen and living room are key areas because that is where homeowners will spend most of their time, and the master bedroom has become increasingly more significant over the years. “It’s important to stage these rooms not only as a sleeping chamber, but also as a retreat at the end of the day,” she said.

Like the master bedroom, Toth said the bathroom, especially the master bath, should also be a place where the buyer can relax and unwind in a spa-like atmosphere. “Buyers want to know they have a space that can be very personal and intimate.”

Depending on what the profile of the ideal buyer is, Toth said she tries to use what the homeowner already has available when staging, and then the seller can rent additional accessories to update the space. She recommends rental furniture for vacant spaces or when a home’s furniture doesn’t match the architectural or buyer’s style.

“When the style of the home is very specific and a seller’s furnishings are in drastic contrast, renting furniture is advisable,” said Piro. For example, she said, a home full of antiques in a very contemporary style house would benefit from renting. However, in most cases you should try to use what you have. “Home staging is more about the positioning of the furniture rather than the furniture itself.”

Toth said that home buying is more of an emotional commitment rather than a financial one, which is why you always hear people say they knew when they walked in the door that the home was meant to be. “No one falls in love with spending tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars,” she said. “So, it has to be a feeling that moves them to make that decision.”

She recommends staging your listing as soon as possible and not testing the market first to see if you can get an offer without putting in the prep work. “In most cases, those of my clients who [waited] have regretted the time they wasted.” ●