

How to improve your chance of finding a buyer

Quick-fire projects can make it easier to sell your home, says Rob Griffin

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If you want to move house, you may have a battle on your hands. A string of interest rate hikes, fierce competition from rival sellers and a lack of first-time buyers is causing delays.

New-buyer enquiries are declining at their fastest rate for three years, according to the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. So what can you do? According to Kate Faulkner, managing director of DesignsOnProperty.co.uk, some quick-fire improvements can boost your chances of finding a buyer. "If you want to sell quickly in a slow market, then your home needs to be the best-value property of its type in your road," she says.

However, this does not have to cost a fortune. Even relatively simple projects can transform your home, increase its value and make it far more sellable. Here are 10 ways to improve your property.

QUICK PROJECTS
De-clutter
This won't add value to your property — but it will certainly make it more appealing. Stripping away furniture will make the house seem bigger and allow people to imagine how their belongings would look in your rooms. Cut down on ornaments and family pictures.
Result: No added value but increased chance of selling.

Painting and decorating
For a few hundred pounds and some hard graft, you could transform the look of your home. Filling in holes in the wall, freshening up tired-looking ceilings and covering chipped skirting boards with a fresh coat of paint is worth every penny. However, if your skills are limited, it could be worth paying for a professional. A badly decorated house could actually deter potential buyers.
Result: Can add 5-10 per cent to a home's value — if it is done well.

Job	% of people conducting work
1 Redecorating	64%
2 Garden improvements	35%
3 New bathroom	32%
4 New furnishing	30%
5 New carpets	28%



EXTRA ROOM: Gillian had her garage turned into a room for guests and for offering reflexology treatments

I'm sure the conversion has increased my property's value

GILLIAN LEASK had her single garage converted so it could be used for a variety of purposes — and is delighted with the result. The retired holistic therapist, who lives in Pelter Heigham, Norfolk, spent £11,750 having the work carried out by the Garage Conversion Company. "The idea was to increase my living space and provide somewhere for guests to stay," she explains. "I can

also potentially use it as a treatment room for reflexology." The work, which included dividing off an area to act as a store cupboard, took about two weeks to complete. "All the workmen were tidy and I can't praise them enough," added Gillian, 64. "There was also a project manager keeping check on everything that was being done." The cottage, which originally had

two bedrooms when Gillian bought it for £172,000 last year, is now big enough for her to stay for the foreseeable future. "It will hopefully be suitable for quite a few years," she says. "I haven't had it valued since the work was completed but I have no doubt it has increased." The company, a national franchise operation, has a website at www.garageconversioncompany.com.

Modernise the house
Keep abreast of the latest trends, suggests Faulkner. For example, hotel chic is popular at present, with its focus on browns and creams, leather furniture and fluffy cushions. "People really like that look," she says.
Result: No added value but increased chance of selling.

Organise rooms
Make sure each room conforms to its description on the property details. If you have said you have a dining room, make sure people do not see a room doubling up as an office or play area. Double bedroom should contain a dou-

ble bed. If you only have a single in the room, people will think it is small.
Result: No added value but increased chance of selling.

MEDIUM-TERM PROJECTS
Put in a new bathroom
A modern bathroom is an essential feature of a house, according to the annual Halifax Home Improvement Survey. But it is important it stays in keeping with the property. Having a tacky bathroom suite in a beautiful Georgian house, for example, looks ridiculous.
Result: Increase of about 10 per cent in value.

Install a new kitchen
If you are planning to stay in your house for a while, it is probably worth considering a wholesale change. If you are planning to sell within months, you may get away with just changing cupboard doors and adding a lick of paint.
Result: Increase of around 10 per cent in value — if the finish is professional.

Convert your garage
Phil Bateman, managing director of the Garage Conversion Company, a national franchise operation, says he receives 100 enquiries each week. "We are doing a wide range of conversions, with everything from granny flats to additional playrooms," he says. "One of the biggest trends is people working from home and wanting extra space for an office."
Result: Depending on nature of work, value can increase by 10 per cent.

LONGER-TERM PROJECTS
Build an extension
Invariably the most costly project but creating an extra room could considerably increase a home's value. If you are planning a single-storey extension, find out if it is possible to make it two instead. Another option is constructing a conservatory. Try to have it as an extension to the main living quarters.
Result: Depending on nature of work, value can increase by 10 per cent.

Landscape the garden
A well-designed and nicely kept garden is a definite selling point. Creating something that is easily maintained also makes sense. If your target market is families, make it as child-friendly as possible with plenty of lawn space. Consider filling in fish ponds which can be a danger to toddlers.
Result: Increase in value of up to 15 per cent.

