



SUREFIRE IMPROVEMENTS TO SELL YOUR HOUSE FASTER

- Quick ways to make your house more saleable
- Nearly 30 projects for less than \$100
- Tax benefits, selling strategies, and more

R. DODGE WOODSON

100 Surefire Improvements to Sell Your House Faster

R. Dodge Woodson



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This book is dedicated to my wonderful daughter, Afton Amber Woodson. While only four years old, Afton is amazing. She understands the importance of my writing and allows me the indulgence.

For Kimberley, my wife, I must extend my thanks. During the many hours I devote to my book projects, Kimberley always holds the fort. We have just had our eleventh wedding anniversary, and I have no regrets; I would do it all over again.

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Introduction

This book is not like most books written to help you sell your home. When you read the following chapters you will discover simple, cost-effective home improvements that help to sell houses faster. These techniques are proven producers. The advice given comes from experience. You will get inside tips from a real estate broker, a real estate investor, a builder, a remodeling contractor, a master plumber, a certified public accountant, and a real estate appraiser. If you are serious about selling your home, this book will help you set your house apart from the crowd, and sell it fast.

The projects discussed in this book will be rated for ease of completion and financial feasibility. You will be given estimates for how long each project will take to complete. You can see examples of how much the improvement will cost if you do the work yourself and how much it will cost if you hire contractors. Tax consequences and advantages will be looked at and explained.

The author, R. Dodge Woodson, has been involved with real estate

for nearly 20 years. He is licensed as a designated real estate broker, a general contractor, and a master plumber. His accomplishments have included selling and building as many as sixty single-family homes in a single year. This man knows what it takes to sell real estate, and he shares it with you in this unique book.

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Chapter 1

Projects That Require Time, But Not Much Money

There is a multitude of home improvements you can do that require time, but not much money. Sprucing up your house doesn't have to be expensive. If you walk around your home and look, you will see potential for several simple projects.

Is your shrubbery neatly trimmed, or is it a little rough around the edges? When was the last time you inspected the caulking around your plumbing fixtures? Have you ever gone away for a few days and noticed unpleasant odors in your home upon returning? These questions are only a starting point to finding aspects of your home to improve upon.

When you live in a house, you begin to accept little annoyances. You might become so accustomed to minor flaws that you no longer notice them. However, when you attempt to sell your house, these little nuisances that you have come to accept may turn a buyer away.

Home buyers can be finicky. If buyers come to view your home and find two or three little problems, they may become suspicious about the rest of the property. For example, consider this scenario.

Your home is listed for sale, and prospective buyers come to inspect the property. When the buyers attempt to locate your house, they have

trouble. Since you postponed replacing the old house numbers blown down in the last storm, the buyers have to guess which house is yours.

The buyers, after trying to determine which house is yours, pull into the driveway. Because of the lack of visible house numbers, they are slightly annoyed. As the buyers step out of their car, the first factor they notice is your unkempt hedge.

Moving toward the front door, the buyers start up the steps, and one of them notices that the handrail is loose and wiggles.

You answer the door, and the buyers step into the foyer. As usual, the first thing the buyers do after greeting you is look around. While looking up, the husband notices a hole around the light fixture in the foyer, the result of your replacing the old fixture with a new, more attractive light. You meant to repair the hole, but you just haven't gotten around to it.

The wife heads for the kitchen, but is repulsed at the brown ring around the kitchen sink. While the wife checks out the kitchen and the bathrooms, the husband heads into the basement, where he wants to set up his model-train collection.

When the man enters the basement, he is met with musty odors, mildew on the walls, and oil stains from the heating system on the floor. His eyes and nose tell him that this basement is not suitable for a hobby room.

Meanwhile, upstairs, the wife has found dripping faucets that won't shut off and plumbing fixtures with a buildup of crud around them. She has decided that this house is going to take some hard housecleaning to make it acceptable.

The rest of the house tour goes well, and the prospects leave, telling you they will discuss the home and get back to you. As the couple is driving away, they begin their discussion of all the flaws they found in your home. The good points about the house are not mentioned.

The immediate response of the husband and wife is to look for a home that doesn't need so much work. You lost a potential sale because you didn't prepare the house for sale properly. With a little time, and not much money, you could have corrected all the factors that caused the couple to strike your house off their list of possible purchases.

This example is not farfetched. As a real estate broker, I have seen people rule out properties for fewer reasons than were given in the example. It doesn't take much to turn hot buyers off. The right sales pitch might overcome the objections and rekindle the buyers, but it's a gamble.

When you want to sell your home, you should remove as much of the gamble as possible. By tending to small features you can improve

your odds of a sale without putting a strain on your bank account. Now let's see what you can do to help sell your house without spending much money.

Trimming Shrubbery

Will trimming the shrubbery help sell your home? It can; unkempt shrubbery will send negative signals to prospective buyers. When buyers see shrubbery unattended to, they assume other areas of the property may be neglected.

Curb appeal is a term used to describe how your home will project its first impression on buyers. If a house has poor curb appeal, buyers may not be interested in looking beyond the exterior.

As a broker, I have pulled up to houses only to have my customers ask me to keep going. After seeing the outside of the homes, these buyers had no interest in wasting time with inside features.

You can't afford to alienate potential buyers. While nine out of ten buyers may not care if your shrubbery is neatly trimmed, the tenth prospect may be fickle enough to ignore further inspection of your home. Since you can never be sure which potential buyer will buy your home, you must make the house appealing to as many buyers as possible.

Trimming your shrubbery certainly isn't an expensive proposition. However, losing a buyer because you didn't groom the greenery is an expensive lesson. Now that you agree with the need to keep your bushes looking nice, let's look at some specifics to keep in mind with your shrubbery trimming.

Security

Shrubbery can create a security hazard. While most buyers will see your landscaping as an asset, some buyers will look upon your shrubbery as a place for criminals to hide.

When you trim your shrubbery, it will normally be best to keep the plants well-shaped and not too expansive. If your house is in a high-crime area, smaller shrubs will probably be more productive in the sale of your home than massive ones.

Foundation Cover

Many people use shrubbery as a foundation cover. These plants are meant to be low-growing and to conceal the home's foundation. When trimming this type of shrubbery, don't thin out between the shrubs too

much. Keep the height in line with the bottom of the home's siding and allow the plants to grow out, not up.

Overpowering Size

The overpowering size of some shrubbery makes a negative impact on buyers. If you have shrubs growing close to your home that reach the roof, the house will look small. From inside the home, these monster plants may obstruct views from the windows. The security factor is another consideration with these big shrubs. You should plant and trim your shrubbery to compliment you home, not overpower it.

Cleaning up after Yourself

Cleaning up after yourself is important when trimming shrubbery. If you leave the cut trimmings on the ground, they will discolor and become an eyesore. Then you have a lawn littered with shrubbery clippings that show negligence. Remember, you never want buyers to assume that you are negligent in the maintenance of your home.

Trimming shrubbery is not difficult. On a rating scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most difficult, trimming shrubbery rates a 1. As for the cost of this home improvement, there is none, unless you use electric trimmers, and even then you are only paying for a little electricity. Your time investment in this task could range from about an hour to a full day. If you engage a professional to trim your shrubbery, expect to spend a minimum of \$35. Rates for this work will range from \$20 to \$30 per hour.

Installing New House Numbers

Installing new house numbers can play a role in the sale of your home. Have you looked at your house numbers recently? Are they in good repair and easy to read from the street? If they aren't, you should replace them.

House numbers are a feature that homeowners take for granted. Since homeowners know where they live, they don't rely on their house numbers to get home. However, people who are not familiar with the home's location will depend on the house numbers for identification. If prospective buyers can't find your house, they can't buy it.

Take a walk outside and look at your house numbers. Don't just stand on your porch and inspect them, go out to the street and look back at your house. Remember, prospective buyers will be driving on the street in search of your home, not standing on your porch. Also

keep in mind that the buyers may be trying to find your house in the dark. Do your house numbers show up well in low-light conditions?

If after inspecting your house numbers you find they are inadequate, replace them. This is a simple job, and the cost of new house numbers is minimal. There are, however, a few pointers you should keep in mind with this job.

If you are going to replace your house numbers, be aware of the potential need to do some touch-up painting or staining. When you replace the old numbers, try to use numbers of the same style and size. If you must use a different type of house number, try to buy numbers that are larger than the existing ones. Your goal is to eliminate the extra work of concealing the evidence of your number replacement.

The siding behind the old house numbers will not look the same as the rest of the house. Weather and exposure will have changed the color of the exposed siding. The siding behind the old numbers will be an obvious mismatch. By using larger house numbers you may be able to avoid repainting or staining the siding.

Don't be too cheap in the purchase of your house numbers. Remember, the house numbers are going to be the first item that prospective purchasers associate with your house. If you use peel-and-stick numbers, you will not make the same impression that you would with brass numbers.

The difficulty rating for changing house numbers is a 1. The cost for this type of project could easily be less than \$10. Plan on spending between one and two hours on this project. Hiring a handyman to do the work will probably cost around \$25.

Keeping Porch Rails in Good Repair

Keeping porch rails in good repair is not only good for safety, it may help to sell your house. Have you ever walked up to a friend's house and had the porch rail shake and wobble? Did you wonder why your friend didn't fix the darned thing? Well, home buyers might ask themselves the same question about your loose porch rail.

Loose porch railings are annoying and potentially dangerous. The railings can damage the steps they are attached to, increasing the cost of future repairs. To a home buyer loose railings indicate homeowners with little regard for their home. This is an impression you cannot afford to cast.

Fixing loose porch railings is usually a simple procedure. The job often requires no more than tightening a few bolts. If the procedure is so simple, why don't more homeowners correct their defective railings?

Railings are not repaired for many reasons, but the main reason is that they seem to be a trivial problem. Granted, most shaky rails are not a physical hazard, but they are annoying, and they can repel buyers.

Selling your home is a big job. There is competition you must beat and market conditions to be dealt with. If you are serious about selling your home, you cannot afford any chinks in your armor. You must make your house as salable as possible. This means not turning your back on little things like shaky railings.

Can you fix your own railings? Most homeowners have more than enough do-it-yourself skills to tackle the job of repairing loose railings. If you are lucky, all you will need is an adjustable wrench and about ten minutes of your time. The job could be more difficult, but if you are at all handy, you can do it yourself.

Many rails are held in place with lag bolts, which are essentially big screws with a bolt-type head. If the lag bolts become loose, turning them clockwise should tighten them and solve your problem.

Some metal railings are screwed into the walls of the home and into the steps. In the case of brick homes and concrete steps, the screws are screwed into a sheath. When these rails become loose, it may be necessary to remove them and reinstall them, but this is not a big job.

As time passes, the screws and anchors used to hold railings in place can become loose. Years of use will cause the holes for the anchors and screws to become enlarged. When this is the cause of your loose railings, you must replace the screws and anchors with larger ones.

When you remove the screws from your railings, the railings should come off. As a side note, this would be a good time to put a fresh coat of paint on your railings. With the railings off, remove the anchors. The anchors may be made of lead or plastic. In either case, a flat-bit screwdriver, driven into the anchor, should aid in its removal. Drive the screwdriver's bit into the anchor and pull it out. With this done, install a new sheath for the replacement screw.

The anchor or sheath you use could be plastic or lead. The sheath should be snug going into the hole. When the replacement screw is installed into the sheath, the sheath will expand, causing the connection to become tight.

Once all the anchors are in place, set your railing back in position. Install your new screws and the railing should be tight.

Lag bolts and the screw-and-anchor method are the two most common ways of attaching porch railings. However, it is possible your railings are nailed into place. If this is the case, and the nails come loose, replace the nails with screws.

None of the methods of tightening loose railings are very difficult.

On the rating scale of 1 to 10, this job rates a 2. As for expense, the cost could range from nothing, other than time, to a few bucks for screws and anchors. The time requirement for this type of work could range from a matter of minutes up to a few hours. A licensed contractor will likely charge between \$30 and \$100 for this job.

Patching Holes

Patching holes should be an obvious need in preparing your home for sale. However, it is surprising how many home sellers fail to notice or repair holes in their homes. While sellers may be oblivious to these holes, home buyers aren't. To a scrupulous buyer, holes will not go undetected. The visual impact of holes in your house will have a lasting effect on prospective purchasers. If you have holes, repair them.

There are many types of holes that you may have to deal with. These holes range from tiny penetrations that once supported pictures, to gaping holes caused by water damage or physical abuse. In all cases, the holes must be fixed.

Even if the holes in your house offer little challenge to correct and leave no doubt that they were only used to support picture frames, the impact they make on a buyer will be detrimental. While educated consumers don't expect lived-in homes to be impeccable, they do expect the basics to be intact. This includes walls and ceilings that are not riddled with holes.

Fortunately, patching holes is not particularly difficult, and it is generally not expensive. You can have all the holes around the house sealed up in a jiffy. Now let's talk about what's involved with most patch jobs.

Drywall

Holes in drywall are usually easy to fix. The only expense required for these repairs is a little joint compound, sandpaper, and some paint, assuming you have basic tools lying around the house.

Since most holes are not huge, you shouldn't need any additional drywall. Normally, filling the holes with ready-mixed joint compound is all that is required to plug the opening. To do this, put the joint compound on a putty knife and press it into the hole. If you don't have a putty knife, you can use a piece of stiff cardboard or similar tool.

Fill the hole and spread the joint compound out over the wall in a thin layer. The compound should be feathered back from the hole to allow it to blend in when the area is repainted. Once the hole is filled, let it set overnight.

When morning comes, take some light-grit sandpaper and sand the compound until it is flush with the finished wall surface. Then apply a second coat of joint compound. This coating should be applied thinner than the first. Feather the compound out and let it sit until it is dry.

When the second coat of compound is dry, sand it lightly. If you are a perfectionist, apply a third coat of compound. The third coat normally isn't needed in small patch jobs, but it doesn't hurt, and it may make the appearance of the job more appealing.

After the last coat of compound has been sanded, you are ready to paint. If the wall had enough holes to make it look like a shotgun went off in the room, be prepared to paint the entire wall. On the other hand, if you are only repairing a hole here and there, you can probably get by with a touch-up paint job.

After matching your new paint as closely as possible to the existing wall or ceiling color, apply it sparingly. A heavy coat of paint will show up as a patched area. You want a thin coat of paint that gradually feathers out into the existing paint. It may be necessary to apply two coats of paint, but one coat will often suffice for small patches.

If you have a large hole in your wall or ceiling, you may have to cut out a section of the drywall and replace it. This still is not a big job, but you will need some extra drywall and some drywall tape.

Using a keyhole saw or a utility knife, cut out the damaged section of drywall. Make the cut so that you will have wood to attach your new drywall to. This means splitting the cut of the drywall so that half of the old drywall is on a stud or joist and half of the new drywall will share the same wooden member.

Cut your repair piece of drywall and install it in the opening; you may use nails or screws, but the fasteners must countersink into the drywall.

Once the new drywall is in place, apply joint compound along the seams and over the fasteners. Then cut sections of the drywall tape to place over the seams, but not over the fasteners. Lay the tape into the compound and smooth it out with a putty knife or similar tool. From here on out, the rest of your drywall finishing will be the same as described earlier.

Plaster

Holes in plaster are a little more difficult to work with. Normally plaster is set into a wire lathe or attached to wooden strips. When a big hole is made in plaster, the surrounding plaster often cracks for long distances. However, small holes, like those used to hang pictures, rarely damage the surrounding plaster.