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**Open The Doors And Buyers Shall Come—But Prepare First!**

by Phoebe Chongchua

If your home is on the market, chances are your agent will at some point hold an open house. Open Houses can be a great way to drive buyer traffic to your home. But most often the desire to physically come and see your home starts with a picture on the Internet.

"I have developed a proprietary way to build layers into a room to give that depth when you're putting the photo on the website," says Christine Rae owner of Certified Staging Professionals (CSP) and co-author of Home Staging For Dummies. For more information visit: [csptraining.com](http://csptraining.com)

She says, "Curb appeal starts on the Internet so it's very important to make the pictures of your home attractive. You have two drive-bys." And if the Internet picture doesn't sell your home, you might not ever get the buyers to actually do a physical drive by and come inside your home.

Once you entice buyers with an eye-catching picture, then you have to keep up the good work.

"Everywhere the eye rests, the sale begins. So that means everything counts: floors, walls, ceilings, windows, the stuff outside, inside, cleanliness, attention to detail," says Rae.

"To me the biggest mistake people make is thinking that good enough is good enough and it isn't -- not anymore. Sellers say to me, 'I can't be bothered to do all of this stuff.' I say, 'You know what? The buyer can't be bothered either.' So if the seller can't be bothered to do all of these things, why should buyers trade their old houses for your old house? There are lots of other options out there. It's a very competitive marketplace," says Rae.

"The buyer is expecting something fantastic and if you've got anything less than a fantastic-looking property, you're less likely to get the offer that you're looking for," explains Rae.

Rae shares a few tricks of the trade to help you before you hold an open house.

Target your buyers.

Rae says target the buyers you think are most likely to buy your home. That means paying attention to economic trends in your market. Also, when advertising, feature the items that are likely to attract the targeted buyers.

"One of the biggest demographics that you have in the U.S. is the Hispanic demographic; 40 percent of the homebuyers are going to be Hispanic. You have a cultural difference in the way that culture lives, buys, and lives in homes," says Rae. If you think that demographic might be interested in your home, consider learning more about how to make your home more appealing to them from an agent who routinely works with the Hispanic market.

"There's also a big demographic growing for single women buying homes. They bought 20 percent of the homes last year and that's a growing trend. You've got to target what's appealing to them such as building in a security system is a very crucial element to selling that home to them," says Rae.

Energy efficiency can help sell your home.

"Anytime you can bring light into a house, that is going to make people feel good," says Rae.

That's why agents typically open curtains and blinds and turn on all the lights before a showing. It's a simple thing to change all the light bulbs to



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energy-efficient light bulbs. "By 2010, North American energy costs are going to rise 50 percent. Who would not want a more energy-efficient home? If you're focusing on energy-efficiency, that's going to help the buyer buy your house," says Rae.

Rae says the energy-efficient light bulbs in a daylight finish are great for helping show off your home. "Daylight bulbs, when they are placed in retail stores, increase retail sales by 40 percent. That reduces energy costs and increases sales; so doesn't that make sense that it's going to have a dynamic effect when you put it into a domestic home?" says Rae.

Good sound system? Then play music.

"CSP has developed a music-for-open house CD. It's kind of easy listening. You have to target the buyer. It can't be elevator music and it can't be funeral music or rock—generally an easy-listening good sound track lifts spirits. People are always apprehensive when they are looking at houses. They feel like they are prying into somebody else's house. So, make your house not feel like that," says Rae.

Remember, that buyers need to feel comfortable when viewing your home. Don't cook anything the night before that might permeate through the entire house and leave a pungent odor. Put away personal items. Get the dog out of the house and roll out the welcome mat!

"A buyer doesn't want to feel like a guest in your home so you have to remove anything that would cause any trepidation," says Rae.

Invite your neighbors over for a preview.

Sometimes your neighbors can be the best sales people. Invite them in to see your home. You never know who your neighbors know. They might have the perfect buyer for your home.

Once the clutter is out, what to do with the stuff you don't want.

There's a new service called StagersList.com that is attracting shoppers and real estate professionals. The site is a virtual consignment shop that provides resources for Realtors, stagers, and homeowners. Various items that are no longer wanted are placed for sale on the site. Many use the site to purchase items that can be helpful for staging while others use it to unload items no longer wanted. Visitors bid on the items at [stagerslist.com](http://stagerslist.com)

So, open the doors and invite buyers into your home, not as guests but as potential homeowners and watch the offers roll in.

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Phoebe is a writer, speaker, and author. She is the Director of Business Development for Quality Service Certification and a trainer in customer service for the real estate industry. She is a Realtor with The Guiltinan Group, a division of Prudential California Realty.

Her articles, feature stories, and columns appear in various publications including The Coast News, Del Mar Village Voice, and Rancho Santa Fe Review in San Diego. Phoebe worked for KGTV/10News in San Diego as a Newscaster, Reporter and Community Affairs Specialist for more than a decade. Phoebe's writing is also featured in Donald Trump's book: *The Best Real Estate Advice I Ever Received*. She is the author of *If the Trash Stinks, TAKE IT OUT!: 14 Worryless Principles for Your Success*.

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