

# Beyond the Balloons: **5 TIPS** for Driving Traffic to Your Open House

Given that there's so much information available online about properties for sale, you might think open houses aren't necessary anymore, or that they're a waste of time. It's true that a serious, highly motivated buyer, working with an agent, can vet a home online and, based on his or her reaction, opt not to see it in person. But open houses are still important today and always will be.

The digital age has opened the floodgates for all kinds of buyers to test the waters in real estate. Someone who isn't quite a buyer or seller yet will sit on the couch in the evening, Zillow app open on a tablet. They'll look at various properties and imagine what it would be like to live in them. They'll do serious research.

What does that mean for you, as host of an open house today, either as the listing agent or showing agent? It means more eyeballs and traffic than ever, especially from people who may be more educated about the market than in years past and more serious about the property than casual looky-loos. These are the best kinds of potential buyers, particularly for a newer agent standing in for a busy listing agent.

The question isn't if open houses are still necessary; it's how can you drive the most traffic to the open houses you host? A successful open house requires advance planning and strategizing, starting at least one week before the event. Here are five tips to help you increase traffic to your open house.

## **1. Pick your open houses wisely**

If you're new to the business and looking to build a client base, think about the open houses you want to do. Choosing the open house (and the agent you want to stand in for) shouldn't be haphazard. You should be watching the market, becoming familiar with the properties, and learning how things work in your market.

Watch for new listings in an area of town you know, and in a price range you're comfortable with. It's a big waste of two hours if you do an open house in an area in which you're unfamiliar. Instead of providing value and serving as a resource for would-be buyers, you're simply standing in. That won't get you any business.

Instead, know the market and keep up with it. Have you seen an ideal new listing hit, in a prime area, and by an agent in your office? Reach out right away. Congratulate her on the new listing and offer to

be a resource for future open houses or even one-off showings. Exude a positive attitude. Understand that the listing agent may want to do her own open house, at least for the first week. But let them know you're familiar with the area and make it clear you're excited about the listing. A listing agent, when looking for someone to stand in for them at an open house, wants to be sure that the agent they pick is knowledgeable and familiar with the listing and the neighborhood/market.

## 2. Place your open house ads early in the week

You should know by Monday which open house you'll be doing and at what times. Ask the listing agent to enter this information in the MLS right away, because you never know when a buyer will be shopping for houses online. If the open house gets into the MLS early in the week, it will hit all the major websites, too.

So, when a potential buyer (let's call her Betty) is sifting through Zillow on Monday night before bed and sees there's an open house on Sunday for an interesting home, she'll be inclined to note it either online or mark her calendar. If Betty is a new buyer, the chances that she'll make an appointment to see the home with the listing agent is highly unlikely. She's just not far enough along in the buying process to feel comfortable engaging an agent. Plus, she's not in a position to carve out a part of her day during the week to visit a home for sale, especially if buying a home isn't yet a top priority. But when Sunday comes along and Betty sees a calendar reminder about the open house at that oh-so-fabulous listing she saw online, chances are she'll swing by. The bottom line: If you hadn't advertised the open house early in the week, you would potentially miss the opportunity to meet Betty.

## 3. Use social media to help spread the word

In days past, the Sunday newspaper was the only place for buyers to look for open houses. Today, buyers can be everywhere and anywhere online. Don't assume because you put the open house in the MLS that it will get fed anywhere. Also, don't assume that because your MLS feeds to multiple sites, your open house will hit everywhere buyers are. Because potential buyers are everywhere today, you have to do your best to get in front of them. Leverage social media for open houses early on and during the open house. Use the open house as a Facebook status update and a real estate ad all in one.

## 4. Put out the A-frame signs early

A-frame signs help direct and drive traffic to open houses, so use them to your advantage. On the morning of the open house, or even the day before, put out five or six A-frames, strategically positioning them in and around the property for sale. On the signs, list the address and price in big block letters. Someone driving by on Saturday afternoon might see a sign and want to come by the next day. He may not be an active buyer, but he could be a future buyer or seller who simply wouldn't have known about the open house without the A-frame. In some communities, high school kids make a business out of putting out agents' A-frames the day before.

Be sure not to leave them up after your open house. It reflects negatively on you and your broker if the signs are left to tip over in the wind or block the street or sidewalk.

## 5. Be ready to engage buyers

Buyers fear being approached by a real estate agent early on in the process of looking for a home. They prefer to search and research on their own time. These buyers are less likely to commit to or formally engage to a real estate agent early on. But if you approach them correctly, engaging them early in their hunt is the best time.

Even though early buyers may just be kicking the tires or feeling out the market, they are often real buyers. That means they probably have questions about what they see online, how this property compares to another one, and what's happening in the market. This is your chance to serve as an informed resource and trusted advisor — someone with value to add, as opposed to a “shark.” By doing the opposite of what they expect, you just might get a new buyer into your fold.

To be a successful agent, you need lots of buyers in your arsenal at all times. The buyer who is new, testing the waters, doing some market research and feeling things out will soon become fully pre-approved for a mortgage. This buyer will want serious advice about how to advance to the next steps. He will become an aggressive, making-offers, ready-to-close buyer. Identifying this buyer early in the process, and at an open house, is the best strategy for a new real estate agent.

How do you go about doing that? Give the buyer information. Be ready to tell her about the five best comps for the open house and to speak with knowledge about them. Of course, first and foremost, you're there to represent the seller or the listing agent. But you should also be ready to respectfully engage buyers and begin a relationship.

Ask simple questions to engage buyers. Some examples are “Have you been looking for a while?” or “Seeing a lot of homes today?” If they answer yes/no without much commentary, this may be a sign they're not interested in engaging. It might make sense to keep quiet.

If they say they're just looking, offer up an alternative home as a comparison. Be ready to describe how it's different, how it shows, or why the price is what it is. Demonstrate that a) you're knowledgeable about the area and b) you freely share information. If a potential buyer opens up, however, continue the conversation. Ask more probing questions like “Have you bought before?” or “How do you look for homes online?”

Also, if you sense they're not yet working with an agent, consider asking them to come to your office to talk about the basics of home buying. People generally like to get free information but only if it's offered without pressure.

Above all, try to understand who the buyer is and where she is in the buying process. More importantly, always react accordingly. If the buyer is still early in the process, accept that and don't do the full-court press.

## Bonus Be creative

There are so many ways to bring attention to an open house listing today. By all means, take advantage of the obvious ones, but think outside the box, too. For example, consider knocking on doors nearby, handing neighbors the property brochure, and telling them about the open house. This doesn't always work, of course, but even if it works 50 percent of the time, you're ahead of the game.

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