

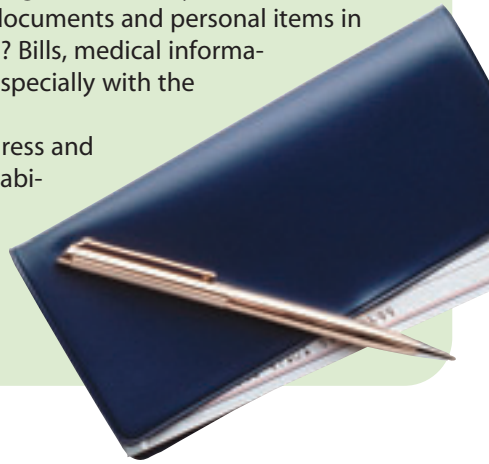
H O YOU ME



Protect Yourself and Your Identity

When you sell a house, you're putting faith in your agent that he or she will protect your home during showings. But before you turn over the keys, you should secure important documents and personal items in a safe or file cabinet. What should be locked up? Bills, medical information and financial data should be out of sight, especially with the increasing incidents of identity theft.

Paperwork that may include your name, address and Social Security number should be in a drawer, cabinet or, better yet, locked up. Checkbooks, jewelry, family heirlooms and cash should be locked up as well. And if you have a personal computer that's easy to access, make sure your data are pass-code protected.



PET PEEVES

Your family pet may be a show dog, but that doesn't mean prospective home buyers



will be happy to see him when they look at your house. Even though Fido might be a bona fide family member, the fact is some people simply don't like dogs or other animals. They might be allergic to animals. Or maybe they are afraid of animals that are especially large, loud or jumpy.

One solution is to crate your pet during the open houses, says Jay Christensen, CRS, of RE/MAX Country Real Estate Inc., in Pocatello, Idaho. "But it's best if they're not

home. A pet — even a cat — can be a distraction, and you want to eliminate any distractions when you're trying to sell your house. You don't want a cat rubbing up against someone and leaving them feeling unsettled."

Christensen warns sellers to remember the nonvisual distractions as well: Don't forget to clean up the pet's toys, wash his bedding and hide the litter box. Take care of neutralizing odors and, if necessary, have carpets professionally cleaned.

SOME LIKE IT HOT

Comfortable Is Better

Temperature is an important factor when buyers visit your home. Although it may seem wasteful, you'll want your heating and cooling systems to work extra hard to make the house a comfortable temperature, says Beverly Aaron, CRS, of Harry Norman REALTORS® in Atlanta. Not only does it help buyers feel at home, it is also a good way to show them that your furnace, heat pump or air-conditioning systems function properly.

So what's the right temperature? It's recommended that you set your thermostat to at least 72 degrees in the winter and 69 degrees in the summer. Even if your house is vacant, don't forget to control the temperature; you don't want to be stuck with weather catastrophes such as mold or frozen pipes.



LESS IS MORE

If you're like most homeowners, your house is filled with all your favorite things. But when the house is "overflowing," it can be a problem. A potential buyer might feel overwhelmed in a crowded house and might not be able to get a good sense of the structure of the house itself. Be certain to make it as easy as possible for buyers to imagine their own furniture and artwork in the home. When you remove things from a room — whether it's chairs or knick-knacks — it opens up the space and gives it a feeling of roominess. "Decluttering is always a nice thing," says **Lori A. Abram, CRS**, of Choice Realty & Management in Bloomington, Ind. "You want to create a warm, homey feel and not have buyers feel like you've moved out already. But anytime you can straighten up, that helps."

Sometimes, removing furniture like an end table makes the space seem larger; and other times, simply rearranging the furniture in a room will give a similar impression. Another tip: Make sure there's enough white space around each piece of art on the wall. A good rule of thumb is to place only one good-sized piece of art on a wall in a normal-sized room. The same goes for plants. And if you don't have enough storage space in the basements or closets for everything you're removing, it might be worth renting a storage locker until you sell your house.



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