

Questions to Ask When Interviewing a Realtor About Listing Your Home

Regular readers of this column hopefully see the value of hiring a professional real estate agent — specifically a Realtor® — to represent them in the sale of their home instead of trying to go it alone. But how do you find the best Realtor to list your home?

You'll want to do your own online research (see box below), but then you'll want to interview the candidate(s) in person. Here are some questions I suggest asking — and why:

1) What commission do you charge? Too many sellers still believe there's a "standard" listing commission of 6% or more. That went out decades ago because of anti-trust enforcement. There is no such thing as a "standard" or "customary" listing commission. If any agent says there is, he or she is committing a federal offense. It's not even legal for agents to discuss with each other what they charge. I can only speak for myself. All commissions are negotiable, and I have seen it published that the average commission nowadays is roughly 5.4%.

2) Will you reduce your commission if you don't have to share it with a buyer's agent? Most agents will answer "yes" to this question but they wait for you to ask it, hoping that perhaps you won't. Our practice at Golden Real Estate is to offer a commission reduction of one-half to one percent when we don't have to share our commission with another agent. We think that's only fair.

3) Will you further reduce your commission if I hire you to represent me in the purchase of a replacement home? We think that's only fair, too. If I'm going to earn a sizable commission on your next purchase, I'm happy to reduce my commission on the sale of your current home, or rebate a portion of that commission if you hire me within the next couple years and I earn a nice commission representing you.

4) Will you pay a referral fee? This question can arise if you have a friend or relative in the business who expects to get your listing, but you know he or she is not the best listing agent for you. A reasonable agent will agree to pay another agent a 25% referral fee, and that could help you to handle the "friend or relative" dilemma. Don't allow a sense of obligation cost you when it comes to the biggest transaction of your financial life.

5) How will you market my listing? You have probably guessed that I'm big on marketing. Normally, I don't recommend print advertising, although I like to feature Golden Real Estate's listings in this weekly space. Since 92% of buyers — a percentage that rises each year — begin their home search

online, I suggest you look for an agent who has a big online presence. This will include an effective website, but also much more.

6) Do you pay extra to realtor.com, Trulia and Zillow to feature your listings? More importantly, does the agent take the time to *enhance* his listings on those important websites, or does he just let the site print what they get from the MLS and other sources? REcolorado no longer uploads its listings to Trulia and Zillow, so agents must have their listings on other websites in order for them to appear on these two websites.

7) Do you post — and boost — your listings on Facebook? Facebook is a great advertising medium that

I have learned to utilize effectively. For nominal fees, an agent can publish a Facebook post about your house and then pay to have it appear in the news feeds of other Facebook users matching specified demographic and other criteria. For example, I was able to have my posting of a high-end Colorado home appear in the newsfeeds of people living in Santa Monica, Santa Barbara, Aspen and Vail with certain demographic characteristics — and pay \$25 or less to do so. (Agents should also en-

courage sellers to post their home listing on Facebook and urge their friends to "Like" it so it spreads organically or even virally.)

8) Do you shoot your own pictures or do you hire a professional photographer? It's not necessary to hire a professional if you have professional equipment and use it professionally. The "gold standard" in real estate photography is what's known as "High Dynamic Range" or HDR technology. Golden Real Estate obtained HDR software and creates HDR photographs for all our agents' listings that rival any professional photographers' pictures. When you look at agent listings, as suggested, on www.REcolorado.com, see if you can tell the HDR photos from regular photos. The difference is most evident in the evenness of the lighting, especially through windows. *Look for HD listing videos, too!*

9) What showing service do you use? If the agent doesn't use Centralized Showing Service for his listings, find another agent. That's how important I think it is to use CSS. They are open 8am to 8pm, seven days a week, and agents can set showings 24/7 on their excellent website. Also, they have an excellent system for requesting and sending you feedback from each showing.

Find additional questions on my blog at www.JimSmithBlog.com. Asking the right questions will help you find the right agent.

REAL ESTATE TODAY



By JIM SMITH, Realtor®

Research You Can Do Online Before an Interview:

◆ **Is the agent a Realtor— a member of the National Association of Realtors (NAR)?** Not all agents are Realtors. It's our trade association with a Code of Ethics that non-Realtors don't swear to, but it also lobbies at the state and federal level to protect your property rights and preserve the home mortgage interest deduction. But another reason it's important is that you want an agent who can afford to pay the \$500/year dues. It's an indicator of whether he'll spend money promoting your listing! Go to www.realtor.com and click on "Find Realtors." If he or she is there, click on their profile.

◆ **Is he a member of the Denver MLS, and how successful is he?** A new feature of our MLS is that consumers, not just MLS members, can find members at www.REcolorado.com and see how many active, un-

der contract and sold listings he or she has. If he's not a member of the Denver MLS, your home's exposure to potential buyers is severely reduced. Click on "Find Agent/Office" and type in the name of any agent. (Remember that the first name might be a nickname.) If you find the agent, click on "view my listings." Click the address of any listing and you'll also be able to evaluate the quality of the photos, video (if any), description and extent of details provided. Keep in mind that the best predictor of how well an agent will market *your* listing is how well they have marketed previous listings.

◆ **Google the agent's name + "Realtor."** You'll find links with bios and reviews. Also look for him/her on www.RatedAgent.com, the only rating website which limits published reviews to those by actual past clients.



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