

## RENT OR BUY?

### Reviewing Your 2011 Housing Choices

Owning a home has always been the American dream. Is 2011 the right time for you — or someone you know — to join the majority of Americans who own their own home? Or, perhaps it's the right time to become a landlord and purchase a rental property as an investment. Here are some important factors to consider in the year ahead.

## Look Ahead

If you plan to stay in the same place for five years or more, investigate the costs of buying a home. You may be able to purchase a home that you can afford on your current salary while still having enough money to save for retirement or investments, unexpected home repairs, medical expenses, etc.

## Interest Rates

Continued historically low interest rates for 30-year mortgages allow you to purchase more home than you would otherwise be able to. But rates won't stay this low forever. To qualify for today's lowest interest rate, you'll need good credit and a significant down payment.

## SAVING HOME

### Last Options For Cash

If you are in danger of losing your primary home to foreclosure, contact your mortgage lender/servicer immediately. You have options you're not aware of. One possibility for quick cash may be taking money out of your retirement fund(s) to get your loan back on track and eliminate foreclosure proceedings. Remember that early retirement account withdrawals are subject to income taxes and penalties. Consult a financial professional for full details before choosing this option.



## PAY IT FORWARD

*It's difficult to maneuver alone in today's real estate market. Lenders are more cautious; home sellers and buyers are too. If you have friends or relatives looking to buy or sell their home, please pass along this newsletter after you've finished reading it. Thank you for putting trust in our services to recommend us!*

## Investment Opportunity

If you're already a homeowner, take a close look at your financial situation with your financial professional. It might make sense to purchase a multi-unit property or an additional property for rental income that can be significant

enough to cover most of your property costs. Experts expect the number of renters over the next few years to increase due to demand from population growth, immigration, retiring boomers and former homeowners unable to afford their foreclosed homes.



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## WOOD FLOORS

### Stop The Squeak

Wood floors are found in more and more homes these days. If your home has been around a while, it's likely there are squeaky spots here and there. They are annoying but can be eliminated with a little work.

#### Why do wood floors squeak?

Generally, most squeaks are due to the movement of the wood against other pieces of wood, the subfloor or the nails used to adhere the wood to the subfloor. Squeaks are often worse in winter, when the wood is more dried out and shrinks, whereas during the summer wood absorbs moisture and expands, not moving as much.

**How to get rid of a squeak?** The key is to eliminate movement by getting the top floor, subfloor and joists connected securely. The work is best done under the floor, from an unfinished basement, if possible. If you don't have access to the floor from underneath, however, you can try applying talcum powder to the joints of the boards, WD-40 to the joints (be sure to wipe up spills) or wood glue where needed.

Another possibility is to drive screws through the hardwood, subfloor and joists from above, using wood filler to cover the counter-sunk holes. Quick-fix kits are also available at your local home-improvement store to stop the squeaks from above the floor.

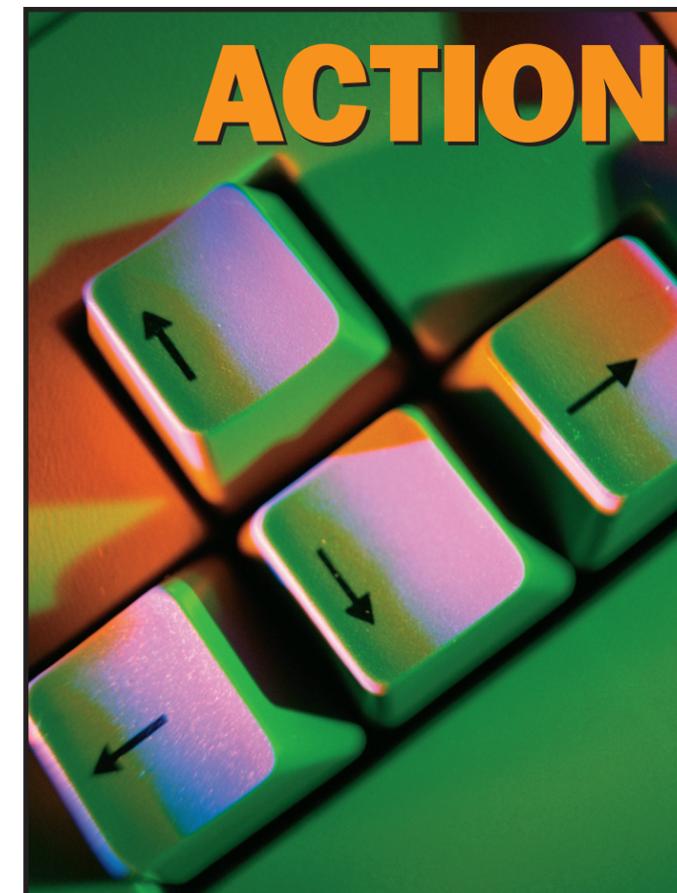


**ONLINE SEARCH WORDS:**  
how to fix squeaky wood floors



# HOME REPORT

Real Estate & Finance News That Affects Your Home



## ACTION PLAN

### Top Tips For Your 2011 Home Sale...Or Purchase!

**S**elling or buying a home in today's market requires planning and action. There is no doubt — real estate today is both an opportunity for the well informed...and a risk for the unprepared. Historically low interest rates, large home inventory, more distressed properties and newly affordable prices combine to offer a unique time to translate this market into long-term value by buying or selling a home in 2011.

That said...how do you avoid the costliest mistakes many buyers make? How do sellers look beyond price cuts to attract buyers? What are the smart moves for buyers to find bargains and for sellers to find buyers?

We can help. With our expertise at your side, we can navigate the process to make the best moves for your family and your finances right now. Use our precise market savvy and our up-to-minute knowledge to learn the do's and don'ts to get a home purchased or sold for the best possible price in 2011.

With a little pre-planning — and timely action — plus relying on local real estate professionals like us, you'll be on your way to reaching your real estate goals. Follow our tips in this **2011 Special Report** for today's home sellers and buyers and you can build your own successful home selling or buying action plan. You've waited long enough. Now is the time.

2011  
REAL ESTATE  
SPECIAL REPORT



## HOME SELLING SECRETS

### 4 Savvy, Smart, Sensible Tips To Get Your Home SOLD!

**1. Price aggressively.** If you're eager to get your home sold, you need action. To get action for your property, you need a price that is better than good. Price to sell. Set a competitive price that motivates — maybe lower than you'd like but better than the majority of your competition. With a competitive price, you will see action, and likely lots of it — possibly even multiple bids that can bring offer prices above your listing price. Call us for details.

**2. Organize, clean, stage.** Before you list your home for sale, go through it from top to bottom and organize every nook and cranny. Attractive homes attract buyers. If you don't have room for items, store, sell or donate them. After this all-out organization task, clean every space in your home. Spic and span sells. After the clutter and dirt are cleared away, stage to entice buyers. Set the table, put out flowers, set up a checkers game on the family room coffee table. Finally, get an inspection and fix problems that could kill a sale.

**3. Be flexible.** Don't be discouraged by buyers looking for the moon. Don't ignore an offer. Every offer deserves a counteroffer. Once a buyer "falls for your home," price and terms are simply negotiation items. We'll help you negotiate effectively to get the price you want or need by coming up with creative ways to counteroffer. If you have flexibility in your timeline (when you need to move, etc.), be sure to let us know too!

**4. Work with a pro.** Selling strategy is what we are all about. When you choose to work with us, we'll help you sell quickly for the best price. We'll work with you every step of the selling process, answering your questions and navigating the myriad of details. Our customer service is beyond your expectations because we have the experience to navigate today's real estate market. If you're thinking of selling your home, collecting information or even ready to list, please contact us at any time. We're here to help you achieve your real estate goals!

## HOME BUYING SECRETS

### 5 Top Tips, Techniques, Keys To Find A Home To Purchase

**1. Get loan pre-approval.** Lending requirements have tightened in the recent past. Before you start house hunting, find a mortgage lender who will approve you for a loan. With that information in hand, your home purchase offer carries much more weight than another buyer who doesn't have financing secured. To a seller, you'll look like a cash buyer. You'll also save time, knowing exactly how much home you can afford, and eliminate looking at homes that aren't in your price range. Be sure to reserve cash in your budget if you intend to buy a distressed property, which may require significant repairs/upgrades.

**2. Adapt to the situation.** Buying in today's market can be complicated, especially if you've never purchased a home before, or you're buying a distressed home. Either way, it's ideal to be flexible. When you are finalizing your loan, be sure to get all your paperwork returned quickly and completely. If you're looking to purchase a short sale or foreclosure, understand that the home buying process may extend longer than you had planned for. If time is of the essence in your home purchase, let us know so we can help you stay on your timeline during your home search.

**3. Look beyond the decor.** Oftentimes, the couches, paint colors or appliances aren't your style in the homes for sale you preview. Does the location of the home, the layout, the number of rooms all fit your needs? Are the systems of the home, the windows, the roof all in good working condition? What items can be easily (and inexpensively) upgraded or changed — before you move in or later when you can better afford to make changes? Don't be put off by decorating that is simply "not your style." You're buying the home, not the furnishings (in most cases).

**4. Examine, inspect, compare.** Buying a distressed property can look inviting in today's real estate market. You will need to do your due diligence, however, to ensure the home is really the best buy compared to traditional home sales that might be in better condition for just a slightly higher listing price. No matter whether you choose a distressed property or traditional sale as your new home, strongly consider a home inspection. A trained professional can provide you with details about the home's systems and condition that you may not be able to see on your own. The best home for you may not necessarily be the least expensive one, but the home that shines in the inspection!

**5. Don't go it alone.** Working with real estate professionals — like us — will allow you the peace of mind to know you have all the details taken care of in the home buying process. In most cases, working with a buyer's agent will not cost you any additional fees. Sellers usually pay our portion of the commission when we find them a buyer for their home — you! During the house hunt and purchase, we'll guide you down the path that's correct for your real estate situation and help define all the variables along the way. We'd love to help you find the home of your dreams!

## LESS CAN BE MORE

### Downsizing Not Just For Retirees

If you made New Year's resolutions to clear out the clutter, you're not alone. Now that January 1 is behind you, how far have you come with your resolve to clean up and clear out? Staying "green" in your quest to eliminate clutter can give you plenty of options for clearing out. To get your goal back on track, here are some quick and easy tips to rid yourself of unwanted stuff and regain precious space in your home.

#### Sell It

If the items you're tossing are in good condition and still desirable, consider

 selling them on sites such as craigslist and eBay, or through local auctions, traditional garage sales, local consignment shops or estate-sale companies.

Be sure to get price opinions from trusted professionals on antiques, rare items and collectibles before listing them for sale.

#### Donate It

If you don't have the time or patience to sell the items one-by-one, find a local charity that takes donations and drop them off or arrange a pickup. Think outside the box and



### Buying, Selling or Deciding?

*Today's real estate market is ready for you. Whether you're looking to buy or sell, the time is right! We are always here to answer your real estate questions. Contact us in the strictest confidence no matter what your real estate situation. We would love to hear from you and help you in 2011!*

## BONUS HOURS

### Show Off Your Home During Winter

Short winter days can make any home feel dark and dreary and affect your mood too. If your home is for sale, you want to ensure it is the brightest it can be for each showing.

#### Mirrors

- Mirrors can lighten up any space if they're placed appropriately. Look for spots directly across from windows and doors with windows. The light will be reflected back into the room.
- If you have mirrors in place already, be sure to turn on lights or simply open curtains and drapes to let in the natural light.
- Mirrors do not only have to be on walls to open up a room. Reflective tabletops, trim and doors can also allow a more open feeling.

#### Lights

- Soft lighting in corners that were previously dark can expand a room's visual size and warm up the feel of the room.
- Lamps that aim light upward add height and light to a room that felt low and dark. Varying the height of different lamps around the room also helps distribute light.
- Bulbs that give off pure, white light, such as halogen bulbs, will make your rooms feel sunny again.
- Change the shades on lamps or light fixtures to allow more light to come through. Replace light fixtures that capture more light than they give off.

#### Color

- Bright colors on the walls, accent pieces or art can light up a room. Throws, pillows, candles can add color and brightness.
- Consider using white to add some splash in a room — perhaps a new coat of white paint on trim and doors. Consider painting dark wood white for a visual pop.



**ONLINE SEARCH WORDS:** brightening up dark rooms

#### Recycle It



If you have odd items that are of no value to you, chances are they can be transformed into something else. Remember, one person's trash is another's treasure! Look for a Freecycle group in your area or simply list the items under the Free tab in craigslist. Advertisements in your local neighborhood, school or workplace newsletters and intranets may also help you de-clutter.

#### Use The Circular File

If all else fails, junk the items. You can put items at your curb on garbage day or a day before in the hope someone will take the items. If not, the garbage truck will do the job. Tip: Be sure your hazardous waste is disposed of properly and safely. Contact local organizations for guidelines before disposing of electronics, batteries, chemicals, medicine, etc.

