

Understanding the buyer

As the seller, you can control three factors that will affect the sale of your home:

- * The home's condition
- * Asking price
- * Marketing strategy

However, it's important to note that there are numerous other factors that influence a buyer, and you need to understand these consumer trends when you enter the sellers' market. The more your home matches these qualifications, the more competitive it will be in the marketplace. Your real estate agent can advise you on how to best position and market your home to overcome any perceived downsides.

Location

Unfortunately, the most influential factor in determining your home's appeal to buyers is something you can't control: its location. According to the National Association of REALTORS(r), neighborhood quality is the No. 1 reason buyers choose certain homes. The second most influential factor is commute times to work and school.

Size

While some buyers want to simplify their lives and downsize to a smaller home, home sizes in general have continued to increase over the decades, nearly doubling in size since the 1950s. Smaller homes typically appeal to first-time home buyers and "empty nesters," or couples whose children have grown up and moved out.

Amenities

Preferences in floor plans and amenities go in and out of fashion, and your real estate agent can inform you of the "hot ticket" items that are selling homes in your market. If your home lacks certain features, you can renovate to increase its appeal, but be forewarned: That's not always the right move. Using market conditions and activity in your neighborhood as a gauge, your agent can help you determine whether the investment is likely to help or hinder your profit margin and time on the market.