

MARKET INTELLIGENCE

executive director of the Douglas & Gordon agency. You get what you pay for: don't even think about using a solicitor who won't respond to requests by email — such solicitors do still exist.

● Dedicate time to moving the sale along. Mead says. "Don't sit back — lean on your estate agent. If they are good they will make sure the sale progresses." Carol Peet, of the County Homesearch Company for West Wales, recommends asking your lawyer to ring their counterpart to get an answer on the phone or get documents emailed, faxed or couriered. Don't be afraid of asking direct questions. Find out what is still to be done and say: "Am I doing everything I can to complete by Christmas?"

● Don't be greedy; the mantra of the estate agent, though phrased more euphemistically to clients. "If you want to sell before Christmas, the most important thing is the asking price," says Adrian Philpott at Winkworth in central London. "Set it too high and you will lose viewings, set it absurdly high and you will get tumbleweed. The person who might have bought your property at a price you are happy with may not even go to view the property if you listen only to the siren voices."

● Lastly, be very clear about your time-frame — right from the start. Give a timetable for exchange and completion as part of the initial negotiation, suggests Roarie Scarisbrick, a partner at the Property Vision agency. "Talk to your lawyers and broker to establish a time-frame, and put it in writing," he says.

'Why does nobody want my lovely flat?'

Timing and presentation are essential to clinching a sale. Hugo Rawlins, right, has spent two months trying to sell his south London flat to cash in on inflated prices in the capital. After 30 viewings, however, his home has yet to attract an offer. Rawlins, who works in public relations, plans to buy a property farther out, in Kingston upon Thames, where prices haven't escalated quite as much.

With tales of an under-stocked and soaring market in the capital, Hugo had hoped for a swift sale on his two-bedroom flat in Wandsworth. He says: "The flat was on the market for two months as of mid-May, during which there were a decent number of viewings

but not one offer. Not even a cheeky one. I was pretty disappointed, having been geared up to sell. Most of the feedback was that the second bedroom was too small, but I just got the feeling that I had missed the boat in terms of the market bounce."

Rawlins had the second bedroom set up as a study. Educating would-be buyers on how a room can work can be crucial, according to David Barker, of the James Pendleton estate agency, which was instructed to market the flat. He says: "The second bedroom was a cause for concern because it is a smaller room than many might like. It was being used as a study and, while a double bed fits easily in the room, many prospective buyers need to see how it would work as



Expert views

Miles Shipside, Rightmove
"This is the year to move, before the election is upon us, an event that typically brings uncertainty and slow sales to the housing market."

Robin Chatwin, Savills
"In any market, buyers will have a ceiling on what they're prepared to pay, as do banks on what they are prepared to lend."

Kate Faulkner, Propertychecklists.co.uk
"Pricing a home fairly is a must. The professionals know you should set a price that's slightly less than a home is worth in the hope of getting more viewings and getting two or more buyers bidding for the property — which will push up the price."

Tim Beattie, Kinleigh Folkard & Hayward
"Sellers can be reluctant to reduce their price as they feel it may result in offers far below the value they wish to achieve. We find a good reduction which brings the property in line with others on the market will often achieve instant results."

a bedroom," says Barker. "It wasn't just about the layout of the flat, though. The timing of the instruction was tricky — it came on the market just as things were starting to turn."

Rawlins is now preparing to keep the flat and let it out, as he is determined to move out of central London. Using rental income, he can remortgage and release equity for a deposit on his next home.

He bought the property in 1999, so has built up a significant amount of equity, which will allow him to capitalise on the gains London has seen and buy a new home as well as get an income from the Wandsworth flat. One of the main advantages of let-to-buy is that the owner can benefit from two properties potentially rising in value.
Holly Thomas

A picture-perfect pitch

If you are thinking of selling later in the year, it might be a good idea to take some decent pictures of the outside and the gardens sooner rather than later, as they will look their best in the summer.

Many photos let sellers down, so make sure that you are happy with the images and, if not, ask for them to be

redone. Windows should be sparkling, surfaces clear and there should be as much light as possible flooding into the property — natural light is preferable.

Replace light bulbs with more powerful ones, change curtains and trim any trees and bushes that are blocking the light from the outside.

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