



# How to pick the best estate agent

Joanne Hunt

Beware of low fees, unrealistic valuations and lazy marketing. They can all cost you in the end

Thinking of selling your home? Picking a good estate agent can help you maximise your sale price, quicken the selling time and lessen the chances of a buyer pulling out. With the number of second-hand properties for sale very low – there were just 13,750 listed for sale in July, the lowest number since 2009, according to Sherry FitzGerald figures – estate agents really want your business. Here's how to pick the right agent.

### Shoparound

Before picking an agent, get three of them to view and value your property, says Breffnie O'Kelly. A registered estate agent, she worked for big selling agents in the past before becoming a buyers' agent, helping house-hunters find their dream home. You need to do some legwork, however, before picking which three, says O'Kelly.

"If you are selling a three-bed semi, look at other properties for sale in your area and pick up the phone and ask what is the bidding," says O'Kelly. "This allows you to step into the mind of current buyers."

When it comes to interviewing prospective agents, you need to have current market insights to vet what they are saying.

Sellers often approach a sale with some figures in their head, like how much they paid for the property or spent renovating it. Potential buyers don't know about "your" figures and don't care either. Taking a current market pulse will disabuse you of "your" figures.

### Backup

Phoning around will tell you how your prospective agent treats potential buyers. Did someone pick up when you phoned, did they return your call promptly, were they helpful and insightful? If an estate agent isn't treating calls from potential buyers with respect,

that's a problem.

"Very often you get good, charismatic agents, but they may not have a good administrative backup system," says O'Kelly. "Is that the kind of response you'd like a buyer to get about your property?"

If the sale of your home is happening because of a family-law settlement deadline or you need to link selling your home with buying another, your agent needs to be agile and responsive, says Niamh Moran, partner at Carmody Moran Solicitors.

"Delays don't help anyone. They are one of the reasons that make house selling so stressful."

### Healthy competition

Having picked three agents, invite them to value your home. "Have them all out on the same day so you only have to clear your house once," says O'Kelly. "And tell them you are having three agents out, that way they will know there is competition and they may be paring their pencil when it comes to their fees, perhaps."

### Beware of flattery

Some estate agents may quote an inflated selling price to get your business, says O'Kelly.

"When I worked in an estate agency, we were briefed to value the property 'uncomfortably high,'" says O'Kelly. "So if we think the property is going to be worth €650,000, our brief was to tell the seller it's going to be worth €700,000 to €750,000. Not all agents do this, but some are under real pressure to get the property on their books to sell. They basically flatter you by giving you a high price," she says.

"Can they give you three comparable properties that were sold or just sale-agreed recently in your area to substantiate the value?" Don't always choose the agent promising the highest selling price. Your house may languish on the market and may ultimately need a price drop.

### Bidding process

A bidding war is no fun for buyers, but this in-

terest and momentum is usually good news for the seller and their agent. You want the bidding process to be efficient, however, says estate agent Owen Reilly.

Choosing an estate agent that uses an online-bidding platform can facilitate this.

"You can't have a scenario where someone makes a bid on Friday evening at 6pm and no other party is made aware of that bid until Monday morning," he says.

"With an online-bidding platform, buyers can bid through the evening and weekend and will change increments themselves without even consulting the estate agent.

"Without momentum, bidding fatigue can kick in very quickly. Bidding buyers want it brought to a conclusion fast," he says.

### Marketing strategy

Selling a property is all about eyeballs, says Reilly. The more buyers that see your property, the more viewings and bids there will be. That's why it's important to quiz prospective agents about their marketing strategy.

Agents should have experience in creating extra leads outside of Myhome.ie, Daft.ie and the For Sale sign, says Reilly.

"There is a cohort of buyers now that get all their news and information on social media – Instagram, TikTok and Twitter [now X]. Agents need to be advertising their clients' properties on these platforms," says Reilly.

"Is Instagram more effective on south Dublin houses? Yes. Is TikTok more effective for renting and for city centre and docklands apartments? Yes. Even LinkedIn is very effective for family homes in the suburbs," says Reilly.

"A lady bought a house from me on South Circular Road a year ago. It sold for above a million. She worked in a tech company and when she first saw the house, on TikTok, she was in California."

### Fees

The cheapest agent isn't always the best deal. If paying €200 more to an agent added €10,000 to the eventual sale price, that would be money well spent.

Estate-agent fees range from one per cent to 1.5 per cent, says Reilly. The range will depend on the value of the property, he says. Marketing costs are typically charged separately.

"With us, marketing costs are €500 plus VAT. For that you will get professional photography, video, a virtual tour, a digital album, listings on Myhome.ie and Daft.ie, social media, a sign outside the property and a brochure," says Reilly.

Drone footage, higher-spec photography and video and newspaper adverts, typically used for high-end properties, will cost more.

Where an agent doesn't charge for marketing, you are unlikely to be getting professional photography or a virtual tour.

Sellers have valuable leverage to negotiate on fees prior to engaging an agent, says O'Kelly.

■ With the number of second-hand properties for sale at its lowest since 2009, estate agents really want your business. Below: Breffnie O'Kelly, Owen Reilly and Niamh Moran. MAIN PHOTOGRAPH: ISTOCK

ly. But they need to be direct. "If an agent says they have a 2 per cent fee, for example, what you could say to them is: 'I will give you the property to sell today, I will sign a contract today, if you will do me the deal of 1.75 per cent.' Then they will start listening. That is much more compelling to an agent than saying, 'What is your best price?'"

### Feedback loop

Before engaging an agent, it's important to know if their level of communication style meets your needs.

"One thing sellers hate about their agent is that they don't give them any feedback," says O'Kelly. "If your property isn't getting any offers, there is a reason. If your agent is talking to those viewing it, they are going to get feedback. 'It's too dark' or 'It's too expensive', for example. "That feedback can enable you to tailor your product. Get them to commit to at least one call a week to give you feedback," O'Kelly advises.

### Lazy listing

Check out prospective agents' current online ads. Is the house description engaging, informative and accurate, or just a cut-and-paste job from others sold in the area? If the first picture in the carousel of images is the clapped-out bathroom and not the spanking new kitchen, someone doesn't care. "Serious buyers are looking forensically. You need a floor plan, square footage and the best photos first," says O'Kelly. Include specifics, naming local schools, transport routes and standout amenities.

### Get on schedule

Once you give an agent the listing, how will things work? "There should be a clear schedule of open viewings in the first couple of weeks," says Reilly.

The first couple of weeks of the marketing campaign is crucial. "I'm a huge fan of momentum. Our average selling time right now is eight weeks but our best results happen in three or four weeks. That's when you tend to sell above asking and tend to create competitive interest in a house."

"When the property is sale agreed, it's very important the agent doesn't switch off," he says.

They should have clear timelines about paying a deposit, about when valuations and surveys get done and what is expected at closing. For example, when the house must be free of contents.

If it's a probate sale, a good agent will understand the process and tailor their timeline accordingly, says Moran.

A property being placed on the market for sale with contracts exchanged before a grant or probate is issued will not be able to progress. This may lead to the buyer pulling out. A failed sale isn't a good look for anyone.

## Sort it

Denise O'Connor



# How to prepare to downsize to a smaller home

Downsizing is a significant life change involving more than moving house and getting rid of some of your belongings. It requires both emotional and practical readiness. Taking time to prepare yourself mentally and emotionally and to plan the logistics will help you make the most of this life-changing process. By approaching this change correctly, you can make the most of the opportunity and find it enjoyable and exciting.

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### Never too young

While downsizing is often associated with people later in life, there's no age requirement for this process. In fact, many people find that downsizing earlier in life has several benefits. One of the biggest emotional benefits is the sense of control it gives you over your future. Rather than feeling like you're being forced to downsize due to declining health or finances, you can decide on your own terms.

In addition to the emotional benefits, downsizing earlier in life also has physical advantages. Maintaining a smaller home can be less physically taxing and reduce the risk of falls and other accidents more common in larger homes. And having fewer possessions to care for can also reduce stress levels and improve mental wellbeing.

### Assess your goals

To mentally prepare for downsizing, assessing your goals and motivations is essential. Begin by asking yourself why you want to downsize. Do you want to save money, simplify your life, or move closer to family? Once you've identified your reasons for downsizing, write them down and prioritise them based on importance. This will help you better understand how downsizing will affect other areas of your life, such as your budget and lifestyle. By looking at the big picture, you can ensure that your decision to downsize aligns with your overall life goals.

### Emotional baggage

Downsizing can be an emotional experience, not only for you but for your entire family. Remember that your loved ones may have their own feelings and motivations regarding your decision to downsize. While they may have your best interests at heart, they may also be emotionally attached to your home and its contents. They may be unwilling to part with sentimental items, even if they have little financial value. This can make it difficult for them to see the bigger picture. Additionally, family mem-

### Berealistic

When downsizing, it's important to be realistic about what you can and can't adjust to in a smaller home. For instance, if you're accustomed to living in a large house with plenty of space, an apartment might feel cramped and constricting. Similarly, if you're used to having your own personal space, sharing a smaller home with someone else might be a challenge.

Another aspect to consider is your lifestyle and daily activities. For example, if you're an avid gardener, you'll want some outdoor space and storage for your tools. Or, if you like to host dinner parties or have guests over, you'll need a home with enough space to accommodate everyone comfortably.

### Plan ahead

One of the most critical steps in downsizing is planning ahead. Set a realistic timeline for completing all the steps involved, like finding an estate agent, decluttering, and preparing your home for sale. This will help you avoid feeling rushed or overwhelmed.

One of the most overwhelming aspects of downsizing is decluttering. The best way to tackle decluttering is gradually starting with one room at a time. This way, you won't get overwhelmed. Start by removing anything broken or damaged, then move on to items you no longer use or need. It can help to ask a friend or family member for their opinion on what to keep or get rid of. This can also make the process more enjoyable.

### Support network

A solid support network is crucial when downsizing. This major lifestyle change takes planning, patience, and emotional support. One of the most valuable steps you can take is to surround yourself with friends and family who can help with practical tasks like packing and moving and provide emotional support as you adjust to your new lifestyle. With this kind of support system, you can approach downsizing with positivity and a sense of adventure.



■ 'It's important to be realistic about what you can and can't adjust to in a smaller home.' Apartment livingroom by Optimise Design

## On view



**17 Glenbrook Park, Rathfarnham, Dublin 14**  
€750,000, DNG  
Four-bedroom semidetached house extending to 122sq m (1,313sq ft). The property, located close to a number of amenities, has a private rear garden and a partially covered garage. There is potential to expand the house subject to planning permission. Ber E2  
On view: Strictly by appointment at dng.ie



**24 Raglan Lane, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4**  
€1.45m, Colliers International  
Four-bedroom mews extending to 155sq m (1,668sq ft). Constructed in 2000, and set behind electric gates, the property designed by architect Paul Keogh has private parking for two cars and a west-facing town garden close to Baggot Street and the Aviva Stadium. Ber C3  
On view: Strictly by appointment at colliers.ie



**Princeton, Ballyedmonduff Road, Stepaside, Dublin 18**  
€1.1m, Lisney Sotheby's International Realty  
Detached four-bedroom house extending to 217sq m (2,336sq ft). Standing on a 1.13 acre site of elevated gardens with panoramic views, the property, which has four reception rooms, has a large outbuilding and double garage. Ber C1  
On view: Strictly by appointment at lisney.com



**79 Calderwood Road, Off Griffith Avenue, Drumcondra, Dublin 9**  
€825,000, Kelly Bradshaw Dalton  
Five-bedroom midterrace house extending to 150sq m (1,615sq ft) has a west-facing rear garden with two sheds and potential to extend, subject to planning permission. The windows were changed in the property in 2003, and a new bathroom installed in 2022. Ber C2  
On view: Strictly by appointment at kbd.ie



**Westmanstown Lodge, Newcastle, Co Dublin**  
€850,000, Sherry FitzGerald  
Detached five-bedroom house extending to 212sq m (2,282sq ft). The property dating from 1972 lies on 1.5 acres of landscaped gardens and has a quadruple garage/workshop adjacent. It has an adjoining one-bedroom unit generating €14,000 per annum. Ber C3  
On view: Strictly by appointment at sherryfitz.ie