

LAWPACK



*Self-Help Kit*

# Sell your own Home

Guidance Manual

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This is an excerpt from Lawpack's *Sell Your Own Home Kit*.

To get more property secrets on how you can sell your own home and sell your property online, [click here](#).

## THIS KIT WILL HELP YOU SELL YOUR HOUSE WITHOUT AN ESTATE AGENT AND COULD SAVE YOU HUNDREDS, IF NOT THOUSANDS, OF POUNDS

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# Contents

	Introduction	5
<b>1</b>	Getting your property ready to sell	11
<b>2</b>	The marketing campaign	35
<b>3</b>	Dealing with enquiries and viewings	55
<b>4</b>	The negotiation	61
<b>5</b>	Introduction to conveyancing	69



# Introduction

Do you have what it takes to sell your home on your own, without an estate agent? Do you feel confident that you can succeed, or even outperform, professionals who have years of practical experience? Consider all the elements that go to make up a successful sale and ask yourself if you are up to the challenge. If you can honestly answer 'Yes' to most of these questions then you are definitely someone who has the talent to go down the do-it-yourself route.

## Do you have the time?

Selling a property is a time-consuming business. Can you devote time and resources to it and can you easily take time off work?

## Do you have an eye for interior design?

The show-home look is what sells properties. But are you willing and able to give your property a thorough makeover?

## Do you have research skills?

You need to research the market so you know who your likely buyers are and how much they are willing to pay. There is a wealth of information out there, but are you up to finding it and putting it to good use?

## Can you prepare a marketing plan?

Property details, For Sale boards, newspaper and internet advertising, organising viewings and setting a timetable – these are the elements which go to make up a marketing plan. There is a lot to consider. Do you feel you can pull it all together into a coherent plan?

## Are you good with people?

Having a lot of people traipsing through your home can be stressful. If you are someone who likes people, can stay relaxed, and who doesn't take critical comments to heart, then you will positively enjoy showing people around your home.

## Are you a good negotiator?







The best way to get what you want is to understand that negotiating is about give and take. Can you stay cool, calm and collected and, above all, flexible in the face of buyers who may turn nasty on you?

## What this Kit can do for you

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This Kit will help you sell your property without an estate agent and save you hundreds if not thousands of pounds. Selling a property is an expensive business and most of that money goes to line the pockets of estate agents. In this Kit we take you step-by-easy-step through the process of selling your property privately and how to get the best possible price.

We will give you advice on:

-  **How to present your property to appeal to the greatest number of potential buyers**
-  **How to value it**
-  **How to advertise it**
-  **How to deal with viewings**
-  **How to negotiate with buyers**
-  **How to avoid the pitfalls along the way**

Throughout the Kit, you'll find recommendations of various products and services to make selling your property easier. For more information, product comparisons and the latest special offers, visit Lawpack's property website at [www.lawpack.co.uk/property](http://www.lawpack.co.uk/property).

If you are selling your home, you might well be looking to buy a new one. Lawpack can help here, too, with a well-established range of property-related titles. Again, please visit the website for full details.

What this Kit does not do is tell you how to do your own conveyancing. This is the legal process involved in transferring the ownership of a property from one person to another, and for this aspect of selling your property we recommend you use a solicitor or a licensed conveyancer. If your property is in Scotland, the sale procedure is fundamentally different from England and Wales and is summarised on page 71; you should keep these differences in mind when reading this Manual.

But just how much money can you save by selling without using an estate agent? Well, the answer is possibly many thousands of pounds, even on the most modest property. In the UK it is the property seller who pays the estate agent. Rates of commission vary greatly, from around one per cent to around two and a quarter per cent. Sometimes the commission includes the cost of advertising in your local newspaper and sometimes this expense is charged as an extra on top of the commission. Expensive properties – say those over £1 million – may cost even more, with estate agents charging extra for producing glossy brochures and advertising in national newspapers.

The latest survey from the Woolwich<sup>1</sup>, which reports annually on the cost of buying and selling properties, estimates that it costs a total of £5,202 to sell a property costing £150,000 and buy a property costing £200,000. And surprise, surprise the biggest slice of that bill – around £1,933 goes to the estate agent.

<sup>1</sup> Annual cost of moving survey, Woolwich April 2004.

### The average property

The Halifax is currently one of the UK's largest chains of estate agents. This firm charges commission of around 1.5%. The Land Registry values the average property in England and Wales at around £187,971<sup>2</sup>. Selling an average property through the Halifax costs £2,820 plus VAT in estate agency fees.

In Scotland prices and charges are generally lower. The average house price is expected to break the £100,000 barrier for the first time in 2005 and is predicted to peak at around £102,500. Selling an average property in Scotland through an estate agent charging an average commission of around 1% is therefore likely to cost around £1,000, plus VAT and advertising costs.

### The average house in an affluent London suburb

Savings are even higher in those areas of the country where average property prices are higher. Firms of estate agents in affluent south-west London areas, such as Wandsworth, usually charge commission of 2.25%, which includes local advertising. The Land Registry values the average property in Wandsworth at £353,578<sup>2</sup>. Selling the average Wandsworth property is likely to cost up to £7,956, plus VAT, in estate agency fees.

### The large family house in an affluent London suburb

In the well-heeled London suburb of Wandsworth large four-bedroom family houses can change hands for at least £650,000. Selling such a house through an estate agent is likely to cost up to £14,625, plus VAT, in fees.

## Estate agents versus DIY

There is some resentment at the amount of money estate agents can earn and people are not always satisfied with the service they offer. Even so, nine-out-of-ten people choose to use an estate agent to sell their property, and less than one-in-five people shop around to get the best deal. So what are the pros and cons of using an estate agent versus going down the do-it-yourself route?

Estate agent	DIY
Charges large fee	Costs of selling lower
Writes property details; takes professional photographs; measures up and produces particulars	Seller prepares own particulars
Arranges a For Sale board	Buys and prepares own For Sale board
Arranges and pays for the advertising (i.e. no sale no fee); seller has little control over where it goes	Arranges and pays for advertising; costs likely to be higher to achieve same presence as estate agent
High street visibility	No high street presence

<sup>2</sup> Land Registry – June to September 2004, [www.landregistry.gov.uk](http://www.landregistry.gov.uk).



Estate agent	DIY
Vets potential buyers, but information not normally passed on to sellers	Personal contact with buyers may lead to better opinion
Maximises selling price by opening up property to pool of potential buyers already on its books	No ready pool of buyers, so may have to work harder to achieve best selling price
Can conduct viewings but may not have detailed knowledge of the property and its selling points	Conducts own viewings; knows the selling points of the property better than anyone else (emotional attachment could be a disadvantage); has good local knowledge
Feedback from viewers can be sporadic and inconsistent; can get frank opinion from viewers	Can get feedback directly; viewers may be reticent to give frank opinion directly to seller
Receives offers and negotiates with buyers	Seller handles his own negotiating
Deals with many buyers and sellers, so may not keep up with progress of sale once an offer is accepted	Seller can keep on top of progress

## The internet

The growth of the internet as the most effective tool yet for selling properties means that the private seller can now harness the power of the world wide web for themselves. Over the last five years, the number of properties advertised on the internet has grown at a phenomenal rate. Five years ago, around 35,000 properties were advertised on [www.propertyfinder.com](http://www.propertyfinder.com), one of the pioneering internet sites; now the site carries advertisements for 150,000 properties. Another site, [www.primelocation.com](http://www.primelocation.com) which was launched later, has grown from 56,000 properties in January 2003 to more than 100,000 in October 2004. While another major site, [www.vebra.com](http://www.vebra.com), claims that over 275,000 sets of details are downloaded every day. Up until now, the internet has been a tool which has been exploited almost entirely by estate agents, but this Kit aims to tackle that dominance with practical advice about how private individuals can advertise their properties on the internet in the most effective way.

## Using an estate agent at the same time

In theory, if you decide to use an estate agent to sell your property you can also, depending on the wording of their contract, sell the property yourself and not pay the agent any commission. The question is what agent would take on the job knowing that you were in competition with them? At best they would be demotivated and at worst they would probably throw the towel in.

If you really want to reserve the right to sell privately then carefully check the wording of the estate agent's contract. A 'sole agency' basis usually means you can sell

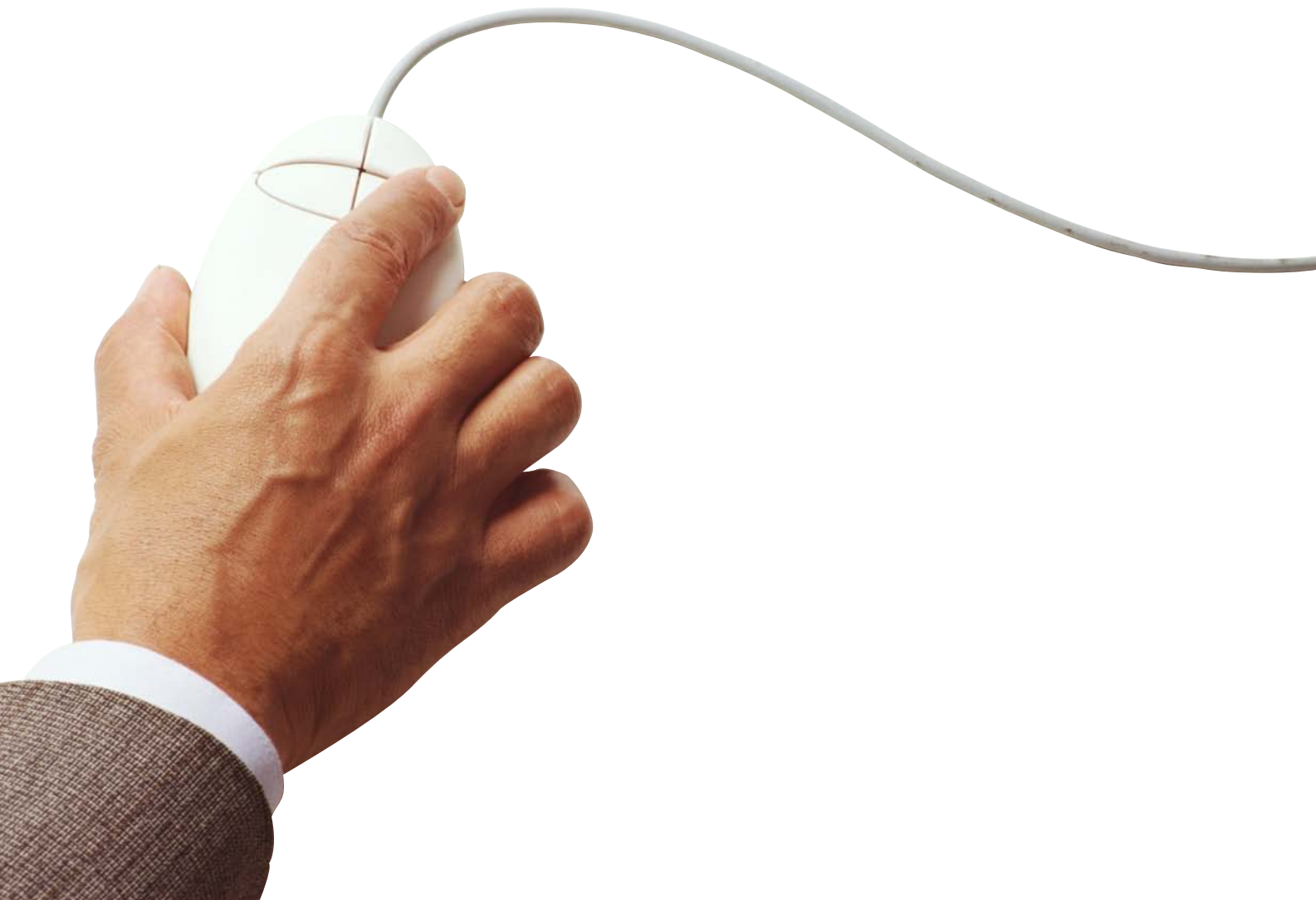
privately without paying the agent any commission. The key word is usually whether the buyer was 'introduced' by the agent. It might be argued that if a buyer knocks on your door having been attracted by an agent's For Sale board outside your house, that amounts to an introduction, which is why some agents require 'sole selling rights' by which they can rightfully claim their commission whether or not they introduced the buyer. Tread carefully if an estate agent's contract mentions their introduction of a 'ready, willing and able purchaser'; this means that commission is payable after they have introduced a buyer, even if you withdraw from the sale, for whatever reason. If you are in doubt about what an agent's contract means, get them to clarify it in writing.

In reality, the contractual niceties of instructing an estate agent at the same time as trying to sell yourself can be fraught with potential difficulties. The advice we give is that you should make up your mind: either sell privately or use an estate agent. If you decide to sell privately you may well find that local agents see your For Sale board and approach you asking if they can help; in these circumstances, if they have an interested buyer you can always negotiate and pay them a reduced commission on any successful sale. Remember that if you try to sell privately and it doesn't work you can always change your mind and hand over the sale to an estate agent later on.



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THE INTERNET IS THE PLACE  
WHERE MOST PROPERTY  
HUNTERS START THEIR SEARCH









# The marketing campaign

## Advertising your property

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Now that your property has been spruced up, decluttered, depersonalised and given a fresh coat of paint, you are ready to start giving your marketing campaign your full attention.

This will entail:

-  **Deciding how much your property is worth**
-  **Deciding the asking price**
-  **Producing the property particulars**
-  **Producing a For Sale board**
-  **Deciding where to advertise**
-  **Fixing a marketing budget**

## Deciding how much your property is worth

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Valuing a property is as much an art as it is a science, but that is no excuse for not taking advantage of all the sources of hard factual information that are now available. It can be hard to explain why a property in one street sells for much more than a similar property in a different street. Before putting a value on your property it is important to get a feel for the market by doing your research. Remember, estate agents are looking at and valuing properties almost every day of their working lives, so they have a very shrewd idea of what a property will sell for. This is the kind of almost instinctive feel for the market that your research is aiming for.

Here is how you find out how much your property is worth:

## 1 Visit all your local estate agents and gather up any property details of properties similar to your own

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Don't be afraid to ask questions. Estate agents can tell you if your type of property is selling quickly, at what price and to what type of buyer. They can also tell you how many viewings on average it is taking before properties are selling, and what percentage of the asking price sellers are achieving. This is all vital market information which will help you set the price.

## 2 Ask three estate agents to value your property

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As you may end up using an estate agent if you can't sell your property privately, it is not wasting estate agents' time to ask them to value your property. Most estate agents provide free valuations and you are under no obligation to instruct them to sell your property. Also, good estate agents keep an eye on the properties they have valued, and, even if they are not instructed, may approach you if they have a buyer who might be interested. In these circumstances, you can negotiate a lower fee, say, 0.5 per cent, or a flat fee of say, £1,000, if this results in a sale.

If your property has potential, it is useful for buyers to know how much the property would be worth if, say, the loft is converted or the kitchen extended. Estate agents can tell you how much your property would be worth if certain improvements were made. Get them to put their valuations in writing.

## 3 View as many similar properties as possible

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While you are property hunting for your next home, you could slip in a few viewings of properties similar to the one you are selling. Use the opportunity to ask the seller what their viewers have liked about their property.

## 4 Use local statistics

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The Land Registry now publishes the selling price of every property sold in England and Wales, and since 2003 this information is available for a fee of (currently) £2 over the internet. If a similar property, or several similar properties, to yours have sold recently, it is worth checking the sale price with the Land Registry. For this all you need is the address and the postcode. If you have the address but no postcode, the Royal Mail website [www.royalmail.org.uk](http://www.royalmail.org.uk) has a postcode search facility. To find the selling price of a particular property, log on to the Land Registry website [www.landregisteronline.gov.uk](http://www.landregisteronline.gov.uk). Click on 'Property Enquiry'. Enter the address and postcode of the property you are researching and the site will then search the Land Registry data base. At this point, when the entry on the register is found, you are asked to pay the current fee of £2 by entering your credit or debit card details. If you don't have internet access you can make an application by post.

The Land Registry also publishes detailed information on average property prices for different types of property in every postcode minus the last two letters. Go on to the Land Registry website [www.landregistry.gov.uk](http://www.landregistry.gov.uk), click on 'Property prices', then 'On-

Line data', followed by 'Postcode'. Entering your full postcode will produce the number of property sales in your postal district (for example, SW12 0BN, will produce all sales in the SW12 0 area; BS6 5RR will produce all the sale in the BS6 5 area) in the last published three-month period. It shows the average price for detached, semi-detached and terraced houses, flats/maisonettes, and the average overall price.

For Scottish property, the Registers of Scotland agency website provides similar services and information at [www.ros.gov.uk/citizen/shp.html](http://www.ros.gov.uk/citizen/shp.html).

A number of internet-based services exist to monitor local property prices and trends nationwide and there are now two sites offering price information direct from the Land Registry. Some information is available free but you may have to pay for more detailed reports. For details of some of the offers currently available visit [www.lawpack.co.uk/property](http://www.lawpack.co.uk/property).

## Deciding the asking price

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If you have done your research thoroughly, you know what your property is worth. Buyers do not generally offer the full asking price, so if you want to get the price you think your property is worth, you must add something extra to allow for this. Generally speaking, properties sell for between 95 and 98 per cent of the asking price, depending of course on the state of the market. So if you think your property is worth £300,000 you must put your property on the market for a higher amount to allow for this. Also fix the price just below a round figure. Psychologically, a figure of £199,950 feels more of a bargain than £200,000 and £499,950 appeals more than £500,000.

If you are aiming to achieve, say, £300,000, an asking price of between £319,950 (roughly 6.7 per cent above what you hope to achieve) and £329,950 (roughly 10 per cent above what you hope to achieve) is what you should be aiming for. This rule applies at every price level, even though asking between £525,000 and £550,000 for a property which you hope to sell for £500,000 looks greedy. It is worth remembering that at this level buyers are sophisticated enough to know that they can make an offer £50,000 below the asking price without being laughed out of court.

In Scotland the way prices are arrived at is a little different. Here a sellers' market philosophy generally prevails. The seller sets an asking price below what he considers the market value, inviting 'offers over' it. Of course, buyers will generally first offer below the full asking price and then negotiate, but others will be prepared to offer between 10 and sometimes 30 per cent above the asking price. In Scotland properties generally sell for between 10 and 15 per cent above the asking price. So if you are looking to achieve, say, £300,000, an asking price of 'offers over £270,000' is what you should be aiming for. (It should be added that this way of inviting offers is not uncommon in England when the market is strong, and likewise in Scotland not all property is marketed at 'offers over' – a seller wanting a quick sale may market his property at a 'fixed price', telling buyers that the first offer he receives at that price will be accepted.)

Wherever your property is, the level at which you fix your asking price will also depend on:

## The state of the market

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If the market is busy and there are more buyers than sellers around, then you can afford to take an optimistic view in the hope of achieving more than your target price. Think about adding around 10 per cent to the price you want to achieve. If there are more sellers than buyers you should be more cautious. In this case think of adding four or five per cent only.

## How many buyers you want to attract

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If you want to attract as many buyers as possible, put it on the market with a low asking price, in the hope of attracting several offers. People will think they are getting a bargain but will probably be persuaded to pay more if they find they are in competition with other buyers. If your property is particularly desirable and you feel you may be able to sell it for more than it is worth, then add a generous amount to the asking price. This is a high risk strategy because if few buyers are interested and you don't get any offers, you will be forced to drop the price and quickly.

## Stamp Duty Land Tax

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Stamp Duty Land Tax thresholds can affect the asking price. Stamp Duty Land Tax is the tax which most people pay when they buy a property.

Current rates of Stamp Duty Land Tax	
Purchase price £60,000 or less	nil
Purchase price £60,001 to £250,000	1%
Purchase price £250,001 to £500,000	3%
Purchase price £500,001 or more	4%

In certain areas with high levels of deprivation, Stamp Duty Land Tax is only levied on properties over £150,000; this is known as Disadvantaged Areas Relief. If your property is worth between £60,000 and £150,000 you need to find out if it falls into this category, by doing a postcode check on the Inland Revenue's website. Log on to [www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk](http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk), click on 'Individuals and employees', then on 'Stamp Duty Land Tax postcode search'.

If your property is worth around, or just over, one of the thresholds for Stamp Duty Land Tax, it may be difficult to sell at a price just above the threshold. This is particularly true of properties worth just over £250,000 when the rate of tax jumps from one per cent to three per cent. For example, the tax on a property selling for £250,000 comes to £2,500; whereas if the property sells for only £500 more, i.e. £250,500, the amount of tax jumps to £7,515. In these circumstances, you could add a generous percentage to your asking price in the hope of achieving well above the threshold. However, most buyers get to know what a property is worth and are unlikely to be fooled and your property could remain unsold. Another alternative is to agree a price just below the threshold and negotiate an additional sum for fixtures and fittings which are not liable to tax. This is unlikely to result in a large uplift in the

total proceeds of the sale because the Inland Revenue has recently tightened the rules on fixtures and fittings with the result that buyers are now reluctant to pay over the odds. If the Revenue considers that the sum paid for fixtures and fittings is inflated they will conduct an investigation, as this amounts to tax evasion. If you are planning longer term, your best bet is to find a way of improving your property that will lift it into a higher price bracket.

## Producing the property particulars

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There is no right or wrong way of writing property particulars. In the end it is down to personal style and what the written description of your property is trying to achieve. It is worth surfing the net and downloading some examples from estate agents. Try large estate agent websites such as [www.propertyfinder.com](http://www.propertyfinder.com) and [www.rightmove.co.uk](http://www.rightmove.co.uk). You will be surprised at the different approaches which estate agents take to writing property details. If you want to contrast two very different approaches, compare the details prepared by south east London estate agents, Wooster & Stock ([www.woosterstock.co.uk](http://www.woosterstock.co.uk)) with London-wide estate agents, Winkworth ([www.winkworth.co.uk](http://www.winkworth.co.uk)). Wooster & Stock produce very detailed property particulars with a lot of photographs. The written descriptions are thorough and take the reader on a step-by-step journey through the property. Winkworth, on the other hand, simply give a very brief description of the property and a list of the rooms with their dimensions.

There is nothing accidental in the different approaches these two estate agents use. The idea behind the Wooster & Stock method is to give people as much information as possible so that only viewers genuinely interested in buying the property decide to make an appointment to view it. The Winkworth approach is the opposite; it is designed to keep information away from potential buyers at this early stage in order to persuade as many people as possible to view the property.

Whatever approach you take, there are a number of essential items that your property details must include and others that you are advised to include if you want to produce a professional job that competes with or exceeds the standard set by the top estate agents. These are:

### 1 The address of the property with the postcode

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If you are worried about security, you can omit the name of the property or the number in the street. But it is important to include the postcode because viewers need this information if they want to research the area.

### 2 Your contact details

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Buyers need to be able to contact you easily, so give as many telephone numbers as possible: your home number, your work number, your mobile number and your email address. You can omit your home number if you are worried about security, but if you do, make sure you keep your mobile switched on while you are selling your home.

### 3 The price of the property and tenure

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If you have followed the advice above, you should now have no difficulty setting a price. Make sure you say whether the price is for a freehold or leasehold. This applies only in England and Wales; in Scotland, the concepts of leasehold and freehold do not apply as all property is simply owned.

### 4 Details of the lease

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If the property is leasehold (England and Wales only), indicate when the lease was granted and for how many years, because this can affect the price. For example, some short leasehold properties with, say, less than 25 years left on the lease can appear cheap, so it would be misleading to omit this information. However, most leases are granted for 99 years or 125 years, so a typical description might be: 'Lease granted for 125 years from 1st January 1990', which buyers can work out means that the lease doesn't expire until the year 2115 and in 2005 there are 110 years still to run. The important date is not the date on which the lease was signed but the date which the lease runs from; for example, a lease signed on 28th April 1990 might actually run from 25th March. The lease will say something along these lines: 'a lease granted for a term of 125 years from 25th March 1990'.

### 5 A picture of the property

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They say a picture is worth a thousand words, and this is certainly true when you are selling a property. Most potential buyers will reject details which don't have at least one picture of the property. It is also a good idea to include photographs of the key rooms such as the kitchen, living room and main bedroom, the garden and any other rooms which you think might tempt in the buyers.

Aim to produce your details digitally on a computer so that you can produce both paper-based and web-based versions. Pictures can be taken with any camera, although a wide-angle lens helps when you are taking pictures of confined spaces, but don't overdo the wide angle as this can also create a misleading picture. This is the moment to think about investing in a digital camera. Treat the cost – you can buy a camera which will do the job for around £150 – as a marketing expense and remind yourself you will have the use of it long after you have sold your property. The other alternative is to use photographic prints and scan them in to your computer. If you don't have a scanner, you can take them to a photographic shop, including those based in larger chemist shops, and have them put onto a CD which you can then load onto your computer. With all this new technology, it is possible to crop pictures, but don't do this if it creates a misleading picture or results in some unattractive feature being removed.



### Tips for producing good photographs

- ✓ Take advantage of bright, sunny days and avoid using flash for interior shots.
- ✓ If there is only one source of light in a room, say from a bow window, shoot the picture towards the window and then use a flash.
- ✓ Ceiling lights will create overall, soft lighting. Lamps can be used to highlight areas of a room; control the illumination by using different wattage bulbs.
- ✓ Create sharply focused pictures by using a tripod. Or stand the camera on a solid surface to avoid camera shake.
- ✓ Use conservatively a wide-angle lens (28-35mm for a 35mm camera) and ensure the camera is level.
- ✓ Where space is limited, consider taking interior shots from the outside, shooting through an open window.
- ✓ Remove your car from the street for exterior shots; otherwise take the shot from a gap between parked cars.
- ✓ Leave status-symbol cars on the driveway to emphasise the existence of off-street parking.
- ✓ If the garden is overlooked, take the shot from the bottom of the garden towards the house, or downwards from an upstairs window.
- ✓ Minor editing, such as removing a temporary feature like a washing line from a picture, is permissible.
- ✓ Don't be afraid of taking one or two artistic shots, for example, a view in to a room from a hall or corridor, or a front path and attractive front door, if this creates a good impression.

## 6 The brief description

Anyone who has ever gone property hunting knows that you need to plough through endless details very quickly. This applies whether you are browsing the property websites or peering through estate agents' windows. What the buyer needs to know quickly is whether the property is detached or semi-detached or terraced; how many bedrooms it has; how many reception rooms and bathrooms it has; how big the garden is; whether there is a garage or off-street parking; whether it is freehold or leasehold; and for flats which floor it is on (unless it is on the fifth floor and there is no lift when this information is better omitted). Keep these initial details brief, although it is always worth putting in any big selling point such as a south-facing garden or ensuite bathroom. Use numerals when referring to the number of rooms because these are quicker to read than words. Also remember to include whether your property has any restrictions on it, such as being a listed building.

A typical brief description might read:

*'A Victorian freehold terrace house with 2 reception rooms, 4 bedrooms, one with an ensuite bathroom, plus a family bathroom and a further shower room. The kitchen has been extended with large folding doors leading to a south-facing garden.'*

Or:

*'A 6-bedroom, double-fronted semi-detached freehold Edwardian house, with 4 reception rooms, a conservatory, a large country-style kitchen, an 80-foot walled garden, a single garage and off-street parking for a further 2 cars.'*

Or:

*'A 2-bedroom leasehold flat with 2 ensuite bathrooms, a 20-foot reception room, a sunny roof terrace on the 5th floor of a purpose-built portered block with a lift.'*



**These days, it is essential to get your property details listed on the internet. It is estimated that in some areas as many as 70 per cent of all property sales are first seen in this way. Lawpack offers a convenient and affordable service for advertising your property on the net. You can apply for this service using the enclosed leaflet or through the dedicated website at [www.lawpack.co.uk/property](http://www.lawpack.co.uk/property).**

You could also list your property on one of the many private property sale websites that have sprung up over the last few years. These vary greatly in both size and quality, and you should carefully research their effectiveness before parting with your money. Research these sites in tandem with preparing your property details as you will be required to file your details to these sites in a particular format.

## 7 Free yourself of estate agent jargon

Keep your property details simple and free of flowery estate agent language and catch phrases. Go through your details and check your use of adjectives. In property details adjectives such as 'delightful' or 'unique' (and don't use that one unless the feature is truly unique!) clutter up what you are trying to say and add nothing to the overall impression you want to create. Here is a list of descriptions and words frequently used by estate agents but which are better avoided entirely or used only sparingly (also see section on page 45 about property misdescriptions):

- prestigious
- distinctive character
- exceptional levels of comfort
- epitomy of elegance
- charming
- attractive
- well-appointed
- stylish
- impressive
- with the benefit of...
- useful
- good-sized
- splendid
- delightful
- outstanding
- unique
- well-presented
- early viewing is highly recommended
- generously proportioned

## 8 The location of the property and a brief description of the area

Locate the property by reference to nearest towns, major roads, train and London Underground stations. For example, a property in the Clifton area of Bristol, could be described as being in *'north-west Bristol; two miles from the centre of the city; half a mile*

*from Clifton Down station; two miles from Junction 3 on the M32 and seven miles from Bristol airport*; whereas a country property could be described as *'standing back from the B1135 between the market towns of Dereham and Wymondham, which has a regular train service to Cambridge'*. It is not necessary to go into enormous detail here about the area. Include brief details of the location of the nearest high street and supermarket shopping. In the case of Clifton, this would say: *'Clifton village has local and speciality shopping, bars and restaurants and there is high street shopping in the centre of Bristol and at the Cribbs Causeway shopping mall at Junction 17 on the M5'*; whereas in the case of the country property this would say: *'Wymondham and Dereham both offer local shopping which meets most everyday needs and there is high-street shopping in Norwich, 12 miles away'*.

If you are selling a family home include information about local schools, both state and independent.

Think about including a map. In an urban area, a map which includes the nearest station is a help to buyers coming by public transport. In rural areas a road map is more useful; these can be downloaded from the internet from sites such as [www.multimap.com](http://www.multimap.com) or [www.streetmap.co.uk](http://www.streetmap.co.uk). These sites also provide information on transport links, giving the distance to the nearest Underground and train stations, motorway and airport. With rural properties on large plots you might want to also include the map which forms part of the Land Registry entry for your property. Both large- and small-scale maps can be useful to potential buyers not familiar with rural locations.

## 9 The dimensions of the rooms

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Buyers expect to see the dimensions of the rooms on the details and because not everyone is familiar with metric measurements, it is a good idea to include both metric and imperial. If you decide to have a floor plan drawn up (see point 10 below) this will provide you with all the room measurements you need. If you decide to do your own measuring, all you need is a good-quality measuring tape and two people, or one person and a sonic measure which takes accurate measurements using a sonic beam. A basic sonic measure which is adequate for measuring properties costs around £30.

If your room is an odd shape, it is permissible to show the longest or widest dimension, but this must be mentioned adding after the measurement a phrase such as 'at the widest' or 'into the bay', as appropriate.

## 10 The floor plan

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It is not essential to produce a floor plan but it does help buyers, not only before they view the property but also afterwards when it acts as a useful aide-memoire. Not everyone is at ease reading a floor plan, so if a viewer shows interest in your property, it is a good idea to sit them down with the floor plan and take them through it, which will help them retain important information about how the spaces and any unusual changes of level work.

Floor plans cost between £50 and £100 to get drawn up, less if you already have architectural drawings of your property, and most firms offering this service can arrange

to have one drawn up in a couple of days. Floor plans include all the room measurements, so if you do decide to have a floor plan drawn up, you won't need to measure the rooms yourself.

A trial version of a floor-plan and interior design software program is included on the free CD in this Kit. Other floor-plan services are available online but most of these are only recommended for broadband users who can download the large programs.

## 11 The area of the property

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These days buyers are sophisticated and some like to compare property prices using the cost of each square foot or square metre of space. By establishing a baseline for property prices in a particular area using this measure, buyers can easily work out if a property is cheap or expensive for the area. For example, if the average price per square foot in your area is £200, the selling price of a 1,500-square-foot house should be £300,000. It follows that a similar-sized house on the market at £280,000 is either cheap or needs work, and another on the market at £325,000 is either in very good condition or is overpriced.

If you decide to get a floor plan drawn up, make sure you ask for the area of the house, both in metric and imperial measurements. If you opt to measure your own property, you can produce a rough approximation of the floor space by adding up the area of all the rooms you have measured and adding 20 per cent for 'circulation' space, i.e. hallways and staircases. By all means quote this figure in your property details but with the caveat that it is an approximate figure.

Finally, remember to get someone to proofread your particulars.

### What estate agents rarely mention but which your viewers will find useful

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#### 1. The name, address, telephone number and website of the local authority

Viewers who want to research the area will be grateful for this simple piece of information.

#### 2. The name, address, telephone number and website of the local education authority

This is a useful piece of information to include if you are selling a family property. The local education authority could be your local council or in rural areas it is more likely to be the county council.

#### 3. Council Tax band and the current year's bill

Properties are placed in one of eight Council Tax bands: 'A' for the cheapest and up to 'H' for the most expensive. Council Tax rates vary depending on the local authority and the band in which your property falls. You can find this information on your most recent Council Tax bill. If you claim a discount, perhaps because you live alone, make sure you include the sum for the full Council Tax bill rather than the discounted amount you pay, and say for which year it applies.

#### 4. Annual utility bills

This information gives viewers an idea of how much the property costs to run. Include figures for the previous year's electricity, gas and water bills, mentioning if, for some reason, they were not typical. (North American estate agents invariably include this information on their property details, but for some strange reason UK estate agents never do.)

#### 5. Service charges

If you live in a block of flats or on an estate of properties there may be an annual service charge covering insurance and maintenance charges and, in some cases, a sinking fund for major repairs. And for leasehold property (England and Wales only) there is a small ground rent payment. Services charges can be a financial burden and it is best if potential buyers know these figures in advance rather than later when they can be a cause of sales falling through. If your last year's service charge bill included a charge for major works, give the amount of the bill and state what it was for. If there were exceptional items on the last service charge bill, consider also including figures from previous, more normal years.

Buyers of freehold houses may have to pay service charges if the property is in a gated estate or is in a rural area and is accessed over a private right of way.

## The Property Misdescriptions Act

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The Property Misdescriptions Act 1991 makes it a criminal offence for estate agents and property developers to dishonestly and misleadingly describe property they are selling. The Act does not apply to individuals who sell their homes privately. However, this does not mean that you can be economical with the truth. In fact, quite the reverse. If someone buys your property on the basis of misleading information you have given them either verbally or in writing, or in the property details you have written, they could sue you for damages for misrepresentation; if they discover the misrepresentation after contracts have been exchanged (or 'missives concluded' in Scotland) but before completion, they may even be entitled to pull out of the deal.

A quick look at the provisions of the Act, which in effect extends to estate agents and property developers the same obligations that a private seller has, is a good guide to what is acceptable practice when describing a property for sale. You must make no misrepresentations of fact, and if you don't know the answer to a particular question asked by the buyer, it is better to say so than to make up what you think they might want to hear. The Act can be downloaded from HMSO's website [www.hmsso.gov.uk](http://www.hmsso.gov.uk) and is enforced by local Trading Standards Officers. One local authority has produced the following guidance for estate agents and property developers which provides useful tips as to what is acceptable practice under the Act:

- A property can be presented in its best light, provided it doesn't mislead.
- Terms such as 'immaculate condition' or 'recently decorated' can be used but they must refer to the whole property unless otherwise stated.

- Attractive features can be used as selling points but not to the exclusion of bad features if the overall result is a misleading description.
- You are not required to disclose a leaky roof, say, but your description taken as a whole must not give the impression that the property does not have this defect.
- Don't stretch geographic areas, such as Cotswolds, Peak District or Lake District, beyond their accepted boundaries. Use instead the correct postal address. And if a property is in one county geographically but its postal address is in an adjoining county, both should be given equal prominence.
- Phrases such as 'easy access' or 'close to' or estimated journey times to local amenities or transport links should be avoided in favour of the actual distance in miles, i.e. '10 miles to junction 12 on the M4', or 'six miles from Cirencester'.
- If a house has open fields on three sides but an abattoir or a nightclub on the fourth it is best not to refer to the outlook at all, and if you use photographs, clearly label them.
- Photographs can be misleading. Avoid using a very wide-angle lens which can make a property look much larger than it is and avoid digitally enhancing a photograph or cropping if the resulting effect is misleading. For example, do not include a view of the garden from the bedroom window if there is a rubbish dump next door and you have cropped the picture to remove it.

Details produced by estate agents normally include a disclaimer and although this may not be legally binding, it is useful to remind buyers that even with the best will in the world, mistakes can be made and buyers should beware and check for themselves the accuracy of all measurements and statements.

A disclaimer could include the following:

- *These particulars are intended to give a fair and substantially correct overall description for the guidance of intending purchasers and do not constitute an offer or part of a contract. Prospective purchasers and/or lessees ought to seek their own professional advice.*
- *All descriptions, dimensions, areas, references to condition and necessary permissions for use and occupation and other details are given in good faith and are believed to be correct, but any intending purchasers should not rely on them as statements or representations of fact, but must satisfy themselves by inspection or otherwise as to the correctness of each of them.*
- *All measurements are approximate.*

## Producing a For Sale board

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The For Sale board is one of your most important marketing tools. It is estimated that around a third of all sales are generated from a For Sale board. This is because most people move within a relatively small area and will have spotted the board as they go about their daily lives; while property hunters who have decided to move to your area often start their search with a recce looking for For Sale boards.



Making your own For Sale board is a simple matter but bear in mind a home-made board may be less attractive than a professionally printed sign. Start by working out what information you need to include. Useful items are:

- Prominent 'For Sale' slogan.
- Include 'Private Sale'.
- If you don't want people knocking on your door, include 'Viewing by Appointment Only'.
- Contact details. For security reasons, you should think carefully before you include your home phone number. The best option is a mobile telephone number or you could use your work number.



Other good ideas include:

- If you have produced your own website, or you have listed your property on a property website, include the web address.
- If you decide to leave a pile of your property details in your porch or attached to your front door or gate, indicate on the board that people are welcome to take a copy. If you leave your property details outside for all comers to pick up, again be careful about which pictures you include.

A brightly coloured background works best and don't be afraid to use different colours. Get some tips on design by looking at local estate agents boards. If you are selling a flat, you can either put the For Sale board in your window or on the gate outside your block.



Lawpack has taken the hassle out of making your own For Sale sign by making available professionally printed, colour boards that can be personalised with your own number. You can order your board using the leaflet included in this Kit or through the dedicated website at [www.lawpack.co.uk/property](http://www.lawpack.co.uk/property).





A plethora of For Sale boards can ruin the appearance of a street. Recently a number of estate agents have been fined for putting up bogus For Sale boards, often outside blocks of flats where the existence of a flat for sale is difficult to verify. This demonstrates just what a powerful marketing tool estate agents think the For Sale board is. In most places – the exceptions are certain Conservation Areas in Bath and in the London boroughs of Camden, Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea – For Sale boards do not require planning permission. However, certain rules do generally apply in England and Wales (but not in Scotland). These are laid down in the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1992. Schedule 3 Class 3 (A) of the Regulations refers to estate agents boards; it states that:

- there should only be one board;
- on residential property the board must not exceed 0.5 square metres, or 0.6 square metres if two boards are joined together;
- no board is allowed to project more than 1 metre from a building;
- all boards must be removed 14 days after completion of the sale.

## Deciding where to advertise

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### Newspapers

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Advertising in newspapers is one idea. Check out the following and don't forget to ask for any special deals or cut-price rates for more than one entry and any free links to websites:

#### 1. Your local newspaper

Many local newspapers now have weekly property supplements which include property advertising from estate agents and private buyers. This is likely to be the cheapest form of advertising and if you think your home will sell to a local buyer, it is probably the most effective. Advertisements which include pictures are more expensive but are worth the extra expense. Ask for details of how much it will cost to run a two- or three-week campaign.

#### 2. A regional newspaper

In some areas of the country, the regional daily newspaper has a very strong presence, and many of these now have weekly property supplements which include good quality editorial coverage. For example, Birmingham has the *Birmingham Post* (tel: 0121 233 0555), Bristol the *Western Mail* (tel: 029 2022 3333), Glasgow *The Herald* (tel: 0141 302 7000), Liverpool the *Liverpool Echo* (tel: 0151 227 2000) and London the *Evening Standard* (tel: 020 7938 3838).

#### 3. A national newspaper

Like local and regional newspapers, many national newspapers now have well-resourced property supplements which take private property advertisements. The best known is the *Sunday Times* (tel: 020 7481 4000) but it is also the most expensive.

#### 4. *Loot*

Loot is an advertising newspaper famous for its free advertisements and is bought by bargain hunters who love to browse its small classified ads. It has editions covering London, most of the home counties, Manchester and Liverpool. It also advertises properties for sale but this is not a free service.

#### 5. *Daltons Weekly*

Daltons Weekly and its associated website [www.daltonsproperty.com](http://www.daltonsproperty.com) has a thriving property advertisement section.

#### 6. Specialist newspapers and magazines

If your property has specialist interest think of placing an advertisement in a newspaper or magazine read by people who share your interest. For example, if your house has stables, try a riding magazine. Or perhaps your house has a particularly beautiful garden and you are keen to sell to someone who will carry on the gardening tradition – a small advertisement in one of the top gardening magazines might be effective.

## The internet

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Today the internet is hard to ignore. In a few short years the internet has become the pre-eminent medium for advertising property for sale. Along with For Sale boards, the internet is the place where most house hunters start their search, and in some areas and in some sectors of the market as many as 70 per cent of initial enquiries are generated from the internet. There are now many property websites with powerful search features which allow you to browse property details according to a number of pre-selected criteria which normally include type of property, location and price.

However, most of these sites are owned or controlled by estate agents and are not open to private sellers. But don't despair because there are now many websites catering for private sellers. These websites offer the facility of placing your advertisement on their own website but more importantly they can sneak your details onto many of the big national property websites as well, claiming access to over two million property hunters a month. Property sites are continually being created and indeed closing down, so for an up-to-date guide to those available visit [www.lawpack.co.uk/property](http://www.lawpack.co.uk/property).



**When looking for a website on which to advertise your property, look for a package which offers access to as many national property websites as possible. However, it is important to check the effectiveness of the service. You can do this by locating a couple of properties on the private sale website and then checking if these properties actually appear on the national websites as promised.**

## Questions to ask before signing up with a private sales website

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**1. How long does my advertisement run for?**

Some of the basic services only offer to advertise your property for a month. Better to go for the level of service which offers to advertise your property until it is sold.

**2. Which national websites will my property be advertised on?**

The basic level of service normally only offers advertising on the private property sale website which may not get many hits. Go for the service which offers to put your advertisement onto national property websites, but do verify their claims.

**3. Do I get to know how many times my property has been searched?**

It is useful to know how many times your details are being looked at because if you are getting lots of hits but this is resulting in few viewings, you may need to change the wording or the picture.

**4. How many pictures do I get?**

When someone clicks the 'more details' button on your property details, you want to be able to show them as many views of your property as possible.

**5. How do potential buyers arrange a viewing?**

Some websites field all initial enquiries while others require you to put your own contact details. If you want to remain in total control of your property sale, opt for a site which allows you to include your own contact details.

**6. Do I get my own website?**

Having your own individual website is useful but unless it is very well constructed it may not come up on many people's casual searches. However, you can put your website address on your For Sale board.

**7. Do my details include a floor-plan?**

This is a useful addition to put on your property details. However, few private property sale websites offer this service unless you are happy to pay for a top-of-the range service including a site visit.

**8. Should I include a 360° virtual tour?**

The quality of virtual tours has improved dramatically over the last couple of years, but unless you are selling a large or expensive house, the expense is not justified. A full selection of photographs can give a very good impression and is the cheaper option.

**9. How much text am I allowed?**

The amount of text varies with the level of service and the website. Make sure you have enough to cover your needs.

**10. How long before my details are listed?**

The length of time it takes for your details to appear on the private sale website and then on the national websites varies with the level of service and the website. With some it takes a couple of days; with others the listings are immediate. However, don't take it for granted and always check your details have been listed.

**11. What other services might be useful to ask about?**

Some websites offer an email and/or SMS text messaging service, paper and/or pdf brochures, and hyperlinks through to your own website. These are useful extras which you might decide you want.

## Fixing a marketing budget

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It is easy to work out how much you are saving by not using an estate agent, but then it becomes easy to get carried away and over-spend on your own marketing efforts, with glossy brochures and 360° tours. In England and Wales, most estate agents charge commission of between 1.5 per cent and 2.25 per cent. If you set your own budget at well below this, say at 0.5 per cent, this would allow you to spend £940 if you are selling an average property, currently worth £187,971; £1,250 on a property worth £250,000; £2,500 on a property worth £500,000 and £3,750 on a property worth £750,000. In fact, even with the most expensive properties, you probably won't need to spend as much as this.

In Scotland, estate agents' rates are lower, typically starting at 0.75 per cent; for cheaper properties therefore, bear in mind that savings may only work out at hundreds rather than thousands of pounds.

Your main priorities will be:

- Erecting a For Sale board – estimated cost £40.
- Getting exposure on national property websites by signing up with a private property sale website – estimated cost £150.
- An advertisement in your local newspaper – estimated cost £100.

This comes to a total of £290 to which you will have to add other expenses which might include:

- Report giving the recent sale prices of properties in your area – estimated cost £18.
- Sonic tape measure – estimated cost £30.
- Digital camera – estimated cost £150.
- Location map – estimated cost £30.
- Floor-plans which some private sale websites include – cost around £50.

Even if you bought all these goods and services this would only add another £278 to your budget, making a grand total of £568.

When preparing your marketing budget, make a list of all the goods and services you could buy, ticking those which you think are essential, putting a question mark against those which you might consider and a cross against those you won't be needing. Work out your budget for essentials, leaving something spare in case you need to adjust your strategy during your campaign. Then add in items marked with a question mark if you can afford them and you are sure they will help sell your property. Happily, the resulting figure will come to a fraction of what it would cost to use an estate agent.

### Items you need to have ready for when you get an offer

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In England and Wales there can be long delays between agreeing an offer and exchanging contracts which puts a huge strain on the property buying and selling process and is responsible for many deals falling through. Thanks to the binding nature of offers in Scotland the situation is less strained; but there can occasionally be delays between agreeing an offer and concluding the missives.

Sellers can speed up the whole process, thus lessening the risk of a deal falling through, by preparing a pack of documents for buyers and their solicitors which will significantly reduce the time between offer and exchange of contracts (or conclusion of missives in Scotland). This pack should include:

- Planning permission for alterations
- Listed building consents
- Building control consents covering structural alterations
- Damp proof and/or woodworm treatment guarantees
- Gas or electricity test certificates
- Evidence that the boiler has been regularly serviced
- Party wall agreements