

A Practical Guide to Choosing the Right Estate Agent to Sell your Home

When the time comes to sell your home, how do you choose which estate agent to appoint? You have a tremendous choice of agencies and, on the surface, most appear to do more or less the same thing. But there is far more to moving than simply finding a buyer, and it is critical that when the time comes, you chose the right agent for you, your property and your situation.

A good starting point is to find an agent who clearly understands the stresses involved in moving and who accepts that you are likely to want to sell your home with minimal stress and for the most attractive figure the current market will pay within a convenient timescale.

Many agents make unrealistic claims and rash promises, so here are some guidelines which we hope will help you choose the right agent to sell your home.

Local Expertise: Buyers overwhelmingly prefer to work with local experts, whom they regard as “in the know”, so choose a well-established local agent, and preferably one that has the backing of a national support network.

Valuation: Beware! It is well-known that some agents deliberately over-value in order to impress you to secure your instruction, so don't fall into the trap of simply choosing the agent with the highest valuation. An inflated price attracts the wrong buyers to your property, and the right buyers never see it, resulting in the property going stale on the market. This often leads to the property falling below its true market value.

The issue of correct valuation is paramount. It is critical that you appoint an agent who not only has a track record of successful sales in the area (not just properties on the market) but also has a thorough working knowledge of current buyer activity, and who can interpret prevailing market trends to your advantage.

Commission: Many sellers are unaware of the considerable differences between agencies and have no alternative than to decide whom to appoint on the level of commission charged. This is often a huge mistake and is a bit like buying a car purely on price considerations. All cars go from A to B, but the vast price differential is related to issues of quality, reliability, security, performance and the whole driving experience.

The same is true of estate agents. Some agents simply cannot afford to provide a level of service that is either effective, or makes the selling experience hassle-free. For example, they are often the last firms to provide adequate staff training or post-offer support, resulting in missed offers, slower sales and lower prices. Cut-price estate agents usually require a higher turnover of stock in order to survive and they are therefore likely to be less concerned about securing the best price for their clients.

The net amount in your pocket is surely more important than the percentage fee charged!

Communication: Too many agencies only communicate good news! That's easy! Good agents are in frequent contact with their clients and have the guts to advise you if anything needs to be done to improve your chances of an impressive sale.

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Enthusiasm: If an agent is not enthusiastic about your property – don't instruct them. A positive approach to selling your home is essential if buyers are to be inspired into buying your home.

The Directors: Choose an agent that is owned and run by property professionals who are interested in your sale, rather than by people who are simply employed to build an empire. Could you get hold of a Director if you needed to? Sawdye and Harris is personally run by its Director, Kate Griffin. Her telephone number is 01364 652 304.

6-day Opening: It seems ridiculous to us that any estate agent should be closed on a Saturday. This is the one time that working people can discuss their needs in a relaxed environment and view property during daylight hours. Why consider an agent who is only open five days a week?

Viewings: Does the agent accompany all viewings? What about evenings and weekends? It is incredible that so few estate agents provide accompanied viewings. Apart from the obvious security issues, only when agents accompany buyers around a property can they probe, listen and understand what the buyer really wants. Agents who develop a picture of the buyers' preferences, in addition to those few key ones that were registered, tend to have a much higher viewing/sale ratio and do not frustrate their clients with unsuitable viewings. *(Our policy is to accompany all buyers around a property wherever possible, and provide prompt and constructive feedback.)*

Floorplans: Good estate agents provide floorplans on their particulars. They are far more helpful and accurate than the flowery descriptions some agents still use, and buyers find them invaluable. Floorplans improve the quality of viewings because they weed out clearly unsuitable purchasers and can motivate those who might otherwise not have viewed your property.

Avoid Virtual Tours: We choose *not* to use virtual tours of our clients' property on our website. We do not believe that anyone will buy your property unless they actually step inside and have a look for themselves. Virtual tours can prevent viewings as there appears to be no need for the buyer to physically visit your home. Additionally, virtual tours can make a property look much smaller than it actually is.

Advertising: Make sure you choose an agent who advertises properties similar to yours in the local press. Chances are that they will already have a large pool of buyers who have enquired about similar homes to yours. However, be wary of the agent who promises to advertise your property every week with a postage stamp size ad! This is simply paying lip-service to you and has very little to do with marketing strategy as it can cheapen your property and lead to over-exposure.

SMS Text Messaging: Make sure that you appoint an agent who employs the latest technology to ensure that their buyers are offered your property first. *One of the reasons for our high viewing rate is that within minutes of taking a property onto our books, details are sent as a text message to all suitable buyers.*

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Open House: Open Houses are planned viewing times that, when marketed correctly; often attract large numbers of buyers who might not otherwise have viewed a property. So for maximum exposure, choose an agent who uses the open house method as part of their marketing strategy.

Buyer Agent: Use an agency that has paying buyer clients as well as sellers. These buyers are so keen to buy that they employ the specialist agent to find them a property. And no – there is never a conflict of interests, and in certain circumstances it could even mean that we are able to sell your property without charge!

Lettings: When you are choosing a selling agent, do make sure you choose one who also does lettings. Letting agents have long-term buy-to-let property investors permanently on their books who buy regularly. They know the agent, and they make quick decisions and reliable offers. They prefer to buy through an agency that does lettings because it is easy for them to let out their new investment. Also, many tenants also register to buy. Good lettings agents build strong relationships with their tenants and are in a good position to help them buy one of their own selling clients' properties.

It also means that should you decide to rent your property out instead of selling it the same agent can handle both – whichever comes along first!

In-House Conveyancing: One of the greatest frustrations in moving is legal delay, along with poor follow-up of linked transactions and poor communication of progress to the client. Good estate agents have acted decisively on this point and now employ (as we do) their own team of conveyancers in-house. This not only speeds up the sale considerably, but substantially reduces fall-through rates and ensures that you are always in the loop. As soon as your property goes on the market the conveyancing team will already be calling for title deeds and mortgage documents, and putting a search in hand in order to make the sale as smooth as possible when a buyer is found.

Priority Removal: Choose an agency that has close ties with a local removal firm and check whether they provide reserved client moving dates and preferential rates.

Home Staging: If you are going to maximise your chances of selling quickly and at the highest possible price the market will pay, then it makes sense to use an agent who employs a specialist home staging expert. A home stager is trained to work with you to make the very best use of your existing resources to maximise the saleability of your property – critical in a crowded marketplace.

After-Sales Liaison: Some agents think the sale is done when a buyer is found, and some sales negotiators are incentivised to arrange sales, but not necessarily to see them through to completion. Many a sale has been lost due to poor follow-up or inadequate liaison with surveyors or solicitors. About 35% of sales arranged in England and Wales fall through (*although far fewer than this in our case*). So choose an agent that provides a dedicated sales progression service that employs people who are trained to spot potential difficulties long before they arise, and who spend 100% of their time working towards a successful outcome.

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Memberships: Make sure you employ an estate agency that subscribes to the highest standards of professionalism, evidenced by membership of the RICS (Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors or the NAEA (National Association of Estate Agents).

NAEA (National Association of Estate Agents) membership: One of the most important aspects to consider is whether your agent is a member of the National Association of Estate Agents, which sets down a stringent code of conduct and provides extensive training for its members.

TEAM membership: Great advantage can be gained by appointing an agent who is part of the TEAM association of several hundred independent UK estate agencies. When you list your property with one TEAM agent, your details will be available to all other TEAM members' buyers. This increases the number of potential buyers actively encouraged to see your property. It also means your chosen agent can be involved in the sale *and* the purchase, with much greater control over a chain of linked sales.

Internet: The Internet is a valuable tool in estate agency. But don't be impressed by any "hit" claims. All web-enabled agents are exposed to many buyers, but how well do they qualify those buyers when it comes to discussing your home. It is very easy for a "buyer" to register a passing interest. It takes a well-trained agent to identify those buyers who have a serious and pressing need to move. Find out how easy it is for buyers to use the agent's property search facility by visiting their website yourself. Is it impressive, state-of-the-art, and does it provide useful buying and selling advice?

Property Portals: Over 80% of buyers use the internet when looking for a property. So you need to be sure that your property is found and promoted – quickly and easily. An agent might have a great website, and that's fine, but do they subscribe to the most effective property portals, because this is how buyers are directed to your property when they search using the search engines such as Google, Ask Jeeves, Excite or Yahoo. Two of the UK's market-leading sites are Propertyfinder and Fish4homes. Good agents list their clients' property on one of these, but very few list on both. But if you want maximum coverage leading to more buyers and therefore the chance to achieve the very highest price for your home, then you really should use an agent who subscribes to these major portals.

Ultimately, you are best served by choosing a locally based agent who holds values similar to your own.

One who has time to listen; one who understands your needs and concerns; one who can offer real, straight-talking advice; one who takes pride in his/her integrity, combined with a passion for results.

Needless to say, Sawdye and Harris not only fulfils, but also goes beyond many of the recommendations outlined here.

You owe it to yourself to make the right choice. So when the time comes to sell, choose wisely.

Choose Sawdye and Harris.

"Helping you with your move, not just your sale"

Choosing the Right Agent Checklist

When comparing which agent is the right one for you, we suggest you compare the benefits provided by each of any other agencies you may be considering.

Service	Benefit to You – The Seller	SAWDYE & HARRIS	Other Agency	Other Agency
Director available	Everyone at your service	✓		
Friendly Staff	A pleasure to work with	✓		
Regular communication	Keeps you informed, and reduces the stress of moving	✓		
Locally based Agency	Intimate knowledge of the area	✓		
Open 6 days a week	Capturing the best buyers when other agents are closed	✓		
Accompanied viewings	Helping buyers to buy. Saves you time and hassle. Increases security	✓		
Floorplans on property particulars	Weeds out unsuitable buyers, reducing stress	✓		
Extensive advertising in the newspaper	Maximises exposure of your property	✓		
Informative articles included in newspaper advertising	Engages the public	✓		
SMS Text messaging	Instant communication with maximum buyers	✓		
"Open Days" at houses for sale	Makes an impact and encourages viewings	✓		
Can act as agents for the buyer	Produces exceptionally keen pre-qualified buyers	✓		
Agency also does Lettings	Access to frequent purchasers and tenants wishing to buy	✓		
In-house Conveyancing	Speeds up the sale. Prevents 'fall-throughs'	✓		
Priority removal service via a local removal firm	Select the moving day of your choice	✓		
Independent Property Staging Advice	Maximises your sale prospects	✓		
Dedicated sales progressor	Significantly reduces the chance of a 'fall-through'	✓		
Directors/Partners RICS qualified	High standard of professional ethics	✓		
Member of the National Association of Estate Agents	Professional, well informed staff	✓		
Member of TEAM associated	Your home is 'multi-listed' with other agents, increasing exposure	✓		
Network of independent branches	Regional strength, local service, widest buyer sourcing ability	✓		
Multi-Portal Web Listing	For maximum exposure from the UK's leading property portals	✓		