



Buying or selling a home? When to call in the experts

Buying or selling a home is no simple business transaction. It takes a team of experts and professionals you can trust to achieve your goals and protect your interests.

Bringing in the right experts at the right time will ensure your purchase or sale goes smoothly and you don't pay a big personal and financial price. The experts you need may vary, but usually include the services of a Realtor, a lender, a lawyer, a home inspector and an insurance agent.

Selecting your team

Whether you're selling or buying, the first individual to get on your team should be a *Realtor*. In Ontario, a Realtor is a licensed real estate professional who is a member of a local real estate board as well as the Canadian Real Estate Association (CREA) and the Ontario Real Estate Association (OREA). This individual has successfully completed an intensive course of study and has skills, knowledge and experience that most buyers and sellers don't have.

Having a Realtor act on your behalf has many distinct advantages. The key benefit is that he or she can negotiate on your behalf, advise you on how to proceed with your purchase or sale and when to bring in the other experts and professionals you'll need.

The Realtor you select should be someone that knows the neighbourhood you live in or want to live in, has a good track record and will handle your sale or purchase as if it were their own.

One of the most important decisions you must make as a seller is deciding the asking price of your home. A Realtor can help you analyse your home and compare it with similar properties for sale or recently sold in your area. A Realtor will also develop a marketing plan for your home that may include open houses, advertising and listing options. As well, a Realtor will provide you with tips on small improvements you can make to help your home 'show' better to prospective buyers.

Few people buy a home for cash. Most usually combine savings with money borrowed from a *lender* through a financial arrangement called a mortgage. Your search for a lender should begin with your search for a home.

Your Realtor can assist you in evaluating the many mortgage options and getting financing at the best available interest rates and terms. When deciding which financial institution or lender to deal with, begin with your own bank, credit union or trust company -- they already know who you are. But shop around and compare what different lenders have to offer.

Whether you are a buyer or a seller, it's important to have a *lawyer* to represent your interests. That's why you should have one on stand by before you put your home on the market or begin your search for a new home. Real estate documents, such as the agreement of purchase and sale, are complex and should be reviewed by a lawyer who specializes in real estate transactions.

As a seller, it's wise to have a lawyer review an offer to purchase before signing anything. As a buyer, when an agreement is reached with a seller, a lawyer will help ensure you receive valid title to the property and that it is clear of any registered claims. Your lawyer will also calculate the amount of land transfer tax you will be required to pay as well as any adjustments to compensate the seller for prepaid bills.

If you are a buyer, you can avoid a lot of expensive surprises by bringing in a *home inspector* as a condition of your offer to purchase. The older the home you plan to purchase — even if it has been substantially upgraded — the more potential there is for problems. Being aware of any structural defects can help you decide whether you want to buy the property at all, or for the price you are considering.

For purchasers, another key member of the real estate team is the *insurance broker*. Creditors and mortgage lenders, almost without exception, require insurance on the home you buy before any purchase can be finalized. Start by approaching the same broker you use for other insurance policies — often, you are able to negotiate a better rate. But still shop around and ensure you get the coverage you need for what you want.