

# Tips before you make that offer to buy

By Naomi Caine

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House prices have plunged by 10.9% over the past year, according to the latest figures from the Halifax. It's the first double digit drop since 1983 and brings the cost of the average home down to £174,178 - the same as in February 2006.

The falls might be enough to tempt some people back into the market. Many buyers have been holding off as prices have been coming down. Of course, timing is always tricky. Most experts predict that market conditions will remain pretty tough as the economy struggles and confidence shakes. The recent attempt by the government to kickstart the housing market with a [temporary stamp-duty holiday](#) for homes worth less than £175,000 has also been dismissed by many as an empty gesture, more about politics than property.

But what if you want to move - or have to move? How do you make sure that you buy the right house at the right price? Here at MSN we have put together our top 10 tips.

**1. Get an offer before you make an offer** If you are selling as well as buying, make sure you have an offer on your existing property before you start the serious search for a new home. It will help you to be taken more seriously - and ultimately clinch the deal.

**2. Sort finance first** Many people leave the finances until the last minute - but that's a big mistake, particularly in today's market. There are not as many mortgage deals as in previous years. Lenders are also more fussy about their customers. So find out how much you can afford to borrow before you make any offers. Remember that it can take some time to arrange a mortgage. And if you aren't sure what you're doing, contact an independent mortgage broker.

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**3. Search for good legal help** It's worth taking the time to find a decent lawyer. [Ollie Hooper of Huntly Hooper, a property finding services, said: "A good lawyer is essential and can make or break a deal. Delays in the legal process will frustrate the vendor. Go by word of mouth and try to find someone efficient. The cheapest is not necessarily the best."](#)

**4. Shop around** View as many properties as possible - without getting the reputation as a time waster. You should register with a number of local agents and keep an eye on the internet and the local paper. If you shop around, you are more likely to spot a good deal and your market knowledge will help you in negotiations.

**5. Check out the area** If you are moving to a new town, find out all you can about neighbourhood life by reading the local newspapers and visiting websites such as [Upmystreet.com](#) and [Aboutmyplace.co.uk](#). You could even spend an evening in a pub, chatting to people who live in the area.

If you find a house you like, visit the property at various times of day and night - you don't always have to go inside. A street that is quiet during the day might be a meeting point for skateboarding youths in the evening. Or you could discover that you will be living on a noisy cut through for rush-hour traffic. What about local amenities? If you are a keen swimmer, is there a pool nearby? John Waldron, Connells Area Director, suggested you also time the journey to work from your potential new home.

Consider the position of the property, too. Jonathan Haward, managing director of County Homesearch, said: "It's impossible to change where the sun rises and sets, but it's important to know if you want the morning sun to stream into the kitchen, or you want to catch the evening sun in the back garden."

**6. Find out about the neighbours** Do they go out to work? Do they have children, dogs, a drum kit? The vendor should give honest answers, but you could always knock on the door if you are in any doubt.

**7. Be wary of renovation work** Think carefully before you buy a property that needs renovation, even if it seems like a bargain. Haward said: "A house that is run-down might be more expensive than you think - and will take up most of your spare time."

**8. You don't have to offer the asking price** Hooper said: "Look at recent sales of comparable properties in the area to get some idea of a realistic amount. And watch out for stamp duty thresholds!" Your offer could take you into a higher threshold, or you could negotiate a deal under the threshold.

**9. Fixtures and fittings** Be clear what the offer includes. Are you buying the carpets and curtains? What about the oven and the washing machine?

**10. Put the offer in writing...** ...and subject to contract and survey. Offers aren't legally binding but it's good practice to get everything in writing. It can also save disputes further down the line. If it's in writing, you also stand a better chance of persuading the vendor to take the property off the market, so no one can come along and gazump you.

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