

Transactions

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Recent Sale

Gaining the Upper Hand



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Phil Madden for The New York Times

With fewer homes on the market in [New York City](#), real estate agents say that the more desirable ones are often receiving multiple offers. Even if the bidding does not escalate to a “war,” it takes a savvy strategy to beat out the competition.

“It’s essentially like a game of chess,” said Robert Dankner, the president of Prime [Manhattan Residential](#). Paraphrasing the Chinese military treatise “The Art of War,” he added, “Many calculations lead to victory, and few calculations lead to defeat.”



When you don’t have unlimited resources, or at least lots of cash sitting around, gathering as much information as possible

about the market, the seller’s motivations and other buyers you’re competing against could give you a leg up in the bidding process. Knowing your own goals — and limits — is also important.

Mr. Dankner’s calculations when working with buyers involve not only determining the value of a property, but also understanding clients’ objectives — for instance, how long they plan to stay in the home and how desperately they want to be in a certain neighborhood — in order to assess what a particular home is worth to buyers.

“If a couple with two children wants to live in TriBeCa and have three real bedrooms and their budget is in the mid- to high \$2 million range and they’re not willing to do much work,” he said, “there are not many choices. They may have to pay a little bit more, or compromise and live somewhere else.”

Before submitting an offer, Mr. Dankner also tries to understand the seller’s motivations. In one case, he suggested that his buyers not try to amend the contract terms for a West Village town house that needed a gut renovation, to keep things simple for a seller who had inherited the property.

“We were actually the third-highest bidder,” he recalled, “but we got the property because of that approach. Delivering something that speaks to the seller’s needs and objectives — if you’re able to understand what they are — has tremendous value.”

Well-priced homes in sought-after neighborhoods, agents say, are often generating multiple bids, which can then lead the seller’s broker to ask for “best and final offers” from all interested parties.

“It’s really a way to add stability to a chaotic situation,” said Noah Rosenblatt, an independent buyer’s agent and the founder of the real estate data site [UrbanDigs.com](#). “Everyone has the same deadline.”

Interested buyers can then raise their bids, offer to put more money down, remove any financing contingency from the offer and adjust the closing date to meet sellers’ conditions. If the sellers need more time to move after closing, an offer to lease the apartment back to them for a short period after the closing date might help seal the deal.

Coming up with a number for a final bid involves a mixture of market calculations and strategy. Mr. Dankner says he tries to submit an unusual price in these “best and final” situations, suggesting his clients offer a little bit more than what he thinks the competition will bid. For a studio listed at \$449,000, he figured the other buyers would offer \$465,000; his clients bid \$467,003 and got the apartment.

Betsy Messerschmitt, a senior vice president of the Corcoran Group, says that when there are multiple bids, it is especially important to submit a financial statement with an offer, listing assets, liabilities and sources of income. She also writes the seller a letter on behalf of her clients, explaining the reason for the purchase (for instance, an expanding family) and the appeal of this particular apartment.

“The seller has to know you really want it,” Ms. Messerschmitt said. “It could be the sun it gets. It could be an ideal location for someone so they can walk to work.”