
THE ROOST® COMPETITIVE BUYER'S PLAYBOOK:



**10 TIPS TO WIN A
BIDDING WAR**

Introduction: Competing Smarter in Today's Housing Market

If you've been looking for a home in Ohio or Florida lately, you already know the truth: finding the right house is only half the battle. The real challenge is winning it.

Multiple offers are now the norm on well-priced homes in desirable neighborhoods. You tour a house on Thursday, love it, and by Friday evening there are already three offers on the table. By Saturday morning, it's under contract – and you're left frustrated, wondering what you could have done differently.

It's easy to assume the highest bidder always wins. But at ROOST Real Estate Co., we've seen time and again that the winning offer isn't always the one with the biggest number. More often, it's the offer that gives the seller the most confidence. Sellers want to know the deal will close on time, without unnecessary drama, and with terms that make their lives easier.

That means successful buyers need more than money – **they need strategy, preparation, and a trusted agent who knows how to compete.**

This guide is designed to show you exactly how to do that. Drawing on years of experience helping buyers succeed in highly competitive markets across Ohio and Florida, we've broken the process into **10 proven strategies** that consistently help our clients rise above the competition.

These aren't gimmicks or shortcuts. They're the practical, real-world steps that serious buyers use to win:

- **Building relationships that matter**
- **Preparing finances so sellers see you as a sure thing**
- **Using escalation clauses and appraisal gap coverage wisely**
- **Navigating the new commission rules to your advantage**
- **Adding value beyond the price you offer**
- **And much more.**

Each tip in this series is designed to stand alone – something you can read quickly and put into practice immediately – but when combined, they give you a complete playbook for competing and winning in today's market.

At ROOST Real Estate Co., our mission is to make sure you're not just in the game, but that you're positioned to win. Let's dive into the 10 strategies every buyer needs to know.

Tip 1: Cultivate Relationships – Yours & Your Agent’s

If you think winning in a competitive housing market is just about having the most money, think again. In reality, the relationships you and your buyer’s agent build in the market often matter just as much – and sometimes more – than the numbers on your offer sheet.

Real estate is still a people business. Sellers, and just as importantly, listing agents, want to work with buyers who bring certainty, professionalism, and calm to what can be a stressful process. This is especially true in the kinds of markets where ROOST Real Estate Co. operates in Ohio and Florida – where neighborhoods often have tight-knit real estate communities and top agents tend to know each other.

Why Relationships Matter

Here’s the truth: the listing agent is the gatekeeper to the seller. A listing agent who already knows and trusts your buyer’s agent will feel more confident recommending your offer – even if it’s not the absolute highest bid – because they’ve seen firsthand how that agent handles transactions.

Think of it from the seller’s perspective:

- Would you rather take a slightly lower offer from a buyer whose agent you trust to get the deal done without unnecessary drama?
 - Or roll the dice on a higher number with an unknown agent and unproven buyer?
- Most sellers – especially experienced ones – will choose the smoother, more predictable path.



Your Role as the Buyer

While your agent's reputation is critical, your own visibility and credibility also play a role. You don't have to become best friends with every agent in town, but you can:

- Attend open houses in your target neighborhoods
- Introduce yourself to listing agents in a professional, friendly way
- Ask smart, respectful questions that show you're serious and informed
- Keep your communication timely and polite

The goal is to be remembered for the right reasons — as a ready, reasonable, and reliable buyer.

Choosing the Right Agent

Your agent's market presence is part of your offer's strength. You want a buyer's agent who:

- Knows the local market inside and out
- Is respected by other agents
- Has a track record for getting deals to the closing table without unnecessary delays
- Communicates clearly, quickly, and professionally with all parties

At ROOST, we make sure our agents are connected, respected, and engaged in the community. This isn't about favoritism — it's about professional credibility that can make your offer more appealing to a seller deciding between similar bids.

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Bottom Line: Winning in a competitive market isn't just about money — it's about trust. The sooner you and your agent start building it, the better your chances when the right home hits the market.

Tip 2: Outprepare Your Competition - Why Smart Buyers Have Two Lenders

In a hot market, hesitation kills. If your financing isn't rock-solid and ready to go, you'll lose to someone who's better prepared – even if your offer is higher. Sellers want certainty, and the fastest way to give it to them is to be overprepared financially.

That's why smart buyers don't just get pre-approved with one lender – they get pre-approved with two. And ideally, at least one of those lenders should be known and respected by the listing agent.

Why Two Lenders Beats One

Most buyers stop after getting one pre-approval letter, figuring it's enough to write an offer. The problem? If that lender hits a snag – maybe their underwriting slows down, an appraisal drags, or a program guideline changes – your deal can stall or even fall apart.

Having two reputable lenders lined up means:

- **Speed:** If Lender A slows down, you can pivot to Lender B without starting from scratch.
- **Negotiating Power:** Sometimes lenders compete for your business with better rates, closing costs, or faster timelines.
- **Seller Confidence:** When we tell the listing agent, “Our buyer has two approved financing options – and one is a lender you've worked with before,” it sends a clear signal that you're not going to disappear because of financing drama.



The Value of a Known Lender

In competitive markets, the listing agent's perception of your lender matters almost as much as the pre-approval itself.

Experienced agents know which lenders get deals closed and which ones cause delays. They've seen the difference between smooth, on-time transactions and messy, last-minute collapses.

If the listing agent has a positive history with your lender — particularly a local or regional lender with a strong track record — your offer immediately looks safer. A trusted lender can add perceived value to your offer without changing a single number.

How to Set This Up

- **Choose the Right Lenders**

Work with your ROOST agent to identify two strong, reputable lenders — ideally, one is a trusted local or regional lender the listing agent may know, and the other is a solid national or specialized lender.

- **Get Fully Documented**

Go beyond a quick online pre-qualification. Provide tax returns, pay stubs, bank statements, and any other required documents so both lenders can fully underwrite you upfront.

- **Be Transparent**

Have your agent highlight both lenders in your offer package and make it clear to the listing agent that you have a backup option — one with a proven closing track record.

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Bottom Line: The market rewards buyers who are ready to move fast and bring trusted professionals to the table. Two lenders aren't twice the hassle — they're twice the confidence for the seller, and twice the security for you.

Tip 3: Escalation Clauses — How They Work (With Example)

In a competitive market, you rarely get a second chance to improve your offer once it's submitted. An escalation clause can keep you in the running without forcing you to guess blindly at what other buyers might be offering.

What an Escalation Clause Is

An escalation clause is language added to your purchase offer stating that you will automatically increase your offer price by a set amount above the highest competing offer — up to a specific maximum. It's a way to tell the seller:

“I'm willing to beat the highest offer you receive, but only to a certain point.”

How It Works in Practice

Let's say you offer \$300,000 on a home with an escalation clause that increases your offer by \$2,000 over any higher competing offer, up to a maximum of \$315,000.

If the seller receives another offer for \$305,000, your offer would automatically increase to \$307,000. If the highest competing offer is \$315,000 or above, your offer caps out at your pre-set limit and doesn't go higher.

Why Escalation Clauses Can Be Effective

- **You Stay Competitive Automatically**

No need to go back and forth — the clause adjusts your bid up to your limit.

- **You Protect Your Budget**

You can't accidentally go far beyond what you planned to spend.

- **You Send a Strong Signal**

A well-written escalation clause tells the seller you're serious and ready to win.



The Appraisal Gap Factor

In multiple-offer situations, especially when prices are escalating, it's common for the final contract price to rise above the appraised value determined by the lender's appraiser. This is called an appraisal gap.

Here's why it matters:

- Your lender will only loan based on the appraised value, not the contract price.
- If the appraisal comes in lower than your escalated price, you must cover the difference in cash – or renegotiate with the seller.

How to handle it:

- **Plan for Cash Coverage** – If you know you can cover part or all of a potential gap, make that clear in your offer.
- **Cap Your Risk** – You can include language saying you'll cover a gap only up to a certain amount (e.g., \$5,000 or \$10,000).
- **Know the Market** – Your agent can help you understand the likelihood of an appraisal gap based on comparable sales in the area.

Buyers who address the appraisal gap upfront often stand out to sellers as more secure and committed, reducing the chance the deal will fall apart after the appraisal.

Important Considerations

- **Verification Requirement**
Always require written proof of the competing offer that triggers your escalation.
- **Increment Amount**
Make it meaningful – \$500 might not sway a seller, but \$1,000–\$2,500 often can.
- **Market Awareness**
Your cap should reflect both your budget and realistic market value for the property.

When Escalation Clauses Work Best

They tend to be most effective when:

- The seller has multiple offers in hand.
- The property is priced fairly for the market.
- You've planned for any potential appraisal gap.

Bottom Line: An escalation clause can keep you competitive without endless bidding, but it's not a set-and-forget tool. The smartest buyers combine it with a clear appraisal gap strategy so the deal stays together all the way to closing.

Tip 4: New Commission Rules – A Buyer’s Opportunity

The 2024 commission rule changes shook the real estate industry. Buyers heard headlines about lawsuits, settlements, and new requirements, and many were left with the impression that buying a home just got harder. The truth? If you understand the changes – and work with an agent who knows how to navigate them – the new rules can actually work in your favor.

What Changed

As of August 2024, several important shifts took place:

- Buyer agent commissions are no longer published in MLS listings.
- Buyers must sign written representation agreements with their agents before touring homes.
- All fees are now openly negotiable between buyers and their agents.
- Sellers are not automatically required to pay the buyer’s agent commission.

For decades, the assumption was that the seller would cover both their own agent’s fee and the buyer’s agent’s fee. That system has been dismantled. Now, buyers have more responsibility up front – but also more control.

Why This Benefits Buyers

• You Choose the Value You Want

With written agreements, you know exactly what services your agent will provide and how they’ll be compensated. This transparency puts you in control.

• You Gain Leverage in Negotiation

Just because the commission isn’t listed in the MLS doesn’t mean the seller won’t pay it. Many still will. But now you and your agent can negotiate directly with the seller on compensation as part of your offer strategy.

• You Eliminate Hidden Costs

Before, buyers often didn’t realize the seller had built the buyer’s agent commission into the list price. Now you can see more clearly how the numbers work, and structure deals that benefit you.

How to Use the Rules to Your Advantage

- **Sign Early**

Don't wait until you find the right house to sign a buyer representation agreement. Having it in place ensures your agent can act quickly on your behalf.

- **Discuss Compensation Up Front**

A good agent will explain their services, fees, and options clearly. At ROOST, we make sure buyers understand exactly what they're getting – and how it helps them win in competitive markets.

- **Make It Part of the Offer**

Instead of seeing commission as a roadblock, use it strategically. You and your agent can structure your offer so compensation terms help make the deal more attractive to the seller while keeping your out-of-pocket predictable.

Why Many Agents and Buyers Are Stalled

Some agents are still frozen by the rule changes, unsure how to present value when they can't rely on the old system. Some buyers are hesitant because they don't fully understand their role. But this hesitation creates opportunity. If you move confidently with a clear plan, you stand out as prepared in a market where many are still catching up.

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Bottom Line: The commission changes didn't break the market – they just changed the rules of the game. Buyers who embrace transparency, sign early, and negotiate smartly can turn what looks like a challenge into a powerful competitive edge.

Tip 5: Get Creative With Contingencies

When competition is fierce, many buyers feel pressured to waive every protection just to get their offer accepted. But going in with no contingencies at all can expose you to serious risks – unexpected repair costs, financing snags, or appraisal issues that could leave you scrambling. The smarter approach is to get creative with contingencies so you meet the seller's needs while still protecting yourself.

What Contingencies Are

A contingency is simply a condition that must be met for the sale to move forward. The most common ones involve:

- **Home inspection** – confirming the property is in acceptable condition.
- **Financing** – ensuring you secure your loan.
- **Appraisal** – verifying the property value supports your loan.
- **Sale of another home** – allowing time for your existing home to sell.

In a hot market, sellers often look for the offer with the fewest roadblocks. But that doesn't mean you should throw away every safeguard.

Smart Alternatives to Waiving Contingencies

• Shorten Timelines Instead of Waiving

Instead of eliminating the inspection contingency, offer to complete it in 5 days instead of 10. That gives the seller peace of mind while still giving you a chance to spot major issues.

• Pre-Inspections

In some cases, you can arrange for a quick inspection before submitting your offer. This lets you waive the inspection contingency confidently, because you already know what you're getting into.

• Flexible Financing Options

If you're relying on financing, talk with your lender about cash-backed approval programs. Some lenders will underwrite your loan in advance or provide cash guarantees that make your financing as strong as cash to the seller.

• Post-Closing Possession

If the seller needs extra time to move, offering them a short rent-back period can tip the scales in your favor without costing you much.

The Balance You Want to Strike

The goal is to look like the least risky buyer without leaving yourself exposed to financial disaster. Sellers love certainty, but you need protection too. The best buyers present contingencies that are streamlined, intentional, and tailored to the specific property.

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Bottom Line: Winning offers aren't reckless — they're smart. By shortening timelines, preparing in advance, and offering flexibility where it matters most to the seller, you can stay competitive without taking unnecessary risks.



Tip 6: Personal Letters – How to Use Them Without Risk

For years, writing a heartfelt “buyer’s letter” was considered a secret weapon in bidding wars. Buyers would tell the seller about their family, their dreams, and why they loved the house. These letters often pulled at the seller’s emotions and tipped the scales in competitive situations.

But today, the rules have changed. Fair Housing laws make it risky to share personal details that could – even unintentionally – open the door to discrimination. Some states have even banned buyer letters altogether. While Ohio and Florida still allow them, buyers need to be careful. Used the right way, a letter can still be effective. Used the wrong way, it can create liability for everyone involved.

Why Buyer Letters Can Be Risky

When buyers talk about their family, their background, or their personal circumstances, they may unintentionally reveal characteristics like race, religion, marital status, or family composition. These are all protected classes under Fair Housing laws. If a seller appears to make their decision based on that information – even subconsciously – it could create legal problems later.

A Safer Approach: Focus on the Property

Instead of centering the letter on your personal story, focus on what you love about the home itself. This keeps the letter relevant and persuasive without veering into risky territory. For example, you might highlight:

- The home’s architectural details or updates you admire
- How the layout fits the way you live (without mentioning family specifics)
- The location, neighborhood, or community features that drew you in
- Your excitement about maintaining and caring for the property



Tips for Writing a Compliant Letter

- **Stay Professional**

Keep the tone appreciative and respectful, not overly emotional.

- **Keep It Brief**

One page or less is ideal. Sellers don't have time for a personal essay.

- **Review Before Sending**

Always let your agent review the letter before it's included with your offer. At ROOST, we make sure letters are legally safe and strategically written.

When a Letter Helps Most

A personal letter can be effective when the seller has an emotional connection to the home and wants to see it cared for. Many sellers, especially those who have lived in a house for decades, take comfort knowing the next owner appreciates its history and character.

But remember: the letter is only one small part of your offer. Strong financing, smart contingencies, and trusted professionals behind you will always carry more weight.

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Bottom Line: Personal letters aren't off the table in Ohio and Florida, but they require a careful approach. Keep the focus on the home, stay professional, and let your agent guide the process to make sure your letter helps — not hurts — your offer.

Tip 7: Add Value Beyond the Price

Most buyers assume the highest number always wins. In reality, sellers are often weighing certainty, convenience, and timing just as heavily as price. In a multiple-offer situation, a buyer who can solve the seller's problems may beat out someone offering a few thousand dollars more.

Why Sellers Care About More Than Money

Selling a home isn't just a financial transaction — it's also a logistical and emotional one. Many sellers are juggling moving deadlines, buying another home, or managing work and family obligations. The smoother you make their life, the stronger your offer looks.

Ways to Add Non-Financial Value

- **Flexible Closing Dates**

If the seller needs a quick close, offer to shorten the timeline. If they need more time, agree to extend closing or provide post-closing possession so they can move on their schedule.

- **Rent-Back Options**

In some cases, sellers appreciate being able to rent the home for a short time after closing. This lets them access their sale proceeds while giving them breathing room to relocate.

- **Taking Items As-Is**

If the seller plans to leave behind furniture, appliances, or other belongings, agreeing to handle removal yourself can save them time and effort.

- **Minimizing Hassle**

Offering fewer, cleaner contingencies (see Tip 5) and presenting documents that are complete and organized shows the seller you won't create unnecessary roadblocks.



Why This Matters in a Competitive Market

From the seller's point of view, an offer that solves their problems is often worth more than an offer that simply promises a higher dollar amount but comes with uncertainty or complications. Sellers who are relocating for work, downsizing after decades, or trying to line up two transactions at once value reliability and simplicity more than most buyers realize.

How to Identify What Matters Most to the Seller

This is where your ROOST agent becomes critical. A well-connected, trusted buyer's agent will ask the listing agent questions like:

- "What does the seller need most in this deal?"
- "Do they have a preferred closing date?"
- "Is there anything that would make this move easier for them?"

Answers to these questions give you the opportunity to structure your offer in ways that add real value without necessarily costing you more money.

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Bottom Line: Money matters, but it isn't everything. By paying attention to the seller's real needs and tailoring your offer to meet them, you can make your bid the most attractive package on the table — even if someone else is offering more cash.

Tip 8: Present the Perfect Offer Package

When sellers are reviewing multiple offers, first impressions matter. A clean, complete, and professional-looking offer package immediately communicates that you – and your agent – are organized, serious, and ready to close. On the other hand, sloppy or incomplete paperwork can sink an otherwise competitive offer before the seller even looks at the price.

Why Presentation Matters

From the seller's perspective, every offer is more than just numbers on a page. It's a preview of what the transaction will be like. If your paperwork is disorganized, missing signatures, or full of unclear terms, the seller may assume the entire deal will be stressful and complicated. Listing agents especially notice these details, and their input heavily influences the seller's decision.



What a Strong Offer Package Includes

A competitive, well-presented offer package should have:

- **Purchase Agreement** – Completed accurately and cleanly, with no missing terms.
- **Pre-Approval Letter(s)** – From one or more trusted lenders (see Tip 2).
- **Proof of Funds** – For the down payment and any appraisal gap coverage.
- **Financial Statement (if applicable)** – Showing strength and readiness.
- **Summary Letter from Your Agent** – A professional, easy-to-read cover note that highlights the strengths of your offer (financing, timelines, flexibility, etc.) without adding unnecessary fluff.

How Your Agent's Reputation Plays a Role

A polished offer package doesn't just reflect well on you – it reflects on your buyer's agent too. Experienced listing agents know which buyer's agents are thorough, detail-oriented, and reliable. When your offer arrives neatly prepared and accompanied by a trusted agent's name, it automatically rises to the top of the stack.

Avoiding Common Mistakes

- **Messy Scans or Illegible Docs** – Every page should be crisp and easy to read.
- **Incomplete Information** – Don't leave blanks that raise questions or slow things down.
- **Overcomplicated Terms** – Keep it clear, concise, and free of unnecessary legalese that confuses or irritates the seller.

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Bottom Line: In a competitive market, you can't afford to lose points on presentation. A clean, professional offer package tells the seller you're ready, your financing is solid, and your agent knows how to get the deal done. Sometimes, that confidence is what gets your offer accepted over higher numbers.

Tip 9: Master Condo & HOA Purchases

While Ohio and Florida don't deal with co-op boards like New York City, buying into a condominium or homeowners association (HOA) community comes with its own unique set of challenges. These associations can affect financing, ownership rights, and even how you use your property. In competitive bidding situations, sellers look for buyers who are "HOA-ready" – prepared to navigate the process smoothly and without surprises.

Why HOAs and Condos Matter in Competitive Markets

Sellers know that condo and HOA approvals can slow down or derail a deal. If you haven't done your homework, you may find yourself stuck halfway through the process with rules or fees you didn't anticipate. A buyer who comes in prepared with the right questions and the right lender looks far stronger than one who's learning on the fly.

Key Things to Review Before Making an Offer

- **HOA Rules & Restrictions**

- Many associations limit or outright prohibit short-term rentals (Airbnb, VRBO, etc.). If your plan is to generate income from the property, you must confirm these rules up front.
- Other restrictions may cover pets, parking, renovations, or even how long you must own before renting.

- **Financial Health of the HOA**

- Look at reserve funds, budgets, and history of special assessments. A poorly managed HOA can lead to surprise costs down the road.

- **Monthly Fees**

- Make sure your lender includes HOA dues in your debt-to-income ratio so financing isn't jeopardized.

- **Pending Litigation**

- If the association is involved in a lawsuit, it can affect both financing and property value.



The Role of Financing

Not all lenders are comfortable with condos or HOA properties — especially if the community has high rental ratios, low reserves, or other red flags. This is why working with a lender who understands condo/HOA underwriting is critical. Sellers know which lenders can close these deals smoothly, and they'll look more favorably on your offer if your financing is with one of them.

How to Make Yourself “HOA-Ready”

- **Ask Early** — Have your agent request the HOA documents before you make an offer.
- **Review Carefully** — Pay close attention to rental restrictions, fee schedules, and bylaws.
- **Work With the Right Lender** — Choose a lender with experience in condo/HOA loans in your market.
- **Be Transparent in Your Offer** — Signal to the seller that you've reviewed the documents and are prepared to move forward.

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Bottom Line: Buying a condo or HOA property requires more preparation, not less. By reviewing restrictions (especially rental rules), understanding fees, and working with the right lender before you make an offer, you position yourself as the buyer most likely to close — and that's exactly what sellers want.

Tip 10: Stay Strategic & Flexible

In today's fast-moving housing market, the buyers who win aren't always the ones with the deepest pockets – they're the ones who can pivot quickly, stay focused, and avoid letting emotions derail their strategy. Flexibility is the edge that separates serious buyers from the rest of the field.

Why Flexibility Matters

Homes in desirable neighborhoods often sell in days, sometimes hours. That means you may have to:

- Tour a property the same day it hits the market
- Submit an offer within 24 hours
- Adjust your terms based on how competitive the bidding becomes

Buyers who hesitate or get bogged down in indecision often lose to those who are ready to move quickly and confidently.

Staying Organized and Ready

• Keep Your Financials Current

Have updated pay stubs, bank statements, and pre-approval letters ready to send at a moment's notice.

• Be Showing-Ready

Clear your schedule enough to make same-day showings possible. In a competitive market, waiting until the weekend can mean missing the house altogether.

• Plan for Work Conflicts

Many buyers lose opportunities because they can't get away from work quickly enough to see a new listing. If you know you're in the market, have a conversation with your boss or HR ahead of time. Let them know you may need flexibility during the search – even an hour's notice to step away can be the difference between getting the house and losing it. A proactive plan with your employer avoids scrambling later.

• Work Closely With Your Agent

Stay in constant communication. The more your agent knows about your priorities, the faster they can advise you when the right property comes up.

Managing the Emotional Side

It's easy to get discouraged if you lose out on a home – or to get swept up in fear of missing out and overpay. The most successful buyers approach the process with patience and perspective:

- Be prepared for the possibility of losing one or two homes along the way.
- Stay focused on your long-term goals instead of letting emotions push you past your comfort zone.
- Trust the process – the right property will align with your budget, timing, and needs.

Balancing Speed With Strategy

Flexibility doesn't mean acting recklessly. It means being prepared enough to act fast without second-guessing. When your finances are in order, your schedule is clear, and your agent is dialed in, you can move decisively without regretting the outcome.

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Bottom Line: Winning in a competitive market requires both preparation and adaptability. Keep your documents current, talk with your employer about flexibility, and stay in close communication with your agent. The buyers who plan ahead and move quickly are the ones who consistently come out ahead.



Conclusion: Confidence Wins in Competitive Markets

Competing in today's real estate market can feel overwhelming. Homes move fast, offers pile up quickly, and buyers are often left wondering if they'll ever break through. But here's the truth: winning doesn't come down to luck, and it doesn't always come down to offering the highest price.

The buyers who succeed are the ones who come prepared, stay flexible, and work with agents who know how to guide them through the chaos. They understand that sellers are looking for more than just money – they're looking for certainty, smooth transactions, and buyers who respect the process. That's exactly what the ten strategies in this guide are designed to help you deliver. From cultivating relationships and mastering your financing, to crafting escalation clauses, handling appraisal gaps, and even navigating HOA rules, these tools give you the advantage you need to stand out.

At ROOST Real Estate Co., we don't believe in crossing our fingers and hoping for the best. We believe in strategy, preparation, and execution. We believe in making sure our buyers understand the process so they feel confident at every step – from the first showing to the closing table.

If you're ready to compete smarter – and finally secure the home you've been dreaming of – our team is here to help.

Ready to put these strategies to work for you?

- Connect with a ROOST Real Estate Co. agent today and start your home search with confidence.
- Subscribe to the All Things Real Estate podcast, where we'll be breaking down these strategies with top agents and sharing real-world insights.
- Download our free guide: "The ROOST Competitive Buyer's Playbook: 10 Proven Strategies to Win in Any Market" for a checklist you can keep by your side throughout the buying process.

