



# **Marketing Toolkit for Realtors®**

## **A Compilation of Articles from the PRO Marketing Blog**

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# New to Social Media Marketing and Feeling a Bit Overwhelmed?

## You're Not Alone

The other day I heard from a friend of mine who expressed how overwhelmed he was with trying to figure out how to build his business with the help of social media.

"Once I got ready to get into the fray of online marketing I decided to update my website but learned that these days, websites are out and blogging is in." He told me that before he uploaded his very first blog post, though, he had already heard of yet another way to find consumers.

"It seems that each time I decide on which particular online marketing vehicle such as Facebook, MySpace, YouTube or any of the other social networking platforms to focus on, I hear about yet another internet tool from friends or business associates." He continued to tell me how he by now has a MySpace account, Facebook account, LinkedIn account – without any particular web marketing strategy.

"By the time I started feeling comfortable enough to get started with FaceBook, people around me started buzzing about Twitter."

He continued to tell me that once he had put the final touch on his carefully branded FaceBook page, though, he started hearing office neighbors talk about how they had found new clients through their LinkedIn or ActiveRain accounts. Next, he found himself adding a profile and his business information on those networks as well.

"I feel like I keep chasing from one tool to another without sticking around long enough to actually build traffic. On top of it all, people around you start talking about the evolution from Web 2.0 to Web 3.0."

I'm sure many can relate.

It's not easy to follow all that moves on the internet these days.

Wait, there's more.

- Digg
- Technorati
- StumbleUpon
- Ask
- Yahoo Buzz
- Twitter
- Reddit

It can be quite intimidating to follow all the new developments, not to mention how to take advantage of them all.

I receive a lot of questions regarding social media marketing and I thought I'd attempt to break down the concepts just a little bit by using a few resources.

### **From Web 1.0 to Web 3.0 in a Hurry**

First, let's take a look at the definition Web 2.0. No, it's not a software upgrade you need to run to the nearest store to get in order to be part of the virtual world of interactive marketing. Instead, it's more of a concept of how the internet has evolved into a network of information sharing. Web 1.0 refers to the static concept of web pages, with "flat" information without any way for you to actively contribute to the content of the page. The introduction of websites and social forums that now invite reviews, comments, information-sharing and general collaboration marked the beginning of what's commonly referred to as Web 2.0. Before we even seem to have fully grasped the concept of a new online environment, those leading the charge of internet development have started talking about Web 3.0.

Here to better explain the concept of Web 2.0 is the video presentation Web 2.0. If you prefer reading

about it, here's Beginner's Guide to Understanding the Basics of Web 2.0.

Next, let's take a look at how you can choose which social networking sites to use, and how you can use them for marketing.

On January 1, 2009, Wall Street Journal published The Secrets of Marketing in a Web 2.0 World, which I consider an excellent resource when it comes to gathering some ideas of how to actually use the social networks that you may now be on.

Getting a grasp of social media marketing may feel a bit overwhelming at times but if you want to learn

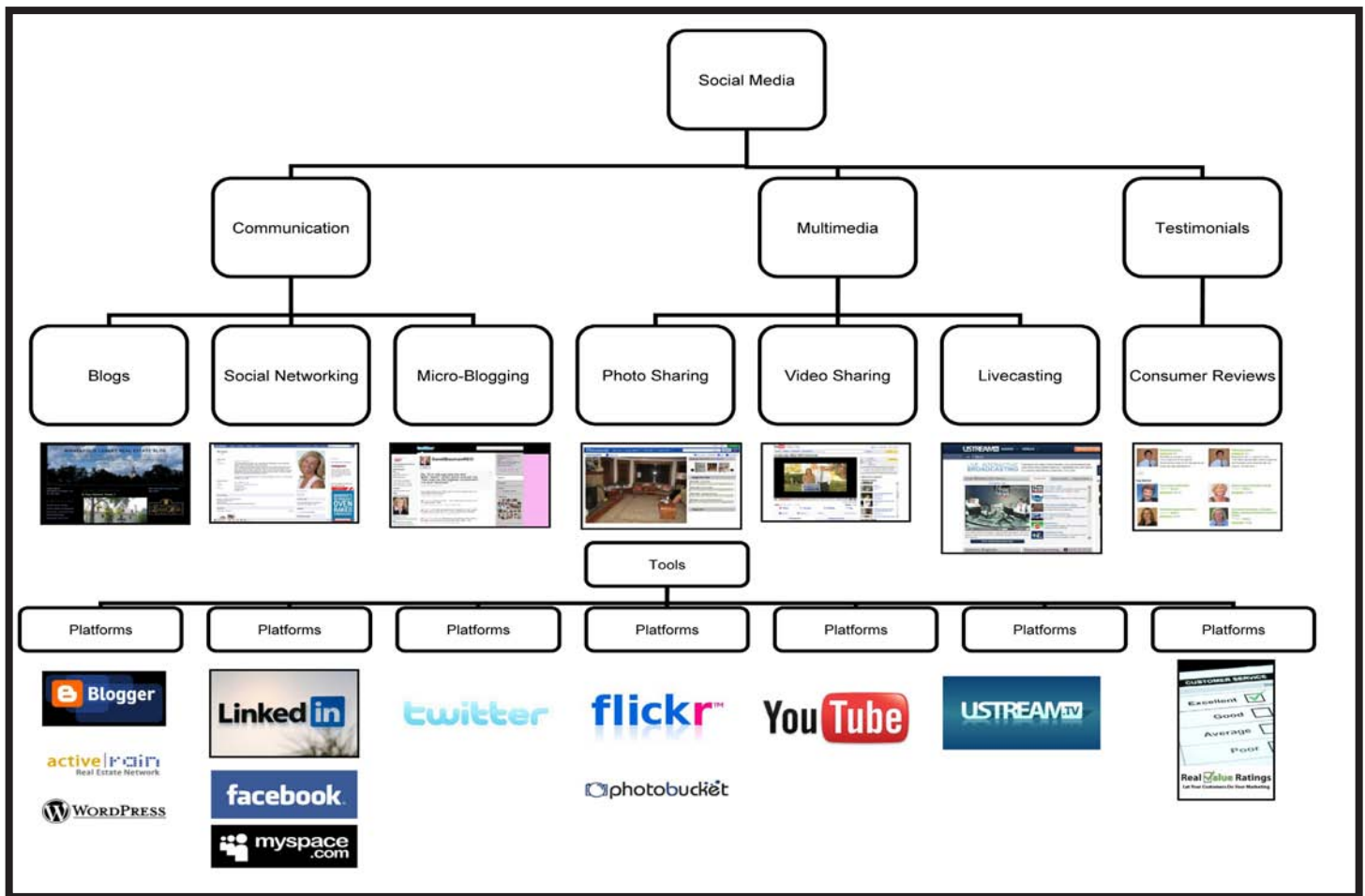
more about what you can do to take advantage of a changing internet, I suggest you go to google.com to search for information by using the following key words:

Web 2.0

Web 2.0 marketing strategies

Social media marketing

If you prefer videos, search for the same words at <http://www.youtube.com/>.



## Treating Every Social Network Profile as Your First Handshake

Years ago, your first contact with potential clients may have been at social events or by word-of-mouth. While you may still meet most people that way, the number of consumers you connect with for the first time through the Internet has probably increased in recent years.

With an ever-increasing number of available online social networks, consumers may first learn about you and your business through a profile you have posted at FaceBook, Twitter, LinkedIn, or ActiveRain. While we may believe consumers mostly learn about us through our websites, brochures, and certainly at meetings, the likelihood that they instead get a sense of who we are, what we do, and how we do it through those social network profiles as well as through search engines, is quite high.

Have you used Google to search for information about yourself recently? If you're on any of the most popular social networks, that's probably the result that comes up first in searches through Google, Yahoo, or any other search engine. Particularly LinkedIn seems to be the first result when searching for individuals and companies through Google. The result of your search for your name is the same consumers will find when they look up your name as well. The question is: would that first look at your online profile accurately depict who you are?

Let's discuss the importance of how we come across online, and the importance of treating every social network profile as your first handshake with a potential client. Here are a few examples to illuminate the subject:

The first thing you say at a fundraising event isn't likely to be that you subscribe to Playboy magazine. Equally as much, you're probably not going to share your passion for stock car racing before you've properly introduced yourself. Nor would you pull out a photo album and show pictures from your latest pool party at home before even the first word has been exchanged. Most would probably also agree that sharing political views and party affiliation may not be the best opening line when you meet someone for the first time.

Yet many business professionals have through their profiles at FaceBook signed up as fans of Playboy

magazine or they may belong to a virtual fan club of the magazine. The use of pictures and videos from recent parties, not always very flattering and also not always very professional, are often found at FaceBook. Finally, many individuals show which political party they belong to at their online profiles.

The point is that every activity at your FaceBook profile adds to the image you, voluntarily or involuntarily, build. While each of those particular activities may lead to an increased appreciation for you among some groups, it may alienate those who simply don't have the same interests or opinions as you do. For personal relationships it may be a turn-off; for a business it may simply lead to lost opportunities. My suggestion is simply to keep private profiles for personal use and business profiles accessible to everyone to attract the interest of consumers looking to buy or sell a home.

The subject of how important it is to make sure to maintain your brand identity online came to mind when reading the article *Career Truth #1: Brand or Be Branded (Are YOU Willing to Risk What Shows on the Top Fold?)* by J.T. O'Donnell.

While the article is about a job applicant and her woes, there's a lot we can learn from her example. While consumers certainly may get to know you through meetings, conversations and any materials you provide them, equally as important is to make sure the perception and image you want to build about your business is carefully displayed on any social network you may choose to join.

Whether it's for a job search or to attract real estate clients, make sure to treat every social network profile as your first handshake with a potential customer.

# Avoiding the Urge to Sell on Social Media Platforms

It's common nature. No matter how much you know you'll need assistance, by the time you enter the door to a retail store and a smiling store clerk greets you with a cheerful "Can I help you?" you know your answer will be "I'm just looking."

A few years ago I entered a furniture store and even though I tried my best to sneak in without gaining the attention of a sales person, it didn't work. Before the door even had a chance to shut behind me a clerk who eagerly had waited for my arrival asked if she could help. Even though I was there to look at a specific furniture set I had already seen at their website, I found myself saying "I'm just here to look around." Why? Because as most people I do not like to be sold anything, and I certainly do not want to be rushed. As consumers we want to take our time, and then seek help when we're ready.

Driving home that day I thought about what it is that makes us react that way. Better yet, I thought about what I'd do if I were in the position of a store clerk. I certainly would want to be helpful and I would like to greet those coming in, but at the same time I wouldn't want to come off as pushy. So, what to do? Here's my idea: I would make a tennis shirt with the imprint "Ready When You Are" on the front. I would stand inside the door but instead of verbally greeting them I would simply let my clothing welcome them. While my idea hasn't been tested, I believe some probably would come up to me when in fact they are ready to ask questions, instead of trying to avoid me if I came to greet them at the doorstep.

## The Anonymous Online Shopper

As consumers we want to be in charge when we seek out product and service providers. We want to take our time finding the information we need, and then take action when we're ready. We will not allow ourselves to be rushed and in the event we feel as if we're being pushed we will walk away. We will probably seek the guidance by others through testimonials and the ones we trust the most will get the call or visit. These days the Internet allows us to do our research anonymously. We can spend our time learning about products, services, and certainly real estate professionals, from the comfort of our homes. In fact, most of us probably even prefer to begin our exploration online before picking up the phone,

enter a retail store or stop by a real estate office. Knowing that, what can you do to cater to such preferences? My suggestion: start blogging. It's a nonintrusive introduction to prospective customers. If you provide valuable information consumers will continue to visit your blog. While they may not need to buy or sell a home by the time they find you, when they do need someone you're likely to be the one they contact.



## Are Your Social Media Platforms Saying "Ready When You Are?"

Think of your Facebook page, LinkedIn profile and blog as your virtual showrooms. Picture yourself as a consumer, entering your "store" for the first time. Ask yourself whether you would feel as if you were being sold something. Consider whether your messages come off as pushy. Assess whether you're providing valuable information that would benefit the consumer. Are you giving them enticing reasons to come back? Are you providing something they cannot find at other websites and blogs?

My suggestion is to treat your blog and other social media platforms as if they were a virtual concierge. You're there to facilitate the information process for your visitors. Rather than immediately display pictures of your listings you'll want to educate them, provide valuable information and establish your knowledge and credibility without coming off as selling. An important part of your blog should also be to entertain them, such as showcasing local gems and giving them interesting tidbits about the area you serve and they could live in. Instead of focusing on your credentials, you want them to spend time reading the information you're giving them without being perceived as being sold anything. Engage them by asking questions, such as what they want to learn more about. Invite them to discuss the topics you're blogging about.

If the overall message on your platforms gives them the feeling that you in fact are "Ready When you Are," by the time they want to find out more, they will come find you.

# Spending One Day Looking through the Eyes of Your Customers

The idea for this blog post was born the other day when following a social media class I taught I was asked for advice on how agents could, and should, market themselves through blogs, websites, social networks, ads and brochures. We discussed branding, images, tone, message, and what information to provide and how to present it.

Quite often I'm asked similar questions by business professionals in different industries and professions. Each time, I answer such questions with a question: what information would your prospective customers look for, how would they want it delivered and where do they typically go to find it? The answers should be the cornerstone of how you develop your online platforms and offline marketing collateral – well, your overall marketing strategy in general.

Spend one day as if you were looking through the eyes of a consumer. Visit your website, blog, and all your other virtual platforms as if you were a consumer who's never purchased a home before, let alone worked with a Realtor®. Do you include information on how to find you online in all your printed materials including your business card? Furthermore, rather than only telling them to go to your website, do you entice them to do so by specifying exactly what they'll get out of a visit to your website or blog? Is your website providing the necessary information and tools so that visitors won't need to continue their search for information anywhere else? Is your blog welcoming, and does it speak to the needs of the consumer rather than being too focused on you and your credentials? Do you outline the steps of a buying or selling process, and do you offer a preview of what you do to serve your customers through a transaction? Are your platforms attractive, with easily followed navigation and images that help illustrate the information you give, or are they too busy and poorly organized? Could your messages be perceived as condescending or do they include too many phrases and real estate-related buzz words that consumers may find overwhelming? Do you provide a way to subscribe to updates through email or RSS feeds so that you don't lose prospects once they turn their attention away from your blog? Most importantly,

did your website and blog engage you, or are they mainly a promotional item that left little reason for the consumer to contact you?

Next, visit other websites, and see if they deliver something you currently don't. Read their introductions of themselves as if you were a potential client and ask yourself: would I want to contact this person? Similar to the critiquing of your own website and blog, are other websites you review speaking more about the agents rather than what the agents can do for you?



Often our best ideas come from others. I've come across quite a few real estate blogs and one that in my opinion takes home the grand prize is Teresa Boardman's blog, Realtor® and licensed Minnesota broker with Saint Paul Home Realty in St. Paul, MN. In fact, in my social media marketing classes I typically describe her blog as the beacon of what blogs can and should do. In her blog, Boardman has a way of weaving pertinent real estate-related information with general community tidbits and just about anything that would be of interest to those living in St. Paul, and those interested in moving to St. Paul. She writes extremely well, providing humor and insight, while incorporating beautiful pictures to illustrate the topics she describes. While you quickly see that she's a Realtor® when you visit her blog you never get the feeling that she's trying to sell anything. A couple of weeks ago I wrote the article *Avoiding the Urge to Sell on Social Media Platforms* and I think Boardman's blog is a true testament of how a blog can provide excellent information without coming off as selling. She provides links to listings, open houses and information about sold homes, with prices and pictures, but those are merely there when you're ready for that information. Spend a few minutes reading her blog and you'll probably feel as if you knew her. Truthfully, isn't that what you want prospective customers to feel when they find you online?

Do you ever find yourself wondering what visitors to your blog, website, and FaceBook page would like to find there? Wonder why not more prospective consumers contact you in response to postcard mailings and brochure distribution? Ask them. Select a few non-Realtors® and reach out to them with a few select questions similar to those listed above. Ask them from the standpoint of being prospective homebuyers or sellers. I'm sure they'll be happy to help.

For all of us it's easy to move ahead with the creation of websites, blogs, brochures, flyers, and business cards without a careful review of how they may be perceived by those who visit or receive them. My recommendation is to spend one day looking through the eyes of your customers to make sure all your marketing materials and platforms focus on the needs of those you serve and what you can do to meet those needs.

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## What's Your Call to Action

**HOME SOLD!** The oversized postcard literally shouted out the good news. Apparently, the home of one of my neighbors recently sold and last week the listing agent sent postcards to those of us living nearby to share their success. My neighbor got one too. With eye-catching colors and an attractive picture of the home, the postcard certainly stood out in the pile of plain vanilla envelopes stuffed with bills greeting me as I opened my mailbox. But, I wonder if the postcard campaign was successful. Without an enticing call to action the postcard went straight into the "circular filing cabinet." Honestly, don't you do the same when you receive most postcards in the mail?

The most crucial part of any marketing campaign is the call to action. Sadly, that's often missing. While the somewhat self-gratifying postcard served the purpose of building up the image of a successful real estate professional, it failed to render a response. Unless I as a homeowner happen to contemplate selling my home that particular day, just waiting for the postcard to arrive so that I'd have an agent to call, I'll probably let the postcard go.

If you're planning a marketing campaign, the first step should be defining the purpose of the effort. Exactly what would you want their response to be? If they do what you ask them to, what's in it for them? Realistically, most homeowners probably aren't in the process of selling their home at the time they receive your postcard, and if your message is purely to advertise your willingness to sell their home, they may just ignore it. Instead, you want to entice them to join your network so that at some point when they do need assistance they'll know how to get in touch with you.

Let's take a look at a few possible calls to action.

1. Most homeowners are probably interested in knowing how much their home is worth given the recent price declines our market has experienced in the last few years.



"Go to [www.mywebsite.com](http://www.mywebsite.com) and request a home valuation for free."

2. Most homeowners are probably interested in staying on top of what's happening in their neighborhood. Consider starting a community blog where you share information about upcoming community events – and invite recipients of your postcard to become subscribers of blog updates. Reach out to local business owners and non-profit organizations, asking them to provide information about upcoming events. In a sense you become a conduit of valuable information and you'll likely remain in their mind when they need a Realtor.



"Go to my [www.mycommunitynewsblog.com](http://www.mycommunitynewsblog.com) to subscribe to upcoming events in your community."

5. Have you ever thrown out a business card, only to days later, when suddenly the need for a particular service arises, frantically search for a way to contact the individual? I have. Most other consumers probably have too. While consumers may not need your assistance right away, you want

to find a way to remain accessible to them. You could make the postcard speak to that effect, leaving them with the opportunity to join your network at LinkedIn.

3. With the goal of remaining accessible to those who may be looking to buy or sell a home several months or even years ahead, you may consider inviting them to become a fan of your Facebook page. Give them an idea for what they'll receive if they do, such as the sample Facebook ad you see on the next page. As a way to entice them you



may add a special offer. You could offer those who connect with you online a chance to win a gift certificate to a local restaurant, or maybe a nearby ice-cream parlor.

“Become a Fan to receive a monthly statistics report about your neighborhood. Go to [www.facebook.com/mbergendahl](http://www.facebook.com/mbergendahl).”

4. Few would dispute that word-of-mouth is effective. If you are planning to send a postcard following the successful sale of a home, ask the sellers to write a brief testimonial. Feature the testimonial on the postcard, with a picture of the sellers if permitted, and invite recipients to read more testimonials at your website. If you are willing to use video, maybe your sellers would agree to give a brief testimonial on camera and then entice postcard recipients to go online what others say about you. Better yet, invite them to view your ratings at [RealValueRatings.com](http://RealValueRatings.com).

A graphic for a Facebook postcard. At the top is a blue bar with the word "facebook" in white. Below that is a square photo of a man in a suit and tie. Under the photo, the text reads: "Become a Fan to receive a monthly statistics report about your neighborhood". Below the text is a 3D pie chart with three segments in green, yellow, and blue. At the bottom, it says "Go to [facebook.com/mbergendahl](http://facebook.com/mbergendahl)".

facebook

Become a Fan to receive a monthly statistics report about your neighborhood

Go to [facebook.com/mbergendahl](http://facebook.com/mbergendahl)



6. The number of homeowners who are struggling with mortgage payments is staggering and many look for help. It's probably safe to assume that within the geographic area you're planning on sending a postcard to there will be individuals and families searching for either a way to keep their home or a way to get out of their home without ruining their credit score. Some may want to sell but owe more than the home is worth. Consider writing

a white paper with the possible title How to Sell a Home in a Down Market, thus not making it sound negative and only geared toward those in hardship. Make sure to include general information about short sales and foreclosure.

For your next marketing campaign, what will be your call to action?



*If you're planning a marketing campaign, the first step should be defining the purpose of the effort.*

# Tips on How to Effectively Communicate Your Value Proposition

The value we'll receive when we're in the market for a product is relatively apparent before we make our final purchase decision. By seeing the product, and from reading specifications, we get a sense of what features are offered and, most importantly, if and how they will meet our needs.

How we as consumers make a decision on which service provider to hire is a different process. Whether the desired outcome of the hiring of a professional such as an attorney, CPA or Realtor® will be met isn't always evident upfront. Rather than judging on what we visually can see, we generally make our decision based on how we perceive service providers, the marketing messages they provide and testimonials provided by others.

As marketers of intangible services we need to communicate with our audience differently than if we offered a product. Here are a few tips on what you can do to effectively communicate your value proposition.

## **Fine Tune a Compelling Message**

"What's in it for me?" Every visitor to your website, reader of your newsletter, and recipient of your postcard will ask themselves that very question. Unless they find a message that specifically addresses a particular need they have, there's a good chance they'll continue their online search or throw away your marketing materials. And, given our impatience when we seek out information online, that message needs to be visible to the visitor within the first three seconds.

A value proposition is a statement you give of what a consumer can expect from a relationship with you. Such a message should give the reader a concrete example of what you'll do for them, and why you should be trusted to assist them.

While the message "Pinellas County Realtor® for 15 years" is rather weak, a description that will outline the process by which you'll assist them is more likely to get their attention and especially generate interest to find out more. Your first introduction

to prospective customers should consist of a compelling message conveying the value you bring, using words that will resonate with the audience you're targeting.

## **Give a Preview**

Since the vast majority of prospective homebuyers begin their search online it's not unlikely that their first introduction to your business will be through your website, blog, or maybe even your Facebook or LinkedIn profiles.

Consider adding a segment on your website or blog that describes how you work. You could create a web page with a description "My Service Model" or "My Home Buying and Selling Process" where you specify, step by step, how you assist your clients. How will you market a home? Will you suggest any changes to the home itself to make it more marketable? How do you generally go about pricing a home and more specifically, what's the impact of pricing given the increasing rate of foreclosures in the area you serve? Do you typically employ new technologies as part of your marketing plan? Discuss your commitment to being available and speak to the response time your customers can expect when working with you. Make sure to point out the various ways consumers can contact you, especially using new technologies such as text message, and even instant message.

Talk about the responsibilities of sellers and buyers through the process as well. Most consumers may not be aware that you'll be there to assist them with any home they're looking at, not just those you have listed. In fact, I often hear of consumers who independently from their Realtor® find a home and automatically call the listing agent rather than the agent who's been assisting them. Knowing that consumers may not have any prior experience buying a home, tell them how it works upfront.

Provide resources where customers can follow the marketplace such as your blog, Facebook profile, website, etc. Populate all online platforms with pictures, community descriptions, maps, and

marketplace statistics in order to show that you truly possess the knowledge required to adequately assist them. Describe how they will be able to engage with you through a free ListingBook account you'll set up for them. Tell them about a daily morning report with details on new properties coming on the market they'll receive and mention that they'll be able to read any feedback from visitors to their home.

### **Here are some actionable ideas:**

A while back I wrote the article *The Realtor® Yard Sign: An Often-Forgotten Marketing Tool*, which describes how to make the most of the Realtor yard sign by allowing prospective clients to send a text message, and in return receive photos and a video tour, while standing outside a home. If you're using such a service, tell those looking to sell their homes. Better yet, give them the code of a property you currently have listed and invite them to view it. Will you use a virtual tour? Tell them. Will you post videos from around the home? Tell them. Will you create a photo album on Facebook, Flickr.com, and Photobucket.com? Tell them that too. And, show them examples of your marketing campaigns, including photos, virtual tours and videos.

Without necessarily giving away the details, describe how you go about working with sellers and buyers respectively. Furthermore, outline what consumers can expect from you, and also what you expect from them. Consumers, both buyers and sellers, will want to know what you'll do to help them achieve their goals before they even contact you.

### **Let Others Speak on Your Behalf**

The power of testimonials cannot be overstated. Consumers expect to hear positive statements from you, and will likely ignore most marketing messages that seem too promotional. What to do? Ask those you've served in the past to write a brief testimonial. In fact, bring a camcorder to closings and ask if you can tape a testimonial once the home purchase is completed. Make sure to publish testimonials online at every social networking platform and profile you have and include them in your printed marketing materials. To really make the process of taping vide easy, and inexpensive, consider buying a flip video with which you can both shoot and edit video clips.

### **Ask Before You Tell**

Before you start crafting your value proposition, ask those who know you the best: past clients. Reach out to those you've served and ask them what they valued the most when working with you. That way you'll be able to increase the likelihood that your marketing message will better resonate among those you want to reach. And, don't just do it once and expect the message you've created will remain effective forever. Reach out frequently to make sure your messages remain timely and always relevant to the ever-evolving needs of consumers.

Effectively, your value proposition should help illuminate what you'll do for consumers in need to either buy or sell a home. Hopefully these few tips will help.



# Ten Ideas for Creating an Effective Social Media Marketing Time Management Routine

Do you go into your local grocery store with a detailed shopping list, or do you typically fill your cart as you steer it around the store? Unless you have a specific plan of what you need to buy, and aim for it as soon as you enter the door, you'll probably spend more time and money than you initially had planned. And, you'll probably walk away with bags full of groceries you really didn't need but were tempted to buy.

Logging on to a social network is a bit like entering your local grocery store. Without a specific plan on what you want to accomplish, you'll likely spend more time than you had in mind, and, don't forget, time is money. As soon as you enter any of the online networks, you're bombarded with messages from your contacts and invitations to take whatever the "quiz du jour" may be.

Just as for any other business activity, I suggest you develop a plan for how you'll manage your social media network. Here's a list of ten ideas you can use to create an effective social media marketing time management routine.

## **1. Shakespeare in Cyberspace: To Be or Not to Be On Social Networks**

The most basic premise of whether you should take time out of your day to engage in social media marketing in the first place is whether those you want to work with are there. If more than 80% of your target group isn't likely to use social networks, you should consider whether there's much value for you to spend time there. Unless you actively correspond with your sphere of influence, and make new connections that could lead to business relationships, you're likely to just spend time on non-essential things.

## **2. Avoid Mixing Business and Pleasure**

Don't commingle personal and business contacts as each group will have a completely different

dialogue. The content you provide your professional sphere of influence should convey your knowledge

and experience, not pictures from your most recent pool party or trip to the annual carnival in Rio de Janeiro. Consider setting up separate accounts on the platforms you use to make sure your contributions are suitable and attributable to each respective group.

## **3. Set Goals, and Enter to Execute**

Not long ago I asked a member who attended one of the social media marketing classes I teach what he wanted to accomplish that day. "Today I will post one article at my blog, add pictures for an open house at FaceBook, and post an article at my NAR LinkedIn group." He described how he has a goal each time he logs on to each network. Asked how he manages his time, he replied "I only spend the time I need to accomplish what I have to do in order to meet my business goals." He further shared that each morning he checks newspaper websites for articles that will be of interest and value to those he's connected with. Before he enters any of the platforms he's on, he creates a Today's To Do list. "It keeps me focused on the tasks at hand, and that way I don't fall into temptation to participate in unnecessary conversations or activities," he said. Within 20 minutes, he completed his lists of tasks. "I typically spend between 30 and 45 minutes each day on my social network, which is sufficient in order to keep an active online presence."

## **4. Define the Purpose of Your Networks**

What do you hope to accomplish by being on FaceBook? What do you use LinkedIn for? What's your purpose for blogging?

By having a clear vision of what you want each platform to do for you; you are more likely to use them effectively towards the goals you've set out to achieve with your online presence. Click here to read [Developing an Action Plan for Social Media Marketing](#), an article I recently wrote where I describe the main use of each platform.

## **5. Limit Your Time**

If you've spent any time on FaceBook you've

probably noticed how easy it is to get carried away. A friend suggests you take a quiz and once you've found out that if you were a rock star you'd be Madonna you discover pictures your friend posted of her new grandson that clearly you just can't resist viewing. Before long, you may find yourself commenting on what others are saying; maybe even posting your own status updates to describe what you currently are doing.

Got an egg timer? Consider setting it to whatever time limit you decide, and do what you initially set out to do.

## 6. Manage Your Tweets

7 a.m.: "I'm having breakfast." 1 p.m.: "I'm in a meeting." 5 p.m.: "Time to leave work." 7 p.m.: "I'm off to the gym." 11 p.m.: "Good night everyone."

You get the idea, I'm sure. If you're familiar with Twitter you've probably seen the most common use of the platform: providing the most mundane information to those who follow you. Twitter is an excellent communications vehicle when used correctly, but it should be used with caution. If someone perceives your never-ending updates about day-to-day things throughout the day as non-essential, they'll likely tune out and avoid your tweets. By the time you want to make sure you reach them, they'll probably not notice.

In my opinion, every tweet should include a link to additional information. A single, 140-character long message is not likely to add any value to the reader. Consider this message: "I just read a great article about the housing market in the New York Times." The message will do nothing for me. If instead the sender included a link to the actual article, it would be valuable.



## 7. Be a Resource, Not a Chatterbox

Perception is belief, as they say, and that very concept must be kept in mind when we engage in social media marketing. You want to be perceived as a busy professional, not a person without much else to do.

If you've been on ActiveRain you've probably come across articles you both agreed and disagreed with, maybe even commented on. For any given article on ActiveRain there are typically an endless number of comments. Many provide insightful suggestions complementing the writer of the initial blog post, but quite often comments aren't much more than a waste of time for the individuals who write them. ActiveRain is an excellent platform to be on as you connect with peers from whom you can learn a lot and to whom you can establish yourself as an excellent resource. Just be mindful of the time you spend reading blogs and articles written by others, and the time you spend commenting on the articles you've read.

## 8. Publish Once, Appear Everywhere

Did you know that you can have your blog posts automatically appear on FaceBook, LinkedIn, and Twitter? If you use Wordpress for your blog you can easily set up a syndication network. Once you've signed up for syndication, each time you publish a blog post a link will appear on your FaceBook and LinkedIn profiles and as a Tweet within your Twitter account. The way you set that up is through what's called a FaceBook application called Notes, which you access by clicking on the application button in the lower left corner of your FaceBook page. To set up a direct feed to LinkedIn you simply add Wordpress in the application box you'll find in the center of your LinkedIn profile. Adding a feed to Twitter is a bit more complex as you'll need to set up what's called an RSS feed at another website. One such website is [Twitterfeed.com](http://Twitterfeed.com).

To learn more about how to syndicate your messages, click here to read [Developing an Action Plan for Social Media Marketing](#).

### 9. Allow Readers to Subscribe to New Blog Posts

Want to make it easy for readers to remember your blog while also avoiding the need to constantly email your sphere of influence each time you publish a new article? Consider signing up for a Feedburner account, provided for free by Google.

By connecting Feedburner to your blog account you'll be able to invite readers to subscribe to new blog posts. Those who sign up will receive your most recent article by email the day after it was published.

Speaking of which, did you know that you can subscribe to this blog? Go to the PRO Marketing Blog at [blogs.tampabayrealtor.com/marketing.php](http://blogs.tampabayrealtor.com/marketing.php).

### 10. How to Avoid Time-Consuming Research for Story Ideas

A common question I receive is how to go about finding topics to write about and share through a

social media network. Online research can be quite time-consuming and without a strategy for how to find story ideas you're likely to spend more time than you have to spare.

First of all, consider setting up a free Google news alert for any specific subject you'd like to cover. Each time the topic is mentioned online you'll receive an email with a link to the article that includes the subject you're looking for.

You can also subscribe to RSS feeds from your favorite blogs and websites. To learn what RSS is, and what it can do for you, click here to watch a video on YouTube called RSS in Plain English by [commoncraft.com](http://commoncraft.com).

Once you have found a story idea you like you can either write a summary and link to the article, or use the share function you find next to a video on YouTube or most often found next to an online article.

**Integrated Approach to Social Media:**  
Treat every platform as your first introduction to a potential customer

**Pinellas Realtor® Organization**

# How to Avoid Mixing Business and Pleasure on Facebook

Each time I add a blog post I typically add it to a discussion group at the NAR and FAR groups at LinkedIn in hopes they'll be of value to the many Realtors® and industry professionals across our state and the nation who belong to those groups.

A response to a recent article I shared through LinkedIn prompted today's blog post:

Too late I recognized that my Facebook account, which I began for personal use, has become a wild mix of personal and business contacts, which it never was intended to be. Even after creating groups and setting different access privileges, I am rather unhappy with the resulting unruliness. Would you advise using a separate account for business on Facebook? And, how on earth am I going to move my existing business contacts over there? I suppose dumping them after a polite request or two will not really endear me to them?

The question is actually asked quite often in the classes I teach. Just as for the individual who posed the question, many of our members started with only one Facebook profile, and now find themselves with a combination of personal and business connections.

I faced a similar dilemma earlier this year when many of my business contacts invited me to become their Facebook friend. At that time I only had a personal profile where I connected with friends around the world. Rather than upset someone for not accepting their friend request, I set up a separate business profile using my email address at work.

Such a separation makes sense as the information you want to share with your business contacts should be different from those you have with your closest friends. Imagine being at a party at a friend's house on a Saturday night and all you hear discussed around the table is business. Most would tune out, right? While you may share family pictures with your friends through your personal Facebook account, you should focus on posting information related to the needs of a real estate client at your business-oriented profile.

There are a few options available. You can use a fan page rather than profile for your business connections. Alternatively, you can mix audiences but hide the content by other than business contacts in order to keep the information focused on real estate. In my opinion, though, the safest and smartest solution to make sure you don't mix the two groups at all is to keep two separate profiles. That way you make sure not to confuse either of your audiences, nor bore them with information they really aren't looking for. The way you set up different accounts is simply by using two different email addresses.

Now to the issue of adding a business profile, and asking current contacts to move to another profile:

In order to not inconvenience your business contacts, consider keeping your existing profile as the one you'll use for business relationships. Remove any previous posts that may have been of a more personal nature and links of the same kind. Next, add helpful information and links to resources suitable for that particular audience.

Your true friends will likely be more accepting to your switch so simply un-friend those you feel don't fit the profile of a business contact and invite them to become your friends from your new personal profile.



# Why LinkedIn May Be a Better Networking Choice than Facebook - and Five Tips to Make Your Profile an Effective Branding Tool

“I want to stay connected, but I feel Facebook may be too personal.”

Following a recent presentation I gave on the topic of social media marketing, a Realtor® spoke about her hesitation to connect with consumers at Facebook.

“I want to continue to build my sphere of influence and I know the use of social media platforms will help me do that. I’m just not sure most of them want me to see the often personal things they share on Facebook. As a result they may turn down my friend requests or worse, I may even alienate them.”

The main purposes of networking are to build awareness of what you do, build trust and credibility, and especially be the one they think of when they need a Realtor®.

To put the importance of remaining easily accessible to consumers into perspective, I thought about something that happened many years ago. As a newly appointed Executive Director for a local museum, I was asked by a newspaper reporter what I planned to do to increase attendance. I shared my desire to attract more families with young children. A week later I received a letter from a mailing list vendor. Having read about my plan, she sent me information about available mailing lists for any upcoming marketing campaigns, and she even attached a copy of the article so that I would connect the dots. I thought it was brilliant as she clearly provided me exactly what I had expressed that I needed. However, I didn’t need it at the time. Months later, as I was ready to do a mailing, I couldn’t find her contact information. I searched my cabinets. I searched online. I searched the yellow pages. In spite of all my efforts, I couldn’t find a way to connect with her. For her it was a lost opportunity. For me, it’s an example of how important it is for professionals to give recipients of a campaign a reason to stay in touch for when they need you. Similarly, imagine a consumer wanting to get in touch with you months after you first met, only to find that they can’t find you.

These days social media can help build a virtual rolodex of sorts, thus eliminating the risk of losing or not finding a printed business card. Similar to how you’d add a business card to your collection, you can now instead suggest a virtual connection. But, should it be through Facebook?

If the social media platforms we now have access to had been available at that time, would I have added the mailing list vendor as a friend at Facebook? Since we had no other relationship other than her contacting me the answer is most likely no. I would, however, have suggested that she become a connection at LinkedIn.

Don’t get me wrong; Facebook is a great networking tool. However; others may not feel that your connection is close enough to warrant a connection on that particular platform. Consumers may not want you to see their pictures, videos, and anything they would only share with those they know closely.

While the main social media “buzz” seems to center on Facebook these days, consider joining the online network at LinkedIn.com. Here are the top seven features you can use to make your LinkedIn profile become an essential part of your online networking efforts.

## 1. Get Online Exposure

Search for my name at Google and you’ll find that my LinkedIn profile is listed among the first few listings. Similarly, your name will most likely show up at the top of the search results once you’ve signed up. I’m not sure why, but it seems LinkedIn is favored by search engines, and having a profile will virtually ensure that you’ll be found when someone searches for you.

## 2. Share Presentations and Blog Posts

Did you know that you can add a Power Point presentation inside your LinkedIn profile? Through the website slideshare.net you can display presentations by adding an application. Consider posting a value proposition slide show or maybe a description of your process. Similarly, you can

have articles you've posted at your WordPress blog featured at the center of your LinkedIn profile by adding the WordPress application.

### **3. Showcase Value through Recommendations**

LinkedIn provides an easy to use tool by which you can ask your connections to write a recommendation on your behalf. Let others showcase your expertise – ask them to describe what it's like to work with you.

### **4. Provide Links to Your Website, Blog and other Platforms**

LinkedIn allows you to add three links, and I suggest you use them to give visitors to your profile additional resources. Consider adding links to your website, blog, and maybe your Facebook profile.

### **5. Show Your Professional Background, Affiliations and Awards**

Essentially serving as your virtual resume, you can list your current and past brokerage affiliations and prior employments inside your LinkedIn profile. Additionally, you can list any awards you've received and designations you've earned. Affiliations with professional groups such as the National Association of Realtors®, Florida Realtors® as well as groups available to ABR, GRI, and CIPS graduates only can also be displayed.

Every consumer you meet may not need a Realtor® at that particular time. Asking them if it would be appropriate to connect on LinkedIn will give you the opportunity to be found when they do.

## **Using LinkedIn to Expand and Nurture Your Sphere of Influence**

Getting started with social media marketing can be a bit intimidating: so many networks, so little time. In the classes I teach I make the recommendation to start off by using three social media platforms, in addition to your website, and then expand with others when those three are established.

First, I suggest building a blog. Next, I recommend creating a FaceBook profile. The third platform I consider essential for any professional working to create an online presence is LinkedIn. While the first two have been covered quite extensively in this blog before, today I thought I'd focus on the benefits of having a LinkedIn account and profile.

First, let's take a look at the setup process. James Kimmons of About.com offers an excellent gallery of images showing you, step-by-step, how to set up your real estate-specific profile. Click here to go to [Setting Up A Successful LinkedIn Real Estate Profile, This Business Network Can Bring You Huge Business In The Future.](#)

Once you have your profile ready it's time define exactly how you can use it for business purposes. Earlier today I came across the article [Effective](#)

Marketing on LinkedIn by Helen Overland, a text I consider an excellent overview of what exactly LinkedIn offers from a marketing perspective.

Next, many ask how you can attract buyers and sellers. Here are a few great tips by Jim Lillig in her text [How to Promote Your Offline Business using LinkedIn](#) and by Jim Gilbert in [5 Tips for Using LinkedIn as a Business Tool](#) by Jim Gilbert.

Finally, by now you have your very own WordPress blog if you've been part of my social media marketing classes. In my opinion the very best feature of LinkedIn is the possibility of integrating your WordPress blog directly into your LinkedIn profile. If you click here you can see what my profile looks like, with my WordPress (which I use in my social media marketing classes) blog feeding every post automatically onto the LinkedIn profile.



## Are You Actively Driving Visitors to Your Website and Social Media Platforms, and Do You Offer Enough Value When They Get There?

Does your business card include your website address? Do you provide a link to your blog in your email signature? Do you entice readers of your ads and postcards enough to make them want to visit you online? In short, are you currently using your offline marketing activities to bring traffic to your online network of website, blog, and social networks?

These days we have access to a tremendous amount of online tools to generate leads. Through FaceBook you may connect with consumers interested in buying a home in your area. LinkedIn, in essence a virtual rolodex, gives you exposure to a network of existing and new contacts. Through a blog you can provide consumers all the necessary information they will need to purchase a home and what to expect from the process.

I recently had a discussion with a local accountant who asked what I thought about an ad he was about to place in a newspaper. The ad looked great, and it did list the website address, except, it didn't really spell out compelling reasons why readers should find out more about him online. Sure, the ad looked great but without a call to action it's not unlikely most would glance at it and turn the page. Turned out, he had a very informative blog where he informed his followers about various tax-related issues. I suggested he put a short note in his ad about his blog including the web address.

Similarly, earlier today I came across a postcard in my office mailbox from a marketing communications company willing to provide me with various services. Being that it was sent by a marketing company I would expect their website address to have a prominent spot on the postcard. It didn't. Out of curiosity I searched for the company online and discovered a wealth of available resources at their website I wouldn't have discovered if I hadn't taken the time to look up the company on the Internet.

In the article [Give Them a Reason to Visit – Leveraging Your Off-line Efforts to Drive \(the Right\)](#)

[Visitors to Your Web Site](#), Peter DeLegge provides actionable ideas on what you can do to leverage your offline efforts to drive visitors online. Click here to read the article.

Next, let's discuss the content on your website or blog.

It's understandable that most professionals will want to greet cyber-visitors with information detailing their knowledge and experience. Yet sometimes websites have a tendency to be ego-centric as opposed to consumer centric.

In the article [How Customer-Focused is Your Website? Stalking the Narcissistic Web](#), DeLegge, publisher of the online publication Marketing Today, gives example of text you'd generally see on an ego-centric website and provides a suggestion about how the same content can be made into more consumer-centric information. Click here to read the article.

### ***Wikipedia:***

***Social media can take many different forms, including Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, wikis, podcasts, pictures, video, rating and bookmarking.***

***Technologies include: blogs, picture-sharing, vlogs, wall-postings, email, instant messaging, music-sharing, crowdsourcing, and voice over IP, to name a few.***

# Twitter for Realtors®: A Focused Approach for Effective Marketing

By now you've probably heard of Twitter. Following months of the micro-blog's ever-increasing exposure in the news, it seems every television anchor, celebrity, rock star and web savvy business person is sending Tweets, as messages through Twitter are called, and asking you to follow them.

Twitter has mostly been talked about as a way to quickly send messages to friends, giving them updates on what you're doing and what's on your mind. For critics, Twitter is simply a medium through which you can send out written messages into a dark hole without any clear recipients. In a sense, they say, Twitter is a forum for mindless chatter. If you view this humorous movie clip it's easy to see how Twitter could be perceived that way. There are also risks involved with the use of Twitter as you may have read in *Before Your Post at Twitter – Consider This*, a blog post I recently wrote.

But, before dismissing Twitter as yet another Internet fad soon to meet its demise, let's take a look at how Realtors® can apply Twitter as part of their marketing efforts.

## Getting the Word Out

Do you have a blog? If you do you probably want to notify your readers each time you've added a new post. I use Twitter and these are a few examples of past messages that were automatically posted to my Twitter profile each time I added an article on my blog.

"Spending One Day Looking through the Eyes of Your Customers: The idea for this blog post was born the other day .. <http://tinyurl.com/dlqeev>"

"Avoiding the Urge to Sell on Social Media Platforms: It's common nature. No matter how much you know you'll ne.. <http://tinyurl.com/cf7qmr>"

"Treating Every Social Network Profile as Your First Handshake: Years ago, your first contact with potential clie.. <http://tinyurl.com/ctukqs>"

In addition to my Twitter account, I use two services to enable this. Twitterfeed automatically feeds my blog posts onto my Twitter profile. TinyURL enables

me to shorten links so that my Tweets will be within the 140-character size limit.

Similarly, you can post short notes about an upcoming open house and include a link to your website where you provide the address, a map, photos and maybe a link to a virtual tour. You can easily send links to newspaper articles you believe would be beneficial to those who follow you, and you could for example bring to their attention important information about new federal housing programs for first-time home buyers.

## Search Engine: An Increasing Use of Twitter

In recent weeks I've come across articles that describe Twitter as an emerging search engine. The main Twitter search page is at [search.twitter.com](http://search.twitter.com) and an advanced search can be made at [search.twitter.com/advanced](http://search.twitter.com/advanced). An interesting feature is that through an advanced search you can limit your search to certain distance within a specific place such as Clearwater. Consider the possibility that a couple interested in finding a home in Clearwater uses Twitter. If you have a Twitter account through which you post information about properties in that particular area there's a good possibility you'll be found if they simply enter Clearwater Realtor® in the search box at [search.twitter.com](http://search.twitter.com). Similarly, a home buyer in St. Petersburg interested in visiting open houses may use Twitter to search for them.

## Follow Your Audience

Consumers haven't been slow to discover available social media networks. Some prefer FaceBook, others may just be content with their LinkedIn account. If you ask your sphere of influence you may be surprised to find that many of them have Twitter accounts, and they probably expect you to have one as well. As a Realtor® you may have to be on all of them just to make sure you reach all those you want to stay in touch with.

With a focused approach Twitter offers Realtors® an excellent way to communicate with prospective and current buyers and sellers.

# How to Damage your Reputation in Eight Easy Steps

Most bloggers get their ideas for what they'll write about from things they observe around them, and I'm certainly one of them. In fact, the subject of today's blog post has been on my mind for several months. Some of the things I'll touch on I've used in previous blog posts. Some of them I've used in the social media marketing classes I teach. All of them I've gathered from monitoring the use of FaceBook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter and ActiveRain.

Your reputation is your most valuable asset and it must be protected. The fact that how you're perceived in the marketplace will dictate your success cannot be denied. The cornerstone of your business must be to build credibility and instill trust so that you become known for your work ethic, your commitment to customers, how responsive you are, and your knowledge.

In the past we spent weeks developing ads that would accurately reflect who we are. We took professional photographs to look the part. We would continuously work on our biographies to make sure they would spell out our qualifications to serve those we seek to reach. We wrote letters carefully to make sure grammar and spelling were correct, and especially making sure the tone was appropriate.

Then FaceBook and other social media platforms came along. Things we typically would never share with others are now considered news worthy for anyone who'll listen. Many say "oh, it's just FaceBook" and "everyone on there knows me." The latter part isn't necessarily true as people you may not have connected with before will come across your profile.

Effectively, the profiles you have online and the content you post all contribute to the branding of you and your business. The purpose of this article is to highlight actions that easily can damage your reputation, and provide ways by which you can prevent that from happening.

## 1. Branding Yourself as a Fan of Playboy Magazine

Let's say I want to introduce myself to someone at a fundraiser. I walk up to the person and say "Hello,

my name is Mathias - it's nice to meet you." After a minute of initial introductions I continue "I would like to share with you that I like Playboy magazine."

Seems crazy, doesn't it? Of course I'd never do that (even if I liked the magazine) and I'm quite certain most wouldn't (even if they liked the magazine). But, while monitoring the use of FaceBook I've come across quite a few professionals who become fans of various entities and groups that to some probably might be deemed questionable. Others may even be turned off by any such choice.

When you choose to become a fan of a FaceBook page, my suggestion is to choose carefully in order to make sure those you want to form relationships with will not find your affiliations distasteful or even offensive.

## 2. Enough with the FaceBook Quizzes

Which 80s rock star would you be? If you were an animal, what would you be? Is your IQ higher than that of your friends? What's your favorite dish?

The list of available quizzes on FaceBook is endless and so seems the time available for many who take them. If a client has hired you to assist them, they expect you to put 100% into the effort. Seeing you take quiz after quiz during the work day may give the impression that you're not hard at work.

I admit that some quizzes are rather entertaining and enticing to take. My recommendation is to do that within a personal FaceBook account (more on that later). And, refrain from inviting others to take quizzes as they may consider you a spammer.

## 3. Online Photo Album 101: No, I don't want to see your Speedos

Have you been to Las Vegas recently? I recently came upon proof that some things that happen there don't always stay there.

Case in point: I recently came across a photo album on FaceBook and the pictures within weren't exactly flattering. Simply put, poolside pictures and photos from late-night parties may not be the best way to convey professionalism.

Personally, I suggest posting pictures with an abundance of caution. Additionally, ask friends and those around you to refrain from posting pictures of you online until you've had a chance to review them.

#### **4. Use Platforms for Both Business and Pleasure**

I recently visited a website for an attorney. Curious to find out more about his business, I clicked on a link to YouTube and a formal video presenting the company started streaming. Once I'd viewed the video I went to see his YouTube profile. I wish I hadn't. While the company presentation certainly was professional, the other available videos, featuring the attorney attending a recent street party (I'll refrain from giving further details), didn't quite reflect professionalism.

Similar to pictures, I would recommend using caution when sharing videos online. In the event you do want to share videos with friends, consider setting up a separate YouTube account so that those wanting to know more about your business do not mistakenly come across videos you'd prefer they didn't see.

#### **5. Cyber-TMI: Finding a Balance of What You Share**

It's natural to want to share our thoughts, beliefs and opinions with others. We want others to get to know us beyond the professional exterior to see the values we hold. However, most would probably agree that there are some topics one should try to avoid, especially when working to establish new relationships. For any conversations, hot button topics such as abortion, gun control, and certainly religious affiliations, should be avoided in order to not offend anyone. While you're fully within your rights to support a particular candidate running for office, be cautious when you share your views online so that you don't alienate those who may have different political views.

While we may know to avoid such potential mine fields offline, it seems the casualness of social networking sites lead to the abundance of opinion-

sharing. The golden rule of social networking is: anything you would hesitate to share offline should be avoided online.

#### **6. Tell Them Like It Is!**

Have you come across a news article you completely disagreed with? Did you post a comment? You're not alone. These days there's no shortage of ways we can comment on news stories, articles, and television shows. Every anchor at CNN, Fox and any other network invites viewers to post comments through blogs, Twitter and FaceBook, and newspapers typically invite comments directly underneath the article.

Be cautious when posting a comment or writing a letter to the editor. While your point may be accurate there's still the potential that readers may not agree with you or find the tone too strong. Remember, all such comments are now saved forever online.

#### **7. Want to Be My friend?**

On any given day I receive a number of requests to be a "friend" on FaceBook, "follower" on Twitter, and "connection" on LinkedIn. At least half of the requests come from individuals I've never met or spoken with. There's no doubt that having online connections can be an excellent way to build up a referral network, even a group of potential buyers. But, a bit of social networking etiquette is in order. My suggestion is to first make sure to establish offline relationships before attempting to create them online.

#### **8. Nobuddy Cares About My Spelling**

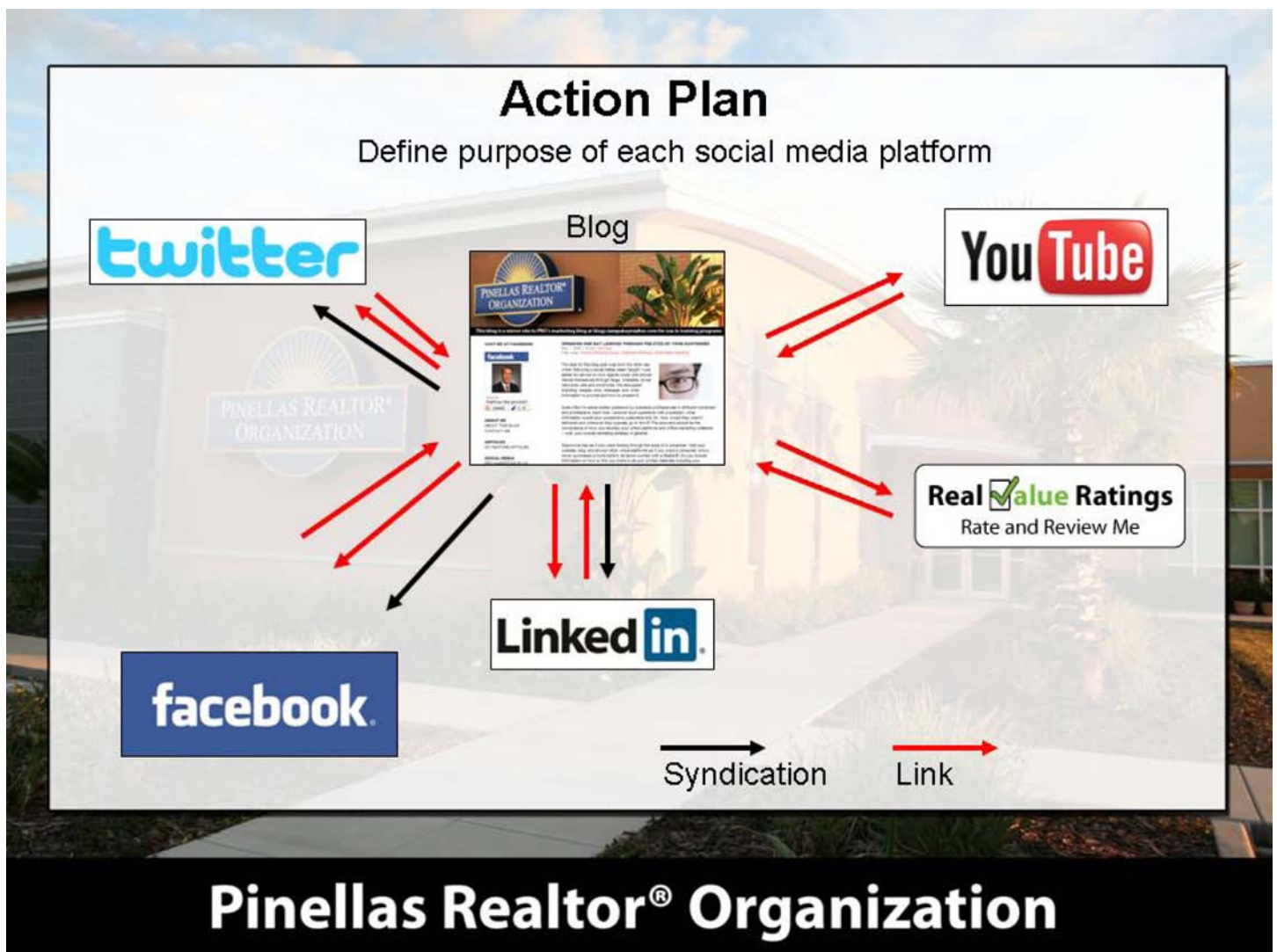
Few things will build a negative perception of you as much as poor spelling. Picture a prospective client coming across a text full of spelling errors and imagine what it will convey. Make sure you use spell check before posting any content online, and consider asking a colleague to read what you're about to post before it goes live.

## Top five things you can do to protect yourself:

1. Ask yourself whether you'd be comfortable seeing what you post on the front page of the New York Times. If you hesitate, considering revising your information or avoid it all together.
2. Look at your posts and materials as if you read and viewed them through the eyes of the reader. Is there anything you would possibly react negatively against, or at least find questionable? If you hesitate, even the slightest, well, see point 1.
3. Hurry up and wait when getting ready to post online. If you just finished writing a blog post, consider scheduling it to publish three hours later. That gives you plenty of time to review and, if you find something you'd like to change, there's time to edit your post before it goes live on the Internet.
4. Set up a Google alert so that each time your

name is mentioned on the Internet you'll receive a notification via email. It's an easy and effective way to monitor where your name shows up and a great way to make sure your name isn't used in a negative way.

5. FaceBook gives you several options on how you want to set up your profile. First, you can have your profile set to either private or public and you you can choose to have a strictly personal account and one devoted only to your professional connections. Consider having your profile public as you want as many as possible to get to know about you and your business. Alternatively, you can have a private profile and then have a separate public page with all your business information. Regardless of which option you choose, make sure you only post information and materials you'd only share with your personal friends in a place the general cyber-population can't access them.



# The Realtor Yard Sign: An Often-Forgotten Marketing Tool

You continually update your website. You've reprinted your business card to include the address to your new blog. You've taken a new photograph of yourself that you'll use in your marketing materials. You keep refining your marketing mix to make sure your efforts are effective, giving you widespread exposure in the community you serve. But, when was the last time you updated your sign? As I travel along busy streets lined with properties for sale it often occurs to me that the Realtor® sign seems to be an often-forgotten marketing tool, or at least not used to its full potential.

The idea for today's blog post came to mind as I walked down the street outside my home the other night. I noticed for sale signs at two neighboring homes, each represented by a different agent. Curious to see how two local agents market themselves, I went closer. One of the signs was of the more traditional style, featuring the name and picture of the agent, and of course a phone number, relying on me to either save the number in my phone or have a pen and paper so that I could contact the agent later.

The other sign, however, caught my attention a lot more. Standing outside the house, I was able to text message a code in order to receive more information about the property. Within a few seconds I received three messages back. The first was a general greeting from the agent, thanking me for my interest in the property. Further down in the message was an address to the agent's website, and email address and a phone number. The second text message included a link to a photo gallery. The third message included a link to a video tour of the home, allowing me to take a virtual tour of the home as I'm still standing outside on the sidewalk.

Back home, I went online for more information about the home. Accessing the information was easy – I still had the text messages in my phone. The link I had been provided led me to a customized page for that specific home. What impressed me the most was that the web page included additional resources. The videos I had viewed outside the home were there. The pictures I had seen as well.

There was information about the neighborhood, a map and directions on how to get there, and pictures of parks and other areas certain to be of interest to someone who would consider living in that area. Additionally, there was an invitation to sign up for a daily email of properties matching the specific criteria I would provide. Finally, there was information about an open house that was scheduled for that particular home a week later, and of course a way to register.

The vast majority of consumers are certain to use the Internet in their home search – 87% according to the 2008 Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers provided by the National Association of Realtors®. An interesting number, however, is the number of buyers who use yard signs as their source of information. According to the same NAR report, 62% of home buyers fall into that category.

In my opinion, the second sign, or the information provided on the sign rather, was a perfect example of a consumer-centric approach. In an ever-competitive marketplace it's absolutely crucial to stand out. The second sign certainly did just that.

Is your sign the best marketing tool it can be?

Late last year I invited several text message vendors to provide a brief description of the capability of their services. [Click here to read Gateway to Texting Technologies.](#)

## Are You Having Blog-Writer's Block?

By now you have established your blog. You've added graphics to illuminate your brand. You've added all the links you set out to have in the navigation bar. The pictures you've taken around the communities you serve are uploaded and ready to be inserted into your blog posts. You've selected the topics you are likely to cover, and you've created categories for them.

Simply put, you're ready for business.

Now what?

It can happen to anyone: writer's block.

Earlier this week I spoke with a member who had attended my classes and now was ready to start writing. But, she said, she didn't know what to write about.

The topic of blog content has come up quite frequently in the classes I've taught. It seems the perception often is that blog posts have to be lengthy and of Pulitzer Prize-level quality. No wonder many seem hesitant when it comes to blog writing. Instead, the guiding light for blog writing should be whether you're adding value to the reader. A blog would best be used to provide tips and suggestions and certainly insight that will help guide your readers to their real estate decisions.

The best subjects for your blog will probably come from everyday discussions you have with current and prospective customers. I came up with an example that I've used in my classes:

Let's say you want to educate your readers about the benefits of home staging. Often the most effective way to educate consumers is by providing statistical evidence and that idea helped shape my idea for a five-minute blog post:

First, I searched for staging at Google.com. In the search results I recognized the website StagedHomes.com, a source I trust for information about staging. While visiting the website I found a section on staging statistics – even a PDF file that highlights statistical evidence that staging helps sell homes faster. Adhering to copyright laws, of course, I didn't download the file but instead selected a link to the PDF. Then I wrote a brief blog post:

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### Does Staging Work?

There's no doubt that staging a vacant home will better illuminate what it's like to live in the home. Staging is an investment to consider when you want to sell your home. But, does it really work? Click here to see statistics provided by Barb Schwarz, Creator of Staging and Founder of StagedHomes.com.

I currently work with local staging professionals. Let me know if you'd like to contact someone who can help you.

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Click here to download a PDF outlining the five-minute blog post about staging.

There are several benefits with the blog post. First, you would provide valuable information to your readers. Second, I'm quite certain Barb Schwarz would appreciate the mentioning of her statistics and StagedHomes.com, and in this business you can't have too many referral sources. Third, by inviting readers to contact you for local staging professionals, you have the opportunity to form local referral relationships as well. Similarly, some clients may have raised a few concerns about entering the market. Some may wonder where the market is going and others whether financing will be available to them. If you hear a concern by one person it's probably safe to say that others would have the same thought that the concern was based on. Want to be proactive? I suggest you write about topics you know are of concern to those you work with, and those you want to work with.

If you find yourself without topics I suggest the following resources:

As most probably know by now I consider Terasa Boardman's blog to be an excellent example of what a blog can and should be. Here's an article she wrote about her own commitment to blogging. Click here to read How Does Teresa Boardman Post Every Day To Her Real Estate Blog? A while back she wrote the article Food For Fodder – 101 Real Estate Blog Topics – in which she provides an extensive list of potential blog topics. Another excellent resource is the article The Easiest Way To Write 30 Real Estate Blog Articles Every 30 days.

# Social Media Marketing Program October 2009

## Getting Started with Social Media Marketing

Has anyone told you recently that in order to build your business you should open a FaceBook account and start blogging? Unsure how it may benefit your business? Don't know where to start? This class will give a basic outline of social media marketing and walk you through the steps to get started.

October 8, 2009 from 10 a.m. until Noon.

*Featuring a Step-by-Step "How To" Clinic for Facebook*

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## My First Blog 101

Having a blog gives you an excellent tool to build an online presence and communicate with your sphere of influence. Knowing how to build a blog can be a bit intimidating, though. This interactive program will walk you through step by step until you've built your own blog. Must have access to email.

October 14, 2009 from 11 a.m. until 1 p.m.

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## Integrated Social Media Marketing Strategies

You may have FaceBook, Twitter, and LinkedIn accounts, but are you using these social media platforms effectively? This class will outline how you can take a strategic approach to build your business by integrating online social media marketing activities. **Prerequisite: Getting Started with Social Media Marketing.**

October 22, 2009 from 10 a.m. until Noon.

*Featuring a Step-by-Step "How To" Clinic for Integrating Social Media Platforms*

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## My First Blog 102

Following My First Blog 101, where you learned how to create a new blog, this class will show you how to customize your blog, including how to change your blog title, change the language of your blog, add polls and additional features, and view visitor statistics. You will also find out how to add blog posts, upload and link to videos, photos, and sound files. Class is followed by a clinic (see below). Must have access to email. **Prerequisite: My First Blog 101.**

October 28, 2009 from 10 a.m. until Noon.

# Membership Benefit - No Charge

# How to Capture the Attention of a Prospect: Build consumer-Centric Greeting and response Platforms

“What do you do?” The question I was asked during a recent east-bound flight across the Atlantic Ocean began a several-hour long conversation about the real estate industry.

Never slow to seize the opportunity to speak with consumers about real estate, and especially the importance of having a Realtor® assist with the process, I found myself listening to a Clearwater couple, soon-to-be empty-nesters, tell their tales of past home buying and selling experiences. Some were great, they shared. Others were, well, not very satisfactory. What’s even more interesting was that they currently are in the market for a condo. Asked whether they’d contacted a Realtor® yet, they responded that they wanted to start their search online on their own initially, but that they eventually would seek out someone to assist them.

During the course of our conversation, inspired by listening to how they’d prefer to go about finding a Realtor®, I came up with a response process by which Realtors® can capture the attention of prospective customers in a non-intrusive way. First impressions certainly do last, and here are two steps you can take to make them a positive one.

## **Step One: Make a Positive First Impression to Anonymous Visitors**

With well over 80% of buyers starting their search for a home online, there’s a significant possibility that your website, blog, Facebook page or LinkedIn profile effectively becomes your virtual first handshake. In fact, if consumers find the information you’re providing on your blog helpful and informative, it’s likely that they’ll come back to read more, anonymously, without contacting you until they’re ready to do so.

So, what can you share in order to make a positive first impression that will bring visitors back? Consider creating a description of your process. From pricing, marketing, and market research to negotiation, provide a bit of insight as to how you typically go about assisting clients. Make sure you

effectively describe your value proposition. Describe your service model, and how you assist your clients from start to close. Spend one day looking through the eyes of your customers, and define which messages you most likely would respond to if it were you looking to buy a home. Avoid the urge to sell, but rather focus on making all content focused on meeting the needs of consumers. Describe how you work with other professionals for the benefit of the consumer. Are you using a text message system integrated with your Realtor® signs as described in this recent blog post? Make sure to describe such innovative solutions as they definitely will make you stand out in your marketplace.

A key consideration when you develop your various online platforms is to decide the depth of the information and materials you’ll provide at each given step in the process. Those engaged in social networking expect to be given in-depth information upfront. Materials we previously guarded until we had a chance to sit down with a prospective client in person are now expected to be available online.

Here’s an example: Present tools you’ll make available to consumers you work with, but don’t give away the details just yet. Describe how you’ll provide a free account through which they’ll receive morning reports with a marketplace activity update (Listingbook) and share with readers how you initially set up an account for your customers through which they easily can bookmark properties they find online that you later can do the research on (Dwellicious).

By describing your services without the details you’re increasing the likelihood that you’ll hear from those visiting your online platforms as they’ll ask for more information. Once you’ve captured their attention, and more importantly left them with a positive first impression, I’m certain you’ll hear from them – when they’re ready.

## Step Two: Create a Powerful Response Platform for Consumer Requests

The first message you receive from a prospective client may be as brief as "I want to know more about this home," arriving by email in response to a listing at Realtor.com or maybe through your website. How do you typically respond? By giving them a call? The couple I spoke with suggested that the response should be in the manner the initial contact was made; in this case an email would be more appropriate.

Consider this:

Create a landing page at your website or blog with the following features:

1. Post a brief video, or write an introduction if you're not comfortable using video, thanking the visitor for their response and welcoming them to your webpage where you hope they'll find out more about the property they've indicated interest in.
2. Provide a link to additional information about the property they're inquiring about. Since most online listings only provide limited information, possibly

just one image, additional information should include a link to a virtual tour, a link to a Google map to show the location of the home, additional photos, and any other information you'd like to share with the consumer.

3. Share a compelling message, in a video or written text, in which you briefly describe your process, focused on meeting the needs of those you serve. Discuss how you're going to market their home. Describe the tools you make available to sellers and buyers.

The key message I took away from our conversation in the sky was that the couple looked for valuable information provided in a non-intrusive way. Before they'd be willing to meet with a Realtor, or even hear from someone over the phone, they would want to have a sense of what they can expect. Before making the first contact, they want to feel as if the Realtor® will be able to assist them and that they'll receive the service level they expect. By building consumer-centric greeting and response platforms you'll be prepared to assist those who like the couple I spoke with begin their search online.

## New from Facebook: Get Your Vanity URL

FaceBook allowS you to register for your unique vanity URL. Considering that FaceBook has over 200,000,000 active users, you'd better be quick to register the URL you want. For example, if your name is Joe Smith, and would like the URL facebook.com/joesmith, I certainly encourage to visit FaceBook as soon as possible.

Be cautious when you register, though. According to FaceBook, you will only be able to select once with no changes allowed.

Previously you could find me at FaceBook:

<http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=1151681714&ref=profile#/profile.php?id=1151681714&v=wall&viewas=656232223>. I think most would agree it wasn't the most memorable web address. Now you will find me at <http://www.facebook.com/mbergendahl>.

For information provided by FaceBook, click here.



# The Cornerstone of Social Media Marketing: Relationship Builder, Lead Generator, or Both?

Sharon was close to giving up. Several months ago she spent weeks researching other blogs to help her decide on what she wanted hers to look like. She'd spent three months writing insightful articles about her community and her local real estate market. She had made it part of her daily schedule to stop along the road as she traveled between meetings to take pictures for use in her blog.

Result? No leads. As far as traffic goes, though, she'd been able to get quite a few hits, growing in numbers each week. Her email notifying past clients about her new blog seemed to have worked as several of those she previously had served had posted comments about her blog posts. Still, her blog had not generated any new leads. Eager to never waste any of her precious time, she was running out of patience. Disenfranchised, she wondered what she'd done wrong.

After teaching a class on how to get started with social media marketing earlier this week, I was asked by a few members what results they can expect once they establish their social media marketing platform. Specifically, we discussed the possibility of generating sales by using a blog and platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn.

Social media platforms can certainly generate leads, and most likely will over time. In my opinion, though, blogs and social networking websites such as Facebook and LinkedIn should initially be viewed as tools through which you can build stronger relationships with your existing sphere of influence. By now you probably have several hundred contacts in your database to which you've previously may have sent postcards or placed phone calls. Once you've built your blog it's time to invite your sphere of influence to visit and subscribe to your blog. Next, the use of blogs and other platforms can serve as an excellent introduction to new contacts. Add your blog address to any postcard you're about to send and give recipients a reason to come visit you online. For those you've never reached out to before it will serve as a first "meeting," and your blog enables you to make a great first impression. In fact,

most bloggers I speak with say that many times they receive phone calls and emails from prospective clients who comment that they already feel as if they know them. Finally, once you've built a loyal following to your blog, and start seeing an increased number of visits through search engines, other blogs, and by online and offline word of mouth, you will likely receive leads. Once you're consistently adding posts to your blog you may climb up the ladder among search engine results and it wouldn't surprise me if you'll start receiving leads through your blog and other platforms.

From time to time you'll find references to Teresa Boardman in this marketing blog, simply because I consider her blog to be, as I've said before, a beacon of what blogs can and should be. Most importantly, beyond the fact that her blog includes interesting and engaging stories, not to mention beautiful pictures, it's also successful. Here are two articles which discuss Boardman's success with blogging: [Click here to read Interview With a Real Estate Blogging Goddess](#). [Click here to read A Small Business Marketing Success Story: Teresa Boardman, Real Estate Agent](#).

Engaging in social media marketing is a marathon, not a sprint. It should compliment your marketing efforts, and expand them, rather than completely replace what you've done previously. Expecting instant gratification most likely will lead to disappointment. Instead, view your social media platforms as a means to build stronger relationships with those you've served in the past. It's an excellent way to introduce your business to new contacts, and turn previously cold prospects to warm leads.



## Before You Post at Twitter - Consider This

Twitter has quickly become one of the most popular ways to communicate with friends, well, the cyber-world in general. Through Twitter you can keep your friends notified on what you're doing, make your customers aware of product updates, and intrigue potential customers with invitations to find out about you.

Is Twitter a great marketing tool? Absolutely, but it needs to be managed with great care.

Sometimes the best way to learn what to do is to learn from what not to do. Well, here are two examples I found online today, and I must admit that I feel for two individuals who supposedly, according to stories found online, made serious mistakes.

First, someone who apparently had just received a job offer lost the opportunity even before day one at the new job. Here's a recap of a story recounted here at the blog *I'm Not Actually a Geek* by Hutch Carpenter.

According to the story, someone receives a job offer upon which he or she posts at Twitter: "Cisco just offered me a job! Now I have to weigh the utility of a fatty paycheck against the daily commute to San Jose and hating the work." According to the information I came across, someone caught the Twitter post and responded: "Who is the hiring manager. I'm sure they would love to know that you will hate the work. We here at Cisco are versed in the web."

If this story is true it's probably safe to assume that the applicant did not get a job, but now the story is all over the Internet. While the story is about a job applicant, there's a clear parallel to anyone who may comment through social media networking, microblogging and blog platforms.

Here's another example. According to a blog post I found, a public relations professional from New York was visiting Memphis, there to meet a group within a large corporation. Hours after a presentation he posts the following on Twitter: "True confession but

I'm in one of those towns where I scratch my head and say I would die if I had to live here!" The Twitter post came to the attention of the corporation, again according to the blog article, and, well, you can read the rest of the story here, including a written response back to the originator of the Twitter post, at the blog of Peter Shankman.

Conversely, the use of Twitter can help you in your marketing activities. Now, while the example provided here describes how one man managed to get a job through Twitter, there's something to be said about the way Twitter can help build ongoing relationships with potential real estate customers.

If you're new to social media marketing and not aware of Twitter, visit [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com). Better yet, go here for *17 Ways You Can Use Twitter: A Guide for Beginners, Marketers and Business Owners*.



*For full disclosure I tried to do due diligence by finding out whether these stories actually were true. Judging from the amount of exposure online I'd say yes. But, it's not always easy to know for sure. I am as we speak trying to confirm the accuracy of the stories. Even if it turns out to be fabricated I felt the stories could serve as a cautionary note for everyone now getting into Twitter. As for the issue of whether or not to believe everything you see online will be covered in a future blog post.*

# Developing an Action Plan for Social Media Marketing

by Mathias Bergendahl, Director of Marketing & Communications

A few days ago a member told me that while she'd like to get started with social media marketing, she will have limited time to commit. She shared that presently she has not signed up for any of the tools or platforms I've referenced in previous blog posts, and she asked for advice on exactly which ones to register for. Based on her questions and comments, I thought I'd devote today's blog post to providing a suggested initial platform. Additionally, I'll share with you how you can automate the sharing of information between the various platforms so that you don't have to spend unnecessary time logging into all of them at all time.

Before even the first social network profile is filled out, each platform you choose should have a defined purpose. With that in mind I've divided the suggested networks into three separate groups with different purposes.

## 1. Information and Knowledge Sharing Platform

### Blog – Your Virtual Newspaper

First, consider starting a blog. It should become your online communications central where you can communicate directly with your audience, sharing your insight and knowledge in an educational and entertaining way. Your blog content should be a mix of articles you've written yourself as well as materials and resources developed by others. The primary objective for your blog should be to nurture your existing relationships and invite new contacts



to read the blog in an effort to build credibility and trust. A secondary goal with my blog would be to receive leads from those who may have found the blog online. The platform I would choose would be WordPress.com as I find the free blog program easy to work with, easy to automatically feed to other platforms, rich with helpful tools and – not the least important – free.

Want tips on blogging? An excellent resource is The Real Estate Tomato where you can find articles on anything and everything about blogging. If you want to see what I consider the best blog in real estate, visit Teresa Boardman's St. Paul Real Estate blog here.

## 2. Resource Platforms

### Website

"Should my blog replace my website?" is a question I often receive. In my opinion, your website and blog both serve different purposes and both should therefore be part of your online presence. An essential reason to maintain a website is so that you can offer your visitors various consumer tools such as a mortgage calculator, and your website, not blog, is where your contacts can search for homes. The main difference between your website and blog is that while your website will remain largely static, your blog will be more dynamic with new information added more frequently.

### YouTube

If a picture says more than 1,000 words, consider the impact of using video. With most of us having a rather short attention span when browsing the Internet, cyber-visitors are far more likely to view a video than reading text. Text-based content certainly can describe your passion for what you do, and especially your strong commitment to your clients. A video, however, where you describe your process – giving consumers a preview of what it's like to work with you – is likely more impactful. Additionally, you can use videos in your open house promotions and home tours. The use of video will require a smaller budget for a camcorder, but these days you can actually find a basic one for as little as \$79. Once you've taped your videos and want to edit, use Microsoft's Moviemaker which is included with Windows for free. Once you've developed your video library it's time to upload them to YouTube –



for free. Once your videos have been uploaded you can easily link to them through all the online profiles and networks you have.

Want tips on using video in your blog or other platforms? Click here to read [An Honest Look at the Impact of Video on Your Real Estate Blog](#).

#### Flickr

Once you really get started with social media marketing you'll probably find yourself using a lot of images. You may want to get in the habit of taking lots of images of listings. Additionally, you will probably need images from the specific community and communities to show your knowledge in those particular areas. By signing up for free profile Flickr.com you have access to a very sizable online photo archive. Once uploaded, similar to videos at YouTube, you can easily link to pictures from emails, website, blog, Twitter, etc.



Need a way to edit and improve your pictures? Click here to go to [picnik.com](#) where you can edit pictures for free.

### 3. Networking and Traffic-Generating Resources

#### FaceBook

Even though you may not be on FaceBook yet, most of your contacts and acquaintances probably are. The first golden rule to FaceBook is to keep your profile strictly professional (you can have a private one separately). Use the profile to share information about your business and promote any open houses you're going to have. You can easily link to articles you've found online and provide links to your other social media platforms.



For tips on how to use FaceBook, click here.

#### LinkedIn

Your LinkedIn profile is essentially a virtual

business card in what could be described as a cyber-rolodex. It focuses on your professional background and merits, and highlights your past and current positions, your education, designations, and specialties, and possibly testimonials and recommendations by those you have in your network.

For tips on how to use LinkedIn, click here to read [Using LinkedIn to Expand and Nurture Your Sphere of Influence](#).

#### Twitter

In recent months, Twitter has gained an enormous amount of publicity and exposure. It seems everyone is Tweeting (as it's called to send messages through Twitter) and quite often for no particular reason at all.

Unfortunately, Twitter has gained notoriety for being a platform where messages are distributed without a clear recipient, and often seem rather incoherent as the 140 characters limit isn't especially conducive to correct grammar. But, there is a business application to Twitter which we'll cover next.

For tips on how to best use Twitter, click here to access [twitter for real estate twits](#). You can also read my recent article [Twitter for Realtors®: A Focused Approach for Effective Marketing](#) here.

Platform Integration: [Twitter, Blog, LinkedIn & FaceBook](#)

It's easy to understand how many perceive social media marketing as requiring a lot of time. By using the right tools, though, it doesn't have to be. By using syndication between all your platforms you'll be able to drastically minimize the time you spend using these tools.

Here are a few steps you can take to minimize your effort yet maximize your exposure. Click here to view how it's done conceptually.





Here are a few steps you can take to minimize your effort yet maximize your exposure. Click here to view how it's done conceptually.

1. Post updates only in your blog.
2. Add an automatic feed from your blog to Facebook using an application called Notes. Click here to see how.



3. Add another automatic feed from your blog to Twitter using Twitterfeed.com. Click here to see how.
4. Add the Wordpress application to your LinkedIn account. Click here to see how.



Once you've established your platform I suggest you spend some time to make sure each of your online profiles has links to all other profiles. For more ideas on how to fully integrate your platforms, click here to read *Treating Every Social Network Profile as Your First Handshake*, an article I recently wrote.