

soci@



attract friends, followers, and
connections to your business

ben kinney with **jay papasan**

in partnership with **activerain**

social

attract friends, followers, and connections to your business

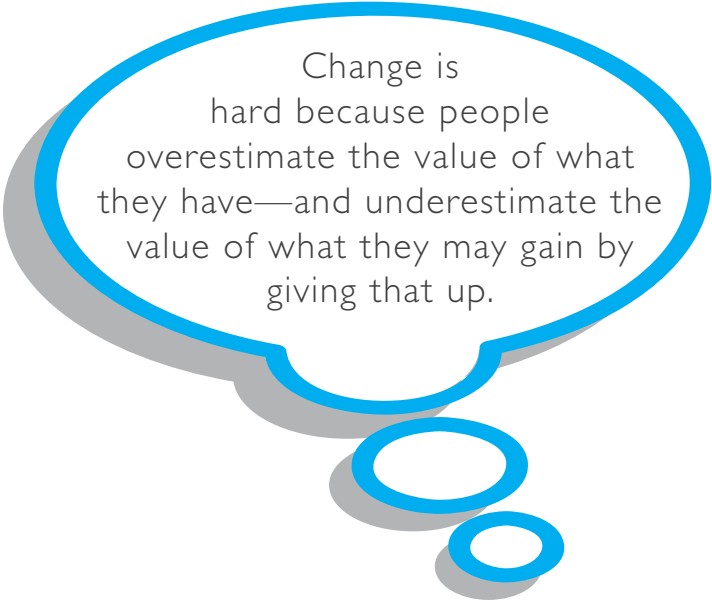
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Change is
hard because people
overestimate the value of what
they have—and underestimate the
value of what they may gain by
giving that up.

James Belasco and Ralph Stayer
Flight of the Buffalo

acknowledgments

Writing books has more in common with social media than you might think. Pull any book off your shelf and, invariably, the authors are identified in bold print on the cover. This is a bit misleading. Authors may get cover credit for the manuscript, but it takes a host of talented and generous people to publish a book (or, in this case, an ebook). Like social media, book-writing is inherently collaborative. A good blog post is always enriched when readers add comments and, especially, when those comments become a conversation. The same thing happens in books; it is simply less apparent. The fact is *Soci@l* would never have been completed without the contributions of hundreds of our friends, family members, and professional colleagues.

At the top of my list, I want to thank Gary Keller. It was after a visit to Keller Williams Realty International in Austin that Jay called me up and asked about teaming up to write *Soci@l* as a compliment to the Internet models in *SHIFT: How Top Agents Tackle Tough Times* (McGraw-Hill 2008). Thanks for the opportunity to join forces.

The Keller Williams team was invaluable. Thanks to Ellen Marks, who first championed the idea of the ebook to Jay and then championed it to the world by leading its marketing efforts; to Cary Sylvester and Bryon Ellington for their leadership on agent technologies; to the creative and design team of Annie Switt and Michael Balistreri; to Amber Presley for working the KW social marketing channels; to KWU's Alexis MacIntyre, Stacia Thompson, and Julie Fantechi for their research and insights on social marketing; to the production team of Jim Talbot, Tamara Hurwitz, Mary Keith Trawick, Jeffrey Ryder, and Jennifer Boyd; and finally, thanks to Teresa Metcalf for doing anything and everything needed to make this book happen.

Special thanks to the entire staff at ActiveRain. The real estate world wouldn't be the same if it wasn't for Jon Washburn's pioneering vision and the amazing, dedicated staff, which includes the customer service crew run by Doug Ching, the community builders—especially Bob Stewart and Brad Andersohn, Lauren Bernstein, Jorgen Hahn, and of course the 170,000 members that keep them on their toes.

When writing this ebook, I relied heavily on Bob Stewart (from ActiveRain), to the extent that he provided us an entire first draft of the blogging chapter. His experience and passion for real estate and technology shines through both his writing and his training. It has been a true honor to have included his contributions in this book and to have been able to share the stage with him throughout our many RainCamp training events.

It would have been impossible to complete this ebook within the established time frames had it not been for my Keller Williams Realty Bellingham office—which includes our amazing ninety-plus agents, MCA Lisa Colburn, broker Marsha Lockhart, as well as my business partner, Chris McNamara, and my Team Leader, Pat Jerns.

My vision of providing lives worth living and businesses worth owning to my Home4Investment Real Estate Team has come full circle, and they have returned the favor and provided me the chance to accept the opportunities that arise. My team is made up of the most dedicated, visionary, and passionate people around that have committed to surviving and thriving in this economic shift. Thanks to my staff—first and foremost Jillene Snell, for being

the first one to share my vision that now includes Janel, Alex, and Haruichi. To my agents and partners: Abel, Anna, Brian, Christopher, Dennis, JD, Jen, Laurie, Nathan, RoseMarie, Sharee, Skipp, Kathryn, Michaelle, Tyrone, as well as to my REO Northwest team: Stephanie, James, and Shannon.

Thank you to all the people that contributed their ideas and business practices to the manuscript, including Nick Cameron, Carissa and Jay Acker, Chad Hyams, Liz Landry, Sue Adler, Abel Bazan, and Matt Fetick. Your willingness to share is what makes our culture so great.

As you read through this ebook, you'll see comments from social marketing experts from across the real estate industry. Hopefully, you'll enjoy their comments as much as we did. Some offer reinforcement, others offer alternative viewpoints, and a few are bona fide members of our very own peanut gallery. While some of their comments are highlighted, many gave us suggestions to change or improve the text that would only be apparent by reading early rough drafts of the book. In the end, everyone on our social marketing expert review board deserves our deep appreciation: Carissa Acker, Sue Adler, Anna Biondolillo, Chris Buckelew, Nick Cameron, Missy Caulk, Lisa Colburn, Bryon Ellington, Matt Fetick, Brandon Green, Rob Hahn, Bruce Hardie, Chad Hyams, Kelley Koehler, Jonas Koffler, Brad Korn, Susan Kraemer, Liz Landry, Ellen Marks, Andrew Monaghan, Jonathan Osman, John Prescott, Amber Presley, Joelle Senter, Bob Stewart, Cary Sylvester, Stacia Thompson, Stefan Swanepoel, Beth Torrence, Mariana Wagner, Jon Washburn, and Mallina Wilson. They generously donated their time and we are eternally thankful for their input and insights.

Even if it's a bit redundant, I wanted to highlight a few examples of how helpful these individuals were. In reviewing this ebook, Mariana Wagner, a MAPS blog coach and co-owner of the Colorado Springs, Colorado-based Wagner iTeam, pointed out that we hadn't adequately addressed the use of hyperlinks in blog content. Most would have stopped there—not Mariana. She carefully drafted the section and it warranted almost zero editing. She's a true expert on the Internet and a classy individual as well. Her contributions are deeply appreciated.

Stefan Swanepoel's contributions also warrant a special shout-out. He generously agreed to read and review the book at the worst possible time for his business—just as he was completing his 2010 Swanepoel Trends Report. Stefan sent us detailed comments on December 23, which clearly meant he worked long into his well-earned holiday. He is a social media expert in the truest sense, and you can find his excellent *2010 Swanepoel Social Media Report* on his website: RETrends.com. Sincere thanks, Stefan.

Finally, working with my coauthor, Jay Papasan, was a great pleasure. We had an intense, eight-week timeline and he coached me through to the finish, while cowriting, editing, and directing the publishing logistics behind the scenes. Thanks, Boss! Couldn't have done it without you, nor would I of attempted! Also, special thanks to his wife, Wendy, for putting up with the long hours and for the home cooking while I was in town working with him. I will definitely practice before I agree to go bowling with her again!

Ben Kinney

January 8, 2010

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Preface

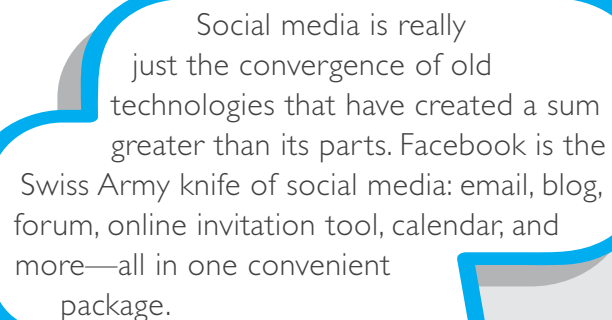
When Gary, Dave, and I began writing *SHIFT* in the summer of 2007, Craigslist was already an institution, Facebook had just topped 50 million users, and MySpace had displaced Friendster as king of the social networking landscape. People were paying attention, but no one knew exactly what to make of this emerging phenomenon. Blogging was catching on, but agents seemed to be doing more browsing than posting.

By the time *SHIFT* was published in August of 2008, more than 100 million Facebook users were regularly struggling to generate clever status updates three times a day, and social networking had officially crested the horizon in the real estate industry. Blogging was going mainstream in-between the two coasts and more than a million postlets plastered Craigslist and the Web with homes for sale.

Over the next twelve months, the deafening buzz around social media became impossible to ignore. Facebook tripled in size to more than 300 million active users, LinkedIn grew from 15 to 40 million users, and Twitter exploded onto the scene with A-list Hollywood actors battling pro athletes (and even the U.S. president) for Twitter-follower-supremacy. During that same period, ActiveRain, one of the most active social networks in the real estate industry, grew to more than 170,000 active members. Still, it took many by surprise.

internet, take two

Social networking, as a concept, is older than you might think. Sociologist A.J. Barnes actually coined “social networks” back in 1954 and helped jump-start a whole new way of looking at social connections. Lab-coat types began mapping personal connections in all kinds of communities from business units to battle groups, from board members to congressional donors. These social diagrams, or “sociograms,” dot the covers of social marketing books and websites, and have become emblematic of connectedness in general. About a decade later, Dr. Stanley Milgram conducted his



Social media is really just the convergence of old technologies that have created a sum greater than its parts. Facebook is the Swiss Army knife of social media: email, blog, forum, online invitation tool, calendar, and more—all in one convenient package.

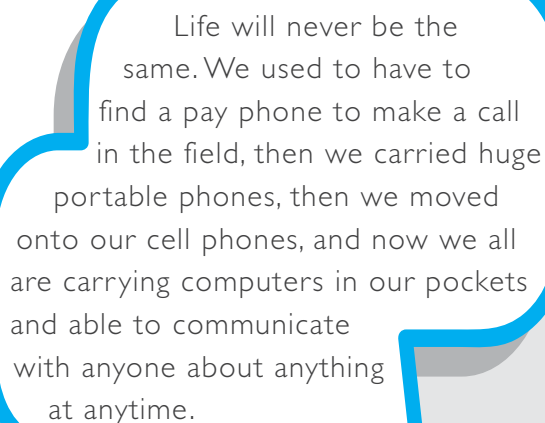
bryon ellington

celebrated “small world experiment” that birthed the idea of “six degrees of separation” for the social sciences (and, just as importantly, birthed the six degrees of Kevin Bacon for a generation of techies). In the 1990s anthropologist Robin Dunbar conceived the “rule of 150,” the idea that our ability to manage a social network tops out at about 150 relationships. Epidemiologists ate this stuff up; they had a vested interest in knowing how real-world viruses spread through human interactions. But other than the Kevin Bacon game, the idea of social networking was far from mainstream.

Credit Malcolm Gladwell and his excellent read, *The Tipping Point*, for bringing some of these ideas back into the mainstream spotlight. Gladwell built on all these ideas to illustrate how ideas sometimes took on the qualities of an epidemic. Done right, social networks harnessed all these concepts and, empowered by Internet technology, could disseminate all things digital in the blink of an eye. Around 2004, tech guru Tim O’Reilly would popularize the term “Web 2.0,” a moniker that has come to describe some of the most successful Internet businesses that rose from the ashes of the 2001 dot-com bust. Web 2.0 is social networking and social networking is about connections, conversations, and collaboration.

Now, Dunbar’s idea that we might network with no more than 150 individuals seems a little antiquated. Web 2.0 tools like Twitter and Facebook put us in direct or indirect relationship with more than 55 million social networkers in the United States alone.¹ When your mom sends you a friend request, you can no longer deny that social media has arrived. But what does all this mean for real estate professionals?

While the ideas we share in the Internet lead conversion chapter of *SHIFT*, “Tactic 6: Catch People in Your Web,” remain valid, they simply don’t address all the opportunities and challenges of attracting and converting leads with social media. That’s why we reached out to Ben Kinney and the good folks at ActiveRain to create this ebook. Ben is recognized across the United States and Canada as a tech leader in real estate. He’s also a brass tacks, serious real



Life will never be the same. We used to have to find a pay phone to make a call in the field, then we carried huge portable phones, then we moved onto our cell phones, and now we all are carrying computers in our pockets and able to communicate with anyone about anything at anytime.

chad hyams

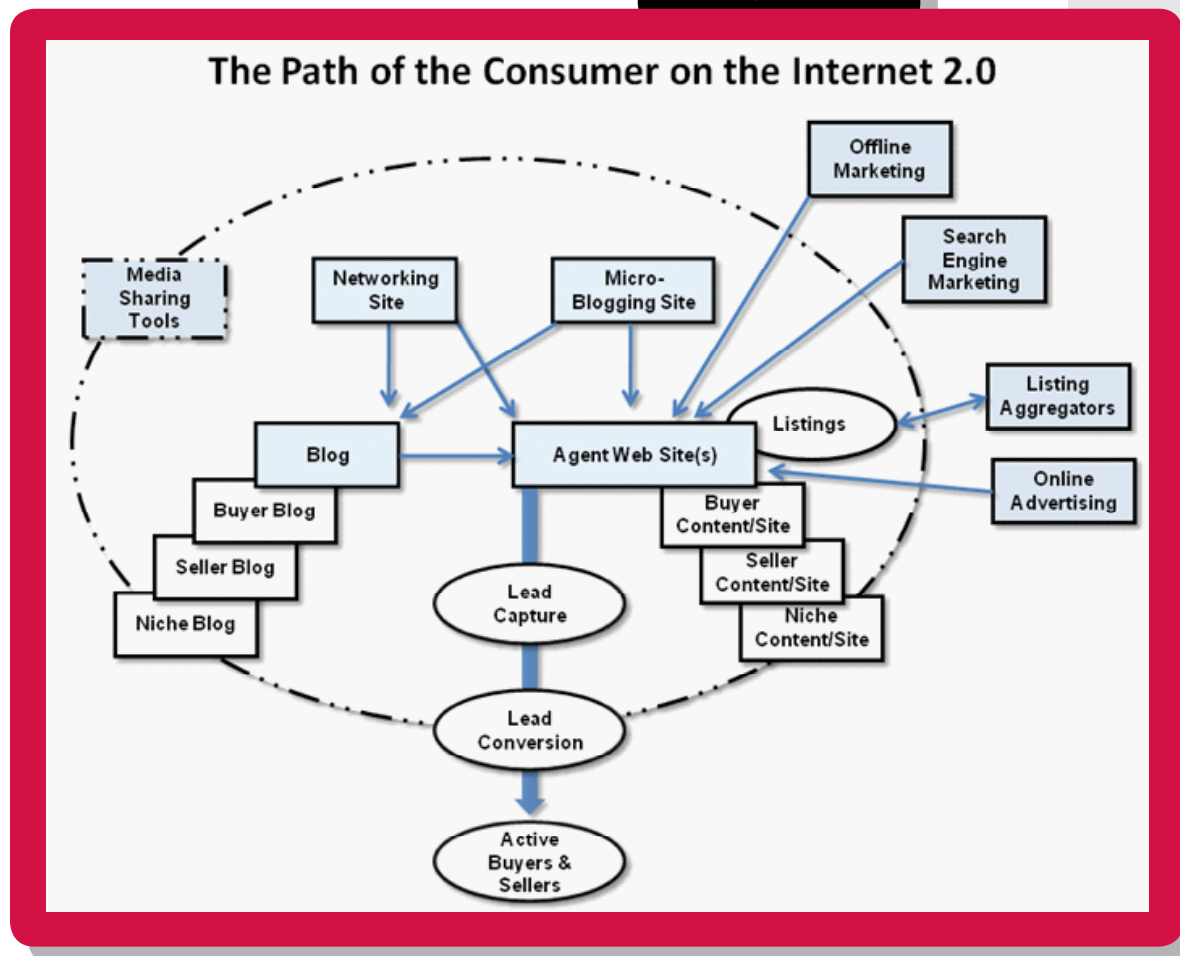
¹ Mashable.com citing Forrester Research: <http://mashable.com/2009/07/28/social-networking-users-us/>

estate professional whose Bellingham, Washington-based business, Home4Investment Real Estate Team, closed more than 150 real estate transactions in 2009. ActiveRain founder Jonathan Washburn is a former real estate agent himself and, with more than a million real estate blog pages at his fingertips, he has a uniquely informed perspective on the impact of social networking on real estate.

shift into social networking

Social networking impacts the lead conversion models in *SHIFT* on every level. It provides new channels for buyers and sellers to find you and your real estate business online, as well as new strategies for making offers and capturing and converting leads. And best of all, social networking tools provide inexpensive and effective ways to keep the conversation going over time for repeat and referral business. In short, social networks bring the world to you and you to the world. It's never been easier to connect with new customers and build relationships with them long past the closing table.

Figure 1



The Path of the Consumer on the Internet 2.0 (Figure 1) illustrates some of these changes. If you compare this to the original model, which appears on page 119 of *SHIFT*, you'll note that we've added Media Sharing Tools, Networking Sites, Microblogging Sites, and Blogs as proven tools for driving traffic to your website. Ben will provide tactical details on how these fit into your lead generation and conversion strategies in the pages ahead. For now, let's make sure we're speaking the same language. (See Figure 2.)

Figure 2: Tools to Increase Web Traffic

- 1) **Media Sharing Tools** – Sites such as YouTube and Flickr empower you to cheaply and easily share multimedia content throughout your Internet world. If a picture is worth a thousand words, what's the going rate for a YouTube video testimonial?
- 2) **Networking Sites** – Sites like LinkedIn and Facebook provide an information-rich platform for connecting with potential buyers and sellers. You can discover who attended school at your alma mater and tell them how cute their babies are, too.
- 3) **Microblogging Sites** – Sites like Twitter can be perplexing at first, but microblogging sites provide massive platforms for reaching an unlimited audience. William Shakespeare famously wrote that "brevity is the soul of wit." With posts limited to 140 characters or less, microblogs bring out the Shakespeare in all of us.
- 4) **Blogs** – Whether you use a mainstream blog tool like Blogger or WordPress or a real estate-centric one like Top Producer's or ActiveRain, blogs allow anyone with something to say a fuss-free way to professionally and stylishly publish their thoughts to the Web. If you ever wrestled with HTML code, or paid some college kid to do it for you, you understand how miraculous these publishing engines truly are.

These are the four new players in your real estate Internet business model. But the basic rules haven't changed. A shifted market and a scarcity of business will continue to tug at your pocketbook and test your willpower. You must still hold each minute invested or dollar spent to a positive cash return. Nothing escapes your scrutiny. If your Internet strategy is yielding anything short of appointments to do business with motivated buyers and sellers, it's time to address that today. The proven tactics in this ebook can guide you. It's time to shift into social networking.

Networking sites are also great resources for giving and receiving referrals!

mariana wagner

Jay Papasan

Coauthor of *SHIFT: How Top Real Estate Agents Tackle Tough Times*

January 2010



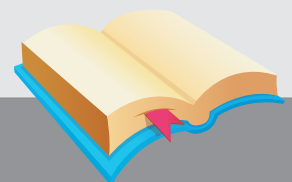
introduction –
why social media matters

Introduction – Why Social Media Matters

I hate to point out incorrect statements of our forefathers, but historically we do appear to have a tendency to doubt that in which we do not yet understand. Thomas Edison once said, “It is apparent to me that the possibilities of the aeroplane, which two or three years ago were thought to hold the solution to the [flying machine] problem, have been exhausted, and that we must turn elsewhere.” I am glad that at least a few skeptics continued to see the possibilities of powered, winged flight.

The history of the Internet has also been littered with similar incorrect predictions. Probably the best example is a prominent Newsweek article that appeared in February of 1995. The title should tell you everything you need to know about it: “The Internet? Bah! – Hype Alert. Why Cyberspace Isn’t, and Never Will Be, Nirvana.” The writer went on to dismiss such fanciful ideas as telecommuting, interactive libraries, virtual communities, and online shopping. He even took a preemptive swipe at ebooks. Look it up sometime. It’s quite entertaining.

In fairness to the author, early fans of the new Internet technology were given to hyperbole on a massive scale. The aforementioned article is no doubt a reaction to a passel of overzealous Internet fans. No, the Internet hasn’t fixed all of our social ills. Heck, it’s even introduced a few. But it has been transformative. And that’s the point. When asked about technology, Gary Keller often replies “people tend to overestimate the short-term impact of innovation while underestimating the long-term impact.” It’s no different with social media. So let’s cut through the hype, examine why social media matters today, and highlight how it might have a meaningful long-term impact on how real estate professionals run their businesses. Along the way, I’ll share with you some strategies that have proven very successful in my Bellingham, Washington-based business, as well as many tried-and-true techniques from other successful real estate professionals across the United States and Canada.



Would you be interested
in a print version
of *Soci@!*? Email
print@socialthebook.com
and let us know!

barcelona and the kuroshio sea

Since the dawn of marketing, businesses have been pushing (or cramming, you might say) products and services in front of consumers, using print, radio, and television to broadcast messages to the masses. Big businesses created a marketplace where only massive infusions of money would determine if the message or product was going to be successful. Corporations competed for the prime advertising spots including magazine covers, prime-time commercials, and drive-time radio spots.

Today, notable products, solid service, and quality content have the ability to broadcast themselves through free platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Yelp, and Twitter. True more today than ever, “Our reputation truly precedes us.”

On July 15, 2009, Mr. Jon Rawlinson posted a rather simple but beautiful video on YouTube, named “Kuroshio Sea - 2nd largest aquarium tank in the world.”² The 4-minute and 34-second video is a simple, static view of an amazing aquarium that contains a mind-boggling 1.9 million gallons of water and is home to 70 species—including as many as four whale sharks. The video was paired with a song: “Please Don’t Go” by Barcelona (a little-known band at the time).

Previous attempts to attach music to homemade videos resulted in attorney phone calls and threatening letters. Barcelona instead returned with a YouTube video response,³ explaining how flattered they were that Jon Rawlinson chose their song for the video and also thanking the 2.8 million viewers of the “Kuroshio Sea” for their questions, comments, and, of course, for the surge in sales on iTunes.

Figure 3



² <http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=u7deClndzQw>


³ http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=Xqlpa3EWsok&feature=response_watch

Rawlinson's video has become the quintessential example of viral marketing and how social media can and is changing the world as we know it. The expense of exposing 2.8 million consumers to your song, product, or service is no longer cost prohibitive for most small businesses. Today, your reach is defined less by your financial resources and more by your creative resourcefulness. A digital introduction to consumers is about placing your product or service in an online context that's remarkable. When that is achieved, social networks take that remarkable something and spread it far and wide.

The average Facebook user has 130 friends (eerily close to Dunbar's Rule of 150). So when you spotted "Kuroshio Sea" on YouTube and shared it with all your friends, you unleashed a virus of sorts. Your 130 friends may pass it along to their 130 friends and so forth. Even if only a fraction passes the video along to their pals, you get to 2.8 million views fast. That's what Rawlinson's video did for Barcelona's song. It can happen for your business too.

social media essentials

There are hundreds of social networks and online tools that can be used to assist in building your business. I have chosen to focus on the tools that I personally rely on in my everyday real estate sales business. No disrespect intended to the other amazing networks and tools available, but there are only so many hours in each day. Hopefully you will investigate my choices and research some of your own.



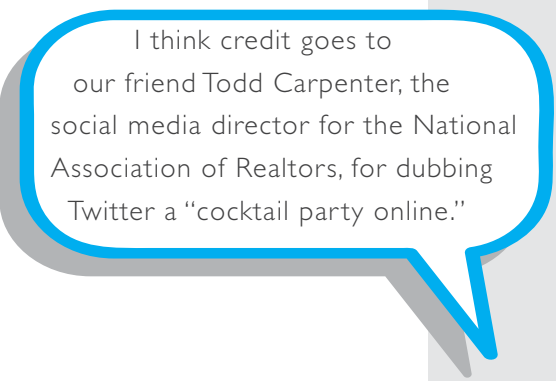
Social media has changed the way I do business. I can connect to all of my clients at once with one smart posting.

chad hyams



The *2010 Swanepoel Social Media Report* provides a great ten-day, step-by-step action plan for agents that can be downloaded for free at www.retrends.com.

stefan swanepoel



I think credit goes to our friend Todd Carpenter, the social media director for the National Association of Realtors, for dubbing Twitter a "cocktail party online."

mariana wagner

Figure 4: Essential Social Networks

- 1) **Facebook** – The current king of the networking sites, highlighted by a casual, conversational tone. Facebook combines the best of media sharing, microblogging, and networking on one platform.
- 2) **LinkedIn** – The leading networking site for professionals that encourages collaboration and collective talent hunting. If Facebook shows up for the Saturday backyard barbecue in jeans and flip-flops, LinkedIn hits the boardroom on Monday wearing polished dress shoes and a business suit.
- 3) **Twitter** – Often called a “cocktail party online,” Twitter is a frenetic microblogging site that does its core job very, very well: It enables conversations and marketing on a massive scale. Despite a confounding 140-character limit on communications, many of the biggest business success stories have originated on Twitter.
- 4) **Plaxo** – Created by the founders of Napster, Plaxo is social networking platform that serves as both an online Rolodex and a contact management program. Plaxo will help keep your contacts up-to-date and you connected with your sphere.
- 5) **YouTube** – The definitive video-sharing website, YouTube connects to all your other social networks and makes video sharing a snap.
- 6) **ActiveRain** – With around 170,000 members and more than a million pages of blog content, no other social media site does more to help real estate buyers and sellers searching for “long tail” search terms connect with real estate agents who specialize in them.

This is a great analogy to showcase the primary difference between Facebook and LinkedIn. If you understand the difference in purpose, you will understand how to leverage each tool to its full potential.

We have created this ebook as a resource for those who are interested in using social media for marketing, prospecting for leads, and for those who want to leverage themselves in today’s shifting market. We are making the presumption that most of you are familiar with the basics on how to sign up and use social media platforms. For any of you that need assistance with taking the first steps, please visit www.SocialtheBook.com, where we have assembled a number of helpful tutorials for anyone starting out.

cary sylvester

Before we dive right into the social media strategies that can help your business, let's review the current facts and statistics about the Internet and social media so that we can better understand the evolution of the real estate industry and its use of the Web. The real estate industry hasn't been the only business affected by technology and our hyper-connectivity. In fact, I might be so brave as to state that we are affected in every aspect of our lives by this thing I like to call the social shift.

the social shift

The book *SHIFT*—by Gary, Dave, and Jay—did an excellent job at identifying the twelve tactics real estate agents need to adopt to survive and thrive in a shifting market. Gary opens with “Get Real, Get Right,” a wake-up-and-smell-the-coffee chapter for real estate agents that sets the tone for the book. In a similar vein, I'd like to set the stage so we are all 100 percent clear on what this guide on social networking and Internet lead generation is designed to do. This ebook is intended to be one part wake-up call and one part action plan. First, we want to underscore how our industry is midstream in a massive shift from the traditional Internet to Web 2.0 lead generation strategies. Then, we'll address specific strategies you can implement in your business to leverage social media for leads and lead conversion.

Not that the real estate industry isn't already aware of the business-altering effects the Internet has brought over the last few years. According to the National Association of Realtors *2009 Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers*, 90 percent of buyers use the Internet in their search for a home. In fact, 36 percent of buyers found the actual home that they purchased online.

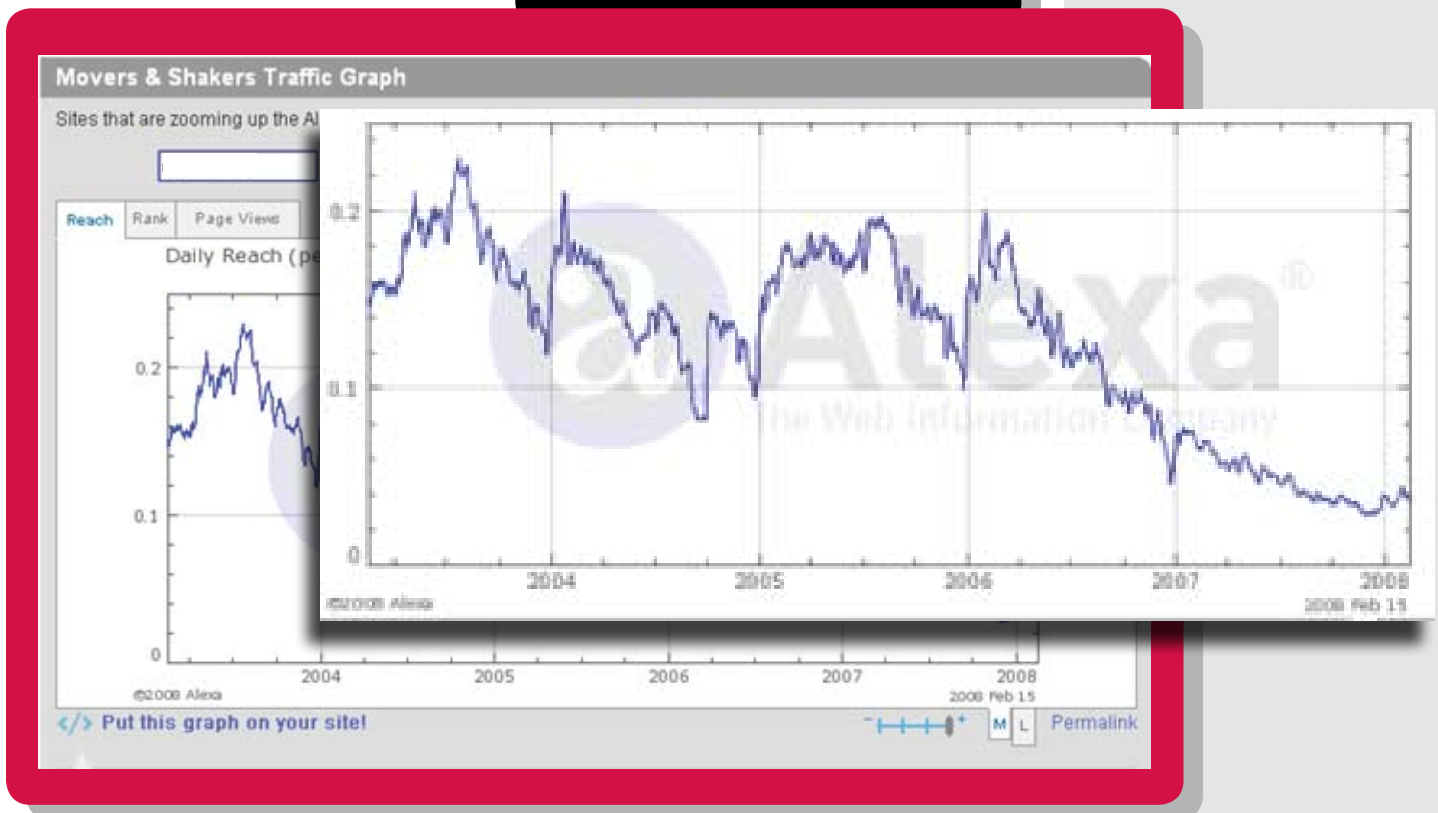
With a nod to Karl Fisch's famous “Shift Happens” YouTube tech video, *did you know* these Internet facts?

- 2009 data from www.InternetWorldStats.com states that 74.1 percent of consumers are using the Internet on a regular basis.
- Three out of every four Americans rely on the Internet as their primary source of communication, research, and entertainment.

- Statistics from Harris Interactive show that consumers are spending more than 13 hours per week on the Internet on average while hours spent watching TV has only been decreasing.

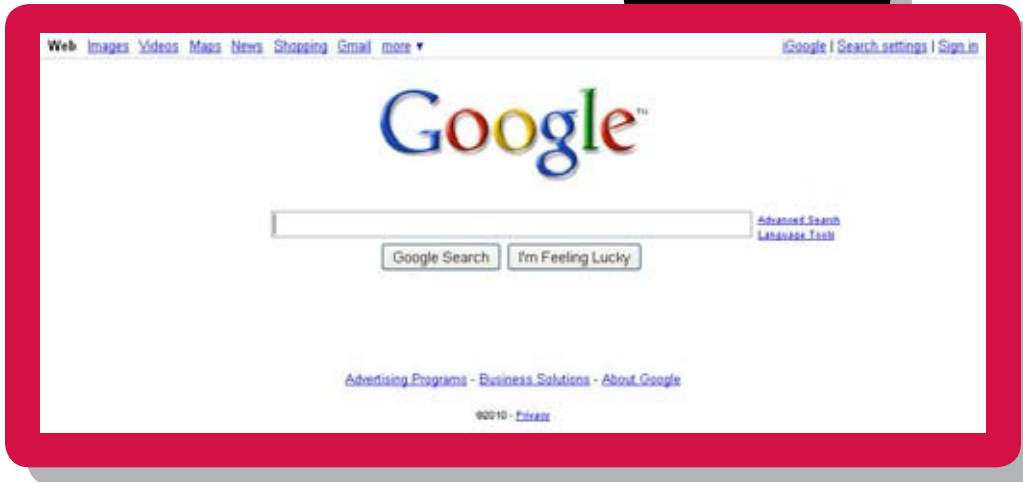
It is no wonder that major corporations are shifting marketing dollars away from the traditional television ads and into social media websites, YouTube videos, and targeted online advertising. The social shift is happening in the real estate industry as well. When Alexa.com allowed five-year traffic trends reports, I noticed a decline in traffic on the majority of the biggest real estate Websites, listing syndication portals, and even some local real estate office websites.⁴ The dominant national site started to slide in 2003 and, from the fall of 2005 to the spring of 2006, the other real estate portals followed suit. The real estate market was still red hot, so the drop wasn't from a lack of interest on the part of buyers and sellers. Also strike marketing dollars from your list too. All the companies on the reports list were clearly putting serious fiscal resources and company focus on driving traffic to their sites. So what happened? The social shift happened.

Figure 5: Movers and Shakers Graph



⁴ Alexa.com doesn't share historic traffic information that far back these days, so you'll have to trust us that they did back then. Figure 5 is an image capture of the Alexa graph in question. We recommend the sites names so as not to embarrass anyone.

Figure 6



Let me explain. In the past, while we were waiting for the obnoxious sounds of our 56k dial-up modem to make a connection, we passed the time by stretching out our typing fingers—both of them. Once connected, we henpecked on the top of the screen and typed ever so slowly, “W - W - W - . - B - R - O - K - E - R - A - G - E - N - T - . - C - O - M,” or maybe painstakingly typed, “W - W - W - . - A - G - E - N - T - N - A - M - E - . - C - O - M.” But in the intervening years, one dominant technology emerged that has permanently altered our online behavior. Yep, you guessed it—Google.com happened.

Now, when we launch our Internet browser over our super-fast broadband connection, the most common website we see on our homepage is some version of a search engine—most often Google, Yahoo, or MSN. In fact, IntelliTeamInc.com stated that 92 percent of consumers who go online reported using search engines on a regular basis, while the remaining 8 percent, in my opinion, just didn’t know enough to understand they were using one and therefore failed to report it. They probably just called it the “homepage.” Regardless, statistics show that the vast majority of Internet consumers rely heavily on search engines to get them where they want to go. (Search engine navigation is so prevalent that many will type the entire web address into the search box before they will enter it into the address bar.) So, before there was a social shift, there was a search engine shift.

I was just on a road trip with my 62-year-old aunt. She became frustrated with the AAA book because she wanted “one of those boxes” to enter what she was looking for.

stacia thompson

Once consumers adjusted to using the “Search” button to navigate, websites that appeared in the initial search results enjoyed a massive competitive advantage. Then, to my dismay, real estate buyers and sellers stopped typing in website addresses and even stopped entering phrases like “Realtor Name” or “Brokerage A” into the search engines. Instead, they were searching for exactly what they wanted to purchase: “Seattle Homes,” “Austin Real Estate,” “Downtown Lofts,” “Beachfront Condos,” and so on.

When local terms like the ones listed previously were entered into search engines, the first page of the search results was missing the major brokerage websites, hence the aforementioned drop in traffic. Instead, local real estate agents who had figured out the “secret sauce” for the search engines (commonly known as SEO or search engine optimization) dominated the top-level search results.

Figure 7: Definition: Search Engine Optimization

SEO or Search Engine Optimization - *How to make a website organically rank in the search engines for a particular search phrase. Search engines continually scour web for content and rank them for validity. To rank “organically” is to be visible and deemed important by a search engine for a particular search phrase like “Atlanta Homes for Sale.”*

Thanks to this online revolution, the Internet lead generation model for real estate agents was born. For the first time, those agents that could leverage the Internet were competing with those experienced agents that had held all the listing inventory. Buyers still wanted to see homes more than anything else. But with Internet Data Exchange (IDX) putting listings in everyone’s virtual hands, the agents who got the most traffic didn’t necessarily have the most signs in yards. Buyers were now making contact with real estate agents online, and that contact was often being made with agents other than the listing agent. Tech-savvy Internet agents were consumed with getting their website to show in the search engine results pages for major search terms like “City Name + Real Estate” or “City Name + Homes.”

All that changed in October 2004, when *Wired* editor Chris Anderson shook the Internet world with his article, “The Long Tail.” Anderson presented a theory (which he later expanded upon in his 2006 book of the same name) that given no inventory or stocking costs and the ability to stock a near unlimited variety of products, your most popular items would generate about 20 percent of your sales. All the rest, the “long tail,” would actually add up to 80 percent. He cited Netflix and Amazon.com as case studies that proved his point.

The “long tail” holds true for search engine phrases as well. The most popular phrases for your product or service will generally add up to about 20 percent of the traffic for your website. The “long tail” of less common phrases will generally deliver an amazing 80 percent of your traffic. We’ve seen this theory become a reality for our real estate website, as you can see in Figure 8.

Figure 8

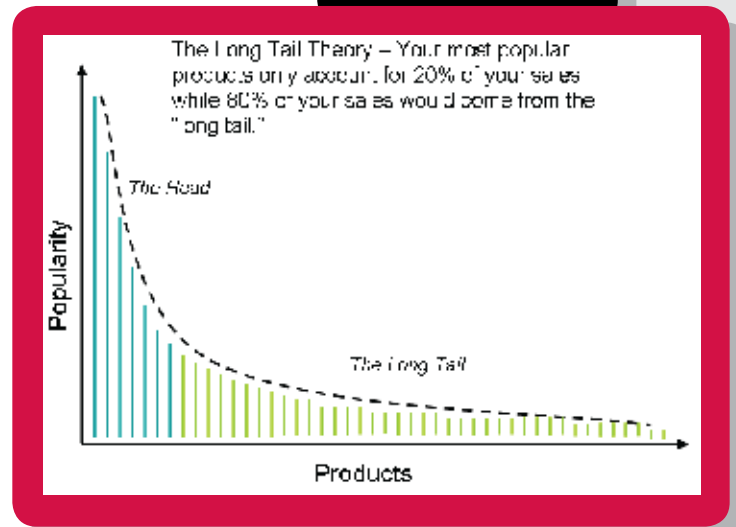
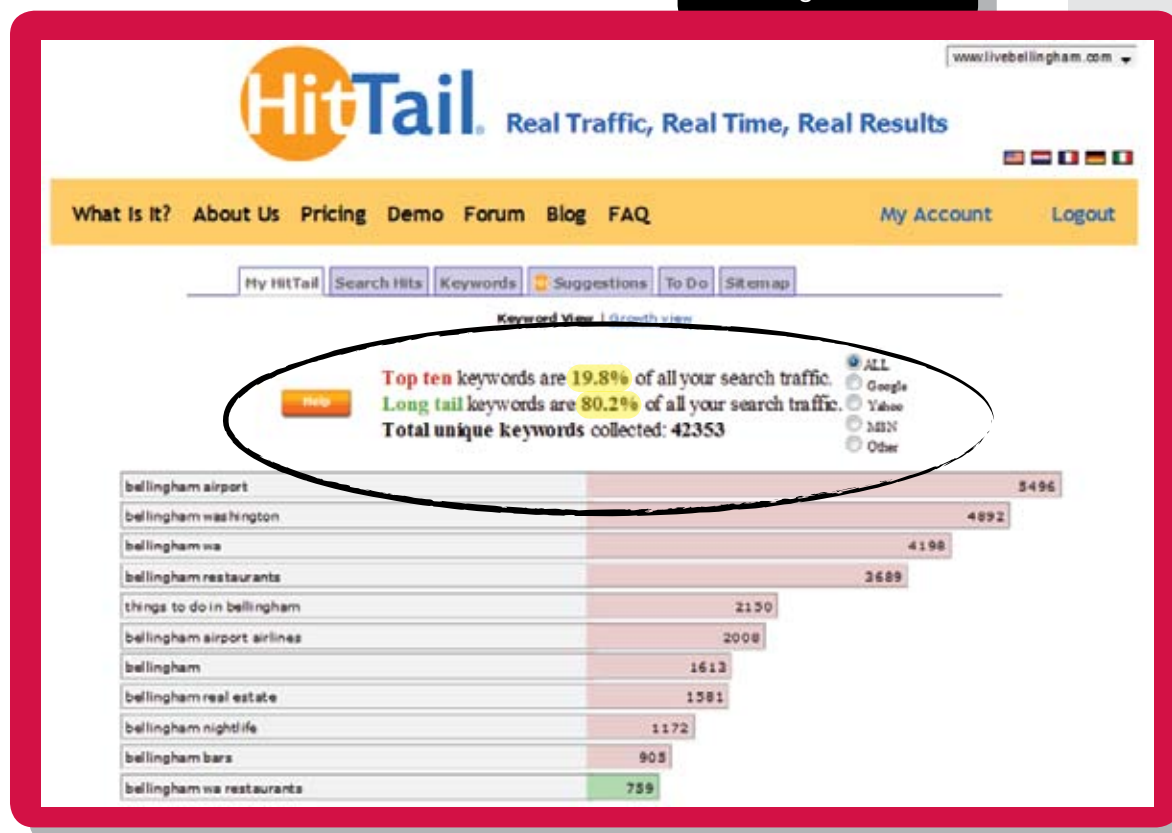
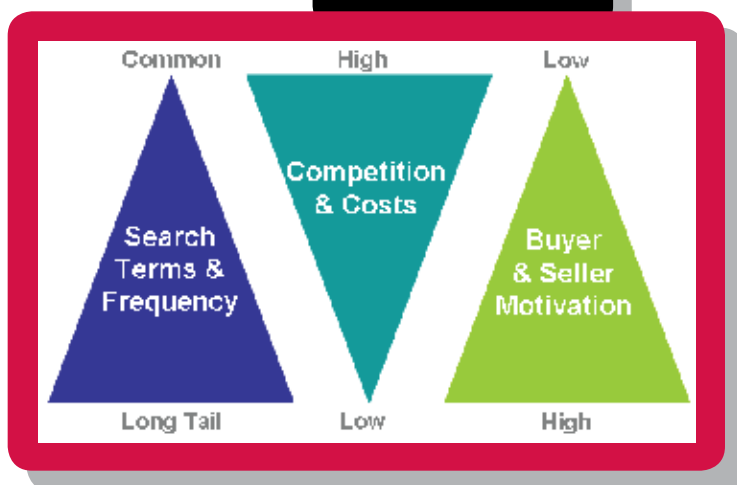


Figure 9



Hyperlocal content generation for websites and blogs started to rise as businesses started to understand the “long tail” theory. Real estate agents quickly noticed the difference in the quality of leads that were generated from the most common search phrases like “Austin Real Estate” when compared to long-tail search terms like “Lake Travis View Homes.” The “Austin Real Estate” leads were mostly buyers just starting their home search or agents checking on the competition. The leads generated from more specific phrases like “Lake Travis View Homes” generated buyers who tended to be further along in their home search, who knew what geographic area they wanted to live in, and who knew what type of home they wanted to buy. The more specific the search criteria, the more motivated the lead. Thus, higher quality leads came directly from less commonly used search phrases.

Figure 10



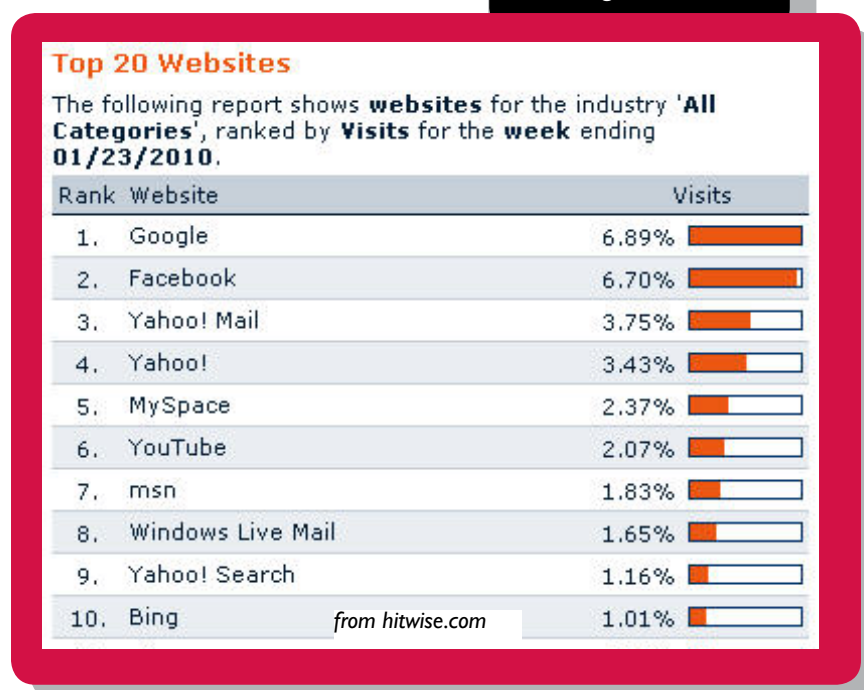
The good news is that the big competitors are still vying for the common phrases like “City + Real Estate” and ignoring the higher quality traffic from the “long tail.” This makes SEO and paid advertising cheaper and easier for agents savvy enough to understand the long tail, and it represents another reason for the traffic drop I noted in the big national real estate websites.

Blogging tools like WordPress and Tumblr have become common marketing tools to the effect of hundreds of thousands of blog posts generated by businesses each day. Blogs made it easy for real estate agents to create and post local content online. And since these blog platforms played well with search engines hungry for relevant content, blogs flush with local content started ranking

well in search engine results for those hyperlocal terms. As a result, in only a handful of years, the online social network and blogging platform ActiveRain went from being a little-known tool to a leading platform for real estate bloggers creating local content that can rank in search engines.

Fast forward to the present and let's examine the Internet's most popular websites based on data collected from Hitwise⁵ (see Figure 11). Three of the top six most-visited websites are social networks.

Figure 11



In my opinion, the recent decline in traffic on the big real estate portals is the fact that the most visited websites are now search engines and social marketing sites. Consumers haven't disappeared, they have simply changed their online behavior. They are often searching for what they want and sometimes linking to it from social networks, rather than navigating to the big portals. In fact, the number of people on the Internet has only increased. Those big portals are still relevant and attract millions of visitors, but I believe the traffic they have lost and a percentage of the new is going to real estate agents and local businesses who get the social shift and who know how to leverage it.

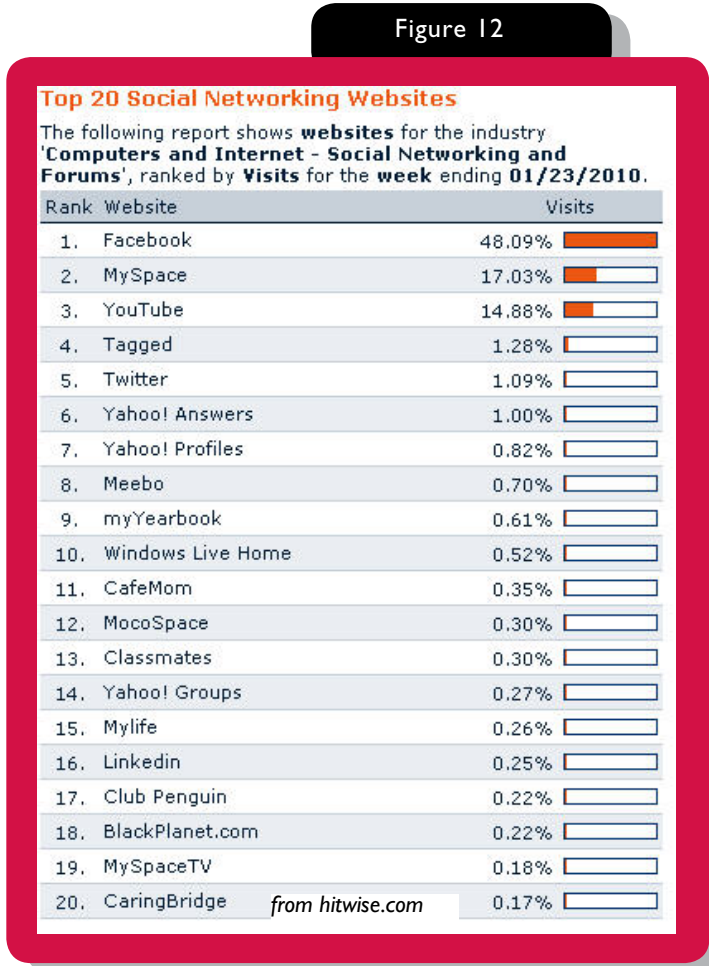
⁵ <http://www.hitwise.com/us>

The social media statistics are, simply put, mind-boggling. For instance, Netpop Research recently reported that 32 percent of Internet users' time online is spent on some form of social media platform—that's one out of every three minutes spent on networks like Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and YouTube. YouTube recently reported on their official blog⁶ that they are serving more than 1 billion page views per day. Experts estimate that if you started watching YouTube videos today, it would take you over 9,000 years to watch them all.

Interestingly, this top-twenty list (see Figure 12) is yet another example of the 80/20 Principle at play. The top 20 percent (sites one through four) attract 80.73 percent of the visits. Facebook, the second most-trafficked website overall, is also the undisputed king of the social networking sites, capturing almost half of the overall traffic. As such, Facebook will play a big role in your social media lead generation strategies.

Tons of people are on social media. Some are creating cute videos of their cats skateboarding and some are positioning themselves as experts in buying and selling real estate. You have a tremendous opportunity; it's like being among the first to realize that you could either create a variety show or a news show on TV. When you engage in social media, what will your message be?

Figure 12



stacia thompson

6 <http://youtube-global.blogspot.com/2009/10/yoooooooooooooutube.html>

the online challenge: being heard above the din

Now, we understand the numbers. We understand the effects of search engines and how the long tail has provided opportunity for the local experts to thrive. We understand social media's popularity and the amount of time spent online by consumers. So now we create a few profiles online and buy a website that is optimized for keywords ranking on the search engines and we are successful, right? Not exactly. What worked initially loses its effectiveness as more and more of your competitors do the same thing. It's like the secret fishing hole that always guarantees you a catch and that you have only shared with a few people. Sooner or later, those people share the secret with a few more people. At first you have a secret society of fishing comrades, and then one day you are standing shoulder to shoulder at your prized fishing hole that still produces fish—but now the number is divided among the group.

Search engines and social network marketers are experiencing the same phenomenon. The masses of people utilizing social media for business and pleasure are diluting our messages and dividing the catch, so to speak. This isn't a new challenge. Early adopters who take the risk of trailblazing a new strategy or technology often enjoy an initial advantage and a disproportionate share of the primary rewards. After a while, others notice their success and crowd in for theirs. So how do you continue to differentiate your message? How do you get your unfair share of the rewards? That's the online challenge: being heard above the din.

First, search engines. SMX Search Analytics reports that 93 percent of traffic comes from the first page of search results. The majority of search engines show about ten natural (organic) results on the first page. This means that only ten websites can be featured naturally at any given time. Furthermore, 60 percent of Internet users believe that organic results are more relevant than paid (pay per click) advertising. Even though you can pay to have your website featured in the sponsored section, this study confirms that to have the most success on the search engines, you should focus on natural results. If you are located in an area that has only ten agents, you might be okay. The challenge with social networking sites stems from the same idea that our messages are being diluted

by competing messages and ads. The number of friends, followers, and connections and their subsequent social updates are creating a live stream of information that is impossible to keep up with. In fact at the time of writing this, Facebook statistics showed that their users were creating more than 45 million status updates each day. On my personal Twitter account, the first page of updates only covers the last four minutes before I have to click the “more” button. For me, genuine interaction with all my friends, followers, and connections is practically impossible. Yet one of the goals of this ebook is to increase the size of your audience—not because having more followers or friends will directly increase your business, but because the larger the audience the more likely you will be to encourage interactions. But why are interactions so important?

Interactions are becoming the real name of the game. How many comments, likes, @yournames, retweets, reblogs, or responses can you get from your online activities is one measure of your overall social media success. Specifically, how many retweets you get from a Twitter post or how many comments a blog post or status update earns can be insight into how much your community values the information you share. Remember that social media and Web 2.0 evolved because consumers wanted to interact in an online world that had only allowed one-way interaction. Websites prior to Web 2.0 were just online brochures or business cards. If friending, following, or connecting with someone is the introduction, the interactions are the conversation. Sometimes you’ll be in the conversation; other times you’ll be encouraging others to converse. Both work.

In my research, I found that average Facebook users typically only engage in a two-way dialogue with 4–6 people. But who wants to strive for average?

stacia thompson

This is critical to success. Social networking is not about using a bullhorn to yell at potential clients, but a way to interact. Just think, how much do you like the loudmouth at the party who never lets you get a word in edgewise? Don’t be that person online!

cary sylvester

Figure 13: Definition: Web 2.0

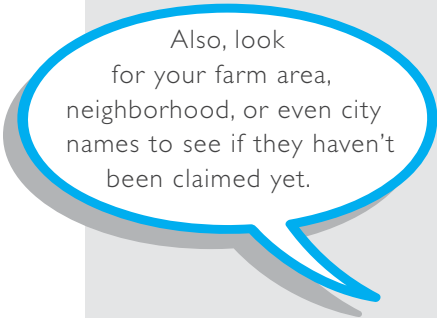
Web 2.0 – Web 2.0 is the term used to describe the evolution of one-way, public-facing websites to those that now encourage interaction, sharing, and collaboration.

Consumers want to interact online with you, and if you are creating quality content or providing good service, they will market and spread your message for you like we saw in the Kuroshio Sea video (which by the way has had more than 11,770 user ratings and over 4,600 comments). Not to be redundant, but the message that “interactions are the real size that matters” needs to be kept front of mind throughout the rest of this ebook.

the online real estate land rush

Throughout my life, I have witnessed increases in the values of some of the silliest things, from baseball cards to penny stocks to vacation condos. The first ones to buy and to sell were always the ones who made the money, and those who bought last are the ones left with a retirement fund full of Beanie Babies and Cabbage Patch Kids.

Of course, the Internet has not been left out of the cultural land rushes of the last few decades. Domain names have become the most valuable online real estate commodity. These names, especially the dot-com addresses, have sold recently for millions of dollars. A recent article on ABCNews.com included a list of the ten most expensive domain names to date⁷.



ellen marks

Figure 14: The Top 10 Most Expensive Domain Names

1) Fund.com, \$9.99 million	6) CreditCards.com, \$2.75 million
2) Porn.com, \$9.5 million	7) Computers.com, \$2.1 million
3) Diamonds.com, \$7.5 million	8) Seniors.com, \$1.8 million
4) Toys.com, \$5.1 million	9) DataRecovery.com, \$1.66 million
5) Vodka.com, \$3 million	10) Cameras.com, \$1.5 million tied with Tandberg.com, \$1.5 million

I am confident that we have all been told the importance of owning the domain names for our businesses, personal names, and our children’s names (e.g., www.BenKinney.com and www.BenKinneyJr.com ... you never know). The new land rush, I believe, will be the subdomains on the most popular websites. (A subdomain would be www.PopularWebsite.com/subdomain.)

⁷ <http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/AheadoftheCurve/story?id=7014819&page=2>

On June 13, 2009, Facebook.com introduced distinct web addresses for user profiles. In a matter of three minutes, more than 200,000 usernames were claimed by existing users. If you have not claimed your Facebook subdomain, it may not be too late. Visit www.Facebook.com/username for more information.

Since Facebook is only one of the important social networks that exist in cyberspace, I would recommend that you secure your business, personal, additional important usernames before your competition does. At the speed our current culture moves, you never really know what network is going to be the next big thing. I would hate for you to be a day late to join the next new trend in social media, only to visit the URL “WEBSITE.COM/YOURNAME” and be staring at someone else’s picture because they beat you to it.

Facebook allows only one personal profile. If you have more than one profile (e.g., one for business and one for personal), Facebook can delete you from the site completely. The way to promote niches, area names, and multiple names is through “Fan Pages.”

brad korn

Since there are so many social media platforms in existence, one of the tools that I utilize is Namechk.com. Namechk is a free tool that checks to see if your desired username or vanity URL is still available on more than 130 different networks.

Figure 15



This is not to suggest you need to secure your name on all 130 networking sites. There is a limit to how many usernames and passwords any one human being can keep up with. As you can see from Figure 15 on page 17, I've only secured about 15 of the most important ones for now. Some, like the ones mentioned in this ebook, I use almost every day. Others I've secured because I'm curious about the possibilities. The point is to pay attention and be purposeful about securing your name and your business brand. Tools like Namechk make this work a whole lot easier.

myths and truths about social media

There are more than a million reasons why you should take advantage of the systems and tools listed in this ebook. Likewise I imagine there are an equal amount of reasons going through your mind about why you can't or shouldn't implement a social media or Internet lead generation strategy. In an attempt to remove the can't, couldn't, wouldn't, shouldn't, never, ever, and won't(s) from your vocabulary, we composed a list of my favorite myths about the Internet and social media.

myth 1 – i do not have the time

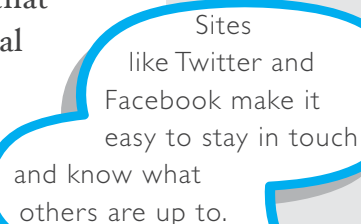
truth – it doesn't take much time at all

Once I had set up my social profiles, property searches, and blogs, the amount of time spent working on these strategies didn't exceed more than twenty minutes per day. One of the best things about Internet lead generation and social media prospecting plans is that you can be online at your leisure. I avoid time blocking my social media lead generation time during hours that I could be on the phone prospecting or on appointments with buyers or sellers.

myth 2 – it's a time-waster

truth – it's a time-saver

Are you *networking* or *not working*? The sad fact of the matter is that for many real estate agents social networks like Facebook and Twitter have not produced leads or closed transactions. The reality is that it is called a Social NetWORK, not a Social NetGAME or a Social NetVISIT. If you spend your time online “working”—



Sites like Twitter and Facebook make it easy to stay in touch and know what others are up to.

chad hyams

which means building relationships, asking for appointments, or generating referrals—it could be one of the best uses of your lead generation time. Much like your traditional database, you have to communicate with it systematically and make offers that encourage immediate responses.

myth 3 – social networks are for children and teenagers

truth – social networks are being embraced by all demographics

Facebook.com’s statistics page states, “The fastest-growing demographic groups are those 35 years old and older.” The amount of people currently using social networks is astounding. In fact, Facebook has more than 60 million users in the United States over the age of 25 and almost 10 million over the age of 55. As social media mavens are fond of telling us, “Grandparents are more likely to be on social networks than their grandkids.” They’re right.

myth 4 – it’s just a fad

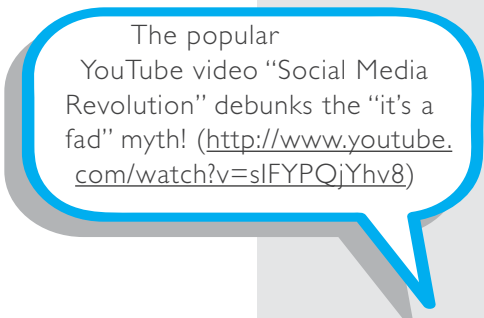
truth – it’s fundamentally changing the way we communicate

Honestly, one of the titles we seriously entertained for this ebook was *I’m So Over Social Media*. Like the author of the 1995 *Newsweek* article I mentioned earlier, maybe you too are getting a bit of a headache from the relentless buzz around social media. Maybe you wish it was a fad. Whether you’re already tired of it or just tapping into it, here’s the truth about social media: It is not a fad but rather a fundamental change in the way we communicate and interact. You have an opportunity to be in front of the pack and to position yourself to become, in essence, the “mayor of your online community.”

myth 5 – social media leads are poor leads

truth – leads generated on social networks can be some of the highest quality leads available to real estate agents

Social media leads tend to have been listening and interacting online with you for a longer period of time prior to making physical



The popular YouTube video “Social Media Revolution” debunks the “it’s a fad” myth! (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIFYPQjYhv8>)

mariana wagner

contact. In my experience, they are more loyal and more likely to refer you to additional prospects. If you learn to work social media networks as adeptly as you work a room at a local social event you attend, the leads you get from your social networks can be as strong as any in your business. Fundamentally, we know that buyers and sellers want to work with someone they know, like, and trust. Social networks allow you to build relationships and connect with potential customers across the globe with little expense or risk.

myth 6 – social media replaces my other lead generation activities

truth – social media is a tool that can enhance your existing lead generation plan

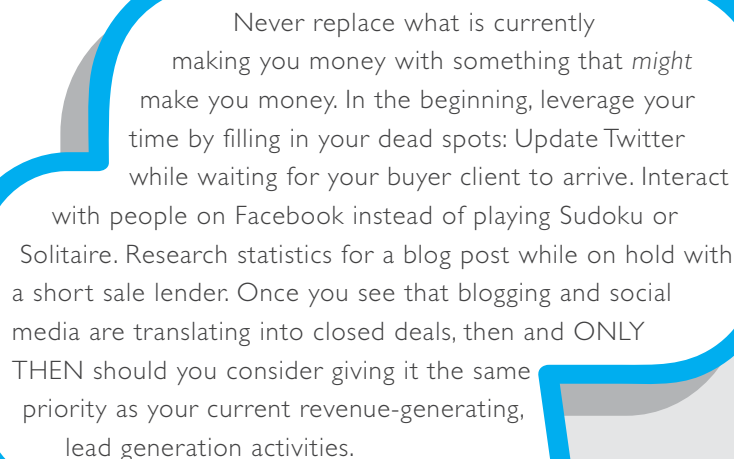
The successful Internet-savvy agents that we have interviewed for this ebook stated clearly that social networks and Internet tools were used in conjunction with traditional forms of prospecting. Technology can reduce marketing and lead generation costs as well as leverage the amount of time spent doing certain activities, such as client and lead follow-up systems like the 33 Touch and 8 x 8. We will dive into this in more detail throughout the book.

Myths are the excuses that we use to limit our own success. In the epigraph, I referred to a quote from *Flight of the Buffalo* by James Belasco and Ralph Stayer that said, “Change is hard because people overestimate the value of what they have—and underestimate the value of what they may gain by giving that up.”



All the misunderstandings around the new social media landscape were a primary reason for launching the *2010 Swanepoel Social Media Report*. Agents were asking for guidance on strategy, how to conduct themselves, how to manage their time, and, ultimately, how to measure their success.

stefan swanepoel

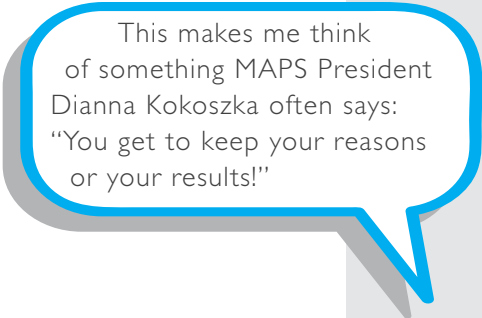


Never replace what is currently making you money with something that *might* make you money. In the beginning, leverage your time by filling in your dead spots: Update Twitter while waiting for your buyer client to arrive. Interact with people on Facebook instead of playing Sudoku or Solitaire. Research statistics for a blog post while on hold with a short sale lender. Once you see that blogging and social media are translating into closed deals, then and ONLY THEN should you consider giving it the same priority as your current revenue-generating, lead generation activities.

mariana wagner

We have an important decision to make: We can choose to let go of our old habits and embrace the new opportunities that social media and the Internet are presenting, or we can choose to do nothing. If you choose to do nothing, then please don't expect the world to wait for you. The longer you wait to embrace this new realm, the harder it will be to catch up with your competition.

For those of you that are interested in embracing this opportunity and setting aside your myths, the next step will be to establish your online brand.



This makes me think of something MAPS President Dianna Kokoszka often says: "You get to keep your reasons or your results!"

stacia thompson



your brand
and online image


Your Brand and Online Image

One fall day, my father shared a piece of his wisdom with me as he sat me down with fly rod in hand on the shores of the Stillaguamish River. He said, “Son, when everything is stripped away, you really only have one thing left—your good name. Always be your word.”

Being true to your word today isn’t just good advice, it’s mandatory in this online world of transparency. Now more than ever, we must protect and treasure our name and brand because our actions today, both positive and negative, will become our legacy. Much like the tattoo acquired one late night on vacation, the things we say and do can become visual reminders of past (mis)adventures. The ubiquity of mobile phone cameras puts everything we do and say just a click away from someone’s Facebook or MySpace profile. Luckily, as with the tattoo, if you’re determined and willing to invest time and money, those visual reminders can also be removed from the Web. Just realize that technological advancements in search engines, photo sharing, video hosting, and social networks have made it harder and harder for business owners to erase unwanted online references.

In the era of Yelp, Angie’s List, and other online review websites, positive and negative opinions about local products and services are easily shared with the masses. Review website usage has been growing exponentially due to the ease of access created by mobile applications. Real estate agent review websites are becoming more common every day. As an industry, we have a decision to make: We can oppose the review websites or, a better solution, we can proactively embrace them by collecting and posting positive consumer reviews. The ability to comment, post reviews, and assign ratings (like the simple star ratings on Amazon or Netflix) is fast becoming an essential part of the consumer experience in other industries. It seems inevitable that review sites will eventually focus on real estate professionals, so get ahead of it and start asking for testimonials.

The 2009 National Association of Realtors *2009 Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers* reports that more than 70 percent of consumers would be most likely to use the same real estate agent again. We don’t have a consumer satisfaction problem; we have problems celebrating and promoting the vast amount of positive reviews we earn for our service. Social media offers a platform to promote your positive reviews, and we will address how to do that in a later section.



Number six on my Ten Rules of Engagement is “be authentic and transparent!”

stefan swanepoel

being consistent in your brand

At first blush, you might assume that your online brand needs to represent the typical professional person, while in actuality the ideal business image varies from location to location and that is something you must determine yourself. Ad legend David Ogilvy said it best when he offered, “You now have to decide what ‘image’ you want for your brand. Image means personality. Products, like people, have personalities, and they can make or break them in the marketplace.” He may have been talking about products, but the same is true for any service business. Now more than ever, the tools of social marketing that allow you (and those who know or work with you) to post photos, videos, and audio to the Web have made it easier than ever to influence, for better or worse, your online brand image.

Be careful not to create a new “online” brand. You have a brand—you’ve established it with traditional methods, now just implement it online.

cary sylvester

Figure 16: Brand Questions You Need to Ask and Answer

Does your offline personality match your online social media profiles?

Do the images and videos found online represent your ideal brand?

Do my online profiles allow me to relate to my target market or target audience?

Hopefully, the brand questions above give you a starting point as you begin to mold your online image and brand. It isn’t always straightforward. You may be a bit goofy in person, given to silly puns or always have a wisecrack on the tip of your tongue. Relating that online can be tough given the fact that most professionals tailor their humor to their specific audience, which isn’t always possible on the Internet.

If you do business in a warm climate, suits may not be required business attire. But what will that buyer from Nebraska think of you wearing a polo, jeans, and flip-flops? Real estate agents that specialize in distressed sales and foreclosures might put off potential clients if their online image celebrates a jet-setting lifestyle with a Saks Fifth Avenue wardrobe. In this case, it might be safe to err on the side of understatement when disclosing income or showing photographs of luxuries like the size of your home or make of your vehicle. On the other hand, if you are a luxury agent, your successful image and expensive taste could actually reinforce your validity. At the end of the day, you’ll need to make thoughtful brand decisions that will work for your business now and tomorrow.

I think that Gary Vaynerchuk, author of *Crush It!*, makes a great point about being true to yourself. He says that when you are crafting your brand, be authentic. Your authenticity will help you to differentiate yourself.

stacia thompson

Figure 17: The Do's and Don'ts of Online Branding

Do	Don't
Include your logo, business name, and website on all your online profiles.	Disclose information, including personal facts, anywhere online that you wouldn't want a potential client to read.
Match your online image to your ideal clientele through all mediums including images, text, and video.	Post exclusively about listings and real estate-related subjects on your profiles. Your audience may start to ignore your messages, or, even on the extreme, block or remove your updates.
Insert personality into both your business and personal profiles. We are still in an industry where the majority of people choose to do business with you because they like or can relate to you.	Disclose personal information that might endanger your family or yourself, including photos of young children or photos that might show a home address or a notable landmark.
	Participate in conversations or start ones that might offend your audience, including political, religious, or social issues, unless you are prepared for the consequences.

Remember, you are using this as a business tool and need to remain professional.

mariana wagner

My Tenth Rule of Engagement is "always add value." It's a good rule to live by too.

stefan swanpoel

Thousands of dollars can be spent identifying your brand. Post an ad calling for requests for proposals and you'll quickly have a line of brand consultants outside your door. There's nothing inherently wrong with that, but in a shifted market when every penny counts, you might consider tapping your social networks for brand advice before tapping your bank account. Ask your sphere the same questions you asked yourself about your brand consistency. Poll them on which logos or slogans they like best. Many of us built our audience on social networks before first making these critical brand decisions. The good news is you can leverage those same audiences to get it right today.

Always build around a brand that has legs, that can encompass all the likely places you might take your business. Gary Keller was famous for answering the phone, "It's a great day at Keller Williams Realty International!" years before the company first expanded outside the United States. His brand vision was big enough to encompass where his business might go. In an interview with *Fortune* magazine, Netflix CEO Reed Hastings explained, "We named the company Netflix, not DVDs by Mail, because we knew that eventually we would

deliver movies directly over the Internet. DVDs will be around a long time, but we're building for the day when they're not." So when it comes to your online brand—think big!

Figure 18

Tip – If you need a logo designed, contact a local graphic artist or visit www.LogoTournament.com and have 50 to 200 or more logos designed for you in days. You get to watch as artists compete to create the perfect logo for your business—all for a price starting at only \$250.



As Seth Godin taught us in his book, *Purple Cow*, we need to be remarkable in our marketing. We need to create little purple cows everywhere we brand ourselves. A dear friend of mine from Keller Williams Realty Bellingham, James Heintz, uses a photograph of the back of his head on his signs, business cards, and marketing materials with the message: “Can we get together and meet face to face?” It is hard to forget the only agent in town that only shows the back of his head. His marketing approach proved to be extremely memorable and successful when compared to 1,000 other real estate agents in the area who use the familiar “glamour shot” pose in marketing materials.

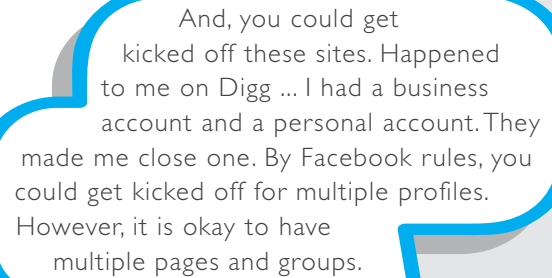
Other options for being memorable might be having the smallest signs in town, the most bizarre business cards, the funniest domain name ... you get the idea. The important thing is to consistently ask: Does this message reflect who I am personally and attract my ideal clients? In the end, all branding decisions should be made based on your own business model, business goals, and geographic location.

separating lives – the business and personal profile dilemma

The most common question I'm asked by professionals about social media is whether or not agents should separate their business and personal accounts online. Although it is generally possible to create a separate business and personal account on each network, in my opinion, it's not advisable.

Here are five reasons why separating business and personal lives online is challenging:

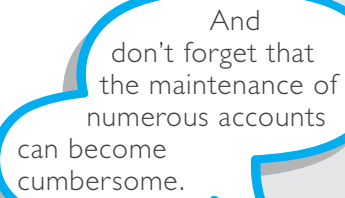
1. Referrals live on your personal profile
– Service providers like the real estate industry statistically rely on referrals for a majority of their leads. The people that provide those referrals represent a majority of the contacts we currently have on our personal social media profiles.
2. Search engines don't differentiate between business and personal media – Photos posted on social media profiles are stored by platforms like Google Images and Flickr. So regardless of where the images live, your personal and business profile photos will be sorted, mixed, and indexed by your name. When people enter your name in a search, they'll find them all. Visit [Images.google.com](https://www.google.com), and search for your name to see what I mean.
3. People won't make a distinction between you and your business – If a potential client searches for your name on a social network, both business and personal accounts are likely to appear in the results. Which one will they choose? It's hard to say, but I can tell you it takes a lot of effort to channel them to one destination over the other.
4. People can still see over the wall – Status updates on Twitter, MySpace, and Facebook create challenges for individuals wanting to separate their business and professional profiles, because many social networks display your status updates prior to accepting a friend request. On a positive note, status updates keep us up-to-date on the current events of our sphere. For example, you might learn about a friend's engagement, divorce, new job, or pregnancy, even though you haven't spoken with them in months.



And, you could get kicked off these sites. Happened to me on Digg ... I had a business account and a personal account. They made me close one. By Facebook rules, you could get kicked off for multiple profiles. However, it is okay to have multiple pages and groups.

amber presley

5. Barriers always leave someone on the outside looking in – How do you explain to a client why you denied their request to become friends on your personal social media account? Answering, “I did not want someone that I do business with to see my personal photos” won’t generate raving fans.

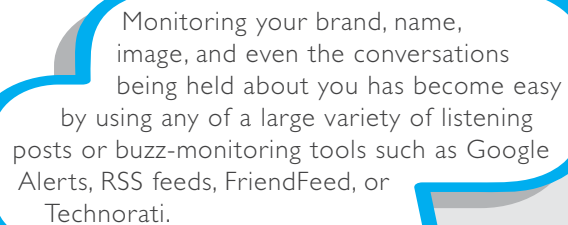


And don't forget that the maintenance of numerous accounts can become cumbersome.

When consumers discover both your business and personal accounts, your brand may begin to blur. Imagine for just a minute what conclusions your audience could make about your brand when your business and personal are combined. Would they envision the real estate professional they know and trust or a rabid college football fan at a tailgate party? Perhaps some combo of the two—wearing a business suit with a hot dog in one hand and a foam finger on the other with face paint for the home team? Do your two personalities merge together into one succinct image? Bottom line: Potential clients who search for you online may make the decision to do business with you, or not, based on the information and data they find. It's time to take ownership of your online brand.

monitoring your online brand

When a potential client uses a search engine to search for your name, hopefully their first results will be your real estate website(s). The following nine results will most likely be a combination of social media profiles, blogs, and press releases. For instance, when I searched Google for “Barack Obama,” page one results included a combination of his personal website, BarackObama.com, the White House website, blog posts, photos, videos, a Twitter account, a Facebook profile, news articles, and a MySpace account.



Monitoring your brand, name, image, and even the conversations being held about you has become easy by using any of a large variety of listening posts or buzz-monitoring tools such as Google Alerts, RSS feeds, FriendFeed, or Technorati.

Just to bring it home a little closer, while writing this section of the book, I took the liberty to google my own name. I was happy to report that the first nine results were a combination of real estate websites, business photos, and social media profiles like Facebook, ActiveRain, and Twitter. The tenth result concerned me: It was a MySpace profile created under the name Ben Kinney. Further investigation uncovered that it belonged to a teenager from the

cary sylvester

stefan swanepoel

Midwest. Although I am always excited to meet new friends with the same name or birth date, I found this one to be lacking the usual appeal. His status update read: “Boy, the next word that comes out of your mouth better be some brilliant \$%^#& Mark Twain ^\$%#. ‘Cause it’s definitely getting chiseled on your tombstone.”

I understand that my clients will not confuse me with a teenager from the Midwest, but hopefully it highlights how other people’s social media profiles, websites, and blogs could negatively affect your online brand. Refer back to the “The Online Real Estate Land Rush” section on page 16 of this ebook for ways to take ownership of sites when your name or brand may appear. For now, you might take a moment to google your own name and see what comes up. It might surprise you. If you feel like it, share your experience with me by contacting me on Twitter: @BenKinney, or go to www.Facebook.com/socialthebook.

Two important concepts have come out of this section. First, what is created and shared online can affect your image and your brand. Secondly, if you don’t monitor your brand online, it may be negatively affected. If you can’t control what someone who shares your same name does online, you can start creating additional content that would push unwanted results onto the second or third page of the search engines. This can be done by writing blogs, creating new social media accounts, or launching new websites.

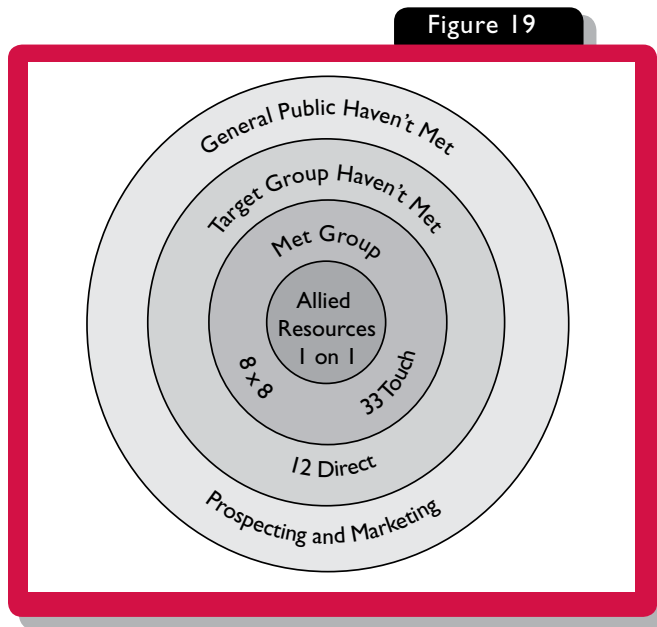
After you create your brand and put a plan in place to protect and monitor it, the next step for you is going to be how to promote it. In the social media world, this means creating your online audience, which will be covered throughout the next chapter and the rest of the book.



growing your online audience –
friends, followers, and connections

Growing Your Online Audience – Friends, Followers, and Connections

Now we will be focusing on how to specifically implement strategies that can build your brand, create stronger relationships, or generate leads online. The first step in this process is to identify your audience. For this particular ebook we are concerned with the online audience that includes friends on Facebook, followers on Twitter, connections on LinkedIn, and subscribers on blogs. I believe that *The Millionaire Real Estate Agent* explained it best in the Lead Generation Model, where four distinct groups were identified: The General Public or Haven't Met, Your Target Group(s) which are also Haven't Met, your Met Group, and your Allied Resources.



Although our strategic options on how or where to market and prospect have been expanded, the rules presented in *The Millionaire Real Estate Agent* hold as true as the first day they were written:

1. Prospect and market
2. Set up a database and feed it
3. Systematically market to your database

The Internet and Social Media Lead Generation Models are identical in concept and only change in the lead capture and lead nurturing process. Please see Figure 20 below in order to understand the real estate agent's newest farm area—the Internet.

Figure 20



The Internet has provided us with an unlimited database of Haven't Mets. The population of Internet users available to prospect and market to far exceeds our potential reach. So to succeed, we must narrow our target audience and focus on targeted niche groups.

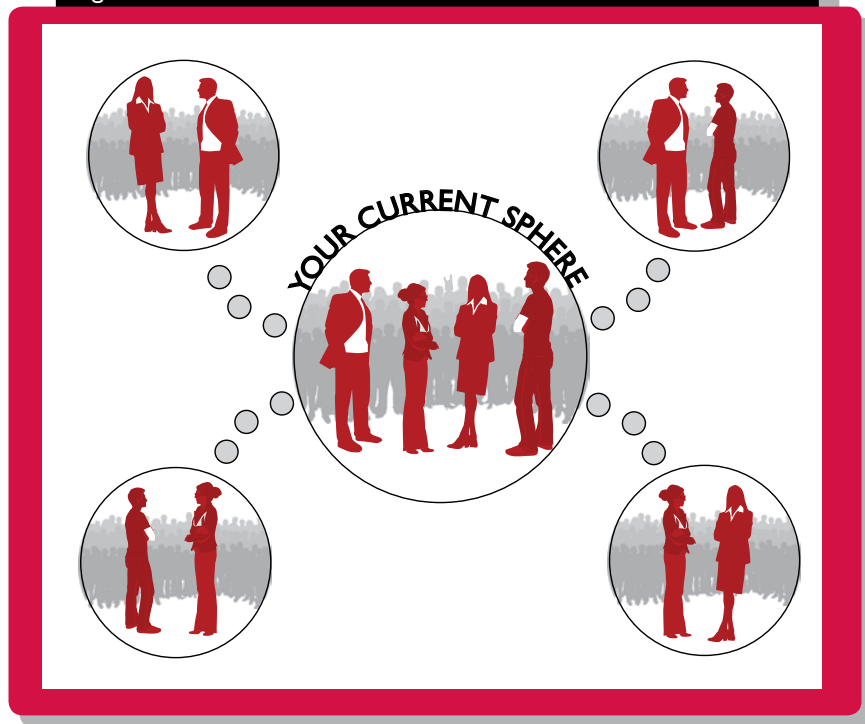
The most common and obvious application is to use the Internet and social media platforms to systematically work our past clients and our Met Database. We will spend time addressing how to work a Met Database in the "Social Media and Your Sphere" section on page 48.

Depending on your market, your existing Sphere Database might not be providing you enough leads that are in a position to buy or sell properties. This is mostly due to the fact that, in a shifted market, tougher lending guidelines and falling property values contract the pool of able buyers and sellers. If your sphere is not generating enough business, you have to start thinking about how to grow your database or how to create additional networks that are unrelated to your current sphere. See Figure 21 on page 33.

Social media makes networking so easy. I can keep in touch with more people than ever before.

chad hyams

Figure 21: Create Networks to Generate Additional Business



You are probably aware of the NAR statistic that 94 percent of buyers within the age range of 25–44 are using the Internet during their home search process. Social media has created a unique tool that allows us to step out of our comfortable circles of friends and enter into new social networks.

To grow your online audience of friends, followers, and connections; you must first identify a niche you want to pursue, then seek to understand them by listening to their online conversations; interacting with them in their online communities; attracting them to become a connection, friend, or follower; and finally building stronger relationships that result in referrals and appointments.

Figure 22: Four Steps to Growing Your Audience

- 1) Identify Your Niche(s)
- 2) Listen and Observe
- 3) Attract Friends, Followers, and Connections
- 4) Interact Online

1) identify your niche

There are an unlimited number of targeted social groups that real estate agents could focus on. You could pick a niche by geographic, demographic, economic, or psychographic factors. An easier way to select your audience might include working niches that you can relate to—including investors, specific age groups, special interest groups like people interested in horses, the city or neighborhood that you reside in, and the list goes on. Two of the biggest niches to emerge from our current shifted market are first time home buyers and distressed properties. Chances are you already work a niche or two in your current real estate practice.

2) listen and observe

Twenty-four hours a day, there are online conversations going on about every known topic from every possible demographic. Our targeted audiences are using the Internet and social networks every day to interact with like-minded individuals. People are sharing stories with neighbors, finding things in common, and debating the most pressing issues.

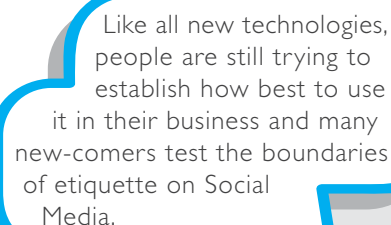
Listening first will assist you in determining when and how to interact with your niche audience. If you first understand your online community, you will be able to communicate using the correct tone, grammar, and vocabulary. Most groups, real or virtual, have an unwritten set of rules. You may find it best to observe group dynamics for awhile and even ask a few questions. Rushing in is to risk having your ignorance misinterpreted as impoliteness.

In every active online community or group, a variety of personality types exist. If you are trying to work your way into an existing close-knit online community, it may serve your purpose well to identify the key players. There will be promoters in every crowd and winning their trust and admiration can be your fast track to social acceptance.



Listening, responding, and being respectful of the other participants and the conversation are the three activities rated the highest on our Top 10 Rules of Engagement.

stefan swanepoel



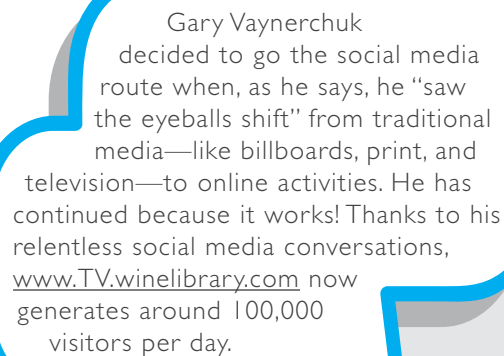
Like all new technologies, people are still trying to establish how best to use it in their business and many new-comers test the boundaries of etiquette on Social Media.

bryon ellington

When using social media for business purposes, the tone of the crowd will determine how you should interact with it. That's the reason you always begin by listening and observing. If the group is edgy and seems to invite debates, being controversial or provocative will probably be acceptable. But in my opinion, being too controversial before being accepted may not lead to the respect or admiration that business owners need when implementing a social media marketing strategy in an existing online community. Alternatively, you can use social networks and the Internet to create your own audience. If you choose not to join existing groups or online communities and you choose to create your own community, you get to create your own conversational tone and online social rules. Gary Vaynerchuk is a master of stepping outside an existing demographic and creating an audience through social media.

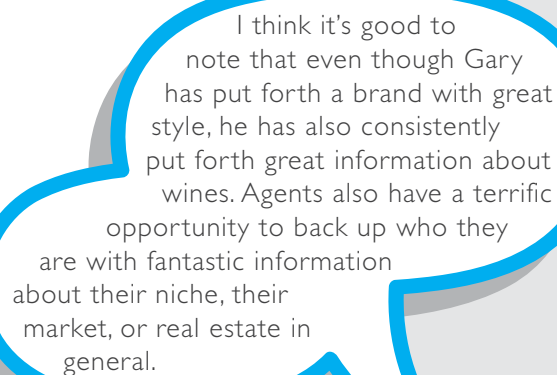
Gary, of www.TV.winelibrary.com, has done a stellar job of building a monster business using social media. I would feel safe in saying he has made wine appealing and even exciting to a whole new era of wine drinkers through his loud and exciting wine-tasting podcasts. At the same time this site was gaining traction, wine-tasting experts who were describing the subtle hints of chocolate they detected might gasp when Gary detects a hint of dirty socks from the same glass. www.TV.winelibrary.com has done an amazing job of creating friends, followers, connections, and subscribers through the use of social media.

Gary became the exception to the rule when he focused on creating his own audience instead of trying to conform. He most likely wouldn't have generated the same response by promoting his message through the existing traditional group of wine lovers. He identified his target audience (not the wine aficionado crowd), listened to his audience, and created a message that elicited audience interaction. Whether you choose the safe route or become the exception, you must master listening to your audience and then adapt based on your response. I highly doubt Gary Vaynerchuk would have continued with his social media campaign if not for consistent, positive input along the way.



Gary Vaynerchuk decided to go the social media route when, as he says, he “saw the eyeballs shift” from traditional media—like billboards, print, and television—to online activities. He has continued because it works! Thanks to his relentless social media conversations, www.TV.winelibrary.com now generates around 100,000 visitors per day.

julie fantechi



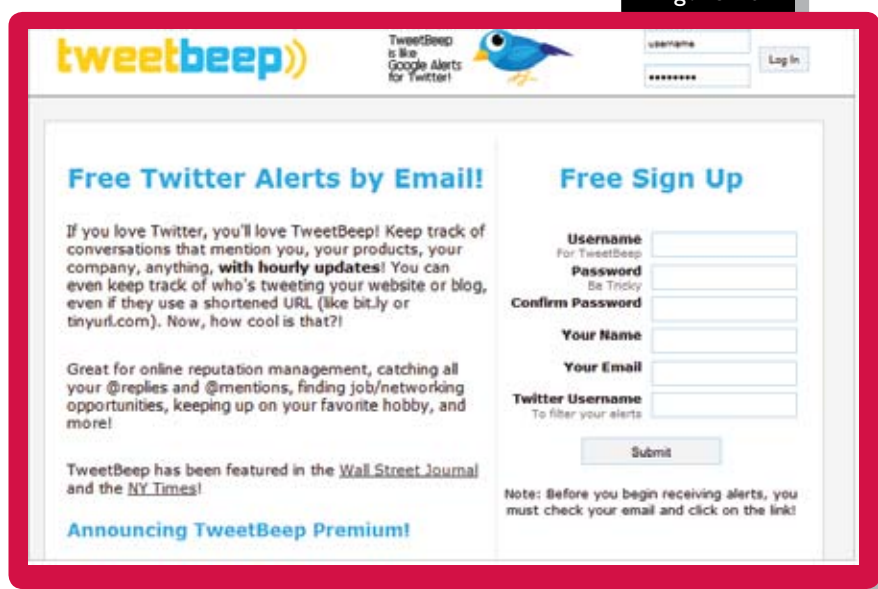
I think it's good to note that even though Gary has put forth a brand with great style, he has also consistently put forth great information about wines. Agents also have a terrific opportunity to back up who they are with fantastic information about their niche, their market, or real estate in general.

stacia thompson

Gauging the response of your messages from your audience or listening to said audience is getting easier and easier. Tools are being created every day that allow you to monitor what is being said online. The actual tools and websites may change over time due to the evolution of technology, but the concept of how to use them will be timeless. Two of my favorite tools that can be used to monitor Twitter are TweetBeep and GeoChirp.

TweetBeep.com (Figure 23) is a service that monitors all of Twitter for phrases that you select. Any time a particular word or phrase is tweeted, you will receive a TweetBeep alert that includes the entire tweeted message and a list of the Twitter accounts that tweeted it.

Figure 23



The screenshot shows the TweetBeep.com website interface. At the top left is the 'tweetbeep))' logo. To its right is a small blue bird icon and the text 'TweetBeep is like Google Alerts for Twitter!'. On the top right, there are login fields for 'username' and 'password' with a 'Log In' button. The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column is titled 'Free Twitter Alerts by Email!' and contains promotional text about hourly updates and mentions of the Wall Street Journal and NY Times. The right column is titled 'Free Sign Up' and contains a registration form with fields for 'Username', 'Password', 'Confirm Password', 'Your Name', 'Your Email', and 'Twitter Username'. A 'Submit' button is located below the form. A note at the bottom right of the form states: 'Note: Before you begin receiving alerts, you must check your email and click on the link!'. At the bottom left of the main content area, there is a link for 'Announcing TweetBeep Premium!'.

GeoChirp.com (see Figure 24 on page 37) is another service that monitors Twitter conversations, with one distinct difference: On the GeoChirp platform, you determine the geographic area to monitor. National real estate franchise owners would be overwhelmed by the amount of comments made on the entire Twitter network about their brand. GeoChirp allows you to monitor your brand on a local level—based on a user-defined radius around a city or zip code—so that only relevant results get presented.

Figure 24



Tools like these will allow you to listen to your audience at a national and local level. The actual phrases that you use with this tool will change with your role, geography, and your predetermined target market. Below, I have outlined some phrases that you should consider.

Figure 25: What to Monitor Online

- 1) Your Name
- 2) Your Business
- 3) Your Neighborhood
- 4) Local Interests
- 5) Real Estate Terms
- 6) Your Competition

I'd recommend another category: "Products, Services, Brands, and Trademarks." Keeping tabs on the industry is also important.

stefan swanepoel

3) *attract friends, followers, and connections*

In order to attract the necessary audience size, you must be able to identify and communicate on the same level. The FORD relationship model still holds true online. Asking questions and learning about an individual's Family, Occupation, Recreation, and Dreams will solidify the foundation of your relationship. In the past, you had to solicit a phone conversation or meeting if you ever wanted to take that relationship to the next level. Now, with our growing online transparency, you can build a relationship entirely online. For instance, there are people that I have never met or spoken to that I follow on Twitter and have friended on Facebook that I consider to be good friends. I could in fact answer each of the FORD questions for multiple people I have never met.



You know that your content is compelling when your friends and followers begin to interact with each other, not just you.

At a recent NAR convention, I was able to sit with a group of five individual real estate agents from all over the United States that appeared to be lifelong friends. As it happened, the group had just met for the very first time after a few years of being friends on the ActiveRain social network. Lifelong friendships, partnerships, and relationships are being formed every day.

For many agents, real estate websites are just pretty online business cards unless the agent has identified a source of traffic. Social networks can also be just as useless, unless you can attract an audience of friends, fans, followers, and subscribers and get them to interact.

First, let's discuss how to attract your audience on social networks. The strategies for attracting your audience change a little from social network to social network, but the concepts stay consistent.

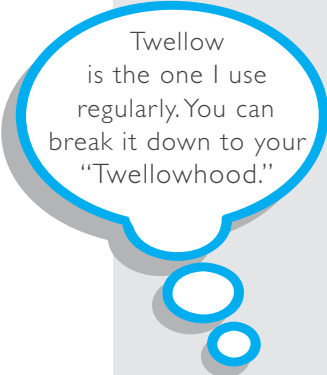
twitter

On the Twitter network, you can follow other members and they can follow you. I have noticed about a 50 percent follow-back from people that I follow on Twitter. This means that if I follow ten people, five will most likely follow me back. It may be tempting to follow everyone, but for real estate agents our business is local—so building a local audience is crucial.

cary sylvester

There are thousands of ways to increase the size of your Twitter following—including below are a few best.

1. Follow local relevant people – Use a Twitter directory like Twellow.com to follow people from your industry, affiliate industries, and people with similar interests.
2. Use tools – Take advantage of tools like TweetBeep and GeoChirp to assist you in finding people located within a radius of a certain city. These are the tools that allow you to build a local audience.
3. Pick a Twitter username – Choose one that is easy to remember and to type. Avoid using usernames with a bizarre spelling or with underscores and numbers. For instance, my username is simply my name: @BenKinney.
4. Promote your Twitter name everywhere possible – Include your Twitter name or “Follow Me” buttons on your other social networks, email signatures, and websites.
5. Create good content – As in the Kuroshio Sea video, good content will spread. When you tweet interesting, funny, or exciting information, your Twitter following will respond (by using the @yourname function) and make a comment about your tweet or they will retweet the post and give you credit. For instance, I sent the following tweet that was very graciously retweeted by @tonytevogt from Twin Cities, Minnesota. “Are you ready for the Pain? <http://tr.im/GA8D> New version of the Pain comes out with the new *SHIFT* book. Get yours at the www.giftofshift.com” After Tony retweeted my message, I began to follow him and now his audience has just grown.
6. Reciprocate the Twitter karma – One of the best ways to create a loyal Twitter following and attract new followers is to interact by replying (@TheirTwitterName) or retweeting interesting tweets that you run across (known as an RT).
7. Use targeted words – When tweeting, consider using words that you believe people will search for online. More and more search engines and blogs are indexing tweets by the keywords used and showing those tweets in search engine results. Instead of saying “grabbing a pizza,” try tweeting “grabbing a pizza from Pizza Time in downtown Bellingham, Washington,



Twellow is the one I use regularly. You can break it down to your “Twellowhood.”

amber presley

for the Huskies game.” You have just created Twitter bait for anyone searching for Pizza Time, Downtown Bellingham, Bellingham, Washington, Huskies, and any combination of those words. Now when someone uses Twitter search or another service that tracks Twitter chat, your tweet and username will show up in the results.

Excellent tip!

stacia thompson

8. Use hashtags – Once you start interacting on Twitter, you will start to notice # signs showing up—which are called hashtags on Twitter. The # sign or hashtag shows as a prefix to a phrase, like #socialthebook for discussing this ebook. #RAINCAMP, #NAR, #IREC would be used for individuals that are, were, or did attend ActiveRain’s Rain Camp, the NAR Annual Conference and Expo, or the Inman News’s Real Estate Connect New York City.

Other hashtags to know are #FF for Follow Friday and #REALTOR, which is obvious. I also use #RETRENDS for conversations about my annual Trends Reports. If you have a special product or service, consider assigning it your own hashtag.

stefan swanepoel

If a # sign was not used in your tweet for an event like NAR then your tweet will be lost in the Twitter world and confused with families that are talking about their own personal family reunions. Hashtags allow tweets about hot topics to be searchable. Try searching for one of the hashtags above and see how much tweeting is happening about those events. Locate popular hashtags for your local community and tweet about those topics. This will increase the amount of views to your Twitter account tenfold.

While we’re on Twitter, TweetDeck—a free download—is a useful tool that will help categorize tweets by sorting them into columns, making it easier to follow several conversations at once.

KW broke into the top ten topics (of all topics on Twitter) during Family Reunion (our annual convention) because we asked everyone to use the same #KWFR hashtag. This also brought the excitement of Family Reunion to all those who couldn’t join us at the event.

cary sylvester

julie fantechi

facebook

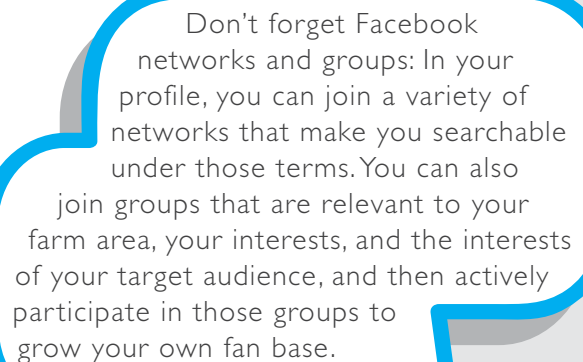
For most agents, building your audience on Facebook will be a lot easier than building an audience on Twitter. Facebook, as you know, allows you to connect with friends (or friends of friends), people who graduated from the same school, and people who work or worked for the same company—which allows you to ramp up quickly. Below are some ways to increase the number of friends you have on Facebook.

1. Start with the people you know first – On Facebook it is easy to connect with people from your past and current friends. Search through each one of your friend’s profiles and click on the “See All” friends button, and browse for anyone that you might know or that might know you and add them as a friend.
2. Find people you email – Facebook has created a “Find People” in your email search tool that searches your email address book to see who is already on and allows you to invite those who aren’t.
3. List the schools you attended – Edit your profile to include all past schools including high schools and colleges. This is a fast way to be found by schoolmates and to search a school for people to add to your network.
4. Detail your previous experience – Add each job you have had under the “Education and Work” section of your profile. This will allow you to search for people who you have worked with in the past.
5. Make sure to include the name of your real estate company – Add your real estate brokerage to your current jobs and connect with the thousands of real estate agents that can and will refer you business. Tip: Be purposeful in your agent-to-agent networking and locate agents in the areas that buyers and sellers move from the most. In my areas, Vancouver, British Columbia, Southern Texas, and San Francisco are some of my best sources of agent-to-agent referrals.



Not sure I agree that Facebook is an *easier* platform for building an audience. Facebook may be a more appealing place to build an audience for most, but I don't think it takes less actual effort.

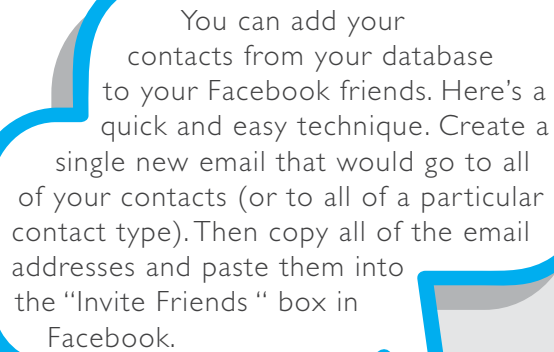
stefan swanepoel



Don't forget Facebook networks and groups: In your profile, you can join a variety of networks that make you searchable under those terms. You can also join groups that are relevant to your farm area, your interests, and the interests of your target audience, and then actively participate in those groups to grow your own fan base.

ellen marks

6. Add an email signature – Make sure you take advantage of the amount of emails you send each day by adding a button or link that says, “Connect with me on Facebook” or “Follow me on Twitter.”
7. Cross-promote through websites and blogs – Use your real estate websites, blogs, and other social networks to cross-promote your main social network. Add ways to connect on Facebook on every online platform.
8. Go offline – Offline marketing can really benefit your online database. Don’t forget to add “Connect with me on Facebook” or “Follow me on Twitter” to every marketing piece you create, including, but not limited to, business cards, fliers, postcards, and yard signs.



You can add your contacts from your database to your Facebook friends. Here’s a quick and easy technique. Create a single new email that would go to all of your contacts (or to all of a particular contact type). Then copy all of the email addresses and paste them into the “Invite Friends “ box in Facebook.

stacia thompson

linkedin

Getting connections on the LinkedIn network can be a very valuable tool in your efforts to build your online audience. Quoting their website, “LinkedIn exists to help you make better use of your professional network and help the people you trust in return.” The site has shared some impressive statistics and facts about their network (press.LinkedIn.com) that are worth mentioning.

1. LinkedIn has more than 53 million members in over 200 countries and territories around the world.
2. A new member joins LinkedIn approximately every second and about half of their members are located outside the United States.
3. Executives from all Fortune 500 companies are LinkedIn members.


On LinkedIn, you create a profile similar to any other social network, but, as stated earlier in the book, this is a place for professionals. This site allows you to connect within three degrees of separation. For instance, I have approximately 123 direct connections on LinkedIn, which exposes me to 15,200 of their connections, which in the end allows me to introduce myself to their 1,405,100 connections.

Increasing your connections is similar to Twitter and Facebook, and the items listed previously on how to get followers and friends, for the most part, will work just the same on LinkedIn.

For fear of sounding redundant, I will omit some of the aforementioned items like email signature, offline advertising, and adding your “Connect With Me” button to other websites and profiles. Below are some specific ways to increase the number of connections you have on LinkedIn.

1. Email Contacts – Importing your email address book into LinkedIn is the fastest and easiest way to get connected with people you already know and who currently use the network. Don’t forget to invite those who are not members yet.
2. Groups – LinkedIn has a large database of existing groups that are organized by interest, occupation, location, and so on. The network also allows you to create and moderate your own groups. Accessing groups can open the doors to many new types of contacts.
3. Companies – Search by employer or company to find past coworkers or search in companies for people that might be able to assist you in your real estate business. For instance, if you are interested in the relocation business you can search for companies that have offices in multiple cities.
4. Job Title – LinkedIn allows you to search by job title in order to find connections. Real estate agents who are interested in relocation business, new construction, or REO could really benefit by searching for HR director, builder, or asset manager.
5. Incoming Email – Each time you receive an email from a LinkedIn profile, use Xobni (inbox spelled backward) to search and connect with them. Xobni is a great free tool for this purpose. You may download it at Xobni.com.

Whether it is on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, or one of the hundreds of other social networks out there, these tips and tricks are the foundation of building your online audience. Having a lot of friends, followers, and connections is only the first step; your real success will come from how you interact with that audience and how they interact back with you.



Ask your customers to write recommendations on your profiles. Then, with their permission, you can reach out to your customers' networks as well.

stacia thompson

4) interact online

There is nothing worse than telling a funny joke only to look up and have no one laugh, or singing in front of a group only to have no one applaud. Social media can be quite similar when you get no comments, likes, or retweets from your blogs, status updates, and tweets. The success of your social media campaign, in my opinion, can be measured by the amount of interactions that your content generates.

On Twitter we all hope that our tweets get responses from the aforementioned replies (@YourName) and retweets (RT's). To get interactions on Twitter you must reciprocate the replies and retweets. Once you get followers and start following them, make sure you take the time to read through the daily updates. Retweet, ask questions, and reply with compliments to the interesting updates of the day. This will get your audience to reciprocate the same with your tweets. Besides interacting with your following, the other most important item to keep in mind is your content. If you are the first one to deliver the news, the daily laugh, or exciting market statistics, your content and profiles will be interacted with on a regular basis.

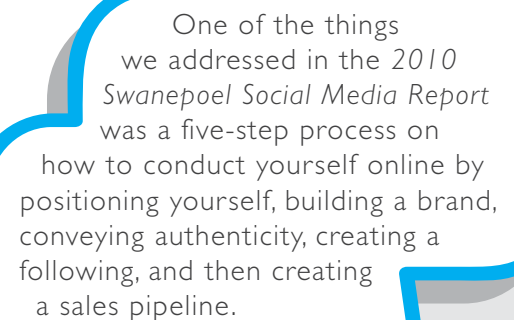
Getting interactions on Facebook is somewhat easier than on Twitter. Mostly because I believe that Facebook friends tend to be stronger connections because of the increased amount of information available on their network, including personal information and pictures. To get interactions on Facebook, you still need to follow the rules of creating quality content and reciprocating interactions. Make sure that you are commenting on status updates, photos, and clicking the "Like" button on your friend's profile updates.

You can use your audiences' profiles and status updates as a way to learn about their "FORD" factors (Family, Occupation, Recreation, and Dreams). The more information you can gather and remember about each member of your database, the more likely you are to get an appointment or a referral when that time comes. Facebook offers a unique tool that allows you to communicate and interact one-on-one with members of your audience: Facebook Chat. Chat is a real-time instant messenger that allows you to ask questions, visit, and build relationships privately whenever contacts are online.



I completely agree!

stacia thompson



One of the things we addressed in the *2010 Swanepoel Social Media Report* was a five-step process on how to conduct yourself online by positioning yourself, building a brand, conveying authenticity, creating a following, and then creating a sales pipeline.

stefan swanepoel

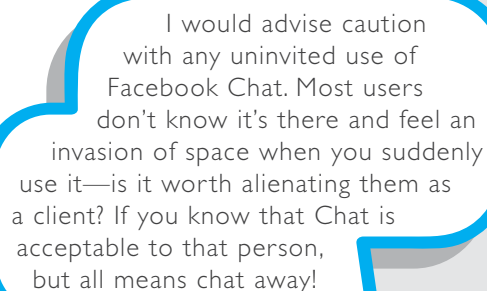
Just look at the bottom right-hand corner for the green circle with the word “Chat” next to it. Chat is a powerful tool that you can leverage to interact with multiple people at the same time and receive instant responses. We are currently using Facebook Chat to work our sphere and ask for referrals, network with agents in other cities, set recruiting appointments, and get appointments to help people buy or sell.

On the surface, LinkedIn is the least flexible in ways to interact. There are no retweets, @replies, or likes. You are limited to sending a direct message like an email, making a reference about that person, or forwarding the profile to another connection. You can ask for and author professional recommendations, join groups and interact with members in your chosen niche, demonstrate your expertise with LinkedIn Answers or share files and presentations through the site’s applications. LinkedIn also provides a wealth of knowledge that can allow you to interact at a higher level. On Twitter and Facebook, you interact mostly with the comments and status updates that are produced daily. LinkedIn allows you communicate about your shared friends or connections, industry and education commonalities, and occupational interests.

The value of LinkedIn in the real estate business is exponential when we get to the Converting Online Leads section, because LinkedIn allows you to research people so that you know where they live and why they might be moving (which hopefully shortens the lead conversion process.)

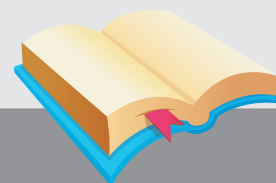
On all of the social networks, we have found that factors like what time of day, day of the week, and how often you update can have a dramatic effect on the amount of interactions. Really the process of getting interactions on social networks deserves a book of its own. Since we have only touched the tip of the iceberg, I would encourage you to experiment to see what times of day, days of the week, types of content, and how often you update your status affects the total amount of interactions you get from your own audience.

No matter what step you are engaged in—be it identifying, listening, growing, or interacting with your audience—much like exercising, it is the discipline of doing it often and consistently that will yield the best results.



I would advise caution with any uninvited use of Facebook Chat. Most users don't know it's there and feel an invasion of space when you suddenly use it—is it worth alienating them as a client? If you know that Chat is acceptable to that person, but all means chat away!

cary sylvester



Would you be interested in a print version of *Soci@!*? Email print@socialthebook.com and let us know!

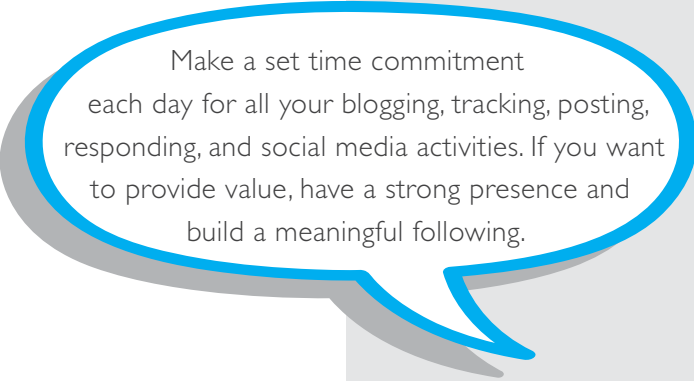
the daily discipline: 20–40 minutes per day

We in the real estate industry only get paid when we close a sale. For that reason, we have been taught to “time block” listing and buying activities first and foremost on our calendars. Much like mailing to your sphere, updating your sellers, or filling flier boxes, your social media, blogging, and search engine optimization work needs to be scheduled. Personally, I prefer to block out time for those activities during times that I can’t be showing, listing, or prospecting. I believe Nick Cameron from Modesto said it best when he spoke about HootSuite.com: “I use HootSuite for fifteen minutes every night because it allows me to schedule my Twitter updates in advance for the following day. That tool makes sure my tweets are posted throughout the day automatically, so that I can spend my time during the day on my business.”

One of the hidden dangers of social media is getting lost in the websites and spending too much time “not working” instead of networking. Make sure that you limit your social media time and be purposeful while you are there. Schedule a specific amount of time each day—for instance, maybe twenty minutes in the morning and twenty minutes in the afternoon or night. You can count that time as prospecting or working your sphere if you are purposeful in your online time.

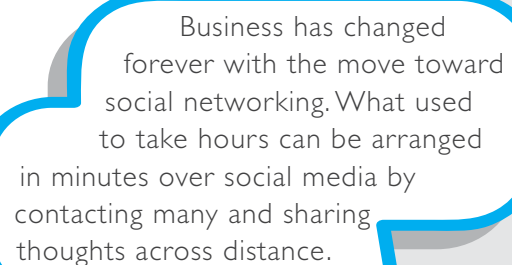
Use the morning to write a short blog post (300 words), or find an interesting article about the market or the economy and share it with your social networks. Use the time in the afternoon or evening to see what responses you received that day including retweets, replies, comments, likes, and forwards. During that time, make sure you reciprocate with those individuals and even go as far as publically thanking them via the same networks.

In order to not get stuck in the social media time trap, first you must avoid Mafia Wars and FarmVille, and then consider using the available tools and systems like Nick Cameron does to



Make a set time commitment each day for all your blogging, tracking, posting, responding, and social media activities. If you want to provide value, have a strong presence and build a meaningful following.

stefan swanepoel



Business has changed forever with the move toward social networking. What used to take hours can be arranged in minutes over social media by contacting many and sharing thoughts across distance.

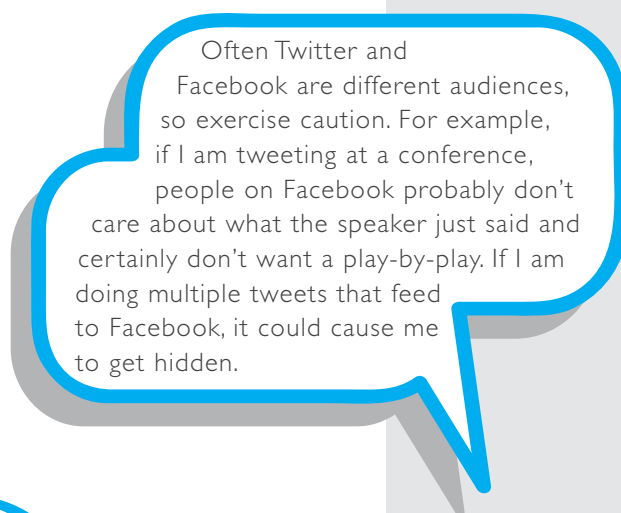
chad hyams

leverage yourself. Consider installing the Facebook.com/Twitter application, you can update your Facebook/Twitter status by simply sending a text message. Refer to Facebook.com/Twitter and Twitter.com for directions on how to set that up. Many additional leveraging tools are available that can be used—just to name a few: HootSuite, TweetDeck, Xobni, and FriendFeed.com. With so many tools to choose from I would recommend playing with a few platforms before making your decision on which ones to use on a more permanent basis.

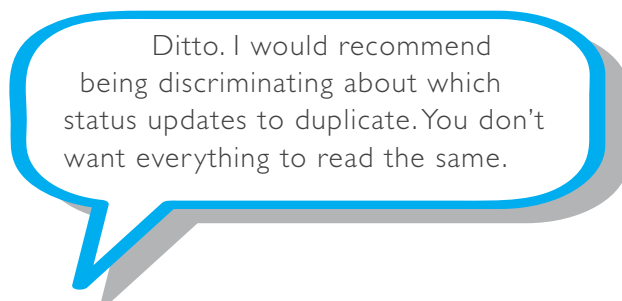
It is easy to see the positive implications of social networking for agents that work their sphere for referral business. Growing your online audience has been discussed throughout this ebook as a way to increase the size of your sphere and generate referrals and leads. The upcoming section will discuss that subject and how to specifically work your sphere online.



stefan swanepoel



amber presley



stacia thompson



social media and your sphere –
working your mets

Social Media and Your Sphere – Working Your Mets


As the popularity of social networks continues to grow, a larger percentage of your sphere will be reachable including family members, past clients, friends, and affiliates. The days of Christmas calendars and football schedules being mailed as the sole means of touching your sphere will hopefully come to an end.

While writing this ebook, we had the true honor of interviewing a Mega Agent from West Chester, Pennsylvania, named Matt Fetick. Matt has been using social media platforms like Facebook to help successfully build his business and work his sphere. He shared with us some valuable tips and strategies that he uses in his real estate business.

Matt made it clear that being more goal oriented than highly social (a “High D” for those of you familiar with the DISC test), it was hard for him to just pick up the phone and call for referrals or business. West Chester is a small community where everyone knows everyone. “It’s my hometown,” says Matt. “I know folks from growing up, school, and from my days working as a police officer.” He is, in fact, mayor of that small community. Straight cold calling didn’t seem like the right approach—he wanted warm, personal reasons for reaching out. Social media gave Matt a reason to call his sphere.

Each day he scans his call list and then browses the “Live News Feed” on Facebook for occasions to congratulate or compliment his sphere—such as weddings, new babies, and promotions. He looks for photos and links, which both stand out and tend to be flags for moments or information that is important to that person. He then contacts them and uses that information as an icebreaker. Often he identifies a great opportunity with an individual who isn’t currently scheduled for a touch. He’ll just make a note of it in his Contact Management System and reach out.

“One lady had posted on her Facebook that morning that one of her kids was coming down with the H1N1 virus. By that afternoon, she wrote that the whole household was down with the flu.” On his way home, Matt picked up some hot soup and personally



You forgot recipe cards!

ellen marks

delivered it to her home. Do you think she will remember Matt when it comes time to buy or sell a home? The personal nature of the information shared on social media sites like Facebook offers professionals an amazing opportunity to build deeper, more meaningful relationships with past and potential clients.

Matt also shared some specific tips that I've put into a list named in his honor.

Figure 26: The Matt Method – Tips for Working Your Sphere with Social Media

- 1) **Don't Be All Business** – No more than 1 in 5 posts should be purely business.
- 2) **Always Be Positive** – Especially in a shifted market, people appreciate an upbeat take on an otherwise tough market.
- 3) **Highlight Your Success, Your Professionalism, and Your Service** – “Congratulations to Bob on his new home purchase” or “Just negotiated another short sale for my sellers.”
- 4) **Spend 15 Minutes Each Day Learning About Your Sphere and Commenting on Their Lives** – To post is fine, but to comment is divine.

Great advice—set a reminder and do it every day! It's actually much less stress than trying to create clever posts. You don't have to be interesting ... just be interested.

As real estate professionals, we have our local sphere and also our agent-to-agent referral network or sphere. Many of us have forged amazing relationships with agents around the world. Social networking with other real estate agents can produce significant amounts of referrals. While writing this ebook, I was able to refer a buyer to an agent that I had met at a conference last week. I remembered the agent because that individual had added me as a friend on Facebook.

A good habit to get into right away is assigning each friend or follower to a specific list. Twitter and Facebook both allow “lists” which were created to organize your expanding online network. Currently, I have friends and followers assigned to the following lists: High School Friends, Past Clients, My Team, Affiliates, Sphere (which includes my friends and family), Local Agents, Keller Williams Agents, People I Don't Know, and Asset Managers. These

cary sylvester

lists allow me to quickly locate people, apply different security settings, and appropriately direct the right marketing messages to each group.

Working your sphere can be simplified into a few simple daily/weekly action items that are fast to implement and, for the most part, free. In the words of a real estate expert and dear friend, Michaëlle Crovisier from the Seattle Metro West office says you need to “get your sphere in gear.” Michaëlle created a program that you can use to effectively work your sphere using technology instead of lots of money. It’s a program my team follows and it’s also what we teach. We’ve received feedback from thousands of students, so it’s a sound program we feel confident you can use successfully (see below).

Most agents would cringe if they heard a new agent trying to do a listing presentation over the phone. The same holds true for social media: It is where you go to connect with people, not hard-sell them.

bryon ellington

Figure 27: The “Get Your Sphere in Gear” Program

- 1) Divide the number of people in your sphere by the number of days that you are planning to work each month: 200 people in your sphere / 20 days = 10 per day.
- 2) Make a commitment to get 200 “asks” in each month. An “ask” is when you can ask the simple question of “Who do you know that is looking to buy or sell in the next 30–60 days?” Note: You can only count it as an “ask” if you inquire in a way that results in an immediate response like phone, in person, or via Facebook Chat. So email or traditional mailings do not count. If you use Facebook Chat, you can work your sphere during off hours and communicate with multiple people at the same time.
- 3) Each week, send out one update via email or social media direct messaging that offers something of value, such as a link to an article or blog post about interest rates. Make sure to remind them to send you referrals. The reason we send a link instead of the entire article is so that we can keep our messages brief enough that most people will take the time to read them, and those who want more information can simply click on the link. Make sure that the message reinforces you as an expert in the real estate field. We’ll cover that in more detail in the Blogging chapter on page 77.

I like to use Tr.im (which you can find at <http://tr.im>) to share links. What sets Tr.im apart from other online services you could use to shorten and share a web address is that Tr.im enables you to track the number of people who actually click through and read the article. This will allow you to see how effectively your content is being interacted with by your sphere.

If you follow Michaelle's sphere program, you will have asked everyone in your sphere for business 12 times a year, as well as touch them via email 52 times. That's 64 touches a year for the cost of a cell phone and an Internet connection, and that doesn't count any special events or traditional mailings you might be doing.

I have a pretty high standard for what I call my sphere—they are basically people I'd invite into my home. So I apply this program to about one hundred people. That's five "asks" a day and one email a week. I average 1 to 2 transactions each month from my sphere. So in my experience, if you successfully follow this plan, you should be able to generate 12 to 24 deals a year at almost a zero marketing cost. Working your sphere is as simple as always being the "top of mind" real estate professional for each member of it.

In his book, *SHIFT*, Gary wrote about how prospecting (asking for potential clients) takes precedence over marketing (attracting potential clients), especially in a shifted market. We couldn't agree more. And as we've interviewed agents across the United States and Canada on how they have leveraged social media to work their sphere, a clear picture of two camps emerges: There are those like Matt who are tapping into the vast database that is social networking to enhance, inform, and empower their direct prospecting, and there are those who are attempting to replace direct prospecting (meeting, phoning, and chatting with clients) with social media interactions. The best results, in our experience, can be found with those who are enhancing their prospecting with social media. They may not have as many friends, followers, or connections as an agent focused solely on social media, but, at the end of the day, they do tend to have more transactions.

At the time of writing this ebook, Facebook was reporting more than 55 million status updates each day, and when you combine that with the volume of tweets, there was a massive picture being painted each day about our desires, intentions, and thoughts. The next area that we will tackle is how to identify ready and willing buyers and sellers through social networks based on what people say on status updates and tweets.



In our 2010 Swanepoel Social Media Report, we provide a comprehensive list of URL shortners including bit.ly, is.gd, ow.ly, tinyurl.com, and more.

stefan swanepoel



farming social networks

Farming Social Networks

Real estate agents are familiar with the tried-and-true tactics involved in geographic farming that work a specific neighborhood, city, towns, or even farming more specific niches like a particular condominium complex. Mega Agents like Darla and Kurt Buehler from Flower Mound, Texas, continue to successfully work geographic farms with huge returns. Geographic farming can be done successfully online as well by focusing on specific websites, fan pages, and online groups. In this chapter, we'll cover three basic areas: marketing to your farm online, prospecting in your online farm, and prospecting in your niches. We'll kick off the conversation with marketing.

marketing to your online farm

Liz Landry from Jacksonville, Florida, has been using Facebook fan pages centered around neighborhoods and experiencing phenomenal success. Her Oakleaf Plantation fan page for Orange Park, Florida, represents one of her key online geographic farms, and she works it daily, offering valuable neighborhood information as well as driving traffic to her open houses. For instance, she posted a link on the site about a foreclosure opportunity. Of the 380 fans she had at the time, 70 clicked through that same day (18 percent), which generated 5 leads (7 percent) and 2 appointments (40 percent). In short, her commitment to farming her Facebook fan page is paying off. In the first month, she took three listings and generated two buyer leads directly from the page. That's nothing to sneeze at.

Many have tried to emulate Liz's Facebook farming with varying levels of success. "The key," says Landry, "is commitment over time. Those most successful create a community and contribute to it on a consistent basis." Liz gives her site daily attention and focuses on offering value in addition to branding her team as the local go-to resource—the hallmark of all successful farming. The net effect is that her community now thinks of the fan page as a resource they can rely on. In August, a resident posted the following:

Neurosurgeons are better paid than general practitioners. RESPA attorneys charge more per hour than average general civil litigators. The highest paid professionals are never generalists. They specialize in a unique area within a field and offer knowledge that few others have.

bryon ellington

If your sphere of influence is on Facebook, use it as part of your 33 Touch program. Think about it ... Wouldn't you prefer a Facebook comment about your baby or vacation from someone you know over a mass-mailed, generic postcard?

mariana wagner

“LOST DOG! Our dog got out Saturday night from the Piedmont neighborhood. Black w/tan Dachshund mix named Happy. Very friendly and sweet, we’ve walked and driven around with no luck. He should have a collar w/[our] number. If someone finds him, please call me at [phone number]. Thanks so much!”

Liz prominently reposted the message to the fan page. Happy the Dog was located in just 27 minutes after being lost for two days! Needless to say the owner was thrilled. This opportunity doesn’t present itself with traditional farming. Postcards and newsletters can be very effective, but they are one-way communications. Social environments like Facebook enable dynamic interactions that can help you create business today and customers for life. And it might help find a few lost pets along the way too.

We reached out to some friends who have seen significant success farming social media profiles and fan pages. So with a nod to our friends, here are a few ideas on how to get started farming social media.

Figure 28: Five Strategies for Farming with Social Media

- 1) Create a Facebook fan page for a specific town, neighborhood, or community like Liz’s neighborhood site. Search for “Oakleaf Plantation” on Facebook and you can check it out.
- 2) Create a neighborhood blog like Stephanie Johnson of Bellingham, Washington, created to showcase her favorite neighborhood. You can find her blog at www.MissFairhaven.com.
- 3) Create or become active Facebook and LinkedIn groups focused on your geographic area or niche market. I’ve personally joined and become active in a number of REO groups on LinkedIn where I’m farming for asset managers.
- 4) Create a separate Twitter account for your town or neighborhood that provides important news and announcements related to that area. Charlotte, North Carolina, top agent Jonathan Osman has done a good job with this; check him out on Twitter at www.Twitter.com/ResideCharlotte.
- 5) Create online videos showcasing your favorite neighborhood, city, or town—like Sue Adler from Shorthills, New Jersey, has done—and post them onto your blogs, fan pages, and social media profiles. You can find some examples on any of her websites, like www.NJExperts.com. It would be criminal not to mention one of the masters of social media, Ian Watt, from Vancouver, British Columbia, who has built a Mega Agent business off of the use of videos and social media. Check out www.IanWatt.ca and see for yourself.

YouTube ranks very high in search engines, and videos you have tagged with common search terms will likely appear on the first page of Google. With one click, consumers could find themselves on your site.

julie fantechi

prospecting your online farm

For the remainder of this chapter, we will be stepping away from marketing to your online farm and focus on prospecting. Think of it this way, whenever you find yourself driving through the neighborhoods you farm, your radar goes up. You're on the alert for opportunities to connect with people and especially for signs someone might be planning to sell. Those signs are often literal—bandit signs on telephone poles announcing moving or estate sales, FSBO signs, and even a For Rent sign that has lingered on a lawn for months on end. These all present opportunities to investigate and connect with the owner to see if they might need your services. With the help of social networking tools, you can prospect your online farm as well. But, as you'll see, buying and selling signs tend to be more figurative than literal online.

With 50 million Facebook updates being posted every day and another 25 million Twitter posts, spotting signs of a motivated buyer or seller becomes a little like standing in a crowded Grand Central Station at rush hour and hoping to overhear a random member of the throng say, "I'm thinking of selling my home." The word "futility" comes to mind. Thankfully, there are tools designed to locate individuals who—through their comments, updates, and tweets—are giving indications that they might be interested in buying, selling, or using specific services and products. Prospecting just got a whole lot easier.

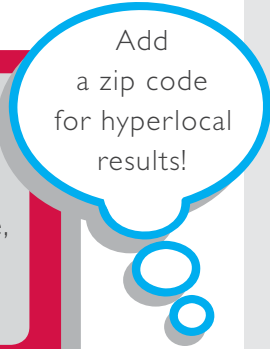
Implementing these tools might very well be the fastest source of business you can get from reading this ebook. We always teach real estate agents to ask for referrals during a transaction, not just afterward, if they want more referrals. Why? Because during a transaction they are talking about their buying or selling experience, which leads to conversations with others who may volunteer their interest in buying or selling. They also just tend to pay more attention. Like the last time that you bought a car that you had rarely seen, but all of a sudden it becomes the most common car that you see on the road. That part of the brain called the reticular activator gets engaged in something and systematically sends you a mental smoke signal whenever it shows up.

Today, buyers and sellers are actively talking about their transactions and they are doing it on Facebook, Twitter, and

LinkedIn. As you are reading this, they and their friends are typing in phrases and words that could identify them as potential leads. To find these leads, you have to identify what phrases to monitor and plug them into a couple of tools that will alert you when they show up. Think of them as your reticular activator for social networks.

Figure 29: Sample Phrases to Monitor on Social Networks

Buying, selling, foreclosure, real estate agent, Realtor, house value, realty, short sale, foreclosure, bank owned, REO, zero down, mortgage, home loan, new house, new home, condo, condominiums, duplex, investment home, rental, vacation home, relocation, inspector, staging, sell our house, FSBO, previewing properties, building, new construction, listing, etc.



Add a zip code for hyperlocal results!

TweetBeep and DemandSpot are currently our favorite prospecting tools for social media, followed closely by GeoChirp and Facebook's built-in search features. This is by no means a comprehensive list. The rate of innovation is such that new tools and technologies are always emerging to make this process easier.

prospecting tool #1 – tweetbeep

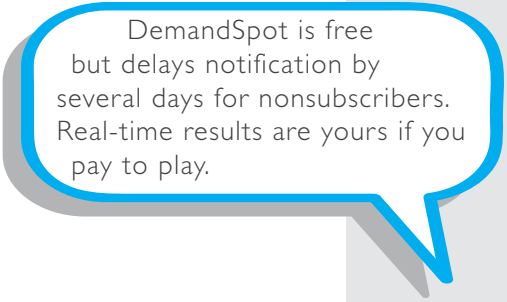
On TweetBeep.com, any time words or phrases similar to ones listed in Figure 29 above are written on Twitter, the username and the message are sent to you via email. The one drawback with this tool is that it is not geographically specific, and if you write the word “home” you will be notified when any of the millions of Twitter users type the word “Home.” It would serve you better to use more specific phrases like “Relocating to Seattle” or “Selling a Home in Bellingham” so that you get relevant leads to your business.

prospecting tool #2 – demandspot

This website monitors predefined phrases on Twitter that indicate a user may be interested in buying, selling, or renting based on a geographic location. DemandSpot enables you to quickly sort through thousands of Twitter posts and identify relevant local leads. One of the first times I used DemandSpot, I found a tweet

julie fantechi

from a gentleman saying, “Getting ready for work, thinking about buying a house.” That to me looked like a guy jumping up and down with a sign that says, “HEY REAL ESTATE AGENT, SELL ME A HOUSE!” This is such a powerful tool that I would add it as an action item to your daily must-do list: Monitor DemandSpot daily.



DemandSpot is free but delays notification by several days for nonsubscribers. Real-time results are yours if you pay to play.

prospecting tool #3 – geochirp

GeoChirp.com is similar to DemandSpot in that it searches Twitter posts in the areas you define. What distinguishes it is that it allows you to pick the keywords you would like to monitor. Try using GeoChirp with the phrases mentioned in Figure 29 on the previous page.

prospecting tool #4 – facebook

In the right-hand corner of Facebook, you will see a little white search box. This area is normally used for searching for existing friends or trying to locate new ones by name. One of the little-known facts about that search box is that you can search for words or phrases that have been used on your network’s status updates. This is a great way to search for any of your keyword phrases like “Homes,” “Real Estate Agent,” “Selling,” and so on.

These prospecting tools will assist you in finding ready and willing buyers immediately. As we mentioned earlier, there are times tweets and status updates act a lot like FSBO signs—big indicators that an individual needs to buy or sell real estate. Like the FSBO sign, you have to slow down, pull up to the curb, and attempt to make contact. For the most part, these tools will allow you to make contact with people that you have not met. So like calling on a FSBO, it may take a few different approaches to build a strong enough relationship that you can actually get an appointment.

cary sylvester

farming your niches

Buyers and sellers on social networks are obvious targets for your online farming. However there are some less obvious sources of business that can bring huge returns including finding asset managers for REO business, HR managers for relocation business, builders for new construction, or attorneys and accountants for divorce, bankruptcy, probate, and short sale leads. These are excellent sources of business and can all be found by searching by employer, occupation, or job title.

Figure 30: Tactics for Farming Your Niches

- 1) Create specific fan pages for your niche. For instance, we have created a fan page for our New Home Group for builders and a REO Northwest Fan Page for our REO business.
- 2) Create a group on LinkedIn or on Facebook for those individuals to connect and share common challenges like a divorce attorney or 1031 exchange specialist group.
- 3) Create a blog that serves as a resource for those individuals that might include a service directory or market statistics.
- 4) Create a city resource website as a free benefit to HR departments that have people relocating. Include hotels, restaurants, and neighborhood information. For instance, I created www.LiveBellingham.com for that purpose.

Just be sure to stick to a time commitment that works for you. Avoid the trap of managing too many pages and none of them well!

julie fantechi

Bottom line is that we must not be so focused on our existing database of friends, followers, and connections that we ignore the obvious sources of clients that are in immediate need for our services. In the last few chapters, we have covered increasing the size of your audience and farming social media networks for active and willing leads. The following chapter will address using advertising and marketing on social networks to generate leads.

The fear many have with niching is that it will limit the number of people they can interact with. But no one says you have to have just one niche. Go after several by segmenting your existing audience by niches and messaging accordingly.

bryon ellington



advertising on social networks –
working your haven't mets

Advertising on Social Networks – Working Your Haven’t Mets

The return on investment from social media and Internet marketing can take time to fully realize. Building your online audience through blogging and search engine optimization isn’t a one-day project but rather the result of consistent online activities. If you need or want immediate results, paid advertising, although costly, can generate traffic and leads on day one. This form of marketing does cost money but it is very manageable. It can be turned on and off with only a few simple clicks, or scheduled to expire when you hit a dollar amount—essentially allowing you to play “Red Light, Green Light” with your online marketing budget.

Paid advertising is a huge component of search engine revenues. In fact, experts estimate that search engine advertising spending will top \$15 billion in the United States this year alone. For you and me, that means they have about 15 billion reasons to make it as easy and painless to execute as possible. So, as with other areas of this ebook, if you have anxiety attacks at the thought of tech stuff, you can turn off the alarm claxons in your head and relax. There are two advertising options on search engines that are as easy or easier than any of the other marketing tasks you’re already doing on autopilot each week: display ads and pay-per-click ads (PPC).

display advertising

Display advertising can be done on a variety of search engines; probably the best examples are done on Yahoo or MSN. More commonly known as banner advertising, display ads allow you to “display” images and or videos in specified areas of a website to specific target groups. Please see Figure 31 on page 62 for an example of how Yahoo display advertising shows up. In most cases display advertising allows you to target people from specific geographic locations and you can target specific demographics like age, education, income, and gender. This type of advertising is usually charged on a CPM basis (cost per thousand impressions) that is tied to a specific monthly budget. You get to pay for as many or as few impressions as you want based on your goals and budget.

Figure 3 |



Display ads are a great way to build brand loyalty and brand recognition. Being able to show images and videos on major Internet portals like Yahoo and MSN can really benefit a business. If you're interested in building your brand through this method, just scroll down to the bottom of the homepage and look for a link labeled "Advertising" or "Advertising Programs." The search engines host all the information and tools you need to get it done.

pay-per-click (ppc) text advertising

Search result pay-per-click ads allow you to market your business and services in the search results when potential customers are searching for terms that might indicate that they are interested in using your specific service or product. Frankly, this is my preferred method. I generally like to make offers for immediate response, and the response I'm looking for is a click through to my primary or niche website. That's where we can connect and do business. The actual process is absolutely simple. Remember, the search engines have billions in financial incentives to remove any barriers between business owners and the advertising needs.

In a break from our earlier promise to avoid a lot of how-to instruction, we'd like to walk you through how to set up a PPC ad to both demonstrate how easy it is and for the opportunity to coach you on a few strategic aspects of this method. Here's how the process works.

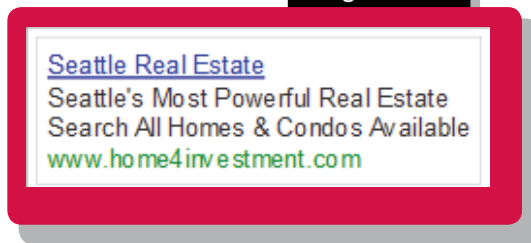
Don't just send them to your homepage unless that is where your call to action is located. Send the ad to the most relevant page on your site to solicit a response.

cary sylvester

step 1: create an ad

At the bottom of each search engine homepage, you'll find links to its ad programs. If you already have a Yahoo, MSN, or Google account, you'll just log in and get started. Otherwise, you'll need to sign up. The first thing you'll do is set up the ad itself. As you can see from the sample ad in Figure 32, there isn't much text involved. If anything, you'll struggle to state your value proposition in the limited space allowed.

Figure 32



step 2: pick your keywords

Next, you'll be cued to bid on the keywords you'd like your ad to appear in. The words we choose are identical to the ones we selected in our "long tail" search terms for our blog and website. Once you've selected your keywords, you'll be asked to set your maximum cost per click and daily budget.

Figure 33



Seattle Washington Real Estate	\$0.98
Real estate Seattle	\$1.09
Seattle Real estate	\$1.11
Seattle Real estate	\$1.16
Seattle Wa Real Estate	\$1.04

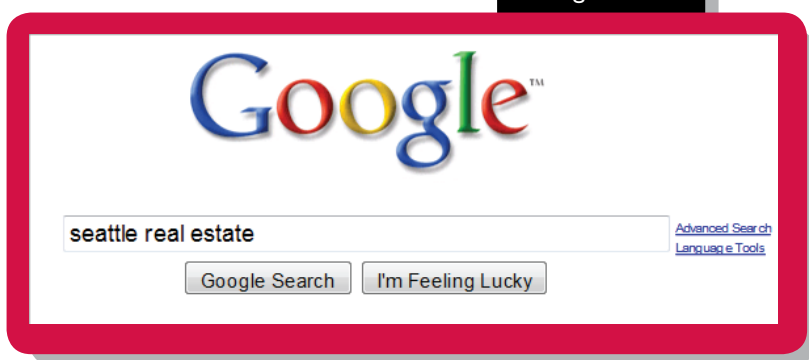
Conveniently, the search engines will recommend a range, say from \$0.45 to \$0.98, for you to bid on each click. Here's the deal: We usually bid on the low end of the spectrum and that usually is still too high. Check back over the next few days to see how

well your ad is working. Typically, it will be doing well and you'll discover that the suggested range has dropped, which gives you the opportunity to lower your bid further. If you don't check back, you won't get the chance to save precious dollars. It takes less than five minutes, so make it a part of your daily discipline if you decide to add PPC ads to your social networking lead generation arsenal.

step 3: buyers and sellers search the web

Interested consumers search online for their real estate needs. Maybe they want information on the home-buyer tax credit, how to qualify for a short sale, or just for a good place to search for area homes. If you've properly selected your keywords, they will also be searching for your service offerings around those topics.

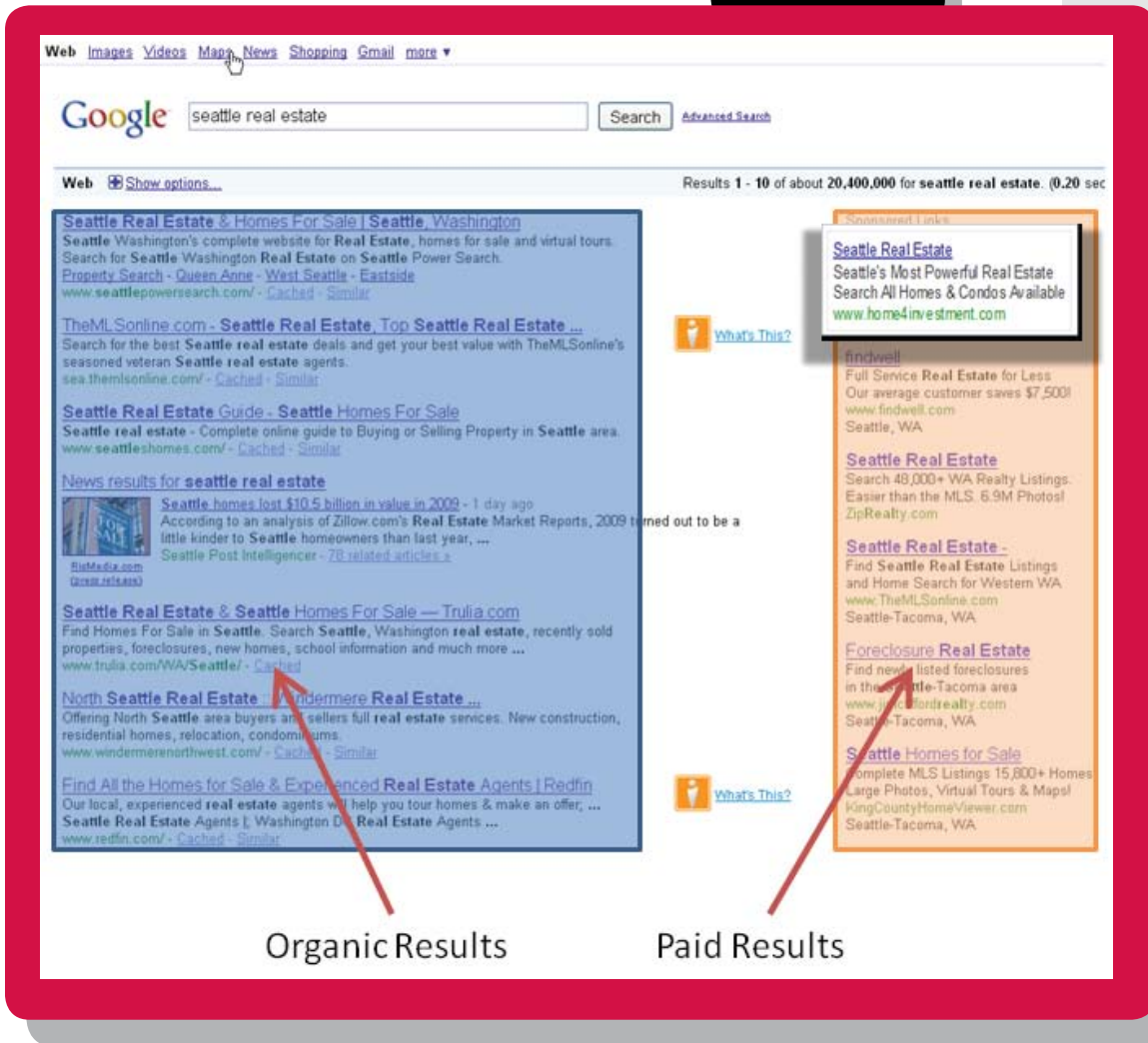
Figure 34



step 4: buyers and sellers click on your ad and find you

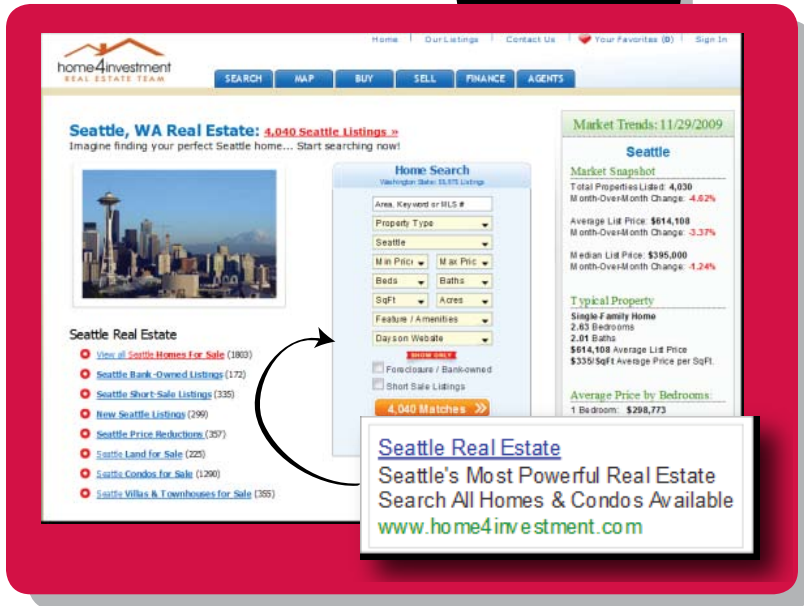
Drum roll please. Depending on which studies you read, roughly seven out of ten (70 percent) of these searchers will select the organic search results (see Figure 35 on page 65). That's where your blogging will pay off. Still, three out of ten searchers (30 percent) will click on the paid advertising. If you've done your job, they will select yours.

Figure 35



A fundamental component of each ad is a link to the website of your choice. So when the buyer or seller clicks on your ad, a new window will open with your site (see Figure 36 on page 66). That's where you have to quickly and obviously make good on your offer. The sample ad promises "Seattle's Most Powerful Real Estate Search." If our website doesn't fit the bill, potential clients will leave and move on to the next candidate.

Figure 36



This is where the rubber meets the road. As Gary says again and again in *SHIFT*, the measure of your website's success isn't traffic or unique visitors—it is appointments set. When buyers search on my website, they see a list of properties. They can drill down and view details on one, but after that, they have to register with the site. That's where we capture their contact information and follow up using proven scripts and dialogues to set the appointment!

Paid advertising campaigns are fast to set up and provide immediate traffic to your website. The only negative to paid advertising can be the cost associated in comparison to the relatively free traffic you can generate from SEO, blogging, and social networks. I get asked whether paid or organic traffic is better all the time. The truth appears to be either one. The challenge for you is knowing which method produces the best return on investment for you.

holding your advertising dollars accountable

We are seeing more and more business tracking tools being created that allow us to hold our marketing dollars accountable. Tools like Arch Telecom—that allow us to track every call and sort every lead by call source—are helping to make advertising more accountable. Arch allows us to answer the question of how many calls did my last advertisement generate. Online tools like Google Analytics (a free tool that tracks website traffic by visitor, source, geographic location, and much more) are shedding light on online advertising effectiveness.

Top agent from Bellingham, Washington, Anna Biondolillo states, “Almost 50 percent of my business comes from Arch Telecom leads.” I personally use Arch, Google Analytics, and a new product called BoomTown IDX to hold my marketing dollars accountable. BoomTown has provided a fantastic tool that allows you to see the most important numbers in Internet lead generation—your click-to-lead ratios!

Figure 37: What to Watch to Hold Your Ads Accountable

- 1) Visitor Source – Did your visitors come from a particular Google PPC ad, a Craigslist post, organic search results, etc.?
- 2) How many of those visitors searched for properties?
- 3) How many visitors saw a contact form?
- 4) How many leads were generated from each source?

Figure 38, on the next page, shows a screenshot from a BoomTown IDX platform that displays the click-to-capture ratios of different traffic sources. You’ll note that for most of my campaigns a huge percentage—30 percent to 100 percent—actually conduct a search (Visit2Search). A smaller, but still sizeable percentage—12 percent to 53 percent—play with the search long enough to get promoters

to register (Search2Form). Anywhere from 10 percent on the low end to 100 percent will become a lead by trading their contact information for the property details (Form2Lead). At the end of the day, I pay most attention to the right-hand column (Visit2Lead), since that shows the overall effectiveness of each campaign.

Figure 38

Visit2Search	Search2Form	Visit2Form	Form2Lead	Visit2Lead
98.84%	26.90%	26.59%	10.87%	2.89%
50.00%	-	-	-	-
100.00%	-	-	-	-
-	-	-	-	-
98.61%	31.46%	31.02%	19.40%	6.02%
10.04%	12.86%	1.29%	-	-
30.00%	53.33%	16.00%	50.00%	8.00%
-	-	-	-	-
75.00%	22.22%	16.67%	50.00%	8.33%
66.67%	50.00%	33.33%	100.00%	33.33%

If you know these numbers, you can effectively manage your online Internet lead generation business. Without this vital information, you won't be able to hold your marketing dollars accountable or effectively prioritize your online activities. For instance, I expect our PPC leads to carry an average price tag of \$17 with our Google PPC ads. Our team converts 2 to 5 percent of these leads to closed business. Budgeting conservatively, that's a worst-case \$833 per transaction at an average commission of about \$7,500. On average, we keep our total PPC lead generation costs around 10 percent of gross closed commission revenue—a target we learned to shoot for in Gary's book *The Millionaire Real Estate Agent*. Using systems like the ones described above, I have been able to reduce expenses, increase my lead conversions, and better capture people in my online web.

paid social media advertising

So now that we have covered paid advertising on the search engines, let's explore the world of paid advertising on social networks.

Social media has given (or provided) those who are willing to pay for advertising and web traffic a unique, targeted way to advertise.

I am going to focus this section on ways you can use Facebook ads to build your business. For additional information on how to actually set up your Facebook ads, visit www.Facebook.com/ads.

In order to get started, we need to take a look at the Facebook ad basics. Similar to PPC advertising as described in Figures 32 through 38, when advertising on the Facebook network, you can create an ad which includes both text and an image. The ads show up on individual profiles while that user is logged into the network based on the targeting you determine.

Targeting options on Facebook include things like a user's geographic location, age, sex, education, workplace, relationship status, relationship interest, languages, or keywords typed by the user on their profile.

Creating your first ad literally takes minutes. The harder part might be figuring out how or where to advertise on a network like Facebook.

In this section, we will cover five tactics for generating ad leads from Facebook (see Figure 40). These will give you some marketing campaigns that you could use to help your own real estate business.

Figure 39: Facebook Ads in Five Easy Steps

- 1) Create ad text and upload image.
- 2) Pick your target market.
- 3) Choose PPC or CPM.
- 4) Choose your daily budget.
- 5) Submit your ad.

Figure 40: Five Tactics to Use with Social Media Paid Advertising

- 1) Use social media ads to build your brand recognition and loyalty.
- 2) Use social media ads to capture buyers.
- 3) Use social media ads to capture sellers.
- 4) Use social media ads to get agent-to-agent referrals.
- 5) Use social media ads to work a niche.

tactic 1 – use social media to build your brand recognition and loyalty

Depending on your message, your ad may not generate a lot of clicks (a click is when a user clicks on your ad and is directed to your preferred destination) but may instead create a massive amount of impressions (the amount of times an ad is shown on the screen). I realize this sounds a lot like having a magazine ad that no one calls on, but this can be a good thing on social media.

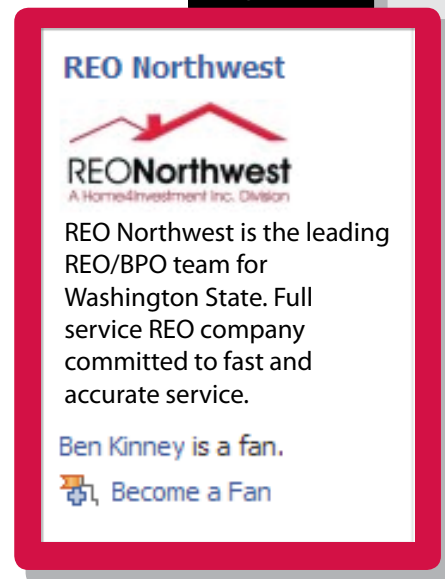
If you select to PPC (paying only when someone clicks on your ad) instead of CPM (pay per thousand impressions), you may be able to get your logo, brand name, or message shown millions of times at a super low cost. It's like having a billboard on the most traveled freeway in your area for free.

In one of my online REO campaigns (see Figure 41), I knew that the actual amount of clicks from consumers would be low, but the value of the name and brand recognition would be priceless for me. In that specific instance, I had 1,322 clicks and 2,215,653 impressions at a total cost of only \$400. This means that 1,322 people clicked on my ad and actually viewed my website but, more importantly, more than 2 million times people in my local community (I had selected a 25-mile radius around Bellingham for this ad) had my logo shown on their Facebook homepage.

Most people don't need a real estate agent at any given moment. But if you use tools like this to become top of mind, then when they or someone they know needs a service like yours, you could be the first one they think of. I have actually had strangers stop me in town and say hi because they recognized me from one of my Facebook ads.

If your brand name is important to your business model, then this strategy might work for your business. Start by thinking about what messages or ads you can use effectively in this manner. Try a message like "Average agent sells only 7 homes – I sold over X ! Call me to find out why." This type of message is bold and memorable but not designed to invite costly clicks.

Figure 41



tactic 2 – use social media ads to capture buyers

There are lots of potential buyers on Facebook that are not already in your sphere. The trick is attracting the ones that you have not met yet and convincing them to do business with you. Once again, it is the message that matters and, of course, who you say the message to.

Buyers are getting smarter and smarter. They know that they can search online for properties. You have to convince them that you have something to offer that no one else has. Repeat after me: “I can help you buy a house for the least amount of money in the shortest amount of time.” Not that you need to say that verbatim, but that is all that buyers care about. They want a deal—so provide them access to those deals and they will become your raving fan.

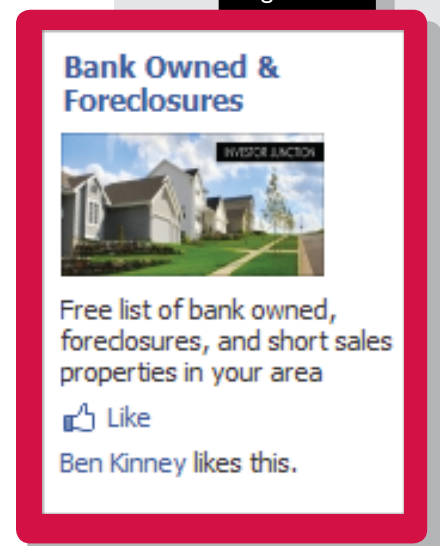
One of the most misunderstood areas in real estate is short sales, foreclosures, and bank-owned homes. Almost 48 percent of buyers considered buying one in 2009, but less than 10 percent actually did. This tells me that those three power words are powerful attractors. Providing lists of bank-owned properties, short sales, and foreclosures is a surefire way to get web visitors. All you ask for in return is just a phone number, email, and name. Not too much to ask when you are providing a free list of the best-priced properties in the area, is it?

The data that each of us provides on our profiles—like age, sex, location, occupation, education, and so on—allows advertisers like ourselves to market only to niches that have the highest chance of buying from us. When paying to place an ad on a social network, it is important that you target your audience as much as possible. For buyers, the user’s location and age seem to be the most important factors.

The demographics I use for my buyer ads are stated below:

1. Local Buyers
 - Location: 25–50 mile radius of your location
 - Age: 21 and up
 - Reason: I want to catch local buyers with this advertisement. This keeps costs low and captures buyers that want to buy now.

Figure 42



2. Out-of-Area Buyers

- Location: British Columbia, Canada
- Age: 21 and up
- Reason: My town is located close to Canada. You can place ads that only show in a specific area including countries, states, or cities.

Notice above that the second ad (Figure 43) was designed to target people living outside of the area. If you know of a city, state, or country where a substantial amount of people relocate from, then you can run targeted ads that only show in those areas. It is also nice that your local competition can't see the ads, because they are not located in your ads' geo-targeted location.

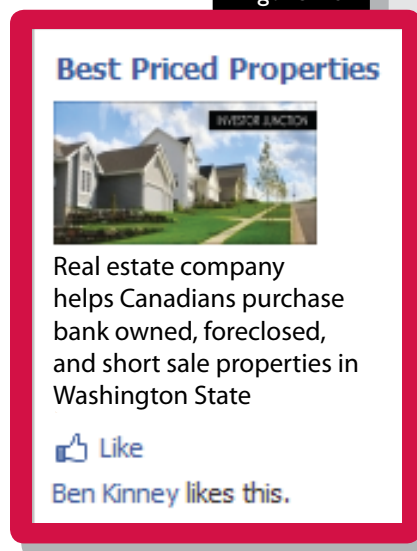
tactic 3 – use social media ads to capture sellers

Research tells us that more than 65 percent of Americans live in a home that is occupied by its owner. Assuming that this statistic transfers over into the general online population, it would be safe to assume that a large percentage of social network users will know someone or have a personal need to sell a property in the upcoming years.

Once again, the beauty of advertising on social networks is that you can advertise directly to the demographic of your choice. If you follow statistics presented by the National Association of Realtors, you will have known that the average first-time buyer in 2009 was around 30 years old and that the average homeowner owns a home for 5–7 years.

Averages are just, as you know, the middle of the highs and the lows. Knowing this information, I prefer to advertise to the age of 25 and older when looking to generate seller leads. Sellers are pretty simple to understand because they really want only two simple things; the most amount of money in the least amount of time!

Figure 43



You have two primary choices when advertising for sellers: offer a home evaluation, or brand yourself as the home-selling expert:

1. The home evaluation offer is simple: “Click here to find out your property’s value” or “Find out what your property is worth online.” Offering no-hassle and no-phone-call evaluations can generate more calls than the typical “contact agent XYZ for your home’s value today.” Once they click on the ad, direct them to a contact form on your website like the ones from Top Producer’s Market Snapshot, or Wufoo’s online form.
2. The branding advertisement has many more options. My advice is to be bold and to compare and contrast. This advertisement will not cost you as much as the home evaluation ad, because it is not designed to generate clicks. It’s meant to brand you as successful and aggressive. The consumer needs to know that homes are still getting sold and that you are working the hardest. Consider using ad copy as follows: “The average agent sold X while I sold more than Y. Call me to find out why—555-1212.” “The top selling real estate team in X!” “Your home sold for the most amount of money in the least amount of time.”

Sellers are not used to these types of advertisements on social networks. In most markets you have a unique opportunity to be the first one to the table with this campaign. We’ve found them to be highly effective.

tactic 4 – use social media ads to get agent-to-agent referrals

There are more than 100,000 real estate professionals on Facebook alone. As long as real estate agents note their brokerage name or share that they’re a real estate agent, you can advertise to them for referrals. These ads are normally cheaper because of the low click-through ratios. This is a great opportunity to brand yourself as the referral source for your area. Often when I open my Facebook profile, I’m greeted with an ad from Mickey Pascerella, a Philadelphia agent in my company. The headline screams, “Philadelphia Referrals—26.8% Paid” and then he has a few more details about his credentials. The funky percentage got my

attention, and he's the first person I thought of when writing this section; he'll probably be the first person I think of next time I get a referral for Philly.

Try creating ads targeting specific companies by running advertising only to someone who stated they work for a specific brokerage: "ABC Brokerage top producer—I pay 31.3% for referrals in Washington State ..." Like Mickey, change the referral amount to an odd percentage—I believe that it is the "purple cow" in what would otherwise be a pedestrian referral ad.

The point is this: Give them something to remember you by. One strategy that has worked very well for me is creating a fan page and advertising to real estate agents to become a fan of that page (see Figure 44).

The goal of that fan page is to help the agents. Obviously, I need to offer value if I want to have a happy referral community. So a few times a week on my fan page (www.Facebook.com/techcorner), I share tips, scripts, tools, and thoughts that hopefully will help their businesses and create awareness of who I am and where I am from. There is no shortage of real estate agents online, so you have to try and make your business stand out from the competition.

tactic 5 – use social media ads to work a niche

Thinking outside of the box is what keeps the world innovating. Advertising on social networks is not revolutionary, but there are ways to use the Facebook ad platform to work some pretty small niches. Although there are lots of niches that we could talk about, I am going to focus on the three niches that I currently target in my marketing: REOs, builders, and relocations.

Figure 44



An excellent idea and a true example of Stefan Swanepoel's rule to give more than you expect to get in order to build great relationships and a reputation for expertise.

stacia thompson

reo business

You can advertise for REO business by targeting your advertisements to specific companies like Bank of America, Citi, Chase, and so on. You can also advertise to a specific job title, like vendor managers or asset managers. See my example ad (Figure 45).

builder business

You can run ads directly to builders based on their company name or simply on keywords like builder, new construction, carpenter, and so on. Since these ads are so targeted, your cost will be low and the branding value will be priceless. Every time a builder logs into Facebook, he will be staring at your advertisement that says, “New Home Sales Specialist for the Seattle Area.”

relocation leads

Try running ads to large local companies that are located in your area. Direct the ads to them by selecting the company name in the Workplace section of the ad manager. Also try targeting locals by their job title or job position like “Human Resource Director” and “Relocation Department” under the Keyword section.

Advertising on social networks does require a minimum investment. I would start with a few hundred dollars per month as your budget and modify up or down from there. In many situations, advertising on Facebook is cheaper than advertising with Google Adwords.

For those of you who would like to keep a lower budget, you might consider blogging as part of your social media and Internet lead generation campaign, which is conveniently the next topic of discussion.

Figure 45





effective blogging – writing
content that ranks and gets read

Effective Blogging – Writing Content That Ranks and Gets Read

I must admit, the first time I ever heard the term blog, it conjured up images of some space alien in a Star Wars movie. I was certain that a “blog” was destined to take over the planet Hoth and save the Vagabond Constellation from extinction at the hands of the Evil Emperor.

My imagination got the best of me, of course. “Blog” is little more than an abridgment of the terms “web” and “log.” A weblog, or online diary consisting of words, pictures, videos, and links to other blogs and webpages, generally focuses on a particular theme or topic. Most blogs focus on text, although they can be focused on images or video. The vlog, or videoblog, is becoming increasingly popular as video becomes a more accepted medium on the Net—with broadband access and video-sharing tools becoming more or less commonplace.

Jorn Barger coined the term “weblog” as a way to log the Web (super creative, huh?) in December of 1997. A year and a half later, Peter Merholz would jokingly break the two words up just a little differently and come up with the phrase “we blog.” He used that on the sidebar of his weblog in May of 1999, and the term “blog” was born. It was soon after that Evan Williams (one of the men who would later found Twitter) used blog as both a noun and a verb and came up with the term “blogger” as part of a project at Pyra Labs. That project, Blogger.com, would later sell to Google in February of 2003 and pave the way for the explosion of blogging as a viable communication medium.

The number of blogs since then has become a number that is increasingly difficult to track. In the early days of blogging, it was important to try to calculate the number of blogs in an attempt to legitimize the medium, much like the early days of the Web with proponents carefully tracking the number of live pages. As of December 2007, Technorati.com, a popular blog search engine, was tracking 112 million blogs across the world. To put that in perspective, data from the World Bank tells us there were 1.2 billion people in the developed world in 2007, so that’s one blog for every eleven people in the connected world.

When Google bought Blogger.com from Pyra Labs in 2003, they would put an easy-to-use platform in the hands of anyone with Internet access, and it was no longer prohibitive for someone with no experience in how to build a website to publish their thoughts and ideas to the entire world. Since then, WordPress and TypePad have joined the fray, and everyone and anyone with something to say keeps a blog. Maintaining and writing a blog didn't involve understanding computer programming languages like HTML, so publishing content became as easy as typing it up and clicking the publish button. When you boil it down to the bare essentials, a blog is just a website that comes with its own content management system—it's a website for the rest of us.

In May of 2006, the ActiveRain Real Estate Network launched, and by June of that year, ActiveRain had incorporated a blogging platform that would give rise to a community of real estate bloggers. Many of the early bloggers on ActiveRain had experience in other forums where they had been discussing real estate with their peers for years. Realtown.com was one of them with roots dating back to 1995.

ActiveRain would quickly become an epicenter of real estate blogging, as the site would have 8,000 members by the end of 2006 and 40,000 members by the end of 2007. Over the next two years, ActiveRain would add more than 100,000 additional members, and in December of 2009, the number currently stands at approximately 170,000. So, the question that begs answering is: Why? Originally SEO was the number one driver for establishing a blog, but increasingly agents' social media strategies are driving the decision to start and maintain a blog.

why blog?

Most agents don't maintain a blog for one of three reasons. Either they feel they don't have time to blog, they don't feel confident in their writing abilities, or they simply aren't interested in the commitment to regular blogging. Maybe you are thinking the same things. Here's the truth: None of that matters. When you understand the bottom-line benefits blogging can have for your business, you'll likely find a way. Me personally, my team discovered that our local university, Western Washington University, was a rich resource for inexpensive blogging talent. For roughly seven dollars an article, we could hire out grateful students to write specific

articles for my blog. In one fell swoop, we removed all three objections—time, natural talent, and interest—and were able to create a consistent blog product for my business.

About three and half years ago, we hired these college writers to create content for our area website, www.LiveBellingham.com. The site has 316 pages of content, which we added at a pace of about 20 pages per week at a weekly cost of about \$140. Said and done, the content for the site cost us about \$2,200. We haven't had to create content in more than two years, yet LiveBellingham.com continues to deliver 8,000 to 10,000 unique visitors a month. Was it a good investment? Absolutely. While others were writing the content, I was focused on my core responsibilities: generating and converting leads. Our average commission is about \$7,500. So in buying my time back, the leads I generated and converted while others were researching and writing easily financed the website, which continues to pay me an excellent return on the initial investment.

Blogging rocks! The point is simple. We understood the benefits of blogging (see Figure 46) and found a way to make it happen. I'm confident you will too.

Figure 46: Six Reasons Top Agents Blog

- 1) Improve your ranking in search engines
- 2) Position yourself as an expert in a field or geographic area
- 3) Advertise and market a listing
- 4) Drive traffic and create links to your website
- 5) Expand your social media conversations
- 6) Educate future buyers and sellers

Honestly, when we've taught blogging in the past, we usually highlight the first four reasons. With the widespread adoption of social media by real estate professionals, we felt the need to add the last two. The former four are more generally related to your Internet strategy and the latter two are directly related to the topic of this ebook.

One hundred percent of our new, nonrepeat, nonreferral business is because of our online interactions, with 80 percent directly tied to our blogs.


mariana wagner

1. improve your ranking in search engines

Agents websites have evolved significantly in the past few years. Now, for a fraction of the previous cost, just about anyone can host powerful Internet Data Exchange (IDX)-powered property searches on their personal website. Buyers and sellers want to see properties, and they can now find them on your personal site. You can also add a host of useful tools—from saved searches and free reports to property valuations and Buyer Instant Notification Systems (BINS), which you can use to entice potential clients to register with you.

Capturing their contact information with registrations is golden. It's the coin of the real estate Internet realm since it allows you to follow up and set appointments to do business. The challenge is that it's like your most powerful business tool located at a deserted outpost in cyberspace. That's the big appeal of social media, which allows you to drop by wherever your customers already are. So how do you drive traffic to your primary website? One of the most powerful ways is to make sure it ranks highly in search engines by loading your site with content your customers are searching for. And blogs are the best, most leveraged way to do that.

As we described at the beginning of this book, buyers and sellers are now conditioned to navigate through one of the popular search portals like Google, Yahoo, or MSN. You don't need to understand the mechanics of how this works. Each search portal uses its own "secret formula," designed to identify the most relevant sites for any set of search terms. And they purposefully change them all the time to prevent cheating. You don't need an expensive consultant to rank highly; you have everything you need already. Because you understand your target market, you can probably guess the 20–30 terms that people might use to find properties or niches you specialize in. If that's an issue, tools like Hittail.com and Google Trends can help you on your way.



"SEO" is actually just technobabble for "Consistently writing about what you want to be found for in the search engines, in the language used by the community of people you want to do business with—coupled with a good linking strategy." Blogging is the easiest way to do this.

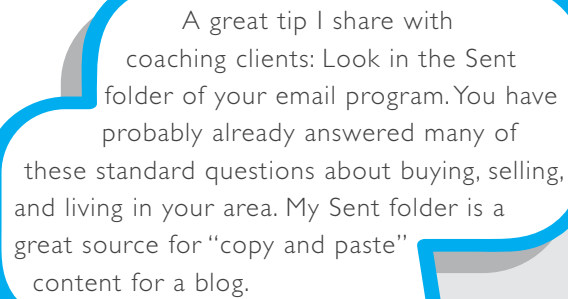
mariana wagner



ActiveRain blogs attract more than 2 million unique visitors per month. More than 1.8 million of these visitors are consumers. Generate a great ranking and gain consumer consideration!

stacia thompson

With those keywords in hand, your job is to systematically add content that includes them on your website. There is no need to be clever—just add a blog post or two each week, and over time the search engines will take notice. Start by answering questions your customers ask you. What are the schools like around here? Are there any parks? What do people around here do on the weekend? How do you buy a foreclosure? What do I need to bring to closing? Figure 47, “What Can Realtors Write About to Demonstrate Their Expertise” on page 83 has some helpful hints. You can also feel free to cruise the site I mentioned earlier, www.LiveBellingham.com, and mimic what we’ve done.



A great tip I share with coaching clients: Look in the Sent folder of your email program. You have probably already answered many of these standard questions about buying, selling, and living in your area. My Sent folder is a great source for “copy and paste” content for a blog.

brad korn

Buyers and sellers aren’t looking for award-winning journalism—they will happily settle for the basic facts delivered clearly with a minimum of grammatical train wrecks. It’s all about content that includes the keywords people are searching for. We’ll walk through the elements of a good blog post later in this chapter, but for now remember this: Write first for the buyers and sellers and second for the search engines. If we stuffed “Bellingham” into every sentence, no one would read it—and what good is that? We just hit a few keywords in the title and again in the body of the article and that seems to do the trick. We blog, therefore we rank.

2. position yourself as an expert in a field or geographic area

If the primary reason to blog is to rank in search engines, then the by-product of that effort is establishing your expertise in the niches and geographic areas you specialize in. The two go hand in hand. Still, notoriety as the local expert on anything from downtown condos to ranchland in the exurbs to real estate investing is a great goal in and of itself. It’s a core ingredient of referral business.

People may connect you to real estate in general because of past business or systematic marketing efforts, but that connection becomes even more memorable when it’s connected to mastery

in something specific. Human brains have long-tail search terms too. When people connect the dots between topics like “Homes” + “Your Area,” you’re in mindshare competition with every real estate professional in their sphere. Add one mental keyword, say “Homes” + “Your Area” + “Duplexes,” and you can become a category of one.

In any presentation where you’re attempting to share your value proposition, you’ll have the ability to point a potential buyer or seller to your blog posts on the topic in question and demonstrate your expertise. It’s a powerful reinforcement.

Positioning the real estate agent as a local neighborhood expert has long been the object of agent marketing campaigns. Agents have been farming neighborhoods since we first started congregating in subdivisions post-World War II. Since that time, real estate agents have been trying to convince sellers and buyers that they have the most intimate knowledge of their neighborhood and are, therefore, the most qualified individuals to sell their home. How have agents convinced neighbors of this local prowess? Saturation.

Agents saturated traditional marketing channels with as much advertising as they could afford. Of course that advertising; television, radio, print, landscapes, all had a finite amount of space. There is only so much time on television or radio. There are only so many bus-stop benches or billboards. There are only so many newspapers and magazines. At some point we made the local mailman our runner and he began stuffing our neighbors’ mailboxes with postcards, but we only had so much money to send them and the mailbox is only so big. So usually it was the person that could provide the most saturation that got top billing in the minds of neighbors. Unfortunately, saturation through traditional marketing media can carry a hefty price tag. Web 2.0 has completely turned this on its ear.

The blog gives any agent with a unique understanding of a certain market or neighborhood the chance to demonstrate that expertise for anyone to find. And since we know that our clients increasingly head online to find their next home, we can also assume they are searching for what it’s like to live in the next neighborhood they intend on choosing. Actually, we don’t have to assume that. ActiveRain has 170,000 real estate professionals engaged in sharing their local communities with the Internet home buyer.

They are getting more than 2,000,000 visitors a month, who are mostly finding articles written about the nuances of living in a neighborhood or community.

Some of this expertise is sought by the consumer prior to purchasing a home; some of it is sought once they are settled. Delivering this information in either instance enhances the brand of the agent as the local expert.

Figure 47: What Can Agents Write About to Demonstrate Their Expertise?

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1) Neighborhood Profiles | 6) Transportation |
| 2) School Information | 7) Employment Opportunities |
| 3) Entertainment and Nightlife | 8) Crime Statistics |
| 4) Local Restaurants and Businesses | 9) Childcare |
| 5) Parks and Recreation | |

Virginia Hepp, an agent in Mesquite, Nevada, credits the exposure from her blog with literally saving her career. In a market that had slowed to a snail's pace for Hepp, who worked mostly from referrals and had almost no online presence, her blog became her savior. "I found that I had more time on my hands than I had ever had before," she says. "When I found ActiveRain and I saw other agents around the country writing about their local markets, and then bragging about the fantastic placement they were getting on the search engines, a light bulb went off for me."

Hepp set out to canvass her market using her blog. She began writing posts about everything she could think of. She became a roving reporter of sorts. Every interaction, every grand opening, every community event became potential fodder for her blog. In the meantime, she continued to use the ActiveRain community as a learning ground for what might work.

If Hepp came across a blog post where another agent was touting contacts they were getting from consumers, she would look back in the person's blog and see what they were writing about. "I knew that I didn't need to re-create the wheel. There were other people who were doing what I wanted to be doing, selling real estate because of their blog, and I was going to assess how they were doing it and emulate them."

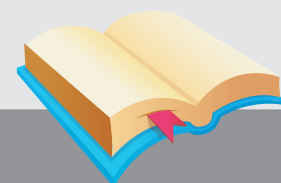
All in all, incorporating a blog into her real estate business was a transformative event for Hepp. In an office of twenty-two agents, she was awarded top producer status for the first six months of 2009 and she's on track to win the award for the full year. "One hundred percent of my business in 2009 was a result of my online activities," says Hepp, "And my blog was the foundation."

Blogging for positioning works and it has many benefits. It can be a core tactic in your efforts to rank in search engines, it can boost your referrals, and, maybe more intangibly, it can keep your head in the game. Whether you're writing the blogs or approving the content your team or contract workers create, the "local expert habit" will help you stay on top of your specialty area—call it mandatory continuing education for local experts, if you will.

3. advertise and market a listing

Blogging is an amazing way to advertise and market a listing if you follow a few simple rules. Remember that your goal is to make sure that your listing gets promoted, and in the Internet world that means page views and search engine ranking. See below for some simple tips:

1. When you title your blog, make sure that the title is a geographically specific term (for instance – "Bellingham View Home").
2. Avoid naming your blog post the address of the property. If someone already knows the address, they will find the property online.
3. Include important information about the property, but not too much. I prefer to include only a single photograph, a paragraph or two about the home, and a link to my website for more information. If you supply too much information, you might reduce your chances of capturing a lead.



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Blogging about your listings can be a tool to get more listings, more leads, more price reductions, and more brand exposure. I have personally gotten price reductions, listing extensions, and new listings because I could show the consumer how I could get their property on the front page of Google search results for a specific term. I take the time at each listing presentation to ask the question: “If you were a buyer looking to buy your specific type of home, what phrase would you type into the search engine to find your specific home?” Seriously, google the phrase “Lake Whatcom View Home” and you will see that we practice what we preach.

4. drive traffic and create links to your website

When you start digging deeper into the world of SEO, you will realize how valuable generating one-way links to your website can be. Writing articles on blogging platforms like ActiveRain.com and Talk.Realtor.com can be an excellent source of one-way links back to your site. The only thing that you have to do is make sure that you include 3–4 links to your other websites in every blog post that you write.

If you write good content, there is a good chance that it will spread throughout the Internet. Well-written and exciting content will act as link bait. Link bait is content that consumers are likely to link to, and it can be an effective and passive way to generate one-way links back to your site and your blog.

One of the reasons that I chose not to install a blog on my own real estate website is because I would miss out on the valuable one-way links that one generates by blogging on other websites. If I did blog on my own website, I would only be generating links from my website back to my own website, which would be called an internal link as opposed to my much-treasured one-way links.

5. expand your social media conversations

In our experience, the most successful Internet strategies have a blog as the anchor. Social media hasn’t changed this reality—it’s underscored it. There is only so much information that one can portray in a Facebook status update or in a 140-character post on Twitter. The hyperlocal information that your buyers and sellers crave needs more elbow room. Social media platforms like

Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter afford you the opportunity to disseminate your message to your networks like never before, but often that message can't easily be shoehorned into a 140-character message.

Explaining the loan application process, informing buyers of the importance of the inspection process, or detailing the nuances of living in a particular neighborhood or subdivision would take hundreds of tweets or status updates. Besides being impractical, it's also "socially unacceptable" in these online communities. It's not uncommon for repeat offenders to get the social media boot—unfriended, unfollowed, unconnected ... effectively silenced.


Social networks, by nature, are permission based and opt in. Having information in one good blog post, with a readily available link you can send to anyone who needs it, is the key to providing this information to those who seek it. In our experience, the best agents post links to longer, blog-oriented content with a succinct "what's in it for them" hook (e.g., "Just posted some cool remodeling tips on my blog—'Eleven Ways to Add Value to Your Home in Two Hours or Less!'" [followed by a link]). Linking to blog posts allows your network to choose whether or not to engage in a deeper conversation. So first and foremost, blogging allows you to expand the conversation beyond the social boundaries of most social networking and microblogging sites.

6. educate future buyers and sellers

Taken on its own, any single tweet or status update may seem irrelevant or mundane. However, taken as a whole, the body of your social media posts can often provide a sense of who you are and allow your followers to connect. Your blog works in a similar fashion, but each post taken on its own will in no way be mundane or irrelevant. Instead, each post has the potential to inform and educate past clients, potential clients, and those that seek the information you are providing. And the totality of your blog can give consumers a clear and concise picture of how you do business.

ActiveRain member and super blogger Bryant Tutas, of Poinciana, Florida, shares, "I no longer have to educate my clients about the way I do business when I first meet with them. Many of them have been following my blog for weeks or months before ever contacting me, and they have a unique understanding of the way I operate."

It's this kind of positioning that has clients seeking out Tutas's services and requesting that he be the person to list their home instead of the opposite, more traditional way in which sellers have selected agents in the past: by interviewing multiple agents and picking the one they feel the most comfortable with. Tutas's clients already feel comfortable with him, having obtained unique insights into how he operates his business. They are never shocked by his method of range pricing a home or what he asks each of his sellers to do prior to listing a home. They have read about it in his blog.



Tutas gets real results. In thirty days he listed three homes as a result of his ActiveRain blog.

stacia thompson

“We rely on our website to get prospective sellers up to speed on the short sale process and what they need to know to qualify,” reports Tempe, Arizona-based Kevin Kauffman and Fred Weaver of Group 46:10, a top real estate team specializing in short sales. “We have just about everything there—in one place—that they need to know to succeed. It takes them maybe ten minutes to read and saves us a good hour of face-to-face consultation time. It definitely shortens the process and that’s a win for the seller and for us.” As you probably know, the short sales process requires the patience of Job. What you may not know is that the initial consultations with sellers can take hours. There are a lot of questions.

Kevin and Fred realized that the time it took to get up and running with potential short sale sellers was eating up invaluable time on the clock for their other sellers and their sales business, so they moved the consultation online. Their website, www.Group4610.com, has information on every aspect of short sales, including detailed questionnaires for would-be clients. Their consultations now require a fraction of the time to complete, so these distressed sellers can get started faster and smarter in a transaction where ever minute could be the difference between a sale or a foreclosure. “Some people know next to nothing when we contact them. Others have researched short selling quite a bit. But we insist they read what’s on our website. I always tell them, ‘You may think you know what to expect, but everyone has their own approach. To succeed with us, you need to know how we do it. We’ve closed over 200 short sales since February 2008—it’ll be well worth your time.’”

how to write a blog post

“There is no single way to have a successful real estate blog,” says Brad Andersohn, community manager with ActiveRain. Andersohn spent twenty years in the title business and was an active blogger on the network prior to being hired full time. “What works for one person may not work at all for another. Some people are comfortable sharing things about their family and more personal details about themselves. Others stick strictly with the traditional real estate topics like market reports, listings, marketing strategies.”

Even though Andersohn has seen agents have success with a more dry, professional approach, he believes that adding your own personality to your blog is very important in the long run. “Maintaining a blog is hard work. There are days when you might not be able to think of anything to write and you just don’t want to do it. When your blog is full of your personality, it’s easier to get through those days. Your readers will not be surprised if you head outside of real estate and talk about your disappointment with your favorite football team ... or the great set your band played the night before.”

“After twenty years in customer service, I really believe that people want to work with someone they like and someone they can trust,” concludes Andersohn. We could surmise then that including personal elements in your blog allows the reader to get a better sense of who you are as a person, and whether they believe they would like working with you and if they would trust you. The elements of a good blog post are easy to understand and implement. There are four primary components of a blog post that one must consider when writing: the title, the body of the post (also known as the content), the tags, and the links.

Figure 48: The Elements of a Blog Post

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1) Title | 3) Tags |
| 2) Body | 4) Links |

1. the title of your blog

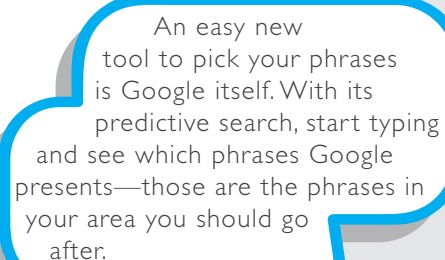
Let’s first start with the title. The title is important for two reasons: It tells your reader what they are about to read, and it serves as an important component in getting your post to rank well in the search engines. The first reason is probably easier to understand, so let’s talk about that first.

People who are online often have short attention spans. Search engines have spoiled us to expect exactly what we want, when we want it. If we land on a page and expect one thing, only to be shown something else, most of us are off the page faster than salmon wiggle off a fishhook. So your title is important because it tells your reader what they are about to read. It needs to be informative in that it explains the content below it, and it also needs to be enticing, so they actually want to read the content.

Secondly, the search engine component of the title is harder to understand but exponentially more important. The title of your blog post should become the URL or web address for the blog post itself. On the ActiveRain Real Estate Network, this is done automatically for you. On other platforms like WordPress or Blogger, you can set your blog up to act in this fashion. Search engines look at the URL in determining how to rank certain pieces of content. It's only one factor, but having a URL that matches a certain keyword phrase can help get your blog posts to rank well for long-tail search results.

In addition, the title of your post can also be set up to become the title of your page. Every page on the Internet has the ability to be given a title, which explains to the search engines what it is about. If the title of the blog post becomes the page title, and the page URL, it becomes very easy for the search engine to understand what the page is all about.

One of the absolute keys to writing functional titles for your posts is to use geographic terms. As an agent, you may very well be interested in targeting someone who is looking for information about “Getting My Home Ready to Sell.” What agent wouldn't want a consumer who typed that phrase into the search engines to find them? How about an agent in Seattle if the consumer was getting ready to sell something in St. Louis? Of course you could argue that if the content was that good, the consumer might contact the agent in Seattle and they could refer them to an agent in St. Louis, but that is not going to happen. Instead, if we are an agent in Seattle, we want to make sure that we use our geographic terms in our titles, so we can target consumers in Seattle who are looking for the information we provide. The same article is more effective if we title it “Getting My Seattle Home Ready to Sell.”



An easy new tool to pick your phrases is Google itself. With its predictive search, start typing and see which phrases Google presents—those are the phrases in your area you should go after.

cary sylvester

When buyers and sellers go online, they generally search using two fields: topic and geography. Many will only use a topic at first. Once they get results back that are most often not relevant to their geography, they refine their search to make it more relevant. Using geographic phrases in our titles allows us to target consumers that are using geographic phrases in their searches.

Figure 49



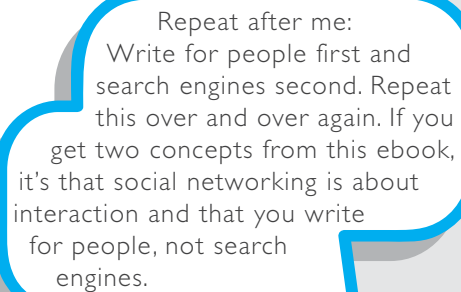
2. the body of your blog

The second component of the blog post is the body of the post, or the content. This is the meat of the post—the part where you actually deliver that unique knowledge that makes you the local expert. We won't talk about exactly what to write in here; hopefully you'll pick that up throughout this section. In here, we will talk about some good rules for getting the most out of your content with search engines.

Try to have your articles be between 300 and 500 words. Any shorter than that and you probably are not delivering valuable information (not always of course, but as a rule of thumb). If they are longer than that, you may want to break them up into two parts.

You want your article to have one focused topic. Each post should be geared toward ranking for a certain keyword phrase or term. That keyword phrase should be in your title, and it

should also be repeated in the body of your post 2–4 percent of the time. Meaning if you have 300 words in your post, you want the keyword phrase to be repeated 6–12 times. This is called keyword density. A recommended keyword density of 2–4 percent has been shown to be optimal. Of course, nobody knows exactly what Google or the other search engines are looking for, but based on years of optimizing pages to rank well, we believe this to be an acceptable range that will keep your pages from getting penalized. If you’ve spent any amount of time studying search engine optimization, you’ve come across the phrase “keyword stuffing.” Exceeding 4 percent keyword density will start to make your posts look fishy, and the last thing we want is for Google to consider us fishy. As we mentioned earlier, write for people first and search engines second. There is a penalty for being overzealous.



Repeat after me:
Write for people first and search engines second. Repeat this over and over again. If you get two concepts from this ebook, it's that social networking is about interaction and that you write for people, not search engines.

cary sylvester

Another important component of the body of the post is including outbound links. Links help reinforce the concepts you are writing about by sending readers and search engine spiders (the instruments that index content on the Internet) to other similar content.

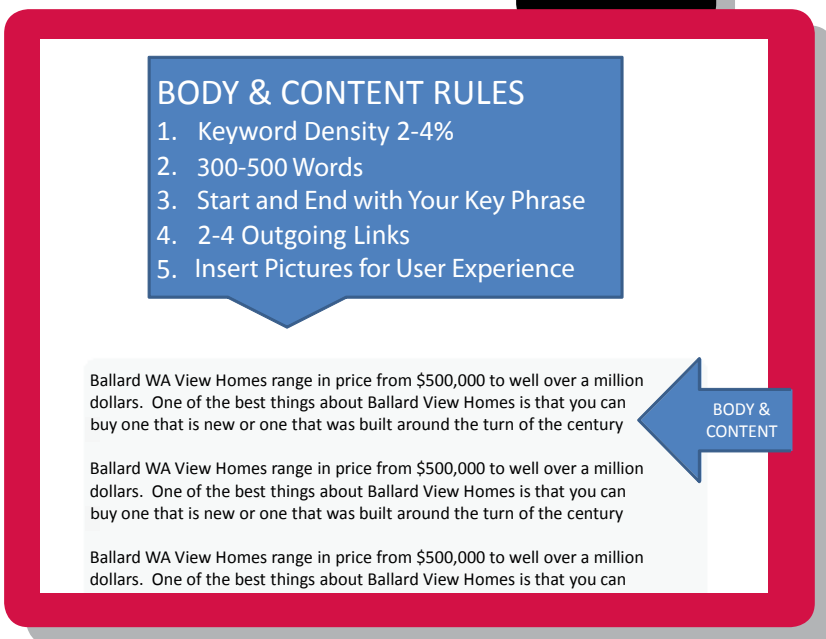
Incoming links are also one of the things that search engines use to rank pages. Creating outgoing links to your static website from your blog can be a great way to increase exposure. For instance, if your post is about the Wallingford neighborhood of Seattle and you have a page on your website that talks about the Wallingford neighborhood, you could link from your blog post to your website. Even more valuable would be a page link on your website that displayed homes for sale in Wallingford, thereby delivering your reader to homes for sale—as the original purpose of reading your blog may have been to get informed about a possible move to the Wallingford community.

Again, the point of these outgoing links is to reinforce the content on your blog with similar content elsewhere on the Web. From the perspective of your website, these incoming blog links help increase the visibility of your site in the eyes of search engines.

One important thing to consider when including links in your blog posts is to make sure you use the correct words when creating a link. If you are targeting the keyword phrase “Wallingford

Community of Seattle,” then you want to create links out of the words. A common mistake agents make is, instead of creating a link out of the correct words, they will tell their reader to “click here” for more information and then create a link out of the word “here.” That is simply telling the search engines that the page you are about to send someone to is full of great information about the word “here.”

Figure 50



3. tags for your blog

The third component of a blog post is the “tags” or “categories.” This is the primary way to organize different posts so they are easy for a visitor to find. Since blogs are usually done in chronological order, with the most recent post being the post at the top of the page and older posts being lower on the page or on subsequent pages, it’s important to have a way to allow readers to find older posts. This is where tags or categories come into play. Some platforms use a different term, but the main idea is that you can “tag” or “categorize” a post with a certain keyword or phrase so that someone looking for that keyword or phrase can find it.

Posts can be given more than one tag in order to allow a reader to find them. Let’s say that you wrote a post about getting preapproved for a FHA loan. It may have two tags: “FHA Loan” and “Getting Preapproved.” Your blog would then incorporate

each of these tags and create a new page out of each one. Someone looking for information about “FHA Loan” could find your post about getting preapproved on that tag page, possibly along with other posts about the FHA loan process. Similarly, if they were to go to the “Getting Preapproved” tag, they could find your post about getting an FHA preapproval along with other posts you may have written about getting preapproved, possibly regarding other types of loans, VA, conventional, etc.

Many blogs get an overwhelming number of tags to the point that it almost becomes a hindrance to use the tags to search for content. Remember as you start your blog that your tags are a great way to keep similar information together on your blog if you make a concerted effort to ensure that your tags are clean and easy to understand. Try to avoid simple duplications, such as using a singular word one time and a plural version of the word the next time. “Home Improvement” and “Home Improvements” are most likely the exact same topic, yet having both tags creates extra places on your blog for your content to be housed. Stay consistent and your readers will be able to consume your content much easier.

Figure 51



4. links for your blog

As mentioned in writing the body of your blog, each blog should have an effective hyperlinking strategy that includes internal, external, and back links. Internal links direct readers from one part of your blog to another part. It can be as simple as linking them to related points or content in the same general category. This keeps readers, and search engines, on your blog. External links direct readers from your blog to another site. First, there are the links from your blog to your agent website IDX and home valuation functions. Second, there are links to the resources that you used to get the data that you quote. The former allows motivated buyers and sellers to move closer to you, and the latter gives your posts credence.

Back links, which are also called incoming links, direct Internet users from another site to your blog. A back link is a way of telling the search engines that an originating site thinks that your blog is important. Any social media network that you belong to gives you the ability to post a link back to your blog, usually in the profile section. Take advantage of this opportunity to get a back link from an important site like ActiveRain, Trulia, Facebook, etc. Those sites rank well on the search engines, which means back links from them to your blog can give your SEO a boost. Also, the more you are out there interacting, the better chance other bloggers will find a reason to link back to you in something they write. The more (quality) back links you get, the more importance your blog or site holds with the search engines.

Figure 52: Link Rules

- 1) Use keywords as "anchor text" when linking internally
- 2) To avoid overlinking, stick to about one link per paragraph
- 3) Try to link to your IDX or CMA tools in each blog post

Writing blog posts designed to rank well in the search engines is not rocket science. Even though you probably get phone calls every week promising to get your website on the first page of Google for only \$_____ (you can fill in the blank, but the dollar amounts are normally enough to make you cringe) and that it's impossible to have your site rank well on your own, it's not true. A well-written blog can immediately target long-tail search phrases and begin to rank on the first page of Google for those terms, sometimes within twenty-four hours. A long-term strategy can allow you to rank well for more prominent search phrases as well.

"Anchor text" is the word or group of words that are hyperlinked to another site or to another spot on your site. For example: You could click on the word "Facebook" instead of "<http://www.Facebook.com>." The word "Facebook" is the anchor text for the URL.

mariana wagner



social media
and lead conversion

Social Media and Lead Conversion

This entire book has been focused on helping you build an audience of potential buyers and sellers through the use of search engines, websites, and social networks. This audience is a combination of website visitors, blog readers, and social networking contacts. The fact of the matter is that it really doesn't matter where the audience came from or how you hooked them on if you do not have the skills and systems in place to reel them in. In fishing parlance, that's a "long-distance release." So even fishermen, with all their proverbial tales, don't count 'em as caught until they are safely in their nets. The leads you generate are only as good as the person whose job it is to convert. The goal of this chapter is to maximize your lead conversion efforts so you can reap the most benefits from your lead generation efforts.

Internet leads are not always instant sources of income, so don't be disappointed if your first few leads don't result in a pending contract. Our experience has shown us that Internet leads require long-term commitments. The difference between a real estate agent that gets a positive return on investment from Internet leads and those that don't is simply one has made a commitment to following a proven lead conversion system. A good lead conversion system requires that you time block, attempt to convert leads daily, and use written and verbal scripts and dialogues. With every lead, you'll use all your systems and skills to do one of three things: Get an appointment to buy or sell, get a referral, or deepen the relationship.

Figure 53: Three Positive Outcomes From Any Lead

- 1) Get an appointment with someone that is looking to buy or sell real estate
- 2) Get a referral to someone that is looking to buy or sell
- 3) Gather additional contact information and strengthen the relationship

Agents that are successful at converting Internet leads follow a systematic plan over an extended period of time. Only then will you be able to harvest the true fruits of your labor. Sadly, a lot of real estate agents give up on Internet leads after only making one or two attempts to connect with them. With these types of leads, your speed of response is key. In our experience, if you can combine speed of response with consistent contact over a two-week time period, your odds of converting a lead to an appointment increase exponentially.

The *2009 NAR Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers* states that of those who purchased a home last year, the average buyer only searched for two weeks on their own prior to contacting a real estate agent. This was the underlining reason why we created our ten-day Internet lead conversion process. This program is a super-aggressive system that focuses on making contact during that statistical fourteen-day window of opportunity.

We named this program “10 Days of Pain,” because it is as painful for the consumer to receive as it is for real estate agents to complete from start to finish. “No pain, no gain” is a truism for a reason. The “10 Days of Pain” conversion program is a proven system, and I’ll share it with you in detail in the coming pages. Your success using it hinges on your commitment to follow the program through to the end.

For the bulk of this ebook, we’ve talked about how to leverage social networks to build and grow your sphere of influence. The purpose of all that is for individuals to eventually pick up the phone and contact you when they have a real estate need. For the people you know and who know you, following up is easy. It’s just a matter of using your scripts and dialogues to establish motivation and set an appointment.

However, through social networks you can attract thousands of friends, followers, and connections who might one day click on one of your posts and register on your website. And thousands more potential buyers and sellers can brush up against your real estate business through your blogging efforts and subsequently email you a question or request a CMA. Despite being labeled “friends, followers, connections,” most of these individuals may not know you personally and you probably won’t know them. When a lead

comes from this group, following up and connecting can be a real challenge. Agents who have a great lead follow-up system in place have the best chance of converting these largely anonymous leads into relationships and business opportunities.

Before we go too far, let me make sure we're speaking the same language. Everyone has their own definition of a "lead." For example, a popular definition is contact information with someone who is ready to do business in the next ninety days. For me, it's all about the contact information. If I can connect with them, I can then discover which of the three positive outcomes (a home sale, a referral, or a new relationship) can happen. By default, they will have to decide whether or not to do business with me in the first ten days or they cease to be a lead I'm actively pursuing.

Figure 54: Definition: Internet Lead

Internet Lead – Any individual (s) who has provided enough information for a successful contact to be made via email, by phone, or in person.

The "10 Days of Pain" program is a combination of persistence, contact, scripts and dialogues, and enticing offers that are tailored to assist you in accomplishing one or more of the following three goals:

1. Validate and collect contact information including the individual's correct name, email, phone number, mailing address, and if the lead belongs to any social network like Facebook or LinkedIn.
2. Classify the lead as an A, B, or C (A being someone buying in less than 30 days, B buying between 30 and 60 days, and C buying 60 days and beyond).
3. Set an appointment to get the buyer prequalified, show homes, or provide a market analysis of their current residence.

When potential buyers register online, they tend to be reluctant to release their contact information. At times, we'll see bogus registrations ranging from Daffy Duck to Anita Bath. Although the ideal Internet lead would have provided all "valid" contact information including their name, email, phone, mailing address,

and home search criteria, the reality is that most leads will lack almost all of the aforementioned contact information and probably will have provided only a valid email address. That's why the first goal is often just discovering their true identity.

Figure 55: Your Communication Checklist

- 1) **Email** – Email is the most common piece of information that you will be provided. You'll want to be connected from the office, your phone, and through a Web interface for those times when you just have to log in from someone else's computer.
- 2) **Social Networks** – If you were provided an email address or name, you can easily search online and see if the lead has a profile on any of the major social networks like Facebook.com, LinkedIn.com, Twitter.com, and Plaxo.com. Make sure you have accounts on them all.
- 3) **Direct Mail** – If an address was provided, take the time to mail a relocation package, seller's guide, thank-you card, or a postcard. Whenever possible, include a couple of business cards in the envelope.
- 4) **Video Email** – Use a service like Goldmail.com or Eyejot.com to create a video that can be embedded into your email. (special thanks to Bruce Hardie, a Mega Agent from Spokane, Washington, for leading us to that tip). Tyrone Bafaro from Seattle, Washington, commented that his best responses have come from sending video emails with mistakes like bloopers. Tyrone says, "If I can make them laugh with a video email, I am 50 percent closer to getting a buyer appointment."
- 5) **Text Message** – Determine if the phone number provided is a cell phone and try sending a short text message. Many times you will get a response back from a text message long before ever getting a call back.
- 6) **Phone Calls** – Use Google.com/voice to track your calls, reduce long-distance charges, and create vanity numbers.

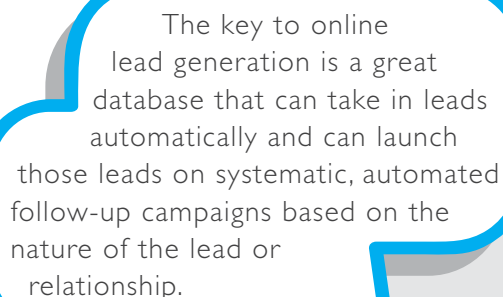
Before we start explaining the Internet lead conversion process, let's take a quick look at the tools and messages you'll need to implement it. We'll start with the tools. You probably have many of these already; however, you'll probably have to track down and set up a few.

the tools

High-producing agents implement systems and find tools that can be used to leverage their time and money. Interviews with top real estate agents from across the United States and Canada have provided some ideas on what good Internet lead conversion ratios would be (meaning the amount of leads needed to generate just one sale). Those ratios ranged from the very best agents reporting 1/10 (1 sale per 10 leads) to as low as 1/100 (1 sale per 100 leads). Since you must generate many more leads than you actually convert to a closing, using tools and systems during this process is not really a choice.

First and foremost, you must have a lead management system in place. There are many options available for database management that range from low tech to high tech. Which one is the best? The one that you will use the most consistently of course! Successful systems I currently use to convert leads include all of the following:

- 1. Printed Lead Sheets** – One of the simplest lead tracking systems available is a two-sided buyer and seller lead sheet. The form we use has buyer contact information and buyer consultation questions on one side with a tracking form printed on the back to keep track of each contact that has been made. Twitter me at @benkinney if you would like a copy of ours or connect at www.Facebook.com/socialthebook.
- 2. Contact Management System** – We like TOP PRODUCER® with an Internet lead action plan created. In TOP PRODUCER®, you can create an action plan that will autoremind you to take certain actions on specified days.
- 3. Custom Solutions** – BoomTown (BoomTownIDX.com) and TigerLead (TigerLead.com) both include a lead management system built into the back end of the agent's website. I would recommend doing a demo with both of these companies. One of the most important steps in this process is researching each lead. Originally, the only tool we used was WhitePages.com to search phone numbers for names and addresses. The next tool we started using was Google to search for each lead's email address. When you google an email address, you can see all the websites, social media profiles, and blogs associated with it.

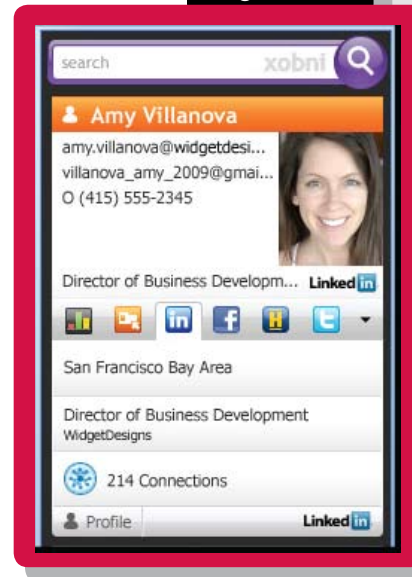


The key to online lead generation is a great database that can take in leads automatically and can launch those leads on systematic, automated follow-up campaigns based on the nature of the lead or relationship.

bryon ellington

Nowadays, we have advanced tools like Xobni.com (pronounced “Zob-knee,” it’s just the word inbox spelled backward) which is an Outlook plug-in that matches email addresses with photos, names, mailing addresses, phone numbers, Facebook profiles, LinkedIn profiles, Skype numbers, and even a Hoovers profile. You get the point: It’s like having your own private detective. Christopher Walton and Abel Bazan from the Home4investment Real Estate Team have reported getting double the amount of responses from sending Facebook messages to web leads as compared to sending traditional emails.

Figure 56



the message

We attempt to contact each lead via phone, email, messaging, mail, and so on. How we contact each one varies from lead to lead. However, the message stays pretty consistent. I have a few rules that we always keep in mind when communicating with web leads (Figure 57).

Figure 57: Ben’s Rules for Lead Follow-Up

- 1) **Keep It Short** – A few sentences will do for most communications.
- 2) **Make an Offer For Immediate Response (MOFIR)** – Each message should include a time-sensitive offer that encourages an immediate response.
- 3) **Include Properties** – Buyers really only care about one thing: properties. Make sure you include a link to properties in every email, or in the case of a phone call, mention a specific teaser property (“I just heard about a good deal located in X area of town.”)

The following is an example of a powerful script that we use every single day (Figure 58). We use it for everything from email leads to sign calls. The message below follows all three rules noted previously.

Figure 58: Best-Priced Property Script

"I just created a list of the best-priced properties in our area. This list includes motivated sellers, bank-owned properties, short sales, and foreclosures. I am reserving this list for clients that are interested in viewing homes this week, as these properties will go fast. When would be a good time to meet and take a look at them? To show you how hot these properties are, I have attached a list of the homes that were located on my list last week—they have all gone pending!"

This message is so important that, throughout the rest of this chapter, I will be including scripts and samples that we are currently using in the “10 Days of Pain.” Now that we have spoken about why we work so hard during the first two weeks and how we contact them, the next step is to outline the ten-day conversion process itself.

the 10 days of pain

The 10 Days of Pain outlined in this ebook is a suggested order of activities. There is no reason that days shouldn't be swapped or messages changed to fit your unique market. The point of the program is to be systematic and consistent in your follow-up with Internet leads. In particular, you use this system to follow up on inquiries and website registration leads when you have very little information about your potential customer. Again, it's not something you employ within your sphere or Met Database. (Presumably you know how to contact them!) However, for people you don't know—your Haven't Mets—it is both proven and powerful.

Once you have set an appointment or had a meaningful conversation that allows you to establish motivation, then I would recommend stopping this process and starting your normal buyer follow-up campaign. Although this process was originally created for use in my business, we have shared this program with agents across the United States who have had similar success. In fact, Carissa and Jay Acker from Denton, Texas, reported that “when we first implemented the 10 Days of Pain program, we noticed an

immediate increase in the number of appointments being set by our team. When we then started using the program on leads generated over the last six months (which in our eyes were ‘dead’ leads), we were surprised when we started converting a large number of them into appointments.”

day one

The most important day in the lead conversion process has always been the day the lead was received. From my experience, you have the highest percentage chance of making contact with a lead while that consumer is still browsing your website. Our goal is always to make initial contact within minutes of receiving a new lead notification. The InsideSales.com/MIT Lead Response Management Study reported that “the odds of qualifying a lead in 5 minutes versus 30 minutes drop 21 times.” By waiting just 25 minutes, you are reducing your opportunity to get the sale by more than 20 times. During a shifting market when leads are scarce, you can’t afford to take those risks.

- Step 1. The first step you need to take is to research the lead. Attempt to verify if at least one piece of contact information is valid. Use Google, WhitePages.com, and Xobni to both verify information and search for additional means of communication.
- Step 2. Call immediately if the lead provided a valid phone number, and leave a message if there is no answer. If you need scripts for phone conversations, connect with me on Twitter: @BenKinney, or drop me a line at www.Facebook.com/socialthebook.
- Step 3. Send a text message to their cell phone, if provided.
- Step 4. Email an introductory message—include a list of just-listed properties attached to the email.
- Step 5. Mail business cards if address was provided.
- Step 6. If you are able to locate a Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter profile, attempt to establish communication by sending a direct message and requesting to connect or become a friend.
- Step 7. Record the results of each one of the above steps in your lead management system.

day two

By this point, the lead has been contacted in a variety of ways. As you proceed through this process, it is important to note that there are far fewer tasks each day, and for the remaining “less painful” days, you are trying different tactics to evoke a response.

Use information that you gathered during your day-one research step to make an educated guess if the lead is relocating or if they may need to sell locally first. If unsure, attempt to send a combined email that offers either a free CMA or a relocation package.

- Step 1. Send the free relocation package email and/or the free market analysis of their home offer. Attach a list of properties that match their criteria to every email. If the lead has not provided any search criteria, send a list of properties that represent the average prices for your area.

day three

Day three is dedicated to determining what price range and neighborhood the buyer is interested in. We use offer-and-response messaging to gather this information both in writing, phone message, and on the first video email. Make sure that you are consistent with your messaging. The reason that we use the foreclosure and best-buy scripts is because everyone wants a good deal, even if a very small percentage actually go on to buy a distressed property.

- Step 1. Send “Foreclosure, Bank Owned, and Short Sale Teaser Email.”
- Step 2. Make first follow-up phone call and leave message if no one answers. (use the foreclosure teaser script located below)
- Step 3. Send your first video email.

Figure 59: Foreclosure, Bank Owned, and Short Sale Teaser Email and Script

“I just heard about a great foreclosure deal. Can you remind me what price range and neighborhood you are looking in? These properties normally go fast, so let me know as soon as you can. When are you available to view a good deal?”

day four: look for other communication methods

If you have not made contact by day four, it is time to start the research all over again and try and locate additional ways to communicate. Try searching other social networks by email and name, then follow the steps below:

- Step 1. Attempt to make contact on another social network like LinkedIn.com or Plaxo.com.
- Step 2. Send the “Price-Reduced Properties Email” and make sure to attach a list of properties that have reduced their prices recently with it.

Figure 60: Price-Reduced Properties Email

“I am sending you a list of the properties that have just reduced their prices. These homeowners tend to be more motivated sellers. If you are looking for a good deal, we should schedule a time to view some of these homes. Could you give me a call as soon as possible to schedule a time to get together? Please click on the link below to view the attached price-reduced properties.”

day five

You must continue to provide value throughout the entire lead conversion process, since there is a really good chance that your buyer has already registered on multiple real estate agents’ websites. In the end, it will be the agent that provides the most value that will win the client’s loyalty and their business.

- Step 1. Send the “Best-Priced Properties Email,” which we outlined at the beginning of this chapter.
- Step 2. Copy the “Best-Priced Properties Email” and send via Facebook or LinkedIn.

day six

Even the best agents need a day off. Let the break in communication come during the times you normally take time off. The potential client will appreciate it as well. We normally take one or two days off during this process. If you miss more than one day, consider extending the 10 Days of Pain another day.

day seven

It is very important throughout the lead conversion process to express to your leads any openings you might have to show homes, any open houses that you might be hosting, and most importantly, that you are in fact a real person that is taking time each day to provide them this service.

- Step 1. Send the “Free Home Inspection Offer” and attach a limited list of bank-owned or short sale properties to the email.
- Step 2. Make the third follow-up phone call that restates the same message: that you have an opening to show homes on a specific day or time.

Figure 61: Free Home Inspection Offer

“My boss just gave me two free home inspection certificates that I can give out ‘this week’ to two separate buyers that are interested in viewing homes on this Saturday or Sunday. This is a huge savings that doesn't happen very often. Are you available this weekend?”

day eight

Many of us can get motivated by a little competition. On day eight, we create an offer that is time sensitive and limited to only a few winners to generate some buyer urgency.

- Step 1. Send the “Contest Email” (see Figure 62 on page 107) and make sure to attach a list of just-listed or price-reduced properties to it.

Step 2. Send the “Contest Email” and attach just-listed properties to a message sent via Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter.

Figure 62: Contest Email

“Time for another great Home4investment contest. Congratulations to ‘Bob K’ for winning last month’s challenge! This month, we are giving away a free home appraisal from one of our preferred lenders to the first three people that can answer the following questions correctly: question #1, #2, #3. They are a little tougher this time, but all the answers can be found on my website ‘www.AgentWebsite.com.’ Please include mailing address so that we can mail the vouchers to the winner.”

Rules and regulations vary from area to area on how contests must be managed. If you aren’t sure, check with your broker or local board.

day nine

bryon ellington

By this time, you will have a pretty good idea if you are going to be able to make contact with the lead or not. Something to consider is that it is not uncommon to get your first response from a lead on days 9 through 11. Day nine is just about maintaining contact and being consistent. Remember when making your phone calls to mix up the time of day that you call. Try calling once in the morning, night, lunch, and once on the weekend.

Step 1. Send the “Price-Reduced Properties Email” (Figure 60 on page 105) and make sure to attach a list of properties that have reduced their prices recently within it.

Step 2. Make a fourth follow-up phone call, and make sure you leave a message if there is no answer.

day ten

By the last day, you will have made more than fifteen different attempts to contact, which might have gotten a restraining order placed against you—or with any luck the potential client has decided that you are the hardest-working real estate agent of all time and hired you. All joking aside, our experience has shown very few people respond in a negative manner if the quality of the content was present.

At the end of the ten-day time period, you will need to take one of the following courses of action:

- If the contact information is invalid (like your email has bounced back and the phone number is disconnected), your only option is to delete that lead from your database.
- If you have made contact with the lead and established a motivational level, then you need to classify the lead as an (A, B, or C buyer) and continue your normal follow-up plan.
- If you have made no contact with the lead but the contact information appears to be valid, enter the lead into a BINS (Buyer Instant Notification System) and make contact a minimum of once per week.

Things to remember: Internet lead generation is another form of long-term investing. If you are not disciplined enough to email and call leads systematically over a 2–24 month time period, you will never realize your true return on investment.

This process might seem tedious because it is—but leads cost money, plain and simple. The lower your conversion rates are, the lower your margin and the higher your cost per transaction. As we have learned from the book *SHIFT*, now is the time that we must focus on reducing our expenses, increasing our lead conversion ratios, and capturing more people in our Web.



putting it all together

Putting It All Together


The strategies outlined in this ebook were centered around a variety of ideas that all combined to create the biggest audience. Once your audience is large enough, the world is your oyster, so to speak.

The beginning concept behind this book was social media and just social media. As Jay and I dove deeper and deeper into the strategies of Millionaire Real Estate Agents, we came to the conclusion that if we did not address the search engines, the Internet, image and branding, and finally lead conversion, we would be doing a disservice to our readers. This was not designed to be a how-to guide or a getting-started resource, as those have been done and are easily available through regular training programs and online resources. If you need more in-depth how-to information, contact us at www.SocialtheBook.com and we'll be able to guide you to the resources you need.

Erik Qualman, author of *Socialnomics* and creator of the videos “Social Media ROI” and the “Social Media Revolution,” has been a big inspiration and influence on my interest in social media and its use in business. I believe he said it best in his Social Media ROI video when he said: “What is the cost of doing nothing? And do you really want to take that risk?”

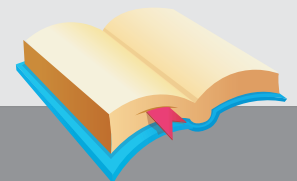
One of the few constants in our lives right now is the fact that we all need a place to live. Our success as real estate agents is not determined by the manner or platform in which we obtain the leads. We must evolve and adapt if we are going to thrive in this changing world. The good news is that these strategies are not driven by the dollar amount invested, but rather by the quality of the relationships that you build.

Social media and the Internet are just tools, no different than your printer or your cell phone that has evolved in tandem with your business. The social media aspect is fundamentally a communication platform—and it's also bigger. I would be so bold as to reiterate a quote by Erik Qualman, “[Social media] is a fundamental shift in the way we communicate.”



The foundation for building your audience is always solid content and real interactions.

julie fantechi



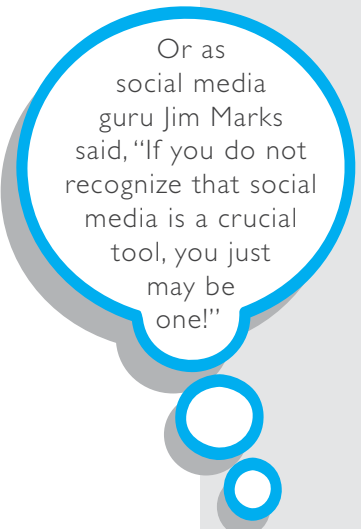
Would you be interested in a print version of *Soci@!*? Email print@socialthebook.com and let us know!

Hopefully, you've picked up some useful techniques on utilizing social media to communicate, lead generate, and build a powerful brand. Please don't try to implement all of these ideas at once! For one, you will probably go crazy and be so busy that you won't have any time to sell houses.

Real estate is a local enterprise, and what works in one area or in one's own business may not work in another. Pick two or three items and start with that. For most real estate agents, using the power of Facebook is probably a great place to start, as it will become one of the promotional platforms for your blogs and real estate-related content. My challenge to you:

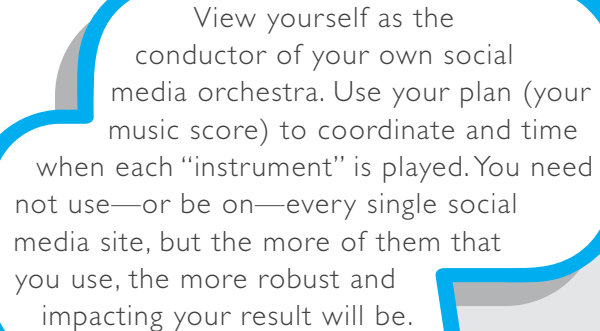
1. Create your brand and identify your niches.
2. Become the expert of your niche.
3. Create an audience large enough to support your real estate business goals at whatever level you choose.
4. Time block your social media campaign into your weekly schedule.
5. Consistently interact with your audience and track your results.
6. If you need more business or faster results, implement one of the advertising programs discussed in this book.
7. Implement a lead conversion plan like the 10 Days of Pain.

Take advantage of the opportunities that have been created by technology and by this shifting market. The greatest opportunities happen in down markets, not in up markets. This is a time when many agents have pulled back their marketing, branding, and lead generation activities. If you can innovate and engage when others are pulling back, you will be able to increase your market share while others are losing ground. I'd encourage you to engage now even though the path isn't entirely clear.



Or as social media guru Jim Marks said, "If you do not recognize that social media is a crucial tool, you just may be one!"

julie fantechi



View yourself as the conductor of your own social media orchestra. Use your plan (your music score) to coordinate and time when each "instrument" is played. You need not use—or be on—every single social media site, but the more of them that you use, the more robust and impacting your result will be.

stefan swanepoel

If you're thinking of hunkering down to see if this phenomenon will pass, let me share with you why I appreciate turtles. Not because they are particularly cuddly or fun; in fact, most turtles are really quite boring, snappy, and even sometimes smelly. Nope, turtles are great because of how they are anatomically designed. See, the turtle's neck and head can slide safely into its shell at will. The problem that turtles encounter is when a turtle's head is inside of its shell, it can't walk or make any progress because the head and neck get in the way of the shoulder blades. So the only way for a turtle to make any progress in life is for it to stick its neck out.

In life, we encounter situations that make us uncomfortable or that force us to take some assumed amount of risks. We risk our precious time and money every day in our business. Especially now, we need to get uncomfortable and stick our neck out like the turtle and try some new tactics. Our production and success is a direct result of our current activities. If we follow the same plan next year as we did this year, why would we expect to do any better? That's the proverbial "definition of insanity"—doing the same action over and over again and expecting a different result. We are knee-deep into a time when we must except the fact that what got us here probably won't get us to the next destination. Evolve and thrive, or remain constant and become instinct. Many agents are having the best years of their careers in some of the worst markets in the world. I choose to be one of those agents, and I would love some company along the way.

Final thought: Get Soci@l—Attract friends, followers, and connections, and watch your business explode! Now go do it!

And you might find that you have a lot of fun in the process.

stacia thompson

Ben and Jay—
great job as usual!
Wonderful, timeless content that will help any agent answer the one question: How do I use social media to make money?

cary sylvester

about the authors

Ben Kinney is the founder and CEO of a top real estate team in Washington state. He is an Operating Principal and owner of a ninety-plus agent office in Bellingham, Washington, and holds one of the three board of director seats at ActiveRain Corp. His passions include teaching, real estate, technology, and social media. When Ben is not speaking, teaching, working on websites, or mentoring top real estate agents around the United States and Canada, he most likely will be found fishing local rivers or entertaining his golden retriever, Taupo.

Ben Kinney



Jay Papasan is vice president of publishing and executive editor at Keller Williams Realty International, where he oversees research, course writing, and book development. Jay coauthored with Gary Keller and Dave Jenks the national best-selling books *The Millionaire Real Estate Agent* and *The Millionaire Real Estate Investor*, and contributed to a third, *FLIP: How to Find, Fix, and Sell Houses for Profit*. In 2008, the three collaborated on a fourth title, *Your First Home: The Proven Path to Home Ownership*. *SHIFT: How Top Real Estate Agents Tackle Tough Times*

Jay Papasan



represents the latest book in this Millionaire Real Estate series and was the top-selling real estate title for 2009 according to Nielsen's BookScan. Prior to joining KWRI, Jay was a freelance writer for publications such as *Texas Monthly* and *Memphis Magazine*. He also spent several years as an editor at HarperCollins Publishers, where he worked on the New York Times best-selling books *Body for Life*, by Bill Phillips, and *Go for the Goal*, by Mia Hamm. In his free time, Jay pursues his hobbies: fly fishing, soccer, reading, writing, and the ongoing quest for the ultimate key lime pie. He resides in Austin, Texas, with his wife, Wendy, and their two children, Gus and Veronica.

about activerain

ActiveRain is a Seattle, Washington-based technology/media company hybrid that operates the largest and most active social network in the real estate space. It also serves as a marketing platform for real estate professionals. This network helps agents create business relationships both within the industry and with the consumer. With more than a million pages of user-generated content, ActiveRain serves over 170,000 members and educates millions of consumers each month.