

**MEDIA MENTION**

**Source:** Real Estate Business (magazine)

**Date:** June 2011

**Title:** Real connections



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Casting a wider net for buyers

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**THE NEW MONTHLY MAGAZINE FOR REAL ESTATE AGENTS**

**real estate Business**

JUNE 2011 | ISSUE 1 | \$8.95 (inc. GST)

# GETTING CONNECTED

**Social media has revolutionised how we communicate, but can it translate to more listings for agents?**

**INSIDE**

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Boosting revenue when sales drop

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ISSN 1839-0854



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**COVER**

# CONNECTIONS

While you may not yet be tweeting, blogging, posting, updating or commenting, your customer base is already engaged in social media. *Real Estate Business* finds out why it makes good business sense to join the social media revolution

**P**eter Taliangis, a real estate representative from Realty One in Perth, has sold a house for a client he'd never met before.

Well, that's not entirely true. He 'met' the vendors, Kate and Chris Quinn, on LinkedIn.

The couple contacted Taliangis, saying they were impressed with how proactive he had been in promoting properties via the business networking site and they decided to engage him to sell their house.

"I promoted it on LinkedIn just through my updates and I had an enquiry straight away," says Taliangis, who went on to sell the property without even having to arrange an open inspection. The couple's gushing recommendation for Taliangis now sits proudly on his LinkedIn profile.

**GAINING MOMENTUM**

Not every real estate agent will sell a home so quickly and easily online. Nevertheless, the industry is in agreement that social media is becoming increasingly important as a marketing and networking tool. Sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter are invaluable for promoting your brand and for connecting with potential customers.

Facebook, the number one social media channel, has more than 500 million users and that number increases daily. The volume of potential customers is therefore huge.

"Half of these users log onto their accounts every day and 200 million access it via their mobile device," says David Crombie, CEO of Estate Agents Co-operative Ltd, which provides social media marketing services to hundreds of estate agents across NSW, Victoria and the ACT.

Charles Tarbey, chairman of Century 21 Australia, says while he does not doubt social media's value to the profession as a marketing tool, it must be embraced for the right reasons.

"I think some agents fail to consider that social media may not be appropriate for the demographics of their target market and they just want to use it because many other agents are having such success with it."

Having a social media presence must enhance your brand, not cheapen it.

"Ideally, internet users should come

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across your blog or Facebook page and be able to recognise who you are quickly," Mr Tarbey says. "This could mean spending some time designing the look and feel of your blog so it is consistent with the rest of your marketing collateral."

He believes that when social media marketing is implemented successfully, it allows agents "to integrate themselves into the daily lives of their target audience, becoming a valued source of information regardless of whether people are selling or looking to buy".

Concerns about demographic fit, potential brand damage or time constraints are legitimate and may be holding agents back now.

However, as the next generation of tech-savvy homebuyers gets closer to putting their foot onto the property ladder, the benefits of social media will start to outweigh the risks.

According to Mr Crombie, agents need to incorporate social media marketing into their traditional marketing mix just as they moved their real estate listings from traditional print publications to online real estate portals a decade ago. >>

**"Don't let your social media marketing go to seed. The moment clients see old news on your blog, or an unattended Facebook or Twitter page, they'll know you're not 'fair dinkum'"**



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### COVER

## AGENT'S VIEW

**DAN SOWDEN**

principal

Ray White Maroochydore

**SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS** Blog, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn

**THE BENEFITS** The ability to interact with an online community and to improve my ranking on Google searches

**PHILOSOPHY** Social media is not just about posting properties online for your own benefit or agenda. I believe that 'straight selling' within the social media platform will probably do you more harm than good. Social media is about others interacting with you online, not just you pushing your own agenda.

#### MEASURING SOCIAL MEDIA

**EFFECTIVENESS** If someone wants to find me, can I be found? Do I appear on the first page of Google, and secondly, when they do find me either through Google or any of the other social media platforms, will that page and the content offered be a reflection of my business? If you can answer 'yes' to those questions then you are on your way; if you answer 'no', then work needs to be done.

**ADVICE** Rather than just promoting myself, I find that unbiased property information with a personal twist works the best.



#### WHICH CHANNELS TO CHOOSE?

While there are many different social media channels in use, and more just over the digital horizon, most experts agree the ones real estate agents should establish a presence in are Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

They should also consider setting up their own blogs to comment on real estate news and issues of interest to potential customers.

Facebook gets top billing in Mr Crombie's estimation by the sheer weight of user numbers and the amount of activity the channel generates. He also rates Facebook highly because it allows agents to add videos and post photographs of property listings.

YouTube has potential given its video capabilities, he adds – "particularly good for agents, who are not usually very tech-savvy".

Blogs are a very powerful tool for real estate agents, according to Mr Tarbey. "By regularly posting about interesting real estate issues of particular relevance to their locality, agents can position themselves as a valuable

nauseating blog posts that talk about just your achievements.

Iolanthe Gabriele heads consultancy Ruby Slipper, which provides online content for estate agents who don't have the time to do it themselves. She says repetitive self-promotion is the most common shortcoming she sees in real estate agents' social media presence.

"Social media is about giving back – giving your community real information about relevant topics they're interested in," she says. "They already know you sell and lease so stop talking about it and boring the pants off everyone!"

#### INVEST FOR THE LONG HAUL

Social media does of course require time and dedication. There is nothing worse than coming across a blog last updated in September 2007 or a LinkedIn profile that contains outdated professional information.

Ms Gabriele says social media marketing

**"Social media can have a negative effect if it's done poorly. This is not the time to get your property manager or secretary to take their eye off the ball and cobble up a piece of 'journalism'. If the content is not in line with brand values this can have a deleterious effect"**

source of information," he says. "This can ensure people will regularly return, and that the agent will be front of mind when it is time for their readers to sell a property."

Blogs can also be a great source of market research.

"Facebook and Twitter allow real estate agents to interact with the general public to provide useful, live information that goes beyond what regular print advertisements can offer," Mr Tarbey says.

Nevertheless, while sales via social media are a bonus and a worthwhile goal, they should not be the sole motivation for setting up a blog, Facebook page or LinkedIn profile. Social media can also build brand awareness and spark discussions with a whole new client base.

No one wants to receive constant Tweets about how great you are or respond to

is "just like being on Weight Watchers – "you need to do a little every day."

"Don't let your social media marketing go to seed – the moment clients see old news on your blog, or an unattended Facebook or Twitter page, they know you're not 'fair dinkum'," she says.

Mr Tarbey agrees: "Time is a significant factor. Take blogging for instance – you must consistently research and write interesting pieces for your blog and then, for it to be most effective, you need to communicate with readers once the blog is posted.

"Your various social media platforms need to be monitored and comments and questions responded to in a timely fashion."

#### DEFINE YOUR GOALS

Before you start setting up your Facebook or LinkedIn page or post your first tweet, you



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### BY SUBSCRIBING TO REAL ESTATE BUSINESS TODAY

need to decide exactly what you want to get out of your social media presence – as well as how much time and energy you are willing to invest.

“You need to have a plan,” Mr Crombie says. “People tend to jump on board and get carried away with the hype. You need to judge the return on your investment of time.”

In fact, it is your own time that will be your most significant cost since basic versions of the various social media platforms are usually free.

Much will depend on your operation’s size. If it’s just you, you will need to set aside time regularly to update your various online presences. Of course, if you have the budget, you can employ someone to do it for you.

“Social media can have a negative effect if it’s done poorly,” warns Mr Gabriele. “This is not the time to get your property manager or secretary to take their eye off the ball and cobble up a piece of ‘journalism’. If the content is not in line with brand values – if the tone is too casual or too formal – this can have a deleterious effect.”

#### MEASURING YOUR SUCCESS

Once active online you need to monitor and measure the effectiveness of your efforts regularly.

This entails counting the number of friends you have added on Facebook; the number of new followers on Twitter; which posts, updates and tweets were responded to and by whom; who has commented, and posted on your blog; how many new connections you made on LinkedIn and who viewed your profile...

The list goes on.

Mr Crombie advises assigning someone in your team to maintain your social media presence and to monitor who is responding and what they say.

Thankfully, there are online tools such as Google Analytics and Facebook Insights that can help you analyse your various campaigns and make sense of the data.

Mr Tarbey says an analysis of website traffic revealed Century 21 blogs often lead users to the main Century 21 website.

“If you are blogging you also want to monitor the number of hits and comments you receive,” he says. “I think a blog post

can be considered most successful when it generates a conversation.”

There are also websites like Hootsuite, Tweetdeck and Seismic that allow you to monitor and manage different social media channels from a central account and to create reports on your activity.

Online success can also be measured in the real world, simply by asking a client where they heard about your brand. It may have been on Facebook, Twitter or via your blog and it’s important for you to know.

#### BRAND DAMAGE CONTROL

The flipside of the free brand promotion, client networking opportunities and business opportunities that all come with social media are the risks to which you expose yourself and your brand and the lack of control you have over what people say.

People forget that a majority of what you put on the internet is permanent and can be viewed by anyone, including the professional media. “Agents need to be conscious of what they are saying in their blogs and through other forms of social media, making sure that every statement is accurate,” says Mr Tarbey.

He advises to “never put something online that you wouldn’t be comfortable with the entire world seeing.”

Even if you are careful about what you say, and you invest the time and effort in providing quality information, your brand is still open to attack from a far wider audience than it was 20 years ago.

The management of online complaints is a big issue, Mr Crombie says. “You have to respond to every negative comment in a timely manner. You need to respond to each of them as you would do in the offline world.”

Rather than emit a collective groan or shudder with the anxiety that comes with knowing your brand is out there and vulnerable to comment and even attack, it’s better to accept the inevitable and embrace the social media world.

“Real estate consumers have changed,” says Mr Crombie. “They are educated, motivated, tech-savvy and looking for constant and instant communication.”

“But it is also these consumers that will drive change in the industry – and they will lead to a new breed of real estate agent.” ■



## AGENT'S VIEW

### PETER TALIANGIS

real estate representative  
Realty One Perth

#### SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS USED

LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Plaxo, Foursquare

**THE BENEFITS** For me, I have created a community of people that are using me and referring me to their friends, family, clients, business associates etc.

#### ADVICE FOR OTHER AGENTS

**USING SOCIAL MEDIA** Have a strategy and stick to it. Be consistent. Be positive. Think about what you are doing. Measure the success of what you are doing.

#### HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN

**SOCIAL MEDIA?** I have no technical knowledge of HTML or anything else for that matter... I obviously know a little about title pages, key words and the impact of that on SEO and searchability. For LinkedIn, Plaxo, Facebook and Twitter I just jumped on and started using them – it’s the best way to learn.