



The evolution of social media marketing

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By George O'Neill

We real estate professionals are a lucky bunch. Really. We not only become proficient, but many of us over time become true experts in sales, negotiations, client management, business management, networking and marketing. We stay on top of trends, often before our clients embrace them, and appropriately integrate new techniques into our businesses to better serve those valued clients and to stay ahead of our competitors. We look "over the horizon" for opportunities to deepen client relationships and to increase sales. In our business, change is constant, and if harnessed correctly, one can leapfrog those who continue to muddle along using out-dated business practices. Even if you are a newly minted sales representative, you can now, more than at any other time, stake out your own territory and build your own brand in a consistent manner on-line.

The application of technology and the exploding use of the Internet in real estate are the focus of much discussion and debate, and are rife with confusion. The recent ruling by the Competition Bureau to have the MLS opened up to new competition further amplifies the importance of technology in real estate. During any period of change there are informed leaders, zealous evangelists, early adopters, many laggards, a number of doubters and a few people who just stick their head in the sand, covering their eyes and ears saying things are just "fine the way they are and there is no need to change". Yes, just fine indeed. How many buggy whip manufacturers remained in business after the introduction of the automobile?

Today, social media marketing is changing the way most businesses engage with customers. We are well into the information revolution with the democratization of that information underway. The first wave of Internet sites included those that contained helpful information such as AltaVista and sites like Amazon.com. That was the so-called "Web 1.0" world, where websites were really just on-line brochures where information was posted by marketing people hoping consumers would read the information and be attracted enough to contact the company to discuss buying their services or products. Some of those organizations evolved (Amazon.com now allows buyers to provide direct feedback for all the world to see on the products they sell) and some sites have disappeared or have been marginalized because they could not adapt (today do you use AltaVista or Google?).

Most sales representatives' and brokerages' websites are stuck in Web 1.0 brochure-ware days. Many post for sale listings, proudly boast sold properties, and often include information about the market. But those sites are not designed to truly engage the viewer, and do not allow the consumer to provide direct input and share their voice. Many sites are designed to try to trap the viewer to fill out a "Top 10 List Of Seller or Buyer Do's and Don'ts". Those sites are not really trying to engage the consumer – they are only trying to get their e-mail address and phone number. Consumers can see through this, and move on quickly. You don't believe this? Check out the average time spent on your website per visitor, and the ratio of the number of people who visit your site versus submit their information. Study the numbers – I think they will be revealing.

What we need to do is engage consumers, give them information (yes, with NO strings attached!) and demonstrate value, knowledge and our expertise, and then consumers may be willing to discuss with us how we may be able to serve them. This is just old-fashioned relationship building, something the

best Realtors have been doing for decades. When you meet someone for the very first time, do you ask within the first couple of minutes if you can help them buy or sell a property? If so, under most circumstances you would be seen as being too pushy. Although we agree we do not want to be pushy, this is exactly what many are doing with their Web 1.0 websites. There is a real disconnect between desire and action.

Today, we are in the Web 2.0 world, which is a place where there can be a much more interesting and interactive two-way dialogue between the service provider and consumer occurring. Interactions are based on creating conversations, sharing information, and if there is common interest by both parties, hopefully a relationship can be built to the point where business is conducted. Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, TypePad, Blogger and WordPress are tools that are essentially free to use (but take considerable time to add good content), and allow us to create those conversations, build trust and deepen those relationships. These tools are great to build new relationships and to stay close to existing clients as well. But, the tools do not work their magic on their own. They must be used as part of a marketing and branding strategy for your business. Remember grade school dances? Unless you know who you are interested in and make the effort to cross the floor to ask that person to dance, you will continue to stand there talking to yourself.

Don't be caught holding a buggy whip when you should have a blog.

George O'Neill is a full-time, second-generation Realtor with Royal LePage Estate Realty in Toronto. He is available to speak about how to appropriately integrate social media marketing into your businesses. He is organizing and speaking at a conference on November 30 in Toronto about this topic. Phone (416) 690-5100; email George@GeorgeONeill.ca; website www.SocialMediaMarketingSummit.ca



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3 Responses for "The evolution of social media marketing"

George O'Neill says:

January 30, 2010 at 2:36 AM

Candace and Anthony,

Thank you for your comments. The tools are not the answer – they are really just a means to an end. In five years time we will be talking about other tools to use, most likely.

Candace, if you are happy with the results you have been getting using your approach to select a sales rep then it would seem to be working. If you are less than pleased, then perhaps another approach should be considered.

Following what a sales rep says on Twitter can be very informative. If there is no content there of interest, then perhaps that says something about what that person may be like in real life. I don't know about you, but the first thing I do when I meet a service provider, or am looking at a new product, I "Google" that person or item to check out the history and what people are saying. I suggest doing the same when you are looking for your next agent.

Anthony, I agree all sales reps should have a blog, and frequently add content relevant to their business focus. I also believe all sales reps should have a Facebook account and reach out to past clients – a great low-cost way to maintain relationships and build new ones.

Keep the comments coming!

George



[REPLY](#)

candace says:

January 25, 2010 at 6:20 PM

Twitter is the lamest thing online, who cares what you are thinking... If I am looking for a Realtor to use to buy a property I contact 10 of them and the first 2 that get back to me the quickest are the ones to consider. Some of these old foggies have online contact forms and/or emails to contact them and they NEVER get back to you. Sad.

[REPLY](#)**Anthony Dyson says:**

January 11, 2010 at 8:59 PM

Interesting article George.

I use in my real estate business and teach a course for Realtors utilizing all these tools.

A real estate web business has to be unique as template sites used by so many realtors are seen by the Search Engines as duplicated content and therefore as Spam so they get very little search engine traffic.

First and foremost like you say in the article an website must have content freely given and based on keyword research. It must be customized for the individual realtor and show them as the experts that they are. In other words, they must show the consumer that they know what they are talking about and there is a benefit to the consumer over and above all other alternatives.

Nowadays, a website must have a blog integrated into it as Google loves blogs but this must not be too time consuming for the busy Realtor. It must have a means to easily post new content and new listings to social media including Facebook, Twitter, etc.

There is a huge opportunity for the budding real estate online agent to outshine the competition and get lots of free organic traffic from the search engines and presell the consumer by giving lots of information for free.

Great article.

Anthony Dyson
Broker of Record
Commercial Tenant Strategies Inc. Brokerage

[REPLY](#)