

National Post

Homes

The New Deal: Home tweet home



"The real estate business is all about personality and the videos are a great way to show ours," say Condo Chicks Erica Mary Smith (left) and Joy Paterson.

Brett Gundlock / National Post

Lauren Ferranti-Ballem, National Post ▣ Friday, Apr. 16, 2010

He's got a close, salt-and-pepper crop à la Clooney, steely eyes and loads of charm. You feel like you already know him, and actually, you kind of do. That's pretty much the idea behind the whole video blogging thing.

Clive McLean is a dashing downtown real estate man who, no wonder, has a background in acting. He's produced a dozen such video blogs since January. Each one averages about a minute and a half, during which he riffs on a range of real estate topics — spring renos, government lending rules — while he drives his car. It's as if you're buckled into the passenger seat while he deftly handles both his script, and his steering. "People get a kick out of seeing me driving on camera, but I just think it's a different spin," Mr. McLean says. "It gives me a distraction instead of staring awkwardly into the camera. I know what I'm talking about, so I can improvise."

Mr. McLean is one of many tech-savvy, social media sensitive agents in the city, and he's hitting it on all angles. His video blogs are posted to his Facebook page and Twitter account, they can easily be found on YouTube, and each one links straight back to his website. "The videos are like an ad for my site," he says. "People follow me for a few months before we even meet in person." Within seconds, a prospective client can gauge whether they like him or not, allowing him to forgo that ginger meet-for-coffee courtship and get straight down to business.

And business is swift. "Since I've been doing these videos, I've seen a 60% increase in traffic to my site," he says. "I could never knock on this many doors."

For George O'Neill, a bearded broker in the Beach, it's all about connecting online. "It's not oxymoronic — it works," Mr. O'Neill says. He's been using social media tools for about three years and even gives workshops on the subject. He's produced precisely 199 video blogs — or "vlogs," as he calls them — with something special planned for his 200th. The vlogs are sometimes shaky, often done on his iPhone, and they cover plumbing in the bathroom to sunny walks on Queen East. Like Mr. McLean's, they are short and snappy with an educational purpose, though perhaps a little less polished. "It shows me as a knowledgeable, trustworthy agent to potential clients, and keeps me fresh in the minds of past ones so they remember to refer me," he says. "I'm definitely getting business from it; it's been very positive."

And while his face is front and centre in the frame, Mr. O'Neill insists his agenda is subtle. "It's not about me or my properties. I'm

not broadcasting an ad. It's about sharing relevant information so that people reach out." It's simple: He puts the vlogs out there and people respond — no loud bus shelter billboards necessary.

Yossi Kaplan, a realtor with a heavy online presence, believes it's important to tailor your message to the medium. "I don't use Facebook and Twitter for non-stop marketing — it's quite annoying," he says. "How many times can you hear from a guy selling a condo? I'm not trying to sell on Facebook. You'll never see exclamation marks or the words 'best deal.' I'm much more discreet."

Joy Paterson and Erica Smith, known collectively as the Condo Chicks, shoot vlogs that blend business with pleasure for a decidedly MTV feel. They're young and beautiful, their blond hair trailing behind them as they click across King West in heels to show me the site of the upcoming DNA3 condos before rushing to collect Ms. Smith's pooch at doggie daycare. "The real estate business is all about personality and the videos are a great way to show ours," Ms. Paterson says. "We keep our little pocket camera in our purses for whenever the mood strikes."

Since they specialize in the same demographic they are a part of — cool, connected first-time condo buyers — the Chicks find this approach suits them best. "We used to do print ads and flyers, but we dropped traditional advertising," she says. "About 80% of our business comes from social media." Their holistic approach, like the others, includes a well-designed website/blog, Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Mr. McLean chose this medium because it speaks to him best: "When I'm online, I watch videos. I throw flyers in the trash." He's learning how to put music to video and has an endless list of video topics. He's also launched a series of neighbourhood spotlights, wherein he conducts casual interviews with local business owners — a roofer, a café owner — to give some area flavour. There's benefit at both ends of the camera: The coffee peddler gets free online advertising, and, when he distributes the link to his friends and family, Mr. McLean's name resonates as a broker of choice.

The tools for real estate marketing may be evolving, but the spirit is largely unchanged. "The best realtors understand the importance of connecting," Mr. O'Neill says. "Social media has replaced the hand-written note and the home visit. We can cover a lot more territory quickly and at lower cost. Real estate is the perfect industry for this type of approach."

As they've been posting status updates almost as long as they've been practicing real estate, the Chicks are well acquainted with the power of social media (Ms. Paterson tweeted about this interview two hours before our scheduled call). "We tweet regularly with listings, open houses, special events and whatever's going on in our lives," she says. "We want to constantly be in the face of our family, friends and business associates. They're not bothered by the updates — we mix business with personal, so they're always coming back to see what we'll say next."

Next week: Developers' social networking