THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO
SOCIAL MEDIA
For Real Estate Professionals

What's Inside:
- How to effectively utilize social media in your marketing
- The do's and don'ts of Facebook
- Using Twitter to sell more homes, in just 15 minutes a day
- Whether or not you should be using Google+
- How to use YouTube to sell more homes
- LinkedIn for real estate professionals
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How to Stop Wasting Time on Social Media

Spending time on social media without a solid social media strategy is a lot like going to the grocery store on an empty stomach, according to Eric Proulx, Internet marketing specialist with Market Leader. Without a list (a plan), you’ll most likely wander aimlessly down the aisles grabbing whatever looks good, calories and nutrition be darned.

It’s the same with your social media marketing plan. If you don’t have a strategy around making social connections for your real estate business, you’re most likely throwing ideas against the wall, hoping something will stick. This willy-nilly process leads to time sucks such as reading and responding to every post, following links posted by friends, and generally following every shiny object on the screen in front of you.

Why do Real Estate Agents use Social Media?

“The number one way to stop wasting time on social media is to get clear on why you’re even on social media,” claims Proulx. Some of these reasons include:

Keeping in touch with clients - Interacting with clients is a great way to stay top-of-mind, so that when the topic of buying or selling a house comes up, you are the person who comes to mind first.
Reaching out to new clients - As part of a well-rounded content strategy, social media can help you rank in Google search results, according to Proulx.

Learning - Proulx says that many agents use social media as a learning platform. "It’s a place where you can seek out other real estate agents and industry experts and get answers to your business questions." Some of the social media sites where agents might go to learn from others include Google+ and Google+ Communities as well as Facebook and Facebook Groups. ActiveRain, even though it’s a blogging platform, has social network aspects to it, and many agents claim they learned how to blog by communicating with other ActiveRain contributors.

Taking Control of Social Media

Once you understand why you use social media, it will be easier to figure out ways to make it less of a time suck. In the real estate industry, targeted engagement is just as important when working with social media as it is with other aspects of your real estate practice.

Determine a strategy – Your daily social media activities should start where they will have the most impact, according to Rich Brooks, President of flyte new media. That means your first social media stop of the day should be wherever your clients hang out, such as Facebook or Twitter. Read and respond to customers first and save the links to YouTube videos or news stories that your friends share for the evening.

Schedule your visits – Time blocking will help you keep on track and avoid the temptation to follow every shiny object you see while using social media. Actually schedule a block of time to tweet, create and respond to Facebook posts and check in on Google+. Once the time is up, close the sites and move on to the next task on your daily schedule. Some agents find it more advantageous to schedule two blocks of time: one in the morning and one at the end of the work day.

Avoid groups and communities – Proulx recommends staying away from these social media time sucks unless you are using social media purely to get business advice, or if you schedule these visits for times outside of
your normal work hours. He claims that it’s far too easy to get lured into debates and conversations. Before you know it, you’ve wasted precious time that should have been used to make money. Save the groups and communities for your downtime, such as in the evening after the kids go to bed or on a weekend with no open houses scheduled.

**Avoid distractions** – Rethink using that handy feature that emails you every time someone mentions you on Twitter or posts to your Facebook or Google+ page. It’s far too easy to let curiosity get the best of you and find yourself on these sites outside of the time you’ve scheduled for them.

**Use tools** – While many real estate agents and social media experts debate the pros and cons of social media scheduling tools, any discussion of how to avoid wasting time wouldn’t be complete without mentioning them. Tools to automate the publishing of your content, such as those offered by HootSuite, TweetDeck (Twitter’s scheduler) and the Facebook post scheduler tool, will definitely save time, but there are drawbacks.

The most significant argument against using scheduling tools is that they make your participation more akin to an announcement than a conversation. If you are asked a question, or if one of your comments takes off, if you’ve followed the advice to avoid being contacted when people post, you won’t be there to respond.

While face-to-face interaction with past and prospective clients is always more memorable, communication via social media can be a valuable resource in your efforts to remain top-of-mind. The trick is to not allow social networks to dominate your day, but to take control by coming up with a solid strategy that works for your real estate business.
As of June 2013, Facebook has more than 1.15 billion active users that also encompass a strong real estate social network. According to facebook.com, of those active users, over 50% log in to Facebook on any given day. And, the average user is connected to 80 community pages, groups and events, and creates an average of 90 pieces of content each month. It’s clear that Facebook is one of the most influential and viral communication engines of our time, providing a real estate social network that every real estate agent can leverage to drive their business.

In the real estate industry, targeted and consistent communication makes the difference between market leaders and those who work hard, yet achieve less-than-desirable results. Let Facebook’s real estate social network be an additional tool in your toolkit of online real estate marketing helping your communication with clients past, present and future.

Creating a great Facebook page

Just like your real estate website, you want your Facebook page to be visually appealing, clean and uncluttered, easy to navigate, and full of information so that visitors want to stay a while and look around. Consider these tips:

1. Take control of your Timeline Cover Photo. With the rollout of the Facebook Timeline, this is the most eye-catching component of your real estate marketing on this page. 850 pixels by 315 pixels are the most ideal size for your photo.
Your photo should avoid promotions and text-based pictures, but staying relevant with how you appear in your real estate social network.

2. Use your entire profile picture space. The ideal dimensions for your profile picture are 180 pixels by 180 pixels. Most businesses are using this space for their business logo to appear.

3. Create customized tabs. Figure out the two most relevant tabs that you would like to share on your homepage. The new Facebook Timeline feature allows for more tabs, but only two will be shown without clicking to see more. Also, be sure that the display picture for your apps is the picture you would like with sizing of 810 pixels.

4. Address your milestones. Another perk to the new Facebook layout is the milestone feature which allows you to physically “go back in time” on your profile and add large events or moments. Great examples of this are your founding date, goals that were hit, new employees, etc.

5. Pinning. Pinning isn’t just for Pinterest anymore. Another great feature to your new Facebook profile is the ability to keep an announcement or important story at the top of your timeline for up to a week.

6. Be interactive. Visitors in your real estate social network will keep coming back to your page if you create a dialogue and provide useful information. Create a conversation with past clients, current clients, and prospects. Answer any and all questions, comments, or complaints efficiently and professionally.
7. Ask for “Likes”. It’s crucial that visitors to your page click the “Like” button so that your content shows up in their news feed. Don’t be shy about pointing them in the right direction.

Optimize your Facebook profile

Creating a great Facebook page is just the beginning in building your real estate social network. Next, you’ll want to optimize your page, find the right tools to increase your real estate web traffic, and create a real estate social network that works for you. Then, start watching the leads roll in!

Most agents understandably focus on driving traffic to their real estate website. But what about driving traffic to your Facebook page? Sure, Facebook does a pretty good job of that on its own by giving users the ability to post just about anything, any time. Your friends can repost, friends of friends can view it—the possibilities are endless. But how can you maximize Google to drive traffic to your Facebook page?

Can your agent or brokerage Facebook fan page be indexed in Google? Sure! Over 3.5 trillion Facebook pages are currently indexed on Google simply by unlocking all privacy controls. That’s the easy part. Getting your fan page to rank in Google? That’s trickier. The same basic search engine optimization (SEO) principles apply, but the question to ask is this: how does Google weigh user experience on Facebook pages?

Let’s look at the SEO elements for a Facebook page:

1. What is the name of your Facebook profile? Be sure to pick a hyper local focus to your Facebook name and page. You might cover an entire city, but choosing one area you know really well is a better bet to getting organic search traffic. Competition for hyper local main phrases and tail phrases (very specific searches) is much lower than city, state, or metro real estate keyword phrases. For example, www.facebook.com/SeattleQueenAnneHill is an example of a hyper local real estate Facebook page that would likely rank well in Google.

2. What is the URL of your Facebook page? Be sure that your URL is succinct and contains the hyper local area you are targeting. Covering a bunch of different cities, suburbs, or neighborhoods will dilute the focus of the page and likeliness of your Facebook page to show up in search engine result pages.

3. Number of overall Facebook “Shares.” One of SEO’s most important metrics is the raw number of “Shares” that any given posting on your page
garners. Ensure that your Facebook friends are re-posting or “Sharing” your posts by making sure they are interesting, timely, and relevant.

4. Include photo albums on your Facebook page. Not only do clients engage with great photos, but Facebook ranks engaging with photos higher than engaging with text. The more engagement your page has, the more your posts become visible to Facebook users who liked your page. Make sure to include descriptive captions that contain your hyper local keyword phrases and update regularly. Posting or even just sharing very unique photos is a great way to increase engagement on your Facebook page.

5. Don’t forget the “About” section. Be sure to completely fill out each section of your profile. Once again, use your hyper local keyword phrases. This area is also your chance to tell about the full area your cover, in addition to being the local expert in the hyper local area you chose for your Facebook page. Tell visitors exactly what they can do on your Facebook page, and why they should “like” your page and engage with your page.
Using Twitter to Sell Homes in Just 15 Minutes a Day

It seems like everyone has a Twitter account these days. Politicians, celebrities, sports figures and companies have recognized the numerous opportunities that this social network provides. Real estate businesses use Twitter to connect to potential leads, promote their brands and sell homes. Because Twitter doesn’t require hours spent writing pages of content, you can devote 15 minutes a day to promote your real estate business and services. Before you start “tweeting,” it’s best to come up with a plan.

What to Tweet

Just as easily as you can engage your target market with interesting tweets, you can also annoy and alienate your audience. According to Pete Deininger, Realtor® at Breckenridge Real Estate, “The golden rule for businesses on social media is to never be salesy.” You want to offer your followers substance. According to Tierra Wilson, founder and CEO of New Media 4 Agents, “We don’t just put the Tweets out there and hope for the best. We use multiple strategies to tweet home listings. One of the most effective is just to have fun. People love to see the inside of homes, so we use their natural voyeuristic tendencies to get them to take a peak. We tweet specific home features with links to images. For example, ‘Cold out side! Wish you had this fireplace? For $250k you could. #interiors #realestate’ and we include a link to a single property website or
IDX listing with pictures of the home.”

Come up with a strategy before sending out tweets. Are you selling specific types of properties such as commercial spaces? Are you just building up a following? What target market are you courting? Your answers to these questions will dictate what you tweet. **It’s also important to keep in mind that not every tweet has to be about real estate.**

**Tweeting Subjects**

People may not want to read a tweet about a home listing every day. Change it up so they become more engaged. “Tweet creative, valuable content that provides entertainment or expertise about the area. This will bring people to your site. If they decide to purchase a home in the future, you will be top-of-mind for them to contact,” says Pete Deininger.

Pete Deininger’s List of Popular Tweeting Subjects:

- **Ask fun and engaging questions.**
  “What’s your all-time favorite holiday movie? Why?”
- **Share local photos;** “Who loves to play in powder!?" – a pic of the new snowfall.
- **Share information about local events.**
- **Tweet local insight** (where to find inexpensive/quality rental ski equipment, best happy hour in town, ski parking tips, local hero stories, etc.).

By tweeting questions, you engage your audience or create a two-way engagement channel, which will help build relationships. You can ask people about what they are doing for the weekend, if they’ve seen a new movie that came out, how they are dealing with the weather or if they have any holiday plans. Give back to your audience by asking questions and responding to their tweets.

**The Compose-Edit-Reply Schedule**

Create a tweeting schedule that you follow every day. **The best time totweet is anytime between 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. Monday through Thursday,** according to the data collected by the bookmarking service, Bitly. You can set an alarm on your phone that goes off every day to remind you. Compose a tweet to send out to your followers.
Give yourself five minutes to write and five minutes to edit it down to fit the maximum allotment of 140 characters. Keep in mind that the length of your username will reduce the amount of characters you can use. After you tweet, spend five minutes replying back to comments from past tweets. Take advantage of the dialogue your tweets are creating. Send thoughtful replies that designate you as a real thought leader in your field.

**Tracking Success**

Track your success by using a web analytic service. “If you have Google Analytics installed on your website, you will be able to measure how many visits you are acquiring from Twitter. You will also get a glimpse at what they are doing after they get to your site. You have the ability to set up ‘goals’ in Google Analytics, and your goal could be to track the number of visits coming from Twitter that eventually land on a listing page or submit contact information,” says Pete Deininger. It’s important to be able to measure the success or failure of your social media campaigns in order to know what is working and what needs tweaking.

**Twitter Burnout**

Prevent Twitter burnout or writer’s block by making a list of all possible subjects that you can tweet about. Taking a look at other real estate agent’s tweets will also give you some ideas. You can also get creative. Some real estate businesses have experienced success by setting up Twitter profiles for properties. Experiment and see what works for you and your real estate business. Above everything else, commit to spending 15 minutes a day. Consistency is the name of the game in social media marketing.
Should Agents Use Google+?

If you’ve spent any amount of time on the Internet each day, then you’ve probably heard of Google+. You may have asked yourself, “What is it and what does it do?” With all the new social media platforms popping up, it’s easy to get lost in the chaos as you are building your real estate marketing tool kit.

Do you have the time for Google+?

Before diving into the compelling reasons real estate agents should be on Google+, carefully consider the pros and cons of tackling another real estate social network. Twitter and Facebook are enough work as it is, and to add another social media site might not be what’s best for you or your company’s real estate marketing plan if you don’t have the time to properly invest into it. Like any social media profile, it isn’t enough to create and leave it. Google+ must be maintained and developed on a daily basis in order for that component of your real estate marketing to be successful.

Google+ is for passions

Guy Kawasaki, CEO of Alltop and former Chief Evangelist for Apple, wrote an excellent book called “What the Plus!” where he outlines why he loves Google+. He doesn’t discount Twitter and Facebook, but he claims that each real estate social network satisfies different needs. If you’re looking for different perspectives you should visit Twitter. If you’re looking to keep up with people you already know, Facebook is the site to go to. But if you’re looking for a real estate social network to share your passions with people you know, Google+ is for you.

Top 4 reasons to use Google+

1. **In Google we trust:** You may have heard some naysayers prophesize how Google+ is a dead-end network or you’ve seen for yourself how empty it may be—devoid of any followers you have on Twitter and Facebook. Those who doubt Google+’s credibility should consider this: *It’s a Google product.* That means everything within
Google’s power will be directed to support Google+. Billions of dollars and some of the most intelligent people on earth are backing this platform.

Besides the most obvious factor that Google owns the most of the world’s Internet traffic, it will soon be integrated into every platform available. Gmail account users are already full-fledged Google+ users. Android and Motorola devices (tablets and smartphones) already have Google+ preinstalled.

Even if you don’t have a Google email account, whenever you search on Google it’s impossible to miss it. Subtle signs to join Google+ are integrated within Google search results.

“Google+ is Google itself. We’re extending it across all that we do—search, ads, Chrome, Android, Maps, Youtube—so that each of those services contributes to our understanding of who you are” - Bradley Horowitz, VP of Products for Google+

Understand that while Google+ may seem quiet now, it will not go away so long as Google remains the dominant search engine.

2. Become a pioneer: Google+ is still new and there are relatively very few people who are active engagers. It is easy to get lost in the crowds of followers on Twitter and Facebook. However, active, meaningful engagement on Google+ is valuable right now because there just isn’t a lot of it going on.

Establishing yourself while Google+ is still young is vital because if you consistently work at providing quality information and expanding your real estate social network, you will find that not only will you build relationships within social media itself, but Google+ will recognize your real estate marketing activity and include you in search results. This means that if you consistently post about specific keywords, then the chances of you appearing within search results for those keywords will improve your Google rankings.

3. Share your passion: One of the best Google+ profiles is The Corcoran Group, organized by Matthew Shadbolt.

The Corcoran Group has over 2,000 people following them on Google+ for one purpose: their passion for New York. It is clear from their daily posts and photos that they’re trying to convey a simple message of what it would be like to live in New York.
City. Each post is an example of how passionate they are about their city, which is made more vivid by a photo attachment.

As Kawasaki and Shadbolt have both figured out, Google+ enables users to share their passions with others in a simple, yet elegant way.

4. Engagement: Let’s take a quick look at a comparison table provided by Kawasaki in “What the Plus!”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Google+</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>Twitter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post size limit</td>
<td>100,000 characters</td>
<td>63,206 characters</td>
<td>140 characters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profile</td>
<td>One profile picture, five-picture scrapbook displayed at once, multiple text areas</td>
<td>One large profile picture, one smaller inset profile picture, and multiple text fields</td>
<td>One small profile picture and 160 characters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video conferencing</td>
<td>Yes, ten people total, unlimited watch-and-listen only guests</td>
<td>One-to-one only</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility of posts</td>
<td>Any follower as well as the public</td>
<td>“Edgerank” determines which friends and fans can see your posts</td>
<td>Any follower as well as the public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After-the-fact editing of posts</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Sometimes, if you edit within seconds of posting</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grouping posts with comments and responses</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not really, unless you are willing to search through every @ mention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automatic display of photos in posts</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes, but smaller in size unless you choose to “feature” it</td>
<td>No, reader must click on a link</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Google+ completely dominates Facebook and Twitter capabilities for meaningful, in-depth engagement. Not only do you have thousands more characters to work with, but you have video conferencing, clean photo display in posts, and high visibility of posts. These features provide more opportunity to establish trust with fellow agents, past clients, current clients, and even future clients.

**Leverage Google+ for your real estate marketing**

Google’s reputation, the chance to become a pioneer, defining your passion, and excelling at engagement are all compelling reasons to join Google+. Whether you’re passionate about the real estate industry or your local area (or even both) you can easily share both on Google+. 
Google+ should not be seen as a lead generation tool. It is a social network and your profile should represent who you are as a professional and as a person.
How to Use YouTube to Sell Homes

Generate business and build your brand using this flexible, free resource.

Many real estate agents use YouTube as a powerful marketing tool. If you haven’t jumped on the bandwagon, you are missing out on an effective method of showcasing properties and generating leads for your real estate business.

This video-sharing website offers agents a chance to shoot engaging, in-depth property tours that highlight amenities and address key selling points. Because there are thousands of home tour and real estate videos on YouTube, it’s important to make yours stand out from the rest by:

- Incorporating your own personality in the video.
- Including a neighborhood tour.
- Adding informative tips.

Selling Yourself on YouTube

Videos of homes may not be memorable enough for buyers and sellers to contact you. Creating a personal connection to the viewer by incorporating your own personality and demonstrating your expertise in a specific field makes your video stand out.

Bob Sokoler, Realtor® at RE/MAX Properties East in Louisville, Ky., draws upon his background as a television news reporter and anchor when making videos. “It’s tough to hide in front of a camera. I’ve been doing these videos for more than six years, and they give both buyers and sellers a unique look at my personality,” says Sokoler. In many of Sokoler’s YouTube videos, he goes beyond showing a property. He adds humor to his
scripted tours and gives people advice about what to look for in a home, which demonstrates his expertise in the market.

To help you reduce performance anxiety, write a video script before filming. Paint a picture of what it would be like to live in the home. Infuse some of your own personality by adding what you think makes the property special. By appearing natural and confident, you are able to produce a video that sells a property and yourself to buyers.

**Neighborhood Tours – Are You an Expert on Your Area?**

Many people make their decision about a home based on a neighborhood’s cultural amenities, proximity to employment opportunities, local schools and distance from outdoor recreation. Real estate agents benefit from creating neighborhood tour videos. Neil Mathweg, real estate agent at Century 21 in Sun Prairie, Wis., gives viewers an engaging tour of the city by showing them all the places where residents shop, eat, get employed and enjoy wildlife.

You can distinguish yourself as an authority on a neighborhood or city by listing community events and other cultural activities. Interviewing locals within a community also gives viewers an idea of whether a neighborhood suits their needs. Don’t let the fear of having to operate or pay for expensive equipment keep you from creating videos. Mathweg shot his neighborhood tour video using his iPhone.

**Attract Viewers With Quick, Informative Tips**

Informative tips are a great way to give people real estate advice and demonstrate your expertise in a field.

Some topics that can be covered include:

- Eco-friendly building.
- How to purchase a home.
- Lease-to-own tips.
- How short sales work.
- Renovation tips.
Videos that cover tips or feature interviews with experts are generally pretty short. Most people don’t have the time to sit down and watch a 10-minute video. **Make your video around three to four minutes so that it will appeal to a wider audience.**

The more videos you have posted on YouTube the better chance you'll have with your website showing up first in search engine rankings. “It helps to increase search engine optimization of my website because YouTube has so many hits; my name comes up first many times when searching for properties in a particular area,” says Karyn Glubis, broker associate at The Real Estate Expert LLC. **To optimize your videos, make sure that you use keywords in the title text, description and tags.** Posting your YouTube video on social media websites like Facebook will also help increase the number of viewers, which can lead to more traffic to your website.

**Marketing Your YouTube Videos**

There are numerous ways to market your YouTube Videos:

- Facebook channels.
- Announcing them in tweets.
- Posting them on listing websites.
- Embedding them in company blogs.

Go beyond sharing your YouTube videos on your own website and social media accounts. **Ask people to “Like” a video in order to increase its ranking in YouTube.** The higher it shows in the ranking the more views you'll get. By adding YouTube to your marketing mix, you are able to promote yourself as well as the properties that you are representing.
LinkedIn for Real Estate Pros

Trolling for referrals is one of the more important aspects of running a real estate business. Anyone who runs a referral-based real estate practice understands that the energy expended to get to that point is well worth it in the long run.

Social media sites have become the go-to places to nurture the valuable relationships that will provide future referrals, and LinkedIn seems to be one of the best sites for this purpose.

This is because LinkedIn, unlike Facebook, for instance, was created for business professionals as a place to meet and network. Yes, there is a difference between personal and professional networking, LinkedIn’s Nicole Williams tells Forbes.

First, the Numbers

LinkedIn is the “site for 238 million people who take their jobs seriously,” according to George Anders, writing for Forbes. The typical LinkedIn user, Quantcast says, is a 45- to 54-year-old male. He is most likely Asian, attended graduate school and makes over $150,000 a year. He has no children. Very few of these users access the site via mobile, and most do so from a home computer. They visit LinkedIn 4.6 times per month.

Getting Started

The cornerstone of your LinkedIn experience starts with your profile. Most social network experts agree that at LinkedIn, your profile and an appropriate photograph will make or break you.

Your profile can be more accurately described as your LinkedIn resume – more education and career history and less hobbies and favorite music.
When you’ve filled in the blanks, you’ll have an opportunity to complete the Summary section. This is the place to “tell your brand story,” says career coach Carol Ross. She’s referring to a personal brand, but agents can use the Summary section to convey their professional brand “in a human voice, revealing what makes you unique,” Ross says.

If you’re tempted to skimp on the Summary portion of your profile, keep in mind that LinkedIn says that a completed profile is seven times more likely to be viewed than one that is incomplete.

**The Company Page**

The personal profile must be completed before you can set up a company page – and you must set up a company page to get all you can out of LinkedIn.

You’ll find the option to set up a company page by clicking on the “Companies” tab.

This is the page where you’ll update what’s been happening in the local real estate market and with your business. From here you can link to other content, providing value to those you hope will refer you to clients.

**LinkedIn Groups**

LinkedIn groups are the water coolers of the site – the place to connect with others in the group. If you choose your groups wisely, they can turn out to be the most valuable pieces of LinkedIn real estate you can land on.

If you’re after referrals, join the groups your past clients and those in your sphere belong to. Any group that appeals to folks who could lead to new business for you is a group you should join.

Williams, for instance, is a new mom and joined a group devoted to all things new mommy-ish. “When I needed an accountant, it turned out there was one in my group who I ended up hiring because of the connection we made over being new moms,” she tells Forbes.

There’s a lot to learn and to like about LinkedIn, from setting up your connections (another important task to complete so that you have access to their connections), to reaching out to past clients and colleagues.

LinkedIn works, but you have to work it.