

Surviving a Challenging Market

This column will answer the most pressing questions we receive from members struggling in today's challenging market.

CONSTRUCT | MARKET | PROTECT



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Q: I'm hearing a lot about Twitter and Facebook? Are they a good way to attract customers or market my homes?

A: Yes. Social Media is heralded as the "next big thing" in marketing, but it can be a very intimidating thing to tackle for your business. Everyone has been bombarded with facts and figures saying that it is a crucial part of the future; the hard part is where to begin.

So first, let's talk about what social media is NOT, as the name itself is a bit of a misnomer. It's not a platform to scream a canned message. It's not an outlet to place an ad and walk away. It's not a spam opportunity. These are where many social media campaigns go awry. Successful social media is better described as social NETWORKING. It starts conversations. Creates interactions. Contributes to its participants. Its greatest blessing and curse is that people choose to be there. Or not.

It's easier to understand if you view the Facebooks, Twitters, and LinkedIns as a huge networking party. If you stand in the corner with business cards but don't talk to anyone, there's no point. On the flip side, you don't want to be the guy running around the room shoving his card down throats. Networking events are valuable because they can introduce you to new people, ideas, opportunities and conversations. Successful online social networking is NO different. With this in mind, here are a few tips for getting started: (or restarted).

Have a Plan

If you don't know where you're going, you'll never get there. So choose a few places to engage and see how it goes. Start by creating a Facebook page and cajoling your friends into becoming fans. Tell your customers about it. Link to it on your website. Then post several times a week and reach out to those that follow you. After you get comfortable with this, evaluate where you can expand.

Could you write a blog? Tweet on Twitter? Reach out with LinkedIn? Choosing the outlets in which you can realistically participate is the crucial first step. If you've got the accounts but no plan, stop, back up and create one.

Fashion a Personal Voice

Meaning: be yourself. Even if you are creating an online presence for your company, be sure that it sounds personal. Companies don't laugh, talk back, or live day to day. Those are things only people can do and it is those interactions that start conversations. Personal stories, quips, even sarcastic asides are more likely to be a catalyst for interaction than a daily corporate-sounding update.

Create Value

Would you want to read the messages you are sending? Social networking is about so much more than sound bite updates and self promotion. If you aren't giving people a reason to be there—they won't be.

Finally, set realistic expectations and keep at it

We wouldn't expect someone to buy a house the first time they meet the builder. Social networking is not a silver bullet. It takes time to generate the meaningful dialogue that will make it an asset to your company. Consistency and constancy are the keys to building credibility in online conversations. Build in increments and don't get discouraged.

Effectively leveraging social media is a process that is evolving as you read. Step out. Don't be afraid to try new things. You might be surprised where it leads you.