



Social Media Best Practices

The rewards are great – and so are the risks. Develop a policy before you post!

Social media is great. In just a few years it has completely changed the way that we communicate, interact, keep in touch with friends and connect with new ones. Social media is great in business and in real estate. It provides easy exposure, increases your reach and audience, offers a source of referrals and it is free! But social media is tricky. It is *social* - meaning that you should use it to be social – meet people, connect, share who you are. And it is a form of *media* - meaning that it should be used and approached as any other media tool. So how do you balance the two? *Strategically*. You wouldn't write a commercial spot in ten seconds and publicly air it, would you? Similarly, don't use social media with such little disregard. This applies to both your *personal* and *business* account – because they both represent *you*.

Your Personal Policy

Start using social media like any other business tool. Before you write another post, stop and develop your own social media policy. Consider your business and personal strategies and goals and be sure they align – with who you are as a person, with your brand, and how you want to be perceived. Don't think you can be one person on your business page and a completely different one on your personal page. Your clients – the world – will see right through you. Set expectations about the purpose of each account and each page you manage and be consistent about your messaging and the information you share. Understand that each social media platform has a different purpose and develop a strategy for *each*. If it sounds like too much work then embrace one at a time and don't create a new account until you understand how it works, how you will use it and what your goal for it is. Facebook is not the same as Twitter and if you try and use them in the same way, you will be wasting your time.

Risks to be Aware of

We have all heard the stories. The smart, well-respected business professional that should have known better but made a bonehead mistake on Facebook, costing them their job and self-dignity. It all seems like common sense, but *people keep doing it*. The thing about social media is that when you make a mistake – it is there for the world to see. Even when you delete it – it doesn't go away. When it comes to real estate, there are some serious *risks* to be considered. Here are a few that you should be aware of.

- Code of Ethics – As a REALTOR® you are subject to the Code of Ethics and the Code applies to the digital world. Review the Code with your social media strategy in mind.
- Online advertising – All the rules that apply to traditional advertising apply to online advertising. Remember this the next time you create a Facebook campaign.

- Plagiarism – If you copy or share someone else’s work (whether ideas, text or images) be sure to give them credit and properly attribute the author.
- Fair Housing – Be careful that what you post doesn’t violate Fair Housing laws or it could be interpreted as discrimination. In the world of 140 characters it is much easier to miscommunicate.
- Anti-trust – Any activity that amounts to an unreasonable restraint of competition is a violation of antitrust law.
- Disclosure Issues – Be careful not to share or disclose private or confidential information entrusted to you as a REALTOR®. Oversharing is a true temptation of social media.
- Defamation – Everyone is braver behind a keyboard. Making an insulting or libelous statement or comment online is still considered defamation.
- Intellectual Property Infringement (including copyright and trademark issues and DMCA) - When you post or share anything online that is protected by copyright or trademark without the permission of the creator, you could be guilty of copyright infringement.

Social media can be risky because technology is outpacing the law and the rules are shades of gray rather than black and white. When it comes to avoiding risks, it is best to play it safe. If you are unsure how it could be interpreted, don’t post it.

Do’s and Don’ts

Here are some guiding principles to keep in mind when writing your own social media policy.

Do:

- Be yourself. Share what you are passionate about and what makes you uniquely you. This is how people will connect with you. People do business with you because they like you and have something in common with you. At the same time, allow others to be who they are. Be thoughtful and have a filter.
- Be transparent. Be you but be forthcoming about your job, connections, associations and ties. If you do mess up, own up to it.
- Comment cautiously. It’s not just your posts that other people see but the comments you make on others posts are viewable by anyone and show up in feeds. Offer solid points and represent yourself in discussions - without arguing, disagreeing or insulting others. Don’t risk looking like a bully to win an online argument. Your reputation and your brand is worth more than that.
- Be open minded to others points of view. Again, it is *social* media - if you are going to engage, be open and accepting of others ideas and realize that not everyone thinks like you. This is the point – to share and learn from one another. You don’t have to agree – but *do* be respectful.
- Educate buyers and sellers of the risks involved. You are not the only one at risk. Remind your clients that posting details about prices and purchases could be detrimental.
- Be neutral on controversial topics. Politics, religion, race and other sensitive topics are considered taboo so be cautious when discussing them on public platforms. When the conversation gets heated, it is best to stay away. Remember, it all comes back to you, your brand, and your business. Don’t give your clients a reason to *not* use you or refer you.

- Maintain your profiles proactively. Use a current profile picture that looks like you and be sure your bio represents who you are. Your online profiles are often the first impression someone has of you. And we all know the importance of first impressions.

Don't:

- Don't friend everyone. Be selective about who you accept as a friend or connect with. When you determine your purpose for each page, think about your audience. If you intend to keep your personal page personal, then don't accept requests from people you don't know. Manage your online world wisely.
- Don't spam or sell. Be human and be real. Use social media to connect with people and form relationships. Posting nothing but automated listings will just annoy people. Being too "salesy" is a turn off too. People use social media for the human interaction – not to be sold to.
- Don't vent. Do not use social media as your personal journal. Do not vent about clients, coworkers or other agents. Just don't do it, ever.
- Don't talk about clients or deals. You may be excited about that deal you just closed but don't risk ruining it by oversharing on social. Even if you are vague about the details, be very cautious.
- Don't assume your friends or family or clients have the same views as you on religion, politics or social issues. We all know what assuming does.
- Don't assume anything on social media is private – this includes private groups and direct messages. It is way too easy for someone to take a screen shot of your "behind closed doors" comment and use it against you. Be cautious of anything you put in writing.
- Don't let social media take the place of face-to-face interaction. Your online presence should augment who you are in person. Use it to connect but don't let it take the place of the real thing.

Social media is fun, exciting and when used correctly - rewarding. However, it takes work to make it work. Put the time in up front. Practice strategy and discipline and be aware of the risks. Remember that you are representing yourself, your business and the real estate industry as a whole. Represent well!