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## Social media a tool for real estate pros

### Facebook, Twitter become the new norm for Las Vegas agents

By [Amanda Finnegan](#) 

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Real estate professional and Nolf Group head Nick Nolf encourages his agents to spend one hour a day on social networking sites such as Facebook, a behavior most company leaders would frown upon.

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They're asked to post photos from the weekend's events, update their statuses and put a face to the small Las Vegas real estate company. It's not just a hobby, Nolf said, but a viable business opportunity to retain current clients, gain new ones and save face with old ones.

"We're doing it so that five, 10 years down the road, our clients are still fans, and when they know someone looking for real estate in Las Vegas, they'll send them our way," Nolf said.

Social media is the latest tool in real estate agents' tool belt, one that was virtually unheard of until only a few years ago. In order to stand out in troubled and oversaturated markets, real estate agents and brokers in growing numbers are fixing up their Facebook pages, tweeting marketing news tidbits, launching blogs and posting property tours on YouTube.

An estimated 84 percent of agents and brokers are using social media for business purposes, according to the National Association of Realtors' annual technology survey released in October. That number compares with 67 percent of agents and brokers who said they were not using social media in 2008.

Real estate professionals are seeing the need to make social media an integral part of their strategies as more homebuyers and sellers are turning to the Internet as the first stop in their process. The National Association of Realtors estimates 90 percent of homebuyers start their search online before contacting an agent, a dramatic increase from 2 percent in 1995.

Nolf started his venture into social media about five years ago with the original social network, MySpace. His company eventually moved away from MySpace and onto Facebook and has gained more than 350 fans.

The Nolf Group page includes links to staff members' personal pages, photos of company events and integrates the company's blog, where weekly posts range from community events to the latest market statistics.

In the social media discovery process, real estate companies have realized that there is a fine line between spamming fans and followers with information and informing potential buyers. Social media is, after all, about being social.

"Our page kind of has a more personal, warm fuzzy feeling. When you're constantly saying, 'Here are our listings,' people want to turn it off. We tried it and it wasn't beneficial for us," Nolf said.

Nolf knows buyers and sellers aren't coming to Facebook and Twitter to find property listings, but rather visiting company and personal pages to learn more about their agents. It's also another place to send referrals, which Nolf said is a big chunk of their business.

"It's the equivalent of going to a very large cocktail party in the middle of the day. It's an opportunity to visit with people and build rapport, and through that, build relationships. I think it's absolutely essential in our industry right now," said Rick Shelton, president of the Greater Las Vegas Association of Realtors.

Social networks have become so ingrained in the Las Vegas real estate culture that the GLVAR hosts classes and seminars on social media etiquette half a dozen times a month. Social media novices can find a field guide to social networking for Realtors on the National Association of Realtors.

Much like Las Vegas, real estate agents in Miami's equally distressed market are using social media to stand out from the crowd.

South Florida-based agent Kevin Tomlinson, a vice president at one of the largest real estate companies in Miami, ONE Sotheby's International Realty, said he feels one social media platform performs better than the rest.

"The best use of social media is blogging by far. It's perhaps the oldest, but the most effective. Real estate agents that are most successful at social media are blogging and then using Twitter and Facebook to disseminate it. You can't produce really great content in 140 characters," Tomlinson said.

Tomlinson, whose South Beach Condo Blog receives more than 1,000 views per day during Miami's peak season, said he prefers blogging because of its longer shelf life through Google. His blog comes up as one of the top searches in Google when searching "South Beach real estate."

In Las Vegas, real estate professionals are all approaching social media differently and learning as they go.

Ken Lowman, who owns Luxury homes of Las Vegas, posts listings through his Facebook page, where his company's presence is smaller than Nolf's with 129 fans. His presence through YouTube is much larger, where Lowman does property tours for almost all of his listings. Lowman's massive, multimillion dollar luxury listings lend themselves to that type of media, where another agent's smaller condos might not.

The Prudential Americana Group, the largest real estate brokerage company in Las Vegas, has a blog integrated into its website that agents post to almost daily. CEO and owner Mark Stark began posting his weekly conference call on the company's YouTube channel, which has more than 3,000 views.

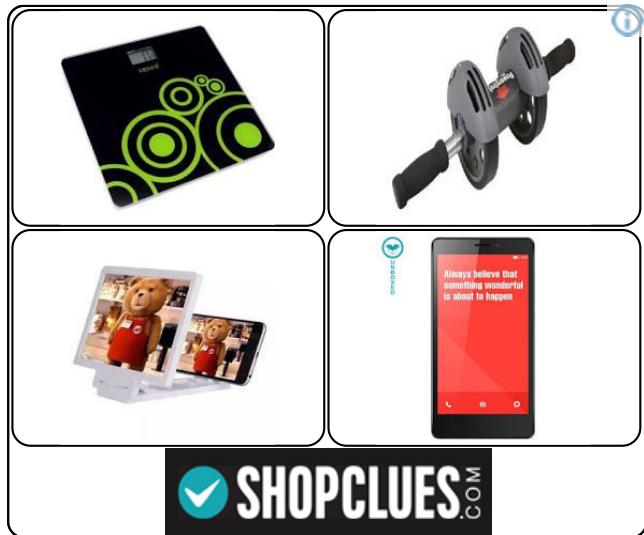
"Social media gets your hands out there. I'll get comments back on a blog I've written from people I've never met before, so that opens me up to different areas. But again, that doesn't mean that person is listing their house that day," Stark said.

Stark echoed other real estate professionals' sentiments about overselling through social media, saying "if

you're selling all the time on these different sites, you're going to get slammed pretty hard."

Shelton said he hopes agents aren't using social media in that way. That's part of the behavior the GLVAR is trying to combat in its etiquette courses.

"It's not about doing business online," Shelton said. "It's about building relationships online."



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