



## Social Networking: Partner Or Pariah

by Esther Muller and Michael Williams, Ph.D.



Technology has become an architect of change. It enables business growth and organizes our lives. Recalling a day or decade devoid of technology is difficult. The rise of social networking as a mechanism for human and enterprise engagement is perhaps the most significant example of technology as architect of change; as well as change agent. Social networking has captured the attention, imagination, and investment of the real estate industry. It has become the *great equalizer* establishing a more egalitarian and competitive marketplace. In order to leverage social networking as a competitive advantage, all parties have been driven to reevaluate their business adaptability, identifying strategies and tactics for implementing these emergent technologies.

Mastering social networking technologies and incorporating them into sales agents' business operations is essential to professional and marketplace survival. Increasingly, agents and company leaders are realizing that fluency with social working technologies such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter is mandatory for success. In addition, as using social networking becomes an industry core competency, industry policies and procedures will emerge for managing and monitoring their use.

Rapidly, social networking is becoming a medium for business engagement. For agents not engaging, their prognosis for industry survival is grim.

However, this prognosis can be improved! Sales agents can choose a self-enabling course of action. They can learn these technologies. Alas, one obstacle may thwart agents' motivation to realize the promise of prosperity embedded in mastering social networking technologies; themselves.

### "We Have Met the Enemy and They Is Us"

As American animator and cartoonist Walt Kelly's character Pogo informed us on a 1971 Earth Day poster, we can be the obstacles to achieving our goals. "We have met the enemy and they is us." Learning and implementing these technologies can seem daunting, if not overwhelming. When discussing engaging social networking many agents state "I know using social networking is important to my business, I'll hire someone to do it for me." Or, "my company does social networking for me." Respectfully, this is wishful thinking at best! In fact, only sales agents occupying the rarified realms of top production in company settings may receive the fiscal and human resources necessary to implement a successful social networking strategy.

As top producers represent a minority of the total sales agent population, the majority of agents must rely on themselves to use social networking. If the thought of learning and implementing social networking technologies has a paralytic effect on agents' action,

technology, as an architect of change, offers an innovative solution generated from an old idea; teaming. Teaming or partnering with other agents can be challenging. However, significant benefits can be culled from organized collective resources focused on mastering and implementing social networking technologies.

### "We Are What We Continually Do"

The Greek philosopher Socrates reminds us that "we are what we repeatedly do." To leverage the long-term benefits of social networking, sales agents must adopt a lifelong learning orientation toward technology. Astute agents anticipating the near limitless business building benefits associated with social networking have returned to classroom to learn and incorporate social networking into their sales practices. Dawn Doherty, Vice President of Strategic Development at StreetEasy.com and an instructor in Touro College's Graduate School of Business Certificate in Residential Real Estate Entrepreneurship program states "Social networking is a capability the sales agents need to learn and continually manage in order to succeed in today's competitive real estate markets. Those not leveraging social networking technologies may place themselves at a competitive disadvantage.

### Social Networking and Learning

In an October 29, 2001 *Newsweek* article, Apple, Inc. Chairman and CEO Steve Jobs shared "I would trade all of my technology for an afternoon with Socrates." If a meeting took place between Socrates and Mr. Jobs (Mr. Jobs keeping his technology!) to discuss the role of social networking in today's residential real estate market, I wonder what they'd say? Unfortunately, we'll never know. However, we do know that central to their thought and action which has so profoundly influenced our world is learning. Though separated by centuries, their shared commitment to lifelong learning provides us with models of *Arete* or excellence for our own critical thought and purposeful action. Socrates stated "I know nothing except the fact of my ignorance." Perhaps these giants learning and innovation discovered that their states of ignorance were platforms for enlightenment and growth. If so, sales agents can apply this learning to leverage their ignorance of social networking technologies as a positive, enabling opportunity for professional development.

Technology has become an architect of change and social networking a key business building for 21<sup>st</sup> century sales agents. Master social networking and commit to lifelong learning. By doing so we can recast Pogo's statement from "We have met the enemy and they is us" to "we have met the enemy and we are lifelong partners in learning, instead of pariahs not mustering the courage to commit to it. ■

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