



Planet Realtor > Florida > Florida Realtor Magazine

Article Search

Search Keywords:

- [Home](#)
- [Archive](#)
- [Vendors](#)
- [Subscribe](#)
- [Write to Us](#)
- [Advertise in Florida Realtor](#)

Heard on the Wires

"In times of disaster why not spearhead the idea of professional helping professional right on down the line, as in Realtor-to-Realtor housing, teacher to teacher, painter to painter, postal worker to postal worker, etc. That would take the heat off everyone else who needs housing by saving public housing for the elderly, poor or disabled."

Buzzword Blog

Buzzword Blog

Build Relationships and Profits Through Your Online Journal



The Web log, or online journal, is the latest craze. What are blogs? How do you set one up? How can it help your business? We'll give you expert tips and advice.
by Dan Rafter

As a first-year real estate associate, Mark Washburn knew he had to build credibility, and quickly, if he wanted to succeed in an increasingly competitive business. So Washburn, an associate with the Cape Coral office of Island Coast Realty, turned to his blog — www.gulfreturns.com.

Washburn has been running this real estate investment Web log for about 13 months — longer than he's been working as a real estate associate. He spends about 30 minutes a day updating the online journal, writing about the price gains in his market, the struggles developers face when angling for building permits, the steps that members of the real estate community are taking to slow the pace of real estate flipping and other topics that investors in residential real estate would find intriguing.

By doing so, Washburn shows buyers and sellers not only that he understands the real estate market in Southwest Florida, but that he knows enough about it to run a busy online diary outlining the market highs and lows.

What the Heck Is a Blog?

Departments

- Technology & You
- Realtor Scoop
- Realtor Advantage
- BizLine
- Legal Hotline
- Makeover
- You Inc.
- Letters to the Editor

TELL US YOUR ISSUES

What's happening in your market? Have you seen an influx in international buyers? Has the revitalization of your city's downtown boosted the market? We want to know. E-mail the editor at FLRealtor@far.org or fax us at (407) 438-1411, Attn. Florida Realtor magazine editor.

ADVERTISING

For [information about advertising](#) in Florida Realtor, [e-mail](#) or phone (407) 438-1400 ext. 2327.

Nancy Richards
Richards Real Estate
Inc.
Vero Beach

Related Articles

[Planet Realtor](#)
[Florida Living Network](#)
[ABigDeal.com](#)
[One Realtor Place](#)
[Realtor.org](#)

Essentially, it's an online journal that allows the blog owner to express his or her opinion on any topic he or she chooses. If you set up a blog, an area of your Web site is dedicated to it, and each day or week you write a few short sentences detailing a market trend, interesting sales call, recent awards or any other topic relating to the business. Clients and customers can come to the site and read the online journal.

"A blog is frequently updated, and posts are made in chronological order," says Josh Hallett, owner of Hyku LLC, an Orlando-based information architecture and Web usability firm.

So, what does this have to do with your real estate business? A lot if you are willing to spend the time posting interesting tidbits about your market, trends in real estate, funny stories and the like. "Blogs are not for everyone, but if you're a business owner who wants to put a human face on your company as well as get people visiting your site frequently, then you might consider this [time] investment," says Hallett.

Blogs don't have to cost anything. They're easy to run. And they allow real estate associates to say whatever they want, a prime opportunity for smart ones to brand themselves as industry experts.

Associates can use blogs to showcase their knowledge of specific niches, running sites devoted to anything from lakefront properties to urban condominiums. They can fill them with real estate investing tips or with inside information on how to quickly sell a property.

But, does a blog really set you apart from the scores of associates out there aiming for the same clients and customers? "Yes," says Washburn. "I figure that 80 percent of the value of my blog comes from building credibility with potential new clients and reinforcing it with my existing customers," he says. "Most of my business comes from word-of-mouth advertising. People can't go to a cocktail party these days without bragging about their real estate gains. If my clients should mention to their friends that they work with me, then my blog is a great way for me to build credibility with people that I've not yet met. They can see that I know the business. That's a great help to me."

Here are some tips even the most techno-phobic real estate associate can use for setting up and running a successful blog.

Getting Started

The easiest way to get started is to go to a site such as www.blogger.com (See "Blog Resources," right, for other options), where you can set up a free blog. Just click on "Create Your Blog Now," and the program will walk you through the setup, step by step. Your blog will be hosted for free on blogspot.com, or you may choose to use your Web site hosting company. If you have a company that hosts your Web site, then it's ideal to contact that company first to see if it can set the blog up for you. Once you set it up, you can start posting.

Read All About It!

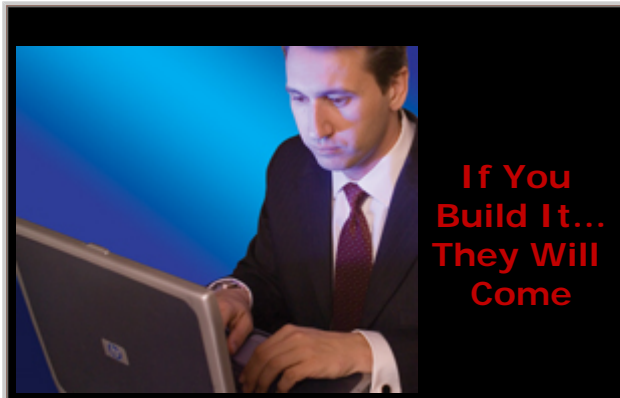
Writing to Boost Business

Stumped about what to write? "With a blog, you can write anything at any time in any fashion to anyone you want," says Chip Tarver, a Sevierville, Tenn.-based marketing expert and publisher of his own business-to-business blog, www.firstcontactsecrets.com/blog.

That, Tarver admits, is a pretty broad assignment and one that can be abused. Real estate associates hoping to use their blogs to boost business should stay away from talking politics, taking stands on controversial issues or writing about their personal views. It does make sense, though, for associates to blog about big real estate deals, new laws that might impact the pace of home sales, tips for moving houses off the market or anything else that potential home buyers or sellers would find useful. Even funny stories relating to your real estate day or holiday recipes can bring in readers.

Blogs, in many ways, are like Web sites: It's easy to put one up. It's tougher to put one up that actually boosts business.

The key, blogging experts say, is to provide information that potential clients and customers will want to read. This means that real estate associates should regularly update their blogs with information that will help buyers and sellers understand the market. Sites that are filled with real estate news — even if this consists simply of an associate writing three



Keeping a blog isn't just a way for authors to offer their thoughts on the world at large. Associates who use a blog properly can find it helping build their business.

Consider the results that Mike Thomas, a broker with Palm Beach Gardens-based Internet Realty Brokers, has achieved with his blog, which can be found at www.homes3.blogspot.com.

During the morning in which he spoke to Florida Realtor magazine, Thomas says, he received eight inquiries from potential clients, all of whom contacted him by e-mail through his blog. He's had similar results from his

Looking for examples of what a real estate blog should look like? Check out these five.

1. Insider Real Estate Journal — www.insidereaalestatejournal.blogspot.com. This site is run by Tampa Bay associate John Mudd.
2. Fran and Rowena — www.franandrowena.blogspot.com. This blog is run by two real estate associates in La Canada, Calif.
3. Daily Pundit — www.dailypundit.com/sfrealblog. This site is devoted to happenings in San Francisco real estate.
4. Curbed — www.curbed.com. This site chronicles real estate matters in New York City.
5. HouseBlogger — www.houseblogger.typepad.com. This site is a real estate marketing blog.

sentences on an item in the local paper and then providing a link to that story — will keep buyers and sellers coming back.

No one, though, will make return trips to a site filled only with boasts about how much business an associate has done. And sites that aren't regularly updated are guaranteed to drive away repeat visitors.

"A lot of people start a blog and then don't commit to it," says Scott Ingram, founder of www.networkinaustin.com, a blog dedicated to the art of business networking. "When you don't regularly update your blog, that hurts your credibility. It

reflects on the character of someone. If you regularly commit to doing a blog, you provide value with it, and if you've been doing that for any length of time, that says positive things about you. A potential client sees this and thinks that when it's time to sell a house, you'll do the things that need to be done."

Give It Focus

Fellow blog expert Tarver says it's important for real estate associates, as it is with all business professionals, to focus their blog on a specialty. An associate may run a blog focused on lakefront properties, one on homes costing \$500,000 or more, or even one focused on budget-conscious

company's busy Web site, www.internetrealtybrokers.com. "It certainly does bring in new leads," Thomas says. "Of course, as with grapes on the vine, not all are ripe at the same time. But [many of the] leads do become ripe, sometimes in as little as two months, sometimes in six months to a year. Using the blog to keep up with the customers and what they're looking for puts us ahead of the game."

Thomas traces a closing in the late fall directly to his blog. A customer visited the site and asked for information about the market in the Palm Beach area, making it clear that he was not yet interested in buying. Thomas kept in touch with the potential buyer, sending him information on the area and new listings. One of these listings caught his attention: an \$800,000 home, which he eventually purchased. "We made more than \$23,000 based on that particular property," Thomas says. "So the blog does pay off."

Blog Resources

Here is a list of resources to help you build and promote your blog:

1. www.blogger.com
2. www.bloglet.com
3. www.moveabletype.org
4. www.blogit.com
5. www.pingomatic.com
6. www.livejournal.com
7. www.masternewmedia.org
8. www.search.blogger.com
9. www.myblogsite.com

buyers, putting together a blog filled with information on buying homes that cost less than \$300,000.

What if you sell waterfront property but also sell city condos? No worries. There's nothing to prevent you from creating more than one blog, says Tarver.

Market It

Blogs have another trait in common with Web sites: Even the best written and most informative of them are useless if potential clients and customers don't know how to find them.

Fortunately, it's not difficult to steer potential buyers and sellers to a blog. One way to promote it is to register it with some of the hundreds of blog directories on the Internet. Blog owners can submit to these at no cost and can even list their blogs in specific categories, like real estate, business or investments. Ingram recommends you log on to www.masternewmedia.org/rss/top55 to find a list of blog directories.

In addition, Tarver recommends you log on to www.pingomatic.com. This free service sends notices to several blog directories when blog owners make new posts on their sites.

Search engine placement is also important. Associates can pay for premium positions on search engines such as Google and Yahoo! But there are free ways to get listed high on searches for phrases such as "Southwest Florida real estate" or "Miami homes." First, bloggers who post frequently, and include several links in their posts, will show up higher in search engines. Search engines love blogs that are updated frequently because they equate up-to-date information with relevance.

It's important, too, to remember the phrases that potential clients and customers are likely to use when searching for a real estate associate. A searcher, for instance, is not likely to type in "Joe Smith Realtor." He or she may, though, type in "Tampa Bay condominiums." It's important, then, if you do sell condominiums in Tampa to include that phrase in your blog postings.

Of course, the best way to promote a blog and drive traffic to it, is the old-fashioned way: Include your blog address on your business cards, in your print advertising and on your For Sale signs.



Interested in building your own blog? Here are some tips to help you build a successful one:

1. Update often. A quiet blog chases away repeat visitors.
2. Remember to use phrases such as "Tampa Bay condominiums" or "Miami luxury homes" so that search engines connect you to the right readers.
3. Write about relevant real estate news, not your favorite songs or your pets.
4. Register your sites with blog directories to help readers find you.
5. Advertise your blog on your business cards, on your For Sale signs and in your print advertising.
6. Remember that a blog takes time. Don't start one if you're not willing to put in that time.

A Long-Term Investment

Roger Theriault, an associate with the Lake Worth office of Illustrated Properties, runs a blog (he calls it his opinion section to avoid scaring off folks who have no idea what a blog is) at his Web site, www.rogertheriault.com. Theriault views his blog, which he started in February 2005 and updates about twice a month, as a long-term investment. He's using it, not to immediately land new business, but to build his credibility as a real estate expert.

"If someone visits my site and sees that I have informative content, they're more likely to decide to contact me rather than just go on to the next agent's site," Theriault says. "I wrote everything on my site myself."

And, most associates agree that the time spent updating a blog is well spent. A blog doesn't have to be time consuming, but it must be something you're willing to update at least three to four times a week. "It doesn't have to be a lot of work," says Hallett. "It can be two or three sentences. If you're monitoring what's going on, you can point to existing things as well, such as 'Hey check out the article about us in the Life & Times section of the Orlando Sentinel,'" says Hallett.

You might even consider having guest bloggers write something for you periodically — say, someone from a mortgage company who writes about interest rates or someone from a title company who offers a tip a week on how to make closings run smoother.

Going the Extra Mile

Zahara Mossman, a real estate associate with Beachfront Realty in Miami Beach, views her many blogs as a way to both build credibility and grab quick business. She's so committed to blogging that she immediately set up her blog in December 2004, the same month in which she earned her real estate license.

Mossman isn't afraid of new technology. Her blogs and Web sites, which include www.zaharaproperties.com, www.costaricanrealestate.bogspot.com and www.condoconversions.blogspot.com, feature podcasting (downloadable audio content that you listen to on an MP3 player or iPod) and online audio descriptions of her listings. And to find relevant content for her sites, she creates and sends out bots (commands that look for specific information and report back to your computer) that scour the Web for information.

"I tell everyone that I speak three languages: English, Spanish and HTML," Mossman says. Reporters and editors at publications such as the New York Times, Los Angeles Times and Chicago Sun-Times have quoted Mossman after having found her blogs. Blogging may take time out of Mossman's day, but it also paints her as a true expert in her field. Any readers who see Mossman's name in these stories are highly likely to contact her when it's time to get serious about buying or selling.

"The blogs are amazing. I've had to get a second phone line," Mossman says. "I've been getting calls from all sorts of time zones. It seems like my phone is ringing 24 hours a day. This tool is

phenomenal.”

An example? In November, an investor who found Mossman through one of her blogs worked with her to buy a \$295,000 home in North Miami Beach. The investor bought the property without even looking at it, and Mossman never met the buyer in person.

“It’s a whole new way to sell real estate,” Mossman says. “I can’t imagine doing business without them.”

Dan Rafter is an Indiana-based freelance writer.

Questions, comments or suggestions on this article? Send us an e-mail: flrealtor@far.org.

© 2006 [FLORIDA ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS](#)

Questions, comments or suggestions on this page? Go to [Support](#). Read Planet Realtor's [Privacy Policy](#) and [Terms of Use](#).

© Copyright 2006 Florida Association of Realtors®