

FEATURE New app turns real estate agent business cards and print advertising into virtual billboards

Real estate technology

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Much of the discussion of technology in real estate at the recent Banff Western Connection real estate conference concentrated on using social media more effectively, but the latest technology allows realtors to get a lot more out of conventional print marketing.

Texas-based **Bernie Ross**, president of **RealEstateCoach.com**, said real estate agents must switch their thinking when marketing through social media sites like **Twitter** and **Facebook**. Unlike conventional real estate marketing, Ross said, "It's not about me, me, me. It is about engaging."

According to Ross, only 5 per cent of a social media site should be selling the realtor's brand and listings, with 95 per cent concentrated on a conversation with potential clients.

Ross also encouraged realtors to use video in their online presentations.

She explained that, using a smartphone, a realtor could film and post an effective video in less than five minutes; for example, a voice-over guide through listing photos.

Other tips include using www.facebook.com/business to set up a business page to connect with existing clients and expand to reach other networks. Ross explained that a realtor could link up with sites on such topics



Photo: Layar

Layar: free app directs printed material to realtor's web page, social media site, virtual tours, etc. RIGHT: Bernice Ross of RealEstateCoach.com: social-media marketing is not about "me, me, me. It is about engaging."

as winemaking or even hockey to engage a wider pool of potential buyers.

She recommended making the most of **LinkedIn** sites by getting testimonials from satisfied customers.

Realtors should also sign onto Saskatoon-based **Point2 NLS**, Ross said. On this system realtors simply add their listings and Point2 posts them to all key search engines, such as **Google**, **MSN** and **Yahoo** and real estate-specific sites such as **Trulia**, **Point2 Homes** and even the *NY Times*.

Layar

Yet for many realtors it is print that is the first step to getting the message out, whether in

the form of a business card, a for-sale sign or ads in the local real estate paper or community paper.

And now there's an application to make print much more compelling and effective.

It is so new – started just seven months ago in Europe – that some technology experts *Western Investor* talked to for this article hadn't even heard of it yet.

But they will.

It's called **Layar** (www.layar.com). It works whenever someone downloads a free Layar app for his or her smartphone, which allows access to online information that's invisibly embedded in any printed material the real estate agent has available.

The *Real Estate Weekly* in Vancouver began offering Layar ads this January in its 500,000-circulation weekly that covers B.C.'s Lower Mainland. *Western Investor* will roll out the service this spring.

With Layar, a realtor's print ad can direct a smartphone user to the realtor's website, a virtual tour of the listing, other listings or a promotional **YouTube** video, as examples.

In Vancouver the service costs a flat \$99 for the advertiser but makes a printed ad come alive – and can also provide precise tracking of how many people have read and responded to the ad.

Some Vancouver realtors are having their business cards and site signs Layar enabled, turning them into virtual billboards of information.

Best of all, Layar takes what most realtors are using – print – and extends into all the social-media marketing the realtor is using.

Getting social

Here are some more tips on using social media courtesy of past sales and marketing chair with the **Greater Toronto Home Builders' Association**, **Jacky Hill** of **Wall2Wall Media**:

- Be social with Google; stay local with Google+ Local. To ensure your customers can find you geographically ensure your Google Places page (now called Google+ Local) is optimized. Your page lists your company name, address, phone number and website along with a map of your location. It doesn't cost a thing and you can edit your information or see how many people have seen and clicked on your page at any time. Learn more about Google+ Local at www.google.com/+/learnmore/local.

- Learn about search engine optimization (SEO). It is extremely important to help increase your visibility on search engines like Google where most consumers go first to search for real estate content. **Searchengineland.com** is a great resource to help you learn more about SEO, providing useful tips and tools. Learn the basics of SEO in three minutes on the site.

- Tracking the success of campaigns and online efforts is crucial to determining return on investment and the time allocated to those tactics. Google's new Multi-Channel Funnels tool in Google Analytics allows you to view interactions across different digital and marketing channels, showing how these work together to create sales and conversions. This tool can help you make important advertising and communications decisions, including which ad placements convert best. ♦



Photo: RealEstateCoach.com