

# Finding a Home on Facebook

When it comes to buying or selling your home in this market, it's all about making connections online. Here's why. According to the National Association of Realtors, 90 percent of buyers search for homes on the Internet, compared to 37 percent in 1999. But how we make those online connections is changing. The key is to seek out new technologies, while finding new uses for online tools that are already popular, but evolving.

If you're looking to make connections to help you sell or buy your next home, a presence on social networks such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter is a must. They aren't new but their popularity is growing at an incredible pace. It's a good idea to find out how your Realtor integrates these networks into their overall marketing plan.

## Doing the math

Facebook has more than 350 million active users and 50 percent of them log on to the network in any given day. The average Facebook user has 130 friends and spends more than 55 minutes per day on the site. More than six billion minutes are spent on Facebook each day worldwide. That is twice as much as the time spent on Google.

Now, let's look at the numbers locally. Within 10 miles of Barrington there are about 70,000 registered Facebook users. Multiply 70,000 Barrington area users by the average 130 friends each and that's 9.1 million people connected through someone on Facebook back to Barrington.

Plus, social networks are gaining a larger share of all Internet time. According to a recent Nielsen survey on social networking, the time people spent on sites such as Facebook and Twitter increased 82 percent in December 2009 as compared to December 2008. When they compared December 2008 to December 2007, the increase of time spent worldwide on Facebook alone was even more dramatic at 566 percent. Whether you're looking to reconnect with old friends or spread the word about your ideas, business, organization or home for sale, Facebook is a powerful pipeline.

## Tracking the audience

Facebook was created in 2004 as a service for university students. But now almost one third of its global audience is aged 35-49 and almost one quarter is over 50, as reported by Nielsen. People are learning that Facebook is much more than a way to reconnect with friends and classmates. It's a vehicle to promote causes, endorse businesses, discuss ideas and share information. Now, many of Facebook's users are its advertisers.

## Tapping the resource

Barrington groups and businesses have tapped into this resource. Four thousand people are members of Barrington High School's Alumni Group on Facebook. The Catlow Theater has a business page on Facebook with more than 1,500 followers. You'll also find a page for Boloney's Sandwich Shop with 600 followers or "fans."

It's a strategy some local real estate professionals are adopting, too. You'll find Facebook pages for Barrington area Realtors promoting themselves and their services. You'll find other Realtors who have adopted a more community-centric approach by creating interactive pages where visitors can share information about local businesses and community events. There are also Realtor pages devoted to sharing information about the properties they're marketing. As these sites gain more users and more of their users' time, they become a richer resource for connecting and researching.

## Keeping it personal

Facebook's stunning growth can be traced to its focus on connecting through a streamlined design with fewer advertisers present on the site. As a medium where people share personal information, a glut of advertisers would be seen as an invasion of privacy. "Social networks are ultimately about friendships, where members add value to each other's lives through interaction...advertising should follow the same philosophy of adding value through interaction and consultation," according to the Nielsen report.

Heading into the new decade, a presence on the strongest social networking sites is a business priority. Yet for us, this means keeping our per-



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sonal Facebook presence known, but separate from any of our Facebook pages related to Barrington real estate. We don't talk too much about real estate on our personal pages, and we don't get too personal on our business pages. By offering the choice for people to join us professionally, we're trying to respect the space of those who choose to only connect with us personally.

We're excited about using these tools — to reach people and businesses here in Barrington, and to connect with neighbors and those we have yet to meet. 