

Click and drag to get new home

Buyers respond to Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn for real estate news

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So you thought Twitter was just a social tool with a bunch of strangers prattling about their every move people tweeting about what they ate for lunch, what they planted in their yard, what they're planning for their cat's birthday.

When Twitter first invaded the tech scene a couple of years ago, it might have been mainly personal electro-blatner. Ditto with outlets like Facebook, LinkedIn, Yelp, personal blogs and other online venues.

But those were the "olden days" — as in, a year or three ago.

Potential homebuyers are consulting a variety of online resources to find their "dream homes" quicker, with less hassle and, in some cases, with less competition.

Buyer Chad Bowman and his wife, Tara, recently found their house via Twitter, where he has an account, after searching unsuccessfully for more than a year. In fact, the Bowmans, who closed on the house earlier this month, made the offer without even walking into the house. The tweet came in before the home even hit the Multiple Listing Service, real estate agents' database of properties for sale. The Bowmans acted quickly.

"With Twitter, it's kind of like a friend or somebody we trusted told us about this secret, and we learned about it before anybody else did," says Chad Bowman, a Veterans Affairs loan specialist for United Lending in Austin. "That's something that got our Realtor's attention."

The Bowmans had been looking for a house for a little more than a year. They had put in offers on several houses but then lost those after discovering that the houses had offers on them before being listed in the MLS, Chad Bowman says.

"Trust me, being the backup offer on homes that you really want, and then losing them, gets really frustrating," he says. "We were starting to talk about not even moving and just doing some home improvements."

Chad Bowman isn't sure how he became a follower of real [estate agent Peggy Little](#), but when the tweet came out late one night about this house, the Bowmans contacted their agent.

Little's tweet immediately linked the Bowmans to her website, where she had some images of the property. Based on those photographs and descriptions, the Bowmans put in their offer before Little could list it in the MLS the following day.

The Bowmans knew that it was the right size, the right price and in the right neighborhood.

"It just came on my phone, and I saw the description, not even the photos first. I said to my wife, 'This is it.' She was like, **'Sure, whatever.'** Then I got on the computer and saw a picture that Peggy had taken. On Twitter we were seeing it before the majority of potential buyers."

High-tech marketing and social networking are reshaping the nature of the real estate industry. And the industry is only going to keep changing, say agents who are using technology to help generate fast-action deals, while clients reap the benefits of getting a potential "scoop" on properties they hope to purchase.

"Agents that are not keeping up with how people are communicating right now are going to kind of get left behind," says Little, of JB Goodwin Realtors, who has been using Twitter for the past 18 months.

"The expectations of how we work are different now, especially in a high-tech-savvy city like Austin," she says.

And commercial realtor Mark Pustka, of McAllister and Associates, says that having his own blog and website has increased his profile immeasurably. He diligently monitors his LinkedIn account, where past clients and associates have logged kudos about his service.

"I am on Twitter, which I started doing about a year and a half ago," says Pustka, "It's difficult to measure the effectiveness of it so far, but I will say that LinkedIn is really useful. It's like putting your résumé on the Internet. I kind of see a correlation between the number of people I'm meeting with each week and those people that have looked me up on LinkedIn. I think that (potential clients) use LinkedIn when they meet somebody and want to know who is this person and want to know his legitimacy, what has he done before."

Pustka also likes the fact that people can recommend you on LinkedIn, and you can approve their recommendation before it gets posted.

Little tries to reach potential clients in most of the Internet venues — on her website, her company's website, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn. She points out, semi-tongue-in-check, that a lot has changed in her 18 years in the business.

"When I first started selling real estate, we got a big book, a big MLS book, and literally, it was printed every two weeks. And you'd get a subscription to the book, and (the book was) about 4 or 5 inches thick, with pictures, addresses and descriptions of everything that was for sale. So you'd get a client, and then you'd look at the book and get back with the client, or drive around neighborhoods to find things. It was horrible."

But in the early 1990s, Little says, the Austin Board of Realtors switched from print to a computer-based resource.

"It was a DOS system and then it switched to several different Windows-based systems (as time passed)," she says. "But our industry was probably one of the first industries that became totally computer-based — particularly here in Austin. For years, I would talk to agents from other states and they would not be computerized. We were the envy of other boards."

Now Austin real estate agents are in the middle of this new technology revolution. Clients are wanting up-to-date information and they want to find it via Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

"Every time there is some sort of technological revolution, it's going to affect us," Little says. "As Realtors, we have to stay ahead of the curve and stay equal to our customers, and we have a lot of customers in the high-tech field here. They don't like it if you can't e-mail them from your iPhone or BlackBerry, or use other new technology to communicate instantly with them."



Courtesy of JB Goodwin