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Correcting Five Common Technology Mistakes

By ANN BROWN

Today's technology will probably never replace the REALTOR® in the industry. However, if you are a REALTOR® who does not correctly use the technology at your disposal, you risk being replaced by another REALTOR® who does.

Many real estate professionals make tech-related mistakes that cost them business. Let's take a look at the five top tech mistakes that are made and how you can correct them.

Lack of Netiquette

"Netiquette," or "Internet etiquette," is overlooked too much by agents when using the Web and e-mail. With more than 70 percent of consumers using the Internet to find a real estate professional to help with their residential purchases or sales, it is up to you to promote an image that clearly says, "Hire me."

Be cautious when using sarcasm or humor. Some people will just not get it, and you run the risk of offending someone. If you must be funny, try using emoticons or a smiley :) to get your point across.

Avoid using all caps. It is irritating and unappealing, and it speaks volumes about your knowledge of the Internet. TYPING WITH ALL CAPS IS CONSIDERED SHOUTING and is very unrefined. If you think you have to use all caps because someone has bad eyesight, use a larger font instead.

Do not forward chain letters, petitions, religious content or urban legends. The content is typically unsupported and of zero value. They are a waste of your clients' valuable time. If you think someone must have something, print it out and send it via "snail mail." Is it worth the time and stamp?

Remember that nothing on the Internet is private. Anything that you write and post could be read by anyone. If you do not want someone to read it, do not post it online.

Common E-mail Mistakes

E-mail is one of the great marketing tools. Yet,

very few people really use e-mail in the most effective way. Think about how many e-mails you send out. All of the recipients are potential leads in your business. What impression are they getting from your e-mail?

Every day, I receive e-mail that contains misspellings and grammatical errors. Nothing will reduce your credibility faster than to send something that has these kinds of mistakes.

Certainly, everyone makes a typo every now and then. However, most e-mail programs include a "spell check" feature. If you are not the world's best typist, set this feature to run automatically.

The look of your e-mail can be one of the quickest ways to annoy your readers. An e-mail with text that has many different sizes, colors and fonts is tacky and makes you look like an amateur. Remember that italicizing, bolding and underlining your text are tools, not decoration. Use these features when necessary and to make a point, but do not, for instance, make all the text of your e-mail bold. Yes, plain text can be a little boring. However, there are many companies that will create a template for your e-mail at a very low cost, and this is a better solution to a plain text e-mail than abusing the text effect features.

Web Site Content

The content of your Web site is important in making a professional impression to your clients. Although it is a place to showcase your talents, it should not be a novel with your life history. It should include at a minimum: 1) something to stop the reader in his or her tracks, 2) a brief explanation of the information available on your site and 3) instructions to tell visitors what to do next, such as "e-mail me" or "click here for a report."

Avoid graphics that do not mean anything. I had a client years ago who e-mailed me a

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dancing elephant to include on her homepage. She thought it was adorable; unfortunately, it had nothing to do with her business. Use graphics that support your personal message and help your readers comprehend information. Do not use graphics simply for their entertainment value.

Do not go overboard on "sharing the love." Saying things, such as "I feel a strong personal connection with all my clients," might make some people feel uneasy. Most of your Web site visitors are prospects, and you have yet to develop a personal relationship with them. Show them that you care by what you do, not just by the words you speak.

Check your Web site frequently for broken links. When a prospect clicks on a link that goes nowhere, it sends the message that you do not pay attention to details. It also tells people that you are not checking your site regularly.

No matter how long it takes, be sure to check your Web site daily. If you do not have the time, outsource it to a virtual assistant who can correct any broken links immediately.

Your Backup Plan

Early last year, my computer crashed. My computer technician told me that I needed a new hard drive and that he was sorry, but he could not retrieve any of the 12,000 files I had stored on my system. It was a reality check for me, to say the least. However, I was one of the lucky ones, as I was eventually able to retrieve all my data, and I have since done regular system backups.

Think what would happen if your computer or PDA crashed. Would you lose your database, contracts and other important files? Would you lose the names of your prospects who said to call them in a month? You get the picture.

If you do not know how to back up your computer, call your tech support person today. He or she will be able to walk you through the process in less than a half hour and show you the important steps in safeguarding your equipment.

Keep your backup CDs in a safe place with a summary of the files you saved and the date on each. In case the unthinkable would happen, you will be able to retrieve your documents. It is also a good idea to keep your backup CDs in a different place than where you normally keep your computer. In case of a fire, for instance, you would not lose both your computer and the backups.

A Simple Message

Using the technology that is out there does not have to be difficult. Just remember to make it easy for your clients and prospects.

Think about your e-mail address. I recently created a spreadsheet for a broker listing all of his agents and their contact information. In the list of 75 agents, there was only one who had a simple e-mail address that was easy to remember.

Do not pick an e-mail that would mean something only to you, like bigjohn4855@yahoo.com. Maybe your nickname is "big John" and you were born on April 8, 1955, but how is a potential client going to know that or remember such an odd address? Buy the domain name of your name for your Web site, if possible, and use the corresponding e-mail address, such as sandy@sandypany.com.

Have one main phone number that you use for your business. Look on most Web sites and business cards of REALTORS®, and you are likely to see an office number, home office number, mobile number, toll free number, voicemail number and fax number. As a prospect, I am probably going to come to one of two conclusions: 1) I have no idea which number to dial to put me in touch with you, which is frustrating, or 2) you certainly must be desperate for a call by listing so many phone numbers.

Have one phone number, and use that on everything that advertises your real estate business. Get rid of the rest; you just do not need them.

Keep the technical talk to a minimum. Using terms or acronyms that only other REALTORS® will know does not make your client or prospect feel comfortable. You worked hard to earn your ABR or GRI designations, but if you do not define how those will affect doing business with you, they are worthless to the consumer.

The REALTOR® who embraces today's technology and uses it to his or her advantage will be the successful top producer of tomorrow. If technology scares you, do not shy away from it. Instead, find someone who is an expert to help you correct some of the mistakes you may have been making.

Stick to what you are good at, and outsource the rest. The result will be a winning combination of less stress and more business.



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