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7 ways real estate leaders can improve their social media

Real estate rockstars Sherry Chris, Spencer Rascoff, Morgan Carey and Sharran Srivatsaa share how they've mastered the social media game

BY MARIAN MCPHERSON ★

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Inman is exploring what the future of real estate leadership should look like through a series of articles, Q&As with industry pros, and an upcoming five-part series called Leadership Week.

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Social media, in many ways, has made the world a smaller place. People who once seemed out of reach, such as celebrities, politicians and leaders, now pop up in our feeds every day, posting pictures and videos of their personal lives and even engaging in conversation with the people they serve and entertain.

According to a recent thread in Facebook group [Inman Coast to Coast](#), many [real estate leaders](#) are struggling to follow suit and embrace the unique opportunity [social media](#) platforms provide —



BGHRE CEO Sherry Chris

part of the real estate industry, each expert agreed that “forcing” your way into social media is a surefire way to fail.



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deeper, more authentic and human level.

Here's what four social media dynamos — Better Homes and Gardens Real Estate CEO Sherry Chris, Real Estate Webmasters founder and CEO Morgan Carey, Douglas Elliman Western Region president Sharran Srivatsaa and Zillow CEO Spencer Rascoff — and a few other social media experts have to say about making meaningful connections online.

Don't force it

Although social media yields positive personal and business results, and has become an integral

Chris and Carey said social media is simply an extension of their personalities and dedication to connecting with their brokers, agents, consumers and wider network.

“You have to want to do it. You can't suddenly turn ‘social’ on,” said Chris. “Doing it halfheartedly is not what I recommend at all.”

Chris says she's always put an emphasis on adding a personal touch, which includes mailing **handwritten cards**, visiting broker offices and attending special events. For her, social media has only served as a tool to make those things easier.

“It's an all-encompassing communication and caring that leads me to be a strong contributor on social,” she said.

Carey echoed Chris' sentiments, noting that he's always been comfortable building relationships online since people in his generation grew up with the internet.

“We grew up talking on bulletin boards, on bb [blackberry] boards, b-bulletin boards [a dial-up messaging system], and chats,” he said. “So I think for someone from my generation (I'm 38), it's a lot more organic for us versus some of the leaders who didn't necessarily grow up with the internet in the same way.”

On the management side, Coldwell Banker director of media engagement Lindsay Listanski noted the importance of keeping social media optional — social media and marketing directors should never pressure their execs into being active on social, especially if participation could become a burden or distraction from other tasks.

“Not every leader needs to have a huge social media presence,” she said. “If it doesn’t come natural to you, figure out a couple areas where you can add value.”



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Understand how to use each platform

[Facebook](#). [Twitter](#). [Instagram](#). [Snapchat](#). Each platform has its own rules, strengths and weaknesses — something that can befuddle the social media newbie. Listanski said every exec

“No copy and pasting across the board,” she said.

Chris’s social media strategy is the perfect example of one that has been thought out and well-planned. Here’s how she breaks it down:

- [LinkedIn](#) is all about business. She reposts interesting business articles and blogs and comments on colleagues’ statuses.
- Twitter is a mix of business and personal. Chris said she’ll tweet about BHGRE and her personal hobbies, such as interior design, fashion and the arts.
- She maintains two Facebook profiles. On her business profile, she shares business articles, the accomplishments of her network and business ideas. On her personal page, she shares business news but mainly focuses on her family and friends.
- Chris says Instagram is all about sharing people and places, and it lends itself to a little more edginess. “If someone wants to know more about me, then Instagram is the place to go,” she said.

Once you understand how a platform works, you’ll be able to understand which ones fit you and which ones can be left behind.

Rascoff says Snapchat “didn’t stick” for him, but he’s been able to effectively use Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn to connect with his network.

“I’ve always used Twitter, and I naturally gravitate to it because I like the brevity of it,” he said. “Over time I’ve added Facebook and Instagram, and I write longer articles on LinkedIn.”



Spencer Rascoff

@spencerrascoff

Thanks to my 12 year old daughter for teaching me iphone trick:
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47 See Spencer Rascoff's other Tweets

Be authentic

Social media has given real estate leaders a unique platform to connect with their networks in a direct and honest way. While some stick to “vanilla” posts (canned responses to simple issues and prepared advertising content) others dive right in — sharing what they care about, who they care about and engaging in thought-provoking conversations.

say," said Rascoff in an emailed statement to Inman.

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Douglas Elliman Western Region president Sharran Srivatsaa says he's able to maintain his authenticity on social media by maintaining full control of what he posts.

"Very simple. Don't farm out your social media," he said. "That takes away from the authenticity of the leader not just for that post but for anything that leader ever wants to say on his or her

personally on social media and it is disrespectful to their audience when they farm out all their social media for someone else to manage.”

For those who need some extra encouragement to move beyond “vanilla” posts, social media coach Katie Lance says hopping on Instagram stories or Snapchat to share behind-the-scenes photos and videos of your day is a good first step.

The stories are quick to produce, they disappear after 24 hours and they allow your brokers, agents and network to have a better understanding of who you are and what you do.

Mix business and pleasure

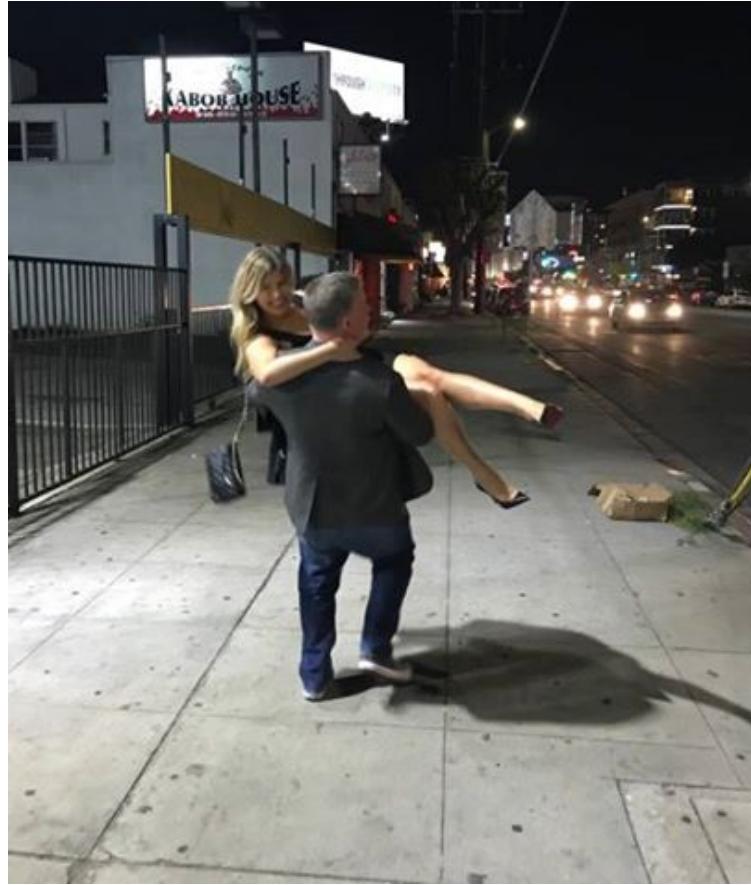
Listanski says the most influential real estate leaders on social media maintain a “yin and yang” balance on their pages — a mix of the rational (business) and emotional (personal).

Carey relishes the ability to share his personal life with his network and said he thinks of his Facebook profile as a gratitude journal.

“I post a lot about my wife, my kids, my dogs, my farm, the things that really make me happy,” he said.



Sharwan Srivatsaa



When your wife wears fancy shoes to dinner and then your friends suggest you go to another place after
#carrymrscarey #husbandduties

81

5

Share



Morgan Carey

For Carey, sharing those positive moments allows his network to have a better understanding of what motivates him and what matters to him outside of real estate. Furthermore, he said sharing your humanity helps build trust — an integral part of making sure you have a team and network that will be there for the long haul.

On the other hand, Rascoff says he doesn't share a lot about his family life, but he will occasionally share a cute picture of his dogs or his kids — just a little something that allows his followers to get a sense of who he is outside of Zillow.

Figuring out how to deal with criticism is a pain point for many leaders on social media, and each exec has a different way of handling it.

“Run toward problems,” said Carey of his approach to online criticism. “You have the opportunity to showcase how you conduct yourself in the face of adversity in that scenario.”

Carey said he’ll engage in conversation with an open mindset and, often times, the result is him gaining a new friend or learning a new way to improve his business. In other instances, he chooses to shut down the conversation when it becomes clear that someone wants to argue for the sake of arguing.

Chris says she prefers to handle criticisms offline. She has a team who keeps an eye on BHGRE’s various social media pages, and they acknowledge any criticisms, questions or concerns. From there, they’ll get the commenter’s personal information so they can reach out to address the problem one-on-one.

Rascoff, who has seen and heard his fair share of fiery comments while at Zillow, says “although there is much to be learned from those who disagree with you, I try to ignore the haters and trolls.”

Stay aware of your role as a brand ambassador and leader

While the key to being successful on social media requires authenticity and a willingness to step into the fray, it’s important for execs to remember they’re the face of a brand, and anything they say can reflect on the company as a whole.

Rascoff says a few tweets he made “about the importance of having a long-term orientation when running a company” on the eve of an earnings call caused an internal company dilemma — his public relations team thought followers could interpret the tweets “as us being likely to have bad upcoming earnings results.”

Rascoff and his team eventually decided to keep the tweets since deleting them could cause more speculation. What did he learn?

“Public company executives have to be extra careful about what they post, and when,” he said.

Beyond maintaining a positive personal and brand image, brokerage industry expert Russ



Spencer Rascoff

media representing. For CEOs, it is very difficult to do so other than as the leader of a company,” said Cofano.

“If the ‘posting voice’ is on behalf of the company or could be construed that way, there are plenty of business/political issues that can come into play, but the primary legal issues revolve around defamation, the release of confidential information into the public domain and in real estate, comments that might be construed as anti-competitive and possibly anti-trust violations.”

Cofano says execs would be wise to have their PR teams look over any social media statements to make sure they’re not inadvertently releasing nonpublic information — something he says could impact a public company’s stock price and create securities laws violations.

“If done right, social media can be a powerful tool that many executives use for the benefit of their organization,” he said. “At the same time, executives should understand all of the negative business, political and legal issues that may arise from a misguided post.”

Bring the online, offline

While social media is great for sparking a friendship or partnership, those relationships can’t thrive without in-person interactions.

Spark Tank Media CEO Jeff Lobb says execs need to stop jetting in and out of conferences and other events without talking to the brokers and agents who help their company succeed.

“Don’t be above the celebration, be a part of it,” Lobb said. “We sometimes forget these are the people who make the company work. So, we should never be above anybody.”

Lobb says execs should prepare to be put on the spot or asked questions they don’t have answers to. But those potentially nerve-wracking moments shouldn’t stop them from interacting with their network. In fact, Lobb says allowing your team to see you in those situations makes you more human.

“Fortunately, those who share and engage and make themselves more human gain the trust and the visibility of others, especially when it comes to the recruiting phase or the franchise sale,” he said.

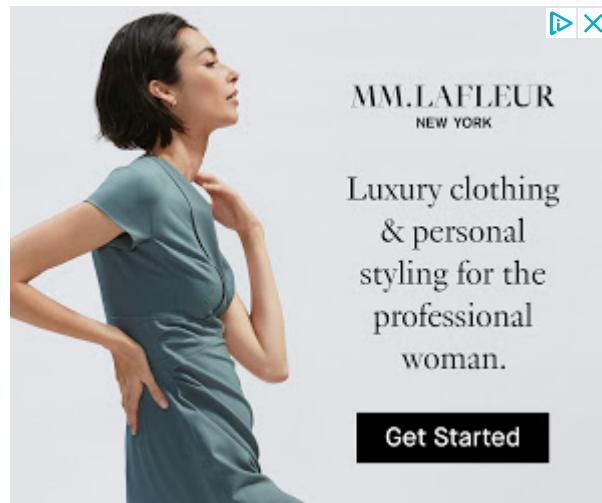
Each of the execs said they’ve been able to use their social media experiences to “minimize the distance” between themselves and their brokers, agents and consumers.

“I try to bring up things I’ve learned about people’s recent activities through their social posts when I meet them because it minimizes the distance from when we last caught up,” said Rascoff. “If I’m meeting with an agent I know well, I’ll check their Facebook or Twitter to see if anything notable happened in their lives — like a new team member starting or taking a great vacation — and ask about that.”

Follow Sherry Chris on Instagram (@sherrychris), Twitter (@sherrychris) and Facebook (Sherry Chris). Follow Spencer Rascoff on Instagram (@spencerrascoff), Twitter (@spencerrascoff) and Facebook (Spencer Rascoff). Follow Morgan Carey on Instagram (@morgancarey), Twitter (@morgancarey) and Facebook (Morgan Carey). Follow Sharran Srivatsaa on Instagram (@sharransrivatsaa), Twitter (@sharran), Facebook (Sharran Srivatsaa) and on his blog (sharran.com).

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