

# NABOR



SPRING 2009

A central image showing two hands, one from the left and one from the right, exchanging a white business card. The hands are positioned in front of two computer monitors on stands. The background is a teal circuit board pattern with a globe visible at the bottom.

## Don't Be Anti-Social

Take advantage of  
social internet networking

### **PLUS+**

Special Insert:  
Are your hands tied  
when doing short sales?

What's New in Naples:  
New properties, amenities  
and incentives



# Don't Be Anti-Social!

By Ginny Cooper

*Networking has long been recognized as essential in the real estate business. But are you taking advantage of all the social internet networking sites available today?*

A recent “googling” of “real estate social networking sites” yielded 285 answers, with the top listing being the most intriguing – a blog posted at the California-based 3 Oceans Realty website that asked the question “Just how many social networking sites does one industry need?” Facebook now supports more than 55,000,000 members, Buzzmetrics reports there are more than 66,000,000 blogs worldwide and more than 100,000,000 videos are watched on YouTube every day. Finding a social network that “fits” you is like, well, finding a house!

A hybrid of the words “Web” and “log”, a blog is essentially an online diary. Easy to establish and a cinch to maintain, blogs are quickly becoming the go-to source for information. Even mainstream media have turned to the ubiquitous communications channel. A search of the term “real estate blog” returned 3,230,000 of them!

One of those three million plus blogs is the creation of **Premier**

**Properties.** Located online at <http://premierproperties1.wordpress.com> the blog lists over three dozen testimonials and has recorded over 2,500 hits.

Features include videos, which are also posted on YouTube. Cathy McCarthy is the Executive VP who oversees marketing, including internet marketing. “I believe a good number of our agents are involved individually in social networking. As a corporate entity we have a blog which is updated almost daily. Our agents also send testimonials for posting,” she explains. Internet marketing experts will tell you Premier is doing the blogging thing right – posting intelligent content and constantly updating it. A minimum of two to three new posts per week is recommended for keeping a blog fresh, both in the eyes of the reader and the spiders that crawl through the Web searching for new content. McCarthy says she “Hasn’t noticed a direct correlation” between the social networking efforts and sales, although anecdotal evidence suggests guests find the blog through internet research.

## **A Bird in the Hand...**

Once you’re comfortable with blogging, it’s time to try micro-blogging. Twitter.com is a social networking site wherein users send out “tweets” – messages of 140 characters (characters, not words!) about what they’re doing at the moment. Twitter allows for instant communication to all of your “followers” – people who have a Twitter account and are signed up to “follow” you. If your followers have notifications set to their cell phones (What?! You’re not using an internet-enabled Smartphone? And you’re still in business?) you can reach them with breaking news such as a new listing, new sale or change in contract status. Used as a mobile intranet, agents within an office can instantly update each other on the office’s listings. But if you plan to use Twitter for business, please avoid “tweets” like “Just gave my dog a bath.”

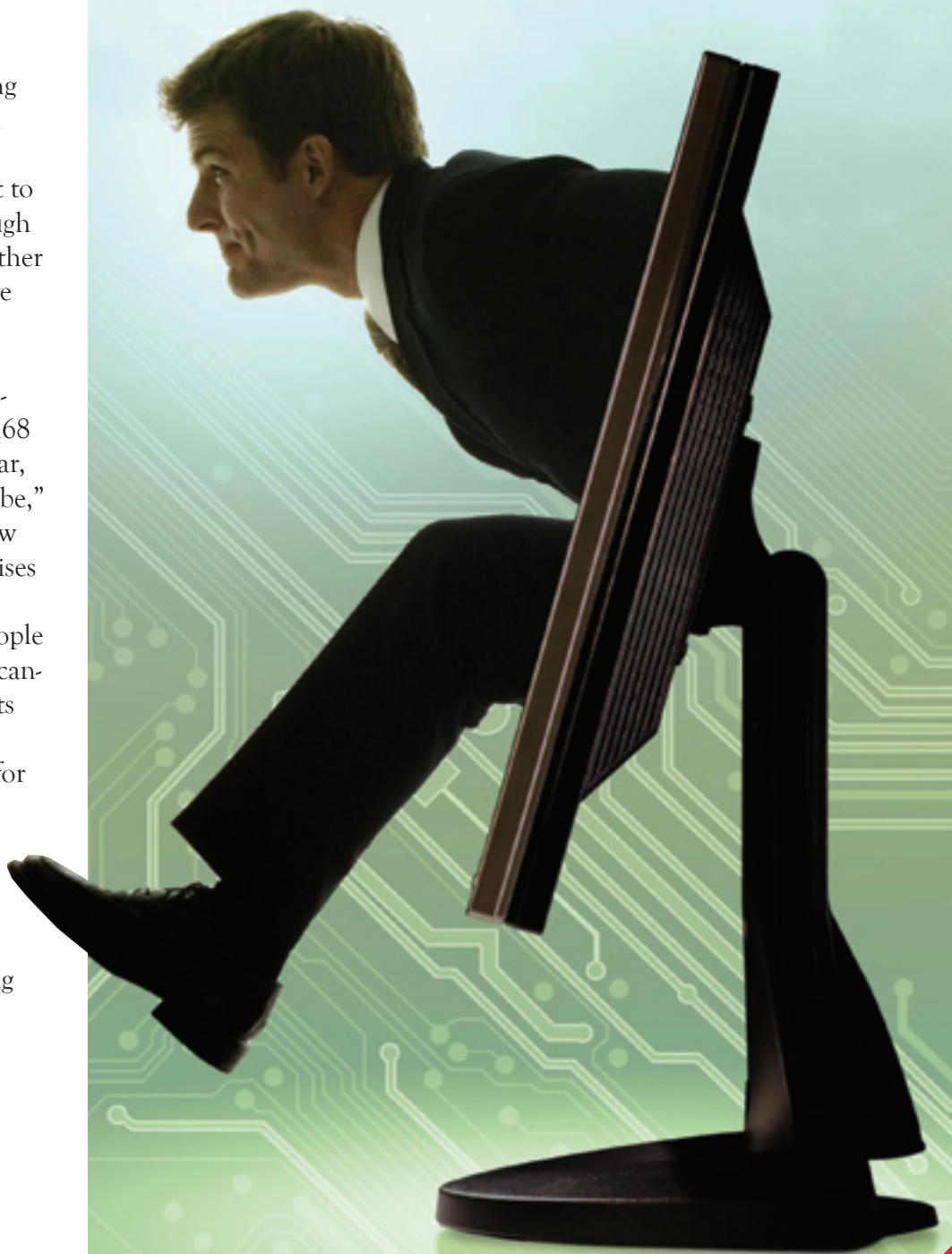
## **Be a Rainmaker**

Shannon LeFevre of John R. Wood REALTORS® is an “Active Rainmaker”. A few weeks ago she was notified by

the real estate social networking site ActiveRain that she was in the top 100 members earning points by contributing content to blogs, initiating contacts through invitations, and many of the other various methods members have of accumulating points. Keep in mind that's the **top 100 of 135,798** members (as of February 23, 2009) nationwide (15,168 in Florida). "ActiveRain is by far, hands down, the best place to be," says LeFevre. "Those boys know how to do SEO!" She also advises that "if you're strategic, you're going to attract the kind of people you want to work with. It's uncanny the way the type of prospects changed once I started social networking." Was it a change for the good? LeFevre says she did \$10 million in sales last year she can directly attribute to her social networking. Which sites? "I'm on everything", she laughs. "And I've been blogging for about three years now."

#### **Remember Me?**

Julie Mitchell, VIP Realty Group, Inc. is on Facebook and LinkedIn. Mitchell has



been using social networking for about six months now, and has yet to attribute any business directly to the effort. “What I love is that it’s a constant way to gently remind people what you do – even friends and family forget!” she says. “And when people are reminded of you, you become the go-to person when they have questions about real estate. To be successful in real estate you have to establish relationships and Facebook helps there. It’s not always about business; it’s about who you can trust.”

### Grandma Knows Best...

“When I saw my 80-year-old grandma learning to use the internet, I knew that’s where I had to be,” says Lori Young of Florida Home Realty. A five-year veteran of social networking, Young points to more than 27 short sale approvals

secured through her networking activities. “I get two to three buyer leads per day,” says Young, “and I never pay for a buyer lead.” Young does have a Facebook page and counts several of her bank contacts among her “friends”, but she is an enthusiastic proponent of ActiveRain. She blogs on the site, where she is adamant about homeowners not needing to pay for loan modification assistance. “I mitigate my own files, and the lender pays me – sellers should not have to pay anyone, I don’t ask sellers for any money.” The blog and the social networking profiles are a constant and prolific source for referrals from other agents. “It adds credibility when you can share experiences with other REALTORS®. We need to be very mindful of how we spend our dollars, and we need to stick

together. We network within our own office as well, maintaining a very positive, upbeat atmosphere.” However, even the best strategic social marketing plan is no substitute for face to face contact said Young. “You can’t find buyers when you’re sitting home in your pajamas.”

### Partners, Not Substitutes

Both of the industry giants – Zillow.com and Trulia.com – advocate working with a REALTOR®. They admit they are only as good as the information they get, and in this market, that information changes daily. Zillow.com is the epitome of social networking, a site for real estate where the base was laid by internet experts, but the content is built by readers. A true conversation, which is what – social networking is all

about. It’s difficult to keep up in this rapidly sliding market however. I searched my



own home and found a “Zestimate” of \$183,500. I wish! The house next door to mine sported a “Zestimate” of \$175,000. However, it sold recently for \$162,500, \$6,000 less than the previous sale. And the previous owners invested a bundle in upgrading the landscaping (not shown on the current photo) and having an interior designer totally redo the house. However, like Wikipedia, sites relying on reader input are only as good as...the input.

Promoting itself as a “delightfully smart partner” for house hunters, Trulia.com intrigued me by presenting a landing page targeted to homes in my neighborhood, including upcoming Open Houses. However, my neighborhood is not named “Jacaranda”, and both sites listed my home as a 2/2, however, it is a 2/2 with a den. So in an internet twist of “caveat emptor”, prospective buyers need to contact a real estate agent to get the real scoop.

## Where in the World Wide Web Are They?

### **www.ActiveRain.com**

“Our goal is to create a valuable resource of information and ideas for real estate professionals and their clients. We aim to help empower people by providing tools to help promote business and connect with peers all over the country.” This is the number 1 recommended social networking tool by Naples area agents interviewed for this article.

### **www.facebook.com**

“Facebook is a social utility that connects you with the people around you.” Used more for its social functions rather than business-like applications, Facebook nevertheless is a channel for establishing referrals.

### **www.LinkedIn.com**

“LinkedIn is an online network of more than 20 million experienced professionals from around the world, representing 150 industries. When you join, you create a profile that summarizes your professional accomplishments. You can add more connections by inviting trusted contacts to join LinkedIn and connect to you.” LinkedIn also allows contacts to post recommendations to your site. Your profile acts as an online résumé and the site is decidedly more professional than social.

### **www.RealEstateVoices.com**

“RealEstateVoices is a real estate social news site designed to help you discover the most interesting articles of the day, as voted and suggested by your fellow users”. Note: this is not a social networking site designed to establish links to buyers, sellers or other agents, it is an online, reader-generated forum.

### **www.RealTown.com**

“RealTown is the oldest and most respected real estate network featuring a variety of online communities as well as a wealth of community created content”. At press time, RealTown listed 123,666 members and its point2.com Web site listed 416 homes for sale in Collier County, 277 agents serving Collier County and 249 blogs on real estate in Naples.

### **www.WannaNetwork.com**

“We believe that our website allows you to have fun while you network with other real estate professionals across the nation. There have been plenty of real estate forums and industry focused social networking groups and blogs originated since we originally launched WannaNetwork.com in May of 2006. The main benefit with WannaNetwork.com is that we give our members their own self-branded free WordPress blogs specifically designed for maximum search engine marketing results.”



# What's New in Naples?

By Ginny Cooper

*With the multitude of properties on the resale market, it's easy to overlook the new, never-lived-in inventory. Here's a glimpse at new properties currently being marketed here along with what amenities and incentives they offer your buyers.*

## Top of Mind

Pulte is doing a “tremendous amount of advertising and internet marketing” to provide top of mind awareness to potential buyers, according to Jill Hoffman, vice president of sales and marketing. “The Internet is one of our biggest marketing tools,” Hoffman explained. While Pulte is not offering any new product at the moment, prices in the developer's popular communities are running up to \$45,000 off. “And builders are offering incentives in every one of our communities,” said

Hoffman. “For instance, at Twin Eagles buyers can receive a free golf membership.”

Among the three brands of Pulte (DiVosta and Del Webb are the others), every lifestyle a buyer could desire is offered. The townhome community of Verona Pointe appeals to the “DINK” (Dual Income No Kids) buyer or to those who are downsizing, while the Orange Blossom Ranch homes and Orange Blossom Grove homes are family-friendly with larger floor plans

and community amenities designed with families in mind.

Following the trend toward emphasis on lifestyle, the amenity-rich Verona Walk, with its miles of walking trails and town center offering personal service-type retail, creates a community that residents “really don't have to leave”, says Pulte Marketing Manager Erika Edwards. Inquiries about specific technologies or “green” building products are few according to Edwards, “we do get them here and there. But

Verona Walk Main Pool



Pulte is one of the top 'Energy Star Certified' builders in the country."

Each community Pulte builds is targeted to a specific market Edwards explained. "The active adult market buys for lifestyle first, home second. The family buyers on the other hand are looking at the home itself and buying for affordability," said Edwards.

It is the "affordability" factor that's creating the most competition among sellers in this economy, whether they are individuals, builders or developers. "There are a lot of really great

deals out there," Edwards agrees, "but the prices are going to be around forever!"

### **Been to Lely Lately?**

On its Lely Resort website, Stock Development asks readers "Been to Lely Lately?" And if you haven't, there's much to acquaint (or reacquaint) yourself with at this 3,000-acre resort lifestyle community. Emphasizing Stock's consistency in producing a product with unique architectural design and floor-plans, award-winning Vice President of Sales and Marketing Claudine Leger-Wetzel describes the rationale behind

opening a variety of new models for 2009.

"We have found that buyers in today's market definitely want to see, touch and feel the product and that is why we have opened 36 new models for the 2009 season, throughout our projects," she said. "People seem product-specific, there's no saying 'Oh I'll take a pink one of that'. That's why we've invested in new models."

One trend Wetzel noted was that people are focusing on lifestyle and want to live in communities that are completed, where

*The Strada at Mercato*





amenities are already delivered. They are asking “what’s the best value?” and rather than create complicated incentive programs, Stock has attracted buyers with bottom line pricing. Simply put, “We deliver,” says Wetzel.

With approximately 60% of sales effected with REALTOR® assistance, Stock continues their commitment to REALTORS® with a full time broker liaison, Terri Speech, who is currently the president of the Naples Women’s Council of REALTORS®.

### Seeing is Believing

Todd Kendall, Director of Development for Premier Properties of Southwest Florida, manages sales at Mercato in Naples. He agrees that prospective buyers want to see what they’ll get, especially when considering a unique-to-the-area concept such as mixed use development. “We’re basically asking people to move into a shopping center,” Kendall quips, “although it’s really a lifestyle center.” A lifestyle where residents “really have everything” and “will be treated like the VIP they are,” says Kendall.

To support the visual experience, Mercato is opening 10 models over the next two to three weeks as the development anticipates receiving its certificate of occupancy in April. “Brokers are extremely important to us,” said Kendall. “And that’s why we’re giving them the first look at Mercato with a week-long Broker’s Open House, with major Broker events.”

To further entice prospective buyers, a full equity membership in LaPlaya Beach Club, valued

at \$60,000, is included in the purchase of a residence. A beach shuttle makes access to the Gulf easy and convenient. Convenience seems to be the key selling point for the residential-over-retail units in The Strada. The 400,000-square-foot amenities deck, located on the third floor of the parking garage, includes a pet amenities area along with the facilities a buyer would expect to find in a luxury condominium development.

With the opening of the models, the Broker events and issuance of the CO, Kendall remains optimistic for the remainder of 2009.

### A Reflection of the Times?

Although Engle Homes’ parent company, TOUSA Inc., filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in January of 2008, the developer of Reflection Lakes in Naples continues to promote sales of this community and perhaps has a secret weapon in resident and REALTOR® Paul Strong.

“Engle builds a really nice product”, asserts Strong. With the clubhouse and amenities done and a well-managed HOA in place, Strong remains enthusiastic about the neighborhood he calls home.

“The developer has cut prices about as far as they can go,” Strong explained, when asked what incentives Engle may be employing to drive traffic and effect sales. “As of last week, they were still offering 100% financing if a buyer’s credit score was over 640.”

### Mining Your Own Business

At The Quarry, sales are ahead of last year and the construction pace is alive, according to sales associate Todd Arrowsmith. In November of 2008, Centex began incorporating the “Centex Energy Advantage”, a package of products and processes that produces homes that are 22% more efficient. In fact, the homes are 48% more energy efficient than those built just a decade ago Arrowsmith said. Coupled with the “Centex Energy Advantage” is an incentive program current at press time called the “10 & 10”, providing buyers with \$10,000 in closing costs and \$10,000 in financing options.

People are definitely buying a lifestyle at the Quarry, according to Arrowsmith. “That’s what the Quarry is!” Although no new models are planned, buyers can visit any of the company’s communities to get a visual on most of the available floor plans.

### From the Greens to the Green

Why bother with a little cheese and crackers open house, when you can host a legendary golf tournament at Southwest Florida’s only TPC Course? Treviso Bay, now home to the PGA Tour’s ACE Group Classic, showcased 17 new models during the tournament.

A special model home tour prize giveaway was highlighted, with 60 prizes awarded, including merchandise certificates, rounds of golf at Treviso Bay and TPC Sawgrass, and three people won a spot in next year’s ACE Group Classic Pro-Am event, according to Treviso Bay Director of Sales



and Marketing Wayne M. Martin. “This community is geared toward serious golfers,” Martin explains, “and reciprocal social and golf memberships are offered at all TPC in the U.S. But even if you don’t have a golf membership (a \$90,000 value), or a spa and club membership (at \$25,000), every resident has social privileges which are also reciprocal.”

That means access to what will be world class dining facilities. “This is the largest clubhouse under construction in the U.S. right now,” asserts Martin. “The Kuttemperoor family takes great pride in delivering what they say they will deliver.” And so construction continues at Treviso Bay although Martin says “We don’t have a magic wand, we’re working through this period of uncertainty like everyone else.”

Harwick Homes is optimistic about Treviso Bay as well. “We’re very excited about the community,” enthused Mark Smith, vice president and general

manager of Harwick Homes, a preferred custom home builder in the Pavia neighborhood. The company’s 5,100-square-foot Palazzina model was chosen for Treviso Bay.

For a company that has always been on the cutting edge of technology in its products, making sure that the home was as “green” as possible was a consideration. “When we were approached to go into Treviso Bay, we thought it was a great opportunity to see how “green” we really were. We took our original design to Dr. Jennifer Languell of Trifecta Construction, a green building consultant, to determine what changes we needed to make. To our delight, the only thing we needed to do to earn the designation of “Certified Florida Green Home” was change out some of the landscaping that was considered invasive,” said Smith.

Did the popular ACE Group Classic and the attendant

promotions drive traffic through Harwick Home’s Palazzina? “We had hundreds and hundreds of people through the home,” said Smith. “What many people are not aware of, however, is the financial commitment that the Kuttemperoor family has made to this community through VK Development. They have made a major commitment to this community and they’re not scaling back in this economy, but moving ahead as planned.”

### **Meanwhile, Everywhere Else...**

These pockets of activity seem to be the exception to the rule, according to CBIA President Tom Lykos. “There’s not a lot going on”, he mused. Developers and builders are doing one thing across the board to incentivize buyers, regardless of where they’re building: “They’re lowering prices as much as they can.”

*The Golf Club at Del Webb*

