



Social Media Policy and Procedures Real Estate Council of Alberta

Adopted: May 12, 2011

Last Update: May 12, 2011

“The goal of all Social Media is to engage people.”

Social Media Definition

Social media is the term commonly given to websites and online tools that allow users to interact with each other - by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. As the name implies, social media involves the building of communities or networks, encouraging participation and engagement. Social media is person-to-person communication; clearly thriving in what is now a people-driven economy.

Principles

Emerging social media platforms for online collaboration will fundamentally change the way RECA engages with industry members, related organizations and associations, and the general public. Social media initiatives, such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and the RECA Blog, will improve engagement, build relationships and strengthen brand.

How will we do this? By responding and adding value to ongoing dialogue. Twitter, for example, is not designed to merely serve as a mouthpiece for a business or organization. Though putting forward relevant information about your cause is important and valuable, your tweets should add to the information stream in a relevant, helpful way. For example, you might link to interesting articles outside of the RECA website, you can join an ongoing discussion regarding electronic forms, or provide information that solves a specific problem. Social media is about relationship building.

The cocktail party analogy helps to explain this approach. You wouldn't walk into a party, shake hands with a group of people you've just met and immediately begin talking about your wonderful business. This approach turns people off. The same rules apply to Twitter. This isn't the platform to send every marketing & communication message created. Why? As with any new relationship, you need to listen first, add relevant pieces to existing dialogue, and then start your own conversation once accepted into the fold. If you don't do this, people in the Twittersphere will block your tweets or report you as spam. Having said that, social media is an enormous opportunity for staff to contribute and create conversations relative to the real estate, mortgage brokerage and real estate appraisal industries.

RECA's overall goal through participating in social media is to communicate clearly, quickly and in an interesting manner with stakeholders.

Objectives

RECA's participation in social media has a number of objectives. Among them:

- Demonstrating RECA's commitment to serving as a source of impartial, third-party information (measured through re-tweets, click-thrus from Tweeted links)
- Building better two-way conversation with stakeholders (measured through number of mentions, number of direct messages)
- Provide a human face to the organization (measured through feedback from followers)

Who does this policy apply to?

These policies apply to all employees using RECA's social media tools as part of their job duties. Social media accounts will be managed by Communications. They will communicate on behalf of RECA on a general basis. They are responsible for, but not limited to, Tweeting about website updates, news releases, newly released information, attendance at industry meetings and trade shows. Blogging about things of interest to our followers.

Communications staff is also encouraged to respond to any general questions, comments or concerns pertaining to RECA or in the areas of business that RECA regulates. All monitoring and responses will be maintained by Communications.

Policies for Social Media Use

Included within this document are RECA's official policies for social media tools. Note that additional policies will be developed as RECA launches other social media initiatives. RECA staff will not use RECA's social media tools on behalf of RECA unless granted permission to do so by their director and/or coordinator.

Those who use RECA's social media tools on behalf of RECA must understand and follow these policies.

- Usage of social media tools can occur throughout the day for those staff members with access to a RECA social media accounts;
- Tweets from RECA Twitter account mentioned above are not required to be protected. RECA's Twitter account is encouraged to follow other Twitter accounts that relate to RECA's mandate; whether or not they choose to follow RECA. Some examples include Alberta industry members, AREA, CREB, AMBA, AIC, etc;
- RECA social media policies regarding who, when, what communication can occur should be made publicly available on the RECA website. RECA social media users are encouraged to use their communication tools to drive followers to the RECA website as much as possible, either to have questions answered, to find information and/or to read the latest news updates; and
- Following another user's Twitter account does not imply endorsement of that user or their business. Likewise, re-tweeting content from other users does not imply endorsement of the originator of the content.

RECA's Social Media Response Policy

RECA staff members will keep the following principles in mind when tweeting:

- Be professional; remember that you are an ambassador for our organization both on and off the job. Wherever possible, disclose your position as a representative of RECA;
- Do not use profanity;
- Do not endorse any industry members or service providers;
- Be responsible and honest at all times;
- Be credible, accurate, fair, and thorough;
- Don't disclose sensitive or "inside" information, make commitments or engage in activities on behalf of RECA unless you are authorized to do so. If you are in doubt, avoid any contribution until you have received express permission from your director or RECA communications. "If in doubt, leave it out";

- Stay within the legal framework and be aware that anti-trust, libel, copyright and data protection laws apply;
- Abide by privacy legislation and RECA's own privacy policies;
- Don't plagiarize;
- Post meaningful, respectful comments - in other words, no spam and no remarks that are offensive;
- Respect proprietary information and confidentiality of our industry members and of our internal operations;
- Avoid comments on politics, religion and other controversial topics;
- If participating in social media unrelated to RECA, be clear that the opinions you're expressing and comments you make are not on behalf of RECA. ("The postings on this site are my own and do not represent the views or opinions of my employer");
- Remember that your online comments are permanently available to all, and may be republished in other media; and,
- Above all else – use common sense.

A more thorough explanation of these guidelines includes the following:

Be honest and transparent. Social media is no place to hide. Identify yourself as a staff member. Remember that what you post will be available for a long time, as will photos of you and your personal comments. In other words, think before you post;

Be Fair. Do not badmouth RECA or other associations and, even more importantly, other staff, our leaders, industry members, and the profession in general;

Add value. Social media sites receive a great deal of traffic. The best way to get your post read is to contribute subjects or information your readers will value. Social communication from our association should help industry members, consumers and co-workers. It should be thought-provoking and build a sense of community. If it helps people improve knowledge or skills, build their businesses or solve problems, or if it helps them understand our organization better—then it is adding value;

Be Conversational. Social media is conversational, so talk to your readers like you would talk to real people in professional situations. Encourage comments. You can also broaden the conversation by 're-tweeting' others' comments;

Perception is reality. In online social networks, the lines between public and private, personal and professional are blurred. Remember that by identifying yourself as a RECA employee, you create perceptions about RECA by our members and by the public;

Write what you know. Make sure you write and post about your areas of expertise. Use the first person. Respect brand, copyright, fair use, confidentiality and financial disclosure laws. If you have any questions about these, see your director. Remember, you are personally responsible for your content;

Moderating Content: RECA encourages its staff to maintain a responsible and balanced online dialogue and believes the designated staff member has the responsibility to maintain adherence to that principle. However, RECA reserves the right to moderate content of employee postings. Should RECA staff exercise that prerogative, content moderation will be based solely on whether or not the content violates the law, or is offensive and/or denigrating to the organization or to personalities involved. Communications will monitor online conversations mentioning RECA through tools like Google Alerts & Social Mention;

Respecting Work Commitments: Social media responsibilities will not interfere with regular work commitments of the employee unless specifically assigned. RECA staff is expected to respect appropriate policies relating to work performance; and

Negative Postings: When dealing with postings that are negative about RECA, encourage the Tweeter to take the communication out of the public sphere. Provide a phone number of email address to the Tweeter for further discussion. Direct the Tweeter to info@reca.ca. This is particularly important when the discussions could involve specific individuals; be aware of limits brought on by privacy legislation.