

This article brought to you by **Commercial Investment Real Estate**, the magazine of the **CCIM Institute**.

To read the entire issue or find out more about the Institute, go to **[www.ciremagazine.com](http://www.ciremagazine.com)**.





# Social Media Savvy

## How are CCIMs capitalizing on this Web revolution?

by Rich Rosfelder

**Linda Gerchick, CCIM**, associate broker for Keller Williams Northeast Realty in Phoenix, was skeptical when her kids showed her how to set up a Facebook account. She knew that social media sites like Facebook and Twitter were becoming more popular among her peers, but she didn't see much potential benefit for her business. Soon thereafter, however, a fellow broker and Facebook user found Gerchick's profile and sent her a message asking if she

had any investor-owned multifamily properties available. She had three. "By the next morning, the contracts were in my inbox," she says.

Gerchick effectively stumbled upon what many business-oriented newcomers see as social media's ideal return on investment: a direct sale. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn now play a key role in many professional marketing programs, and, understandably, business users want

a quantifiable ROI. But in social media, traditional hard-sell campaigns often have the opposite effect. “The social media audience is very sensitive to push-style marketing,” says Bob Taylor, director of strategic business development and social media programs for DDM Marketing & Communications in Grand Rapids, Mich. “If all they ever see from you is advertising or messages about how great you are, they will block you or stop following you.”

Taylor worked for a commercial brokerage firm before becoming a social media expert. He knows that industry pros can’t afford to alienate potential clients right now. “The core asset any real estate professional has is his or her relationships,” he explains. “Yes, social media platforms offer Realtors another place to promote themselves and their listings, but more importantly the sites foster new relationships and help maintain current ones.”

Gerchick and other CCIMs are making these connections — and maximizing the ROI — by carving out their own unique space in the ever-evolving social media landscape.

### Get Out There

After her initial success, Gerchick began working on her Facebook profile at least eight times a day. “It changed my business life,” she says. Now hosting more than 300 million active users, Facebook offers a variety of ways for commercial real estate professionals to connect with colleagues and clients. Profiles and groups, which are distinct from business-only fan pages, are the most popular options among CCIMs.

To increase her virtual reach, Gerchick started a group called “Want to Buy Real Estate in Phoenix, Arizona?” The page includes a company logo, business and e-mail addresses, and a brief statement of purpose. While surfing Facebook, a Canadian investor found Gerchick’s group and sent a message expressing interest in purchasing an RV park in the Phoenix area. Thanks to her expanded Facebook presence, Gerchick currently is putting the finishing touches on the approximately \$3 million specialty transaction.

Michael K. Houge, CCIM, SIOR, chief executive officer and managing partner of Chief Real Estate Co. in St. Paul, Minn., sees similar deal-making potential in Twitter, a microblogging platform that lets users send and read messages composed of up to 140 characters. In addition to industry news and events, Houge disseminates property listings via Tweetlister, an add-on for creating and sending Twitter-friendly real estate listings to followers and their followers. But Houge, like Taylor, knows it doesn’t pay to be too pushy. “I don’t think my followers would appreciate me blasting properties to them every hour or even every day, but once in a while is OK,” he says. “Who knows, you might end up making a deal, after all, and that is the ultimate goal, isn’t it?”

### Find a Balance

The question of etiquette becomes more pressing when a social media account serves both professional and personal functions. Facebook and other platforms let users determine what content other people can view, but these settings can become unwieldy, especially when accumulating a large number of connections for professional networking.

Tom Rohde III, CCIM, vice president of Rohde Ottmers Siegel Realty in San Antonio has approximately 1,000 Facebook friends. More than two-thirds of those friends are colleagues, clients, and other business users. Instead of crafting a profile that appeals only to this segment of his network, Rohde mixes professional and personal elements without sharing too much. “I don’t post what I had for breakfast,” he says. Alongside photos of his real estate development projects, for example, Rohde’s Facebook friends see pictures from his latest fishing and hunting trips. “When I friend other CCIMs, [this personal information] helps open up a dialogue,” says Rohde, who has secured at least one lease through his Facebook activity.

In a forum that’s essentially public, does a line between personal and professional content really exist anyway? If something shouldn’t be said at work, it probably shouldn’t be posted on a Facebook profile. But as Taylor notes, “What’s wrong if one of your clients knows, for instance, that ‘My son scored two goals today — so proud?’ It humanizes you and engages your friends or followers in a new way.”

### Spread the Knowledge

As social media usage increases among real estate pros, it is fast becoming an indispensable repository of industry information. CCIMs who position themselves as experts on certain industry topics can generate connections through even the most restrictive platforms. “I tweet regularly about what I’m

## EXPLORE THESE SITES

To view the Facebook profiles and groups mentioned in this article, visit [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) and create an account. After providing the necessary information, you can friend fellow users and view their page content. But first you need to find them. Because Facebook profiles often contain nicknames, it’s best to search by last name and location or some other identifier. For example, Tom Rohde’s Facebook profile name is “Tommy Rohde.”

Twitter users also can be difficult to find, but you don’t need to create a Twitter account just to view tweets. Here are a few examples:  
Michael Houge: [www.twitter.com/1031properties](http://www.twitter.com/1031properties)  
Jerry Anderson: [www.twitter.com/Anderjer](http://www.twitter.com/Anderjer)





Linda Gerchick's kids introduced her to Facebook.

doing with distressed assets,” says Jerry Anderson, CCIM, executive managing director of Sperry Van Ness in Edgewater, Fla. “Last week an attorney from California who had been following me on Twitter asked if he could chat with me about his new job — managing the other-real-estate-owned department for a Midwest bank.”

Though Twitter and Facebook are gaining momentum, business-focused sites like LinkedIn are still the best places for CCIMs to establish themselves as industry resources. In addition to Twitter, Anderson has had success with CRE-Advice.com, a directory of industry experts that receives 200,000 visitors every month. “I wrote an article titled ‘Group Investment Is Now Hip’ and posted it on the CRE-Advice.com blog,” he says. “I received seven inbound calls from investors looking for an opportunity to invest with me based on my approach to the market.”

Last summer, Rod N. Santomassimo, CCIM, president of Mas-

simo Group LLC in Cary, N.C., generated a similar buzz when he uploaded his white paper “Today’s Brokerage Strategies for Tomorrow’s Market Leaders” to CRE-Advice.com and several LinkedIn groups. The document was discovered by David A. Morris, CCIM, senior vice president of Grubb & Ellis/Gundaker Commercial in St. Louis, who sent it to several colleagues, including Henry W. Hagen-dorf, CCIM, vice president of Grubb & Ellis in Houston. “Henry sent me an extremely complimentary e-mail, informing me that he and his partner were now using some of the tactics suggested in my white paper,” Santomassimo says.

Social media has made it so easy to access expert information that some real estate pros have started bypassing the Google search engine altogether. “There’s only so much time in the day to learn what’s happening in the commercial real estate market,” says Kurt R. Gies, CCIM, senior investment adviser for Smith Equities Real Estate Investment Advisers in Orlando, Fla. When Gies was curious about the status of the government’s Public-Private Investment Program a few months ago, he posted a question in a LinkedIn group. CCIMs from around the country sent him links to the most relevant and up-to-date PPIP coverage. Instead of wasting time culling search engine results, Gies found the exact information he was looking for. “It didn’t provide a financial return, but it helped me become more knowledgeable about the market,” he says.

### Optimize Your Exposure

Despite social media’s increasing pervasiveness, many commercial real estate pros and their potential clients are not updating their Facebook status or tweeting. Some of them may not even have a

## How CCIM Institute Uses Social Media

Through national advertising, marketing, and public relations campaigns, CCIM Institute promotes the value of the CCIM brand and the benefits of working with designees. As part of our designation promotion and member outreach efforts, the institute also actively participates in social media and provides a central place for members to exchange information on the three fastest-growing sites — Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. By monitoring these and other social media platforms, we can spotlight content that promotes CCIMs as industry experts and respond to inaccurate information.

The institute primarily uses three free services — Icerocket.com, Socialmention.com, and Google Alerts ([www.google.com/alerts](http://www.google.com/alerts)) — to listen to online discussions relating to the CCIM Institute, its members, and elected officers. Those services help us find blog posts, comments, tweets, or other items written by CCIM members or about CCIM. Because the institute has a larger audience than most individuals, we use that reach to promote CCIM members’ industry expertise. When we link to members’ blogs in Facebook or retweet chapter events and career announcements, the information reaches the thousands of fans or followers on our social media sites.

The institute also shares useful information on how to use social media effectively with our members. Last July, Twitter published “Twitter 101,” its first attempt to guide businesses in the effective use of Twitter. The institute linked to that publication in a tweet and received more than double the number of hits than any other posted link. Since then, we’ve shared information about how to live tweet, upcoming Twitter trends, and more.

In 2010 members will see more video messages on CCIM’s YouTube and Facebook pages, including regular updates from President Richard Juge, CCIM.

— Dennis LaMantia is communications manager for the CCIM Institute. Contact him at [dlamantia@ccim.com](mailto:dlamantia@ccim.com).

### CCIM Links

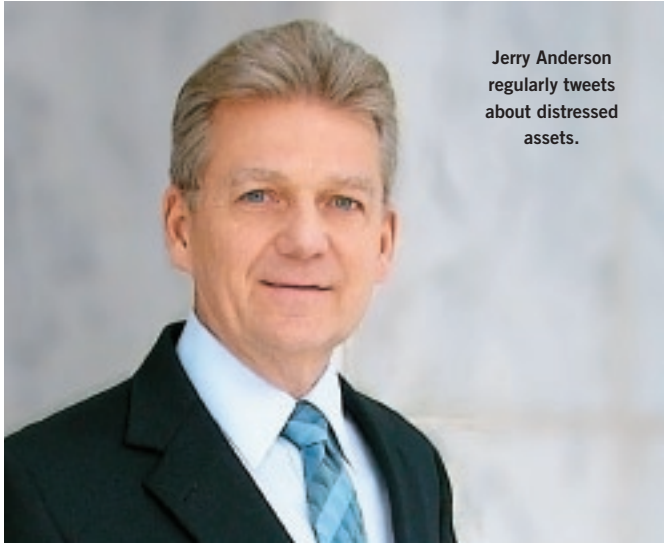
Facebook: [web.ccim.com/fb](http://web.ccim.com/fb)

Twitter: [web.ccim.com/twitter](http://web.ccim.com/twitter)

LinkedIn: [web.ccim.com/linkedin](http://web.ccim.com/linkedin)

YouTube: [web.ccim.com/youtube](http://web.ccim.com/youtube)

LinkedIn account or favorite blog. Most of them, however, are familiar with Google and other search engines. “I’ve found that one of the first things potential clients look for are search results on Google, Bing, and Yahoo,” says Palmer Bayless, CCIM, senior vice president of SRS Real Estate Partners in Atlanta. “If my information is accurate on social media sites such as LinkedIn, it helps immensely with my personal and company branding since all of these sites are indexed on the major search engines.”



Jerry Anderson regularly tweets about distressed assets.

A popular Web marketing tool, search engine optimization generally refers to the practice of editing a site’s content to increase the relevance of certain keywords and, in turn, improve the site’s ranking in search results. When applied to social media profiles and blogs, these modifications can help users make potentially lucrative connections. Anderson, for example, includes information about his nonperforming-asset expertise on all of his pages. “My recent speaking engagement in New York surfaced because the organizers Googled *distressed assets*, and I showed up on LinkedIn, Twitter, and blogs talking about the topic,” he says. Anderson connected with more than a dozen potential buyers after moderating a panel at the event.

Though many companies are hiring consultants to optimize their Web sites, social media users can make simple modifications to boost their search engine ranking. For example, Neil Victor, CCIM, senior adviser for Sperry Van Ness/Avat Realty in Huntsville, Ala., uses keywords like *CCIM*, *Huntsville*, and *multifamily* and posts frequently to increase his blog’s reach. And while Victor reaps the benefits of the high search-engine ranking (including at least one listing assignment), most of the site’s content is written by other bloggers and republished with permission. This allows him to spend less time working on his blog and more time working on the business it generates.

➔ **Rich Rosfelder** is associate editor of *Commercial Investment Real Estate*.

# Social Media Tools

Facebook and Twitter are growing at remarkable paces. Nielsen.com put Twitter’s monthly increase in users at 1,382 percent and Facebook’s at 228 percent. This rapid acceptance has led to a proliferation of third-party applications that supplement the social media experience.

**TweetDeck ([www.tweetdeck.com](http://www.tweetdeck.com)) and Seismic Desktop ([www.seismic.com/desktop](http://www.seismic.com/desktop))** — A desktop client lets you monitor multiple social media accounts. TweetDeck and Seismic Desktop are two of the most widely used desktop clients. Both are free and available for Macs and PCs. Seismic has a browser version — handy if you’re on the road — and TweetDeck has an iPhone version (Seismic’s is coming soon). Both feature multi-column layouts, allowing you to update and monitor your Facebook and Twitter accounts in one place.

**Tweetbeep ([www.tweetbeep.com](http://www.tweetbeep.com))** — A number of free tools can help you control the subject and the flow of content on Twitter. One such tool, Tweetbeep, allows users to set up e-mail alerts or RSS feeds for terms, locations, hashtags, and more.

**WeFollow.com** — By entering keywords, WeFollow helps you find tweeters with similar interests. In addition, others can find and follow you. Users enter up to five keywords to associate with their Twitter profile and site visitors can find the profile when they search those terms. For instance, if you are a CCIM who specializes in industrial property, you might tag your profile with the terms *industrial*, *commercial real estate*, and *CCIM*. Likewise, you can enter the term *industrial* to find Twitter users who have tagged their profiles with that term.

**Mashable.com** — This social media blog is a good source of information about these tools and other social media news and trends.

— Dennis LaMantia is communications manager for the CCIM Institute.

Contact him at [diamantia@ccim.com](mailto:diamantia@ccim.com).