A Twitter Toolbox
for Brokers

By Michael K. Houge, SIOR, CCIM

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Tweet! I can't think of a more irritating description for the phenomenally popular 140 character "mini-blog" found on Twitter.com.

What Is Twitter and Why Tweet?

You'd have to have your head buried in the "cyber-sand" not to have noticed the impact Twitter is making on the world of social networking, and possibly the world in general. This was evidenced by the Twitter traffic in Iran during the recent violent uprising and the current campaign by www.barackobama.com to "tweet your senator in support of health insurance reform." Not to be outdone, the conservatives have many tweeple (people who tweet) that keep their tweeps (followers) posted on the enemies on the left. One good example is RedState, http://twitter.com/RedState, which provides conservative news and community information. Strange, but as I write this, a tornado is ravaging the area, and a local record store is currently tweeting storm damage updates to

their tweeple! *Time Magazine* recently reported that there are 32 million Twitter accounts.

That said, I thought it necessary to link this popular web-based communication tool to the business of commercial real estate, by presenting real-world examples, techniques, and applications that will likely have you adding Twitter to your arsenal as you navigate a most difficult marketplace.

Twitter 101 and 201

Take a look at this link to view a short 2:23 minute video that does a great job of describing what Twitter is and how to get started. I would recommend that every "newbie" check it out. (www.commoncraft/twitter)

Basically, think of Twitter as another form of electronic communication that allows you to post (and read) very short messages in plain text or that often provide links to Web sites, articles, photos, videos, and/or audio files found on the Internet. You cannot attach files, photos, etc. to a Tweet, but you can link to just about anything you can normally send by e-mail or find on the Web.

I was asked not to make this article a "how-to," but I want to emphasize the ease of setting up a Twitter account, and why you should do that ASAP. According to Nielsen, Twitter

is growing exponentially—1,382 percent from February 2008 to February 2009! This means the best Twitter account names are being snapped up much like domain names were in the late '90s. Since Twitter accounts and their names are free, I would get one before someone gets the name you desire (including yours!) It takes less than five minutes to get started, but I'd suggest you set up a complete profile, which will take a little longer.

A Twitter account allows you to Tweet (or post) a message to anyone who decides they want to follow you. This is similar to Facebook: You see all posts from your "friends" when logged into Facebook—on Twitter you will see all of the Tweets from those you elect to follow.

The big difference is that with Facebook, you have the opportunity to confirm a "friendship" and allow or not allow access to your posts. With Twitter, you can be as open as you want in allowing access by "followers." You can approve or block them, but you are usually found by like-minded people who are interested in what you have to say. They aren't really called "friends" as in Facebook, because you might not know them at all. This may be one of the key benefits for a business or real estate practitioner. Just think of the possibilities.

Search
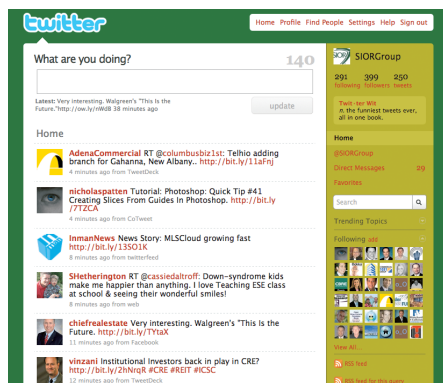
Twitter has a powerful search engine that allows you to search for key words or people throughout the entire platform. This means you can search and find people, businesses, jobs, posts, articles, videos, photos, etc. using a simple key word search, which results in the account

information, the account holder descriptions, and tweets or posts by the 32 million current Twitter users. Again, think of the possibilities.

Real Estate Twitter Ideas

Linking: Twitter allows you to post one link to a Web site of your choice. This is a very powerful feature, as it lets you link back to a myriad of market-making or service-oriented sites. You can link to:
- A company or personal Web site
- Your blog
- Your LinkedIn profile
- Your Facebook page
- Your listing
- Your charity
- An article you authored or were featured in
- A real estate organization (SIOR, CCIM, Colliers, etc.)
- Your community
- A development project

I'm sure you can think of many more, but you get the picture.

E-mail/Messaging: Twitter accounts are linked to an e-mail address. This allows you to get responses and direct messages, track followers, and/or manage follower requests. Again, think how cool it would be to get an e-mail from a tenant, user, investor, seller, landlord, applicant, employer, etc., who liked what they saw on your Twitter page and contacted you out-of-the-blue for an opportunity. The reverse is also true. Twitter users expect followers *that they do not know* to track their tweets and get to "know" them. You could reach out to the aforementioned with a direct message that could be text, links, photos, etc., since the message is, and acts, exactly like a tweet. Can you see some applications yet?

Branding: Twitter allows you to personalize or modify your Twitter account site. This allows you to add links, information, marketing, phrases, logos, photos, colors, and contacts that can be viewed by anyone who visits your Twitter site. There are so many marketing and business

applications to this feature that I'll leave it to your imagination. Your Twitter account site is like a miniature one-page Web site that showcases your tweets alongside your brand.
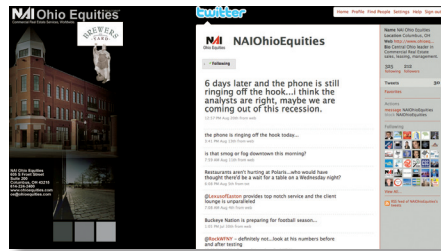
Google Loves Twitter

Twitter allows you to include a 160-character biography or description of you, your organization, company, development, property, charity, etc. This list is endless. Write a description that encompasses key words or phrases that best, and succinctly, describe whatever your Twitter account or site is trying to accomplish. This is a very powerful feature *and it is free!*

One thing I've noticed is Google loves Twitter! Soon after setting up my Twitter account(s) I found that Google indexed the accounts almost immediately, and when I searched for my company or my name, my Twitter accounts were ranked ahead of my previous Web placements, even if the prior result had been on the Internet for many years and had had significantly higher ranking. I am not an expert on Search Engine optimization (SEO) but if Google finds Twitter extremely relevant, who am I to argue?

Factoid: Google had 76.8 billion searches in July 2009. They command 67.5 percent of the market.

Tweets for Real Estate

I think you should consider setting up two (or more) Twitter accounts—one for business and one for fun. Why? Your business Twitter account can (and should) be an extension of your business. I don't think you need to shut down the personal side of your life on Twitter, but I think you will have a separate set of followers for your personal life, and these can be much different from those who follow your business tweets. Do you really think your business followers care to know your daily habits and thoughts on issues not normally part of the business world? There is nothing worse than reading a tweet like "I'm eating a ham and cheese sandwich." All tweets ought to assume that followers will read it and they *give a rip.*

Some business tweet ideas include:
- Post a new listing
- Ask for advice
- Find or seek an employee or a job
- Provide a link to your blog
- Announce a closing
- Herald a success
- Provide a link to an article
- Link to a pertinent Web Site
- Promote a new…
- Praise a client or colleague

If you are consistent in Tweeting this type of content, mixed with a smidgen of your real or private life, I guarantee you will accumulate followers and that, in turn, can generate business opportunities.

Brand/Reputation Tracking

Many companies, organizations, politicians, celebrities, and ordinary people use Twitter to track what is being said about them in the "Twittersphere" (another irritating word). In today's litigious society, it is always a good idea to keep track of what people are saying about you. Additionally, awareness of your brand is a key component of your overall marketing strategy. Why not leverage the power of Twitter to enhance your brand awareness, at no charge!

Twitter Applications, Add-ons, and Tools

Early on, Twitter, like Apple's iPhone, opened up their API (Application Programming Interface) to developers and third parties to allow for better and easier usability of Twitter. This has produced a seemingly never-ending list of applications, add-ons, and tools that can enhance your Twitter experience. Here is a list of six tried and true Twitter applications, along with brief descriptions.

HootSuite: (www.hootsuite.com) A twitter client that manages multiple Twitter accounts or profiles, schedules tweets, and measures your Twitter effectiveness. Hootsuite links to Facebook.
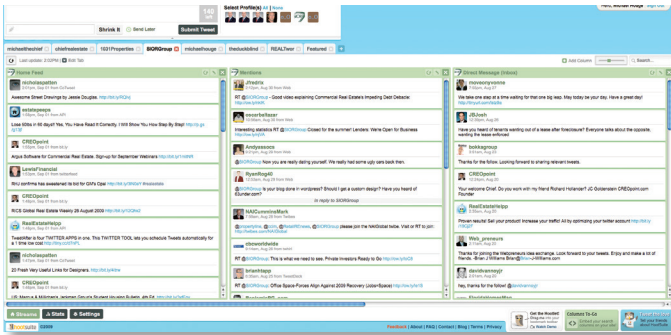
TweetDeck: (www.tweetdeck.com) A Twitter client that allows you to organize, update, and react to all of the tweets, direct messages, retweets, etc. that you get over multiple accounts. TweetDeck also interfaces with Facebook and offers a free iPhone application.
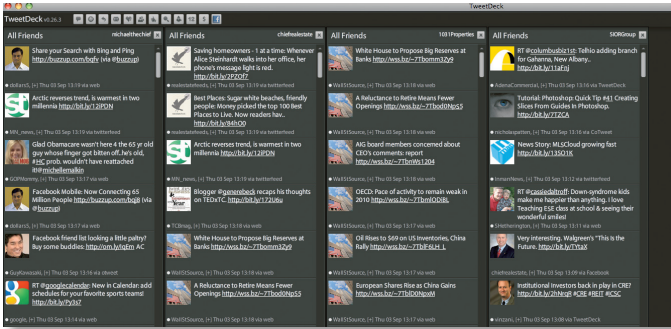
Twitpic: (www.twitpic.com) A photo interface to share photos on your Twitter accounts.
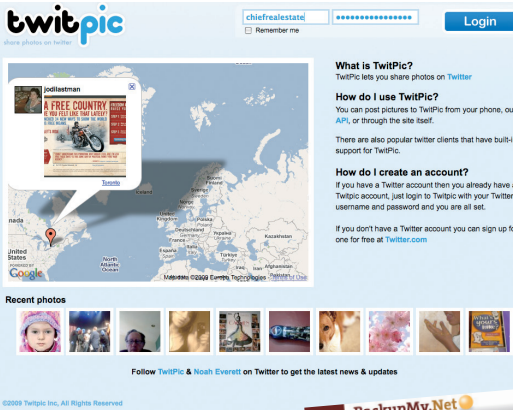
Back Up My Tweets: (www. backupmytweets.com) Hackers, bad guys, viruses—oh my! Yes, even Twitter can be taken down. You might need one (or all) of your Tweets for future reference. This *free* service will back up multiple Twitter accounts, just in case.

GroupTweet: (www.grouptweet.com) Broadcast messaging to your private group of Tweeps. This handy application can be used for a company, organization, brokerage team, office building, etc.

TweetLister: (www. tweetlister.com) This is a real estate listing service that allows you to post properties for sale or lease, complete with forms that are similar to those used on other Web based listing services. Did I mention that it was free?

There are many tools to enhance your Twitter experience, but you'll have to try them for yourself. (See the list on page 8.)

Is Twitter a Fad?

There are many who think Twitter is a complete waste of time and possible a fad. They may be right! If Twitter is used only as a way for friends to keep in touch and let each other know what they are eating, I think it will end up getting crushed by Facebook. Facebook has more than 250 million users and is consistently enhancing its Web site to compete with Twitter and MySpace. This competition should spur Twitter to step up and provide better service, more enhancements, quality add-ons, and most importantly, a clear way to bring in revenues. If this does not happen, we'll add Twitter to a long list of once powerful entities of the digital world. Do you remember? Compaq, Netscape, Prodigy, Wang, Commodore 64, InfoSpace, WebCrawler, Inktomi, MapBlast, Visio, Sperry Corp., Burroughs Corp., and on and on and on.

Final Thoughts

As with any tool, you need to use it to get any value from it. Twitter is an amazing application tool that can be used to expand your digital footprint and potentially your business, networking, opportunities, and ultimately your revenues. Oh, did I say it is *free*?