



Cultivating Online Communities

By **Caroline Heller**

Nobody likes a troll; the kind who wreak havoc in a virtual community or forum. Many agents are either members of or run their own online communities—digital places where people can come together to discuss common interests. But, when it comes to running an online group, the important thing to remember is cultivating a sense

of community is just as important online as it is offline. In other words, do not feed the trolls.

Named one of the Top 200 Power Social Influencers, Brian Copeland, CRS, owner of Doorbell Real Estate in Nashville, Tennessee, gives his advice on how to use digital forums to covertly convert internet users into clients.



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Harmonize the “real-life you” with the “online you”

Give people the chance to meet you in real life. “If people can’t meet the ‘real-life you,’ then you’re missing the opportunity,” says Copeland. You have to go to in-person events just as much as you are being an online presence. For example, Copeland runs a local Facebook group called “Neely’s Bend Neighbors” and goes to events like Kiwanis breakfasts to meet the people he interacts with online.

You also have to be an authentic version of yourself online. “Let me tell you a little story about what I call ‘Corn Chip Dissonance,’” says Copeland. “For years, my grandmother would always have a bowl of corn chips on her table that she would never let me eat. When she finally let me eat one, I took a bite and realized that the corn chips didn’t have salt on them. I hated them! Don’t be the corn chip.”

The morale of the story: “You’ve got to be the same person they expect to meet,” says Copeland.

Add to the comfort not the chaos

“As REALTORS®, our brand is home,” says Copeland. “Do people want chaos in their home or comfort? When you are not only administrating an online community, but are present in an online community, you should always be the voice of calm, comfort and sanity.”

In other words, no one wants a troll in their home. “You have a choice when you decide that you are going to comment on something,” Copeland says. “You can either add to the chaos or add to the comfort.”

Instead of jumping into a political conversation or putting on a partisan hat, be the voice of reason instead.

Don’t walk in with a billboard of yourself

Treat the online community as you would a party. “Just as I wouldn’t go to a party, walk into a room and yell, ‘Hey, I’m a REALTOR®, refer to me,’ I wouldn’t go into an online forum shouting for referrals,” says Copeland. A common mistake that REALTORS® make is using online communities, say a neighborhood group, as a way of posting listings.

“People have Realtor.com for finding listings,” says Copeland. Even though he runs an online community that includes his neighbors and sales market, Copeland doesn’t use the virtual space for posting listings or explicitly marketing himself.

Make sure some information is visible

When it comes to Facebook and Facebook groups, you want to make sure that people know what you do and are able to contact you. “Make sure your personal Facebook page has some photos that are public,” says Copeland. “Also make sure your sales market information is there and at least your

email address.” People want to see photos of you as a way of determining if you’re a real person or not. If they can’t quickly find a way of contacting you or don’t know what areas you cover, they are going to move on.

Tap into your passions and hobbies

Join as many online communities and Facebook groups as you can, especially ones that interest you. Copeland is a member of a number of online communities that align with his interests and hobbies—from ATV riding to photography. He says his hobby of photography netted him over \$5 million in one year alone.

“Case in point: In 2011 or 2012, I started a group called ‘Neely’s Little League,’” says Copeland. “And early on I took a photo of a little boy at bat and posted it to the forum.” Copeland says that last year a family reached out to him about selling their home.

“When I walked into the house, they had that photo on their mantle. ‘This is why we picked you,’ they said. ‘You took our favorite photo of our son, and soon he will be leaving for college on a baseball scholarship. We owe you,’” Copeland says. You never know where your hobbies might lead you and what doors they might open. **TBS**

For more on getting started with a Facebook community, check out the tutorials at facebook.com/business.

MARKET MOMENT

Builder Bargains

Homebuilders cut prices for newly built homes in 2023 as the slow start to construction in 2022 resulted in a glut of unsold inventory.

The slowdown was caused by lower demand for homes due to rising mortgage rates and the fact that more Americans are renting instead of buying. The increase in rental stock has resulted in less demand for new homes and has pushed builders to cut prices to clear out inventory.

In addition, inflated prices combined with lingering shortages of building materials have further dampened builders’ taste for new home starts.

There have been a lot of signs that the market is slowing down—the main cause being interest rates hikes—but this is one of the first concrete signs that this slowdown has begun to impact builders.

So, what does this mean for 2023? It means we’ll see even more price cuts and slower construction starts as builders try to manage their inventory so they aren’t stuck with too many unsold homes on their hands.

Robert Dietz, chief economist of the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB), offered a prediction that the pace of new single-family starts would continue to slow through the first half of 2023 and begin climbing once the Federal Reserve Board can stabilize interest rates.



New Privately-Owned Single Housing Units Started in the U.S.

(Measured in thousands of units)

January 2022	1,157
February 2022	1,213
March 2022	1,191
April 2022	1,173
May 2022	1,073
June 2022	1,013
July 2022	900
August 2022	923
September 2022	893
October 2022	859
November 2022	807
December 2022	879
January 2023	841

% Change from January 2022 to January 2023: **-27.3%**

Source: U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

On average, builders have reduced their prices by

6%,
according to the NAHB.

Source: USA Today