

# The Snapchat secrets behind this agent's social-media success

Sereno Group, the no. 4 player in the Silicon Valley real estate market, talks about its progress on social media after 10 years in the business.



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## Key Takeaways

- Snapchat can be used to make a human connection with clients -- show them a day in the life of a real estate agent and the work involved.
- It can also be a tool to connect agents with other agents -- or as an intra-

brokerage communication platform.

In 2006 — even in Silicon Valley (<http://www.inman.com/2015/10/06/silicon-valley-broker-ken-deleon-is-killing-it-with-an-agent-employee-model/>) — brokers were having serious conversations about this new Facebook (<http://www.inman.com/2015/12/22/how-to-rake-in-the-facebook-leads-as-a-complete-beginner/>) platform and whether it was relevant to their business.

Saratoga childhood friends and neighbors Ryan Iwanaga and Chris Trapani set up their real estate company, Sereno Group (<http://www.serenogroup.com/>), in 2006 — and they decided they should look into it.

Ten years on, they have grown from 30 to 275 agents — with nine offices from Santa Cruz to Los Gatos to Palo Alto — and a sales volume of \$4.2 billion in 2015.

Today, Facebook (<http://www.inman.com/2015/12/09/how-to-create-a-facebook-page-that-drives-leads-to-you/>) is a given. The new social media names being talked about are Instagram (<https://www.inman.com/2016/03/17/16-easy-ways-to-dial-in-your-instagram-marketing/>) and Snapchat (<http://www.inman.com/2016/01/25/why-im-jumping-on-snapchat-in-2016-and-why-you-should-too/>).

“Everything, the whole business and how you market yourself, has changed,” said Iwanaga.

“I know that with the younger set who grew up with it, it’s the reality. For us coming from the old model of brokerage ... it’s a new opportunity,” he said.

The two Sereno Group founders have taken pains to build a collaborative, philanthropic company culture — the better to compete against big brokerages — and they have attracted a number of successful independent agents to the business.

## **Look for early adopters**

Alex Wang

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In 2012, Alex Wang (<https://www.inman.com/2015/07>)



/29/alex-wang-on-his-hyperlocal-yelp-strategy/), owner of his own boutique real estate business, Rainmaker Properties, joined Sereno Group with his staff and was appointed to the company's leadership team.

The self-acclaimed real estate evangelist is now leading the Snapchat charge at the company's office in Palo Alto.

"He's a very good early adopter," said Iwanaga. "He's not afraid to take a leap and get out there.

"His sensibility is to look at the tech and be on the leading edge," he added. And Wang is a mentor to everybody.

Iwanaga describes Snapchat as "uniquely brilliant" when used in the right way.

"In his daily journal on Snapchat, Alex is sharing his insights about the business," Iwanaga said.

"One of the challenges of real estate is how to educate others on the issues you face in the business. For people who think, 'How hard can writing a contract be?'

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**#real estate agent Alex Wang has a daily Snapchat journal. (<https://twitter.com/share?text=%23real+estate+agent+Alex+Wang+has+a+daily+Snapchat+journal.&url=>)**

“The reality is, it’s a grind. You are living the life of a Realtor every single minute of the day.”

## **What to snap about?**

Wang — whose production numbers were \$50 million last year and are \$20 million to date for 2016 — is bringing his personal stories to Snapchat videos as well as talking about industry issues that are top-of-mind.

He also likes to speak about the tech he is using with other agents in the firm and outside.

“What I wanted to do on Snapchat was to record different things I do on tech,” he explained. “I wanted to share with other agents, people who have not had a chance to use it, and show them how tech has helped me.

“It’s good for inexperienced agents to see what a top producer does, and also it’s good for the general public. They don’t know how hard it is, the grind of our business. They think it is like a reality TV show — driving around in fast cars, cashing big checks and having parties, but a lot of it is not like that.”

On Snapchat, Wang talks frankly about the struggle of balancing the life of a busy real estate agent (<http://www.inman.com/2016/01/21/17-creative-ways-for-agents-to-salvage-work-life-balance/>) and raising three kids.

“It’s not about getting business, but more about sharing who I am,” he said.

The Sereno Group agent also uses Snapchat to market listings.

Wang said his informal Snapchat daily journal is read by other agents and consumers alike.

“It is much more real. These are one-take snaps — I take a snap and post it and don’t try to curate it.”

Like any other social media, you have to promote it, he said. “That’s why it’s important to cross-pollinate across channels like Twitter and Facebook,” he said.

After nearly three months of being active on Snapchat, Wang said he is finding increasing numbers of agents are taking to it.

### **The short life of a Snapchat message makes it more valuable**

One thing to remember about the platform is the message disappears once it is read. Because it disappears, the engagement is much higher compared with email or text, said Wang.

“The eyeballs are much more focused on the content with that engagement,” he said.

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**“The eyeballs are much more focused on the content (<https://twitter.com/share?text=%E2%80%9CThe+eyeballs+are+much+more+focused+on+the+content+&url=>)**

His daily diary is part of a 24-hour story cycle, disappearing every 24 hours.

“I have about 50 agents looking at my snaps, compared with 2,000-plus followers on Twitter,” said Wang.”

“But the 50 viewers watching my snaps are so much more engaged with me and my content than the 2,200 followers that I have on Twitter,” he said.

What the agent appreciates about Snapchat is its no-frills, informal approach.

“It’s pretty amazing how fast and raw the content can be,” said Wang.

The way he sees it, nothing is as it seems on real estate reality TV shows (<http://www.inman.com/2015/08/31/how-reality-tv-is-causing-headaches-for-real-estate-agents/>) — events tend to be re-enacted, working backward. Even with Instagram, a lot of the content is filtered and curated.

“Everyone is a no. 1 producer on some list,” said Wang. Snapchat brings a “transparency” to your image.

## **The Snapchat audience is ‘aging up’**

“If anyone is 21 years and younger, they are on Snapchat (<http://www.inman.com/2016/01/29/build-snapchat-following/>) for sure,” said Wang.

And in a few years’ time, they will be looking for a house.

Meanwhile, growing numbers of their parents are on Snapchat (<http://www.inman.com/2016/01/19/whats-value-snapchat-real-estate-agents/>), too — just as parents started going on Facebook a few years ago, following their offspring.

“It’s already ‘aging up,’ becoming more the go-to form of communication for many people,” said Wang.

The agent found that in his Palo Alto office, members of his team already had Snapchat on their phones — but they weren’t using it for work, they were using it to message their children.

Wang said he is now using Snapchat like a default camera.

“I was at a fundraising event on the weekend and handed my phone to someone to take a photo on Snapchat — it was interesting to see the majority knew of it.”

What has it done for his business to date?

“I’m not necessarily finding new business,” Wang said, noting that it’s easier to reach out to consumers via Twitter and Facebook, “but the referral business is

amazing coming from agents across the country,” he said.

“I have connected with so many agents about Snapchat,” said Wang, who has more ideas for ways the platform can be used.

## **Use Snapchat for internal communications**

If a company had all of their agents on Snapchat, it would be a faster, more intimate way of communicating, he said.

“It would be a great way to communicate about new listings, for example,” said Wang.

The agent recently made a connection with another Sereno Group agent he hadn't met before from the Los Gatos office.

“We just exchanged a video message and are figuring out a time to meet. I am answering questions through snap. He's following me.”

Iwanaga, who is more active on Instagram than Snapchat, said he has been inspired by Wang's use of the up-and-coming social media platform.

“Wouldn't it be a cool thing to have a day in the life of a manager or a broker on Snapchat and Instagram?” he said.

He could discuss issues that were relevant to current market activities — common escrow challenges, for instance.

Meanwhile, he is watching Wang's progress on Snapchat with interest.

“By putting himself out there, Alex is saying: ‘This is me, this is who I am.’ It's a look inside the life of a Realtor — a dialogue with the real estate community.

“It is a good way to show the consumer that we are people too — we have families; we laugh and cry like everybody else. That's what Alex is trying to create in Snapchat.”

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