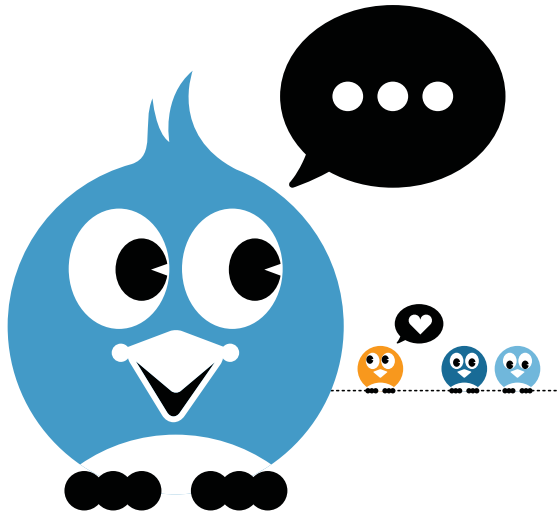


All A Flutter About Twitter



Twitter may prove to be a fad, but it's the easiest of social networking sites to use and lots of companies are making their presence felt.

ANNMARIE HANLON and **JOANNA AKINS** explain the potential benefits and what's involved

Social networking provides a way to connect people of similar interests, regardless of geography, on a website. A wide range of social networking sites provide networking tools for individuals and for businesses, depending on the site. Twitter was initially about answering the question, "What are you doing?", in less than 140 characters, via texting, instant message, or the web. A message on Twitter is known as a 'tweet' and people adding messages are said to be 'tweeting'.

Twitter started in 2006 and gained momentum in 2009. Popular with celebrities and politicians, Twitter is now being used by journalists, big brands, local councils, sports clubs and smaller businesses, as well as individuals in all walks of life. Increasingly, Twitter is being used by businesses worldwide to communicate with customers, potential customers and influencers.

The power of Twitter is that, although it is a web-based application, you can tweet from many mobile phones using applications such as Twitterfon. Wherever you are, whatever your experience, whenever it happens, you can share it with the world. You can give instant feedback on customer service, share information about airport delays, political changes, even the weather and

you can get real-time opinions about places or events.

Twitter is free of charge, but it does require some time to get to grips with. You need to:

- decide how you can get the best use out of Twitter (to raise your profile, engage customers, gain feedback, promote new products)
- create a Twitter account
- start tweeting
- gain followers and follow other people.

What can Twitter do for your business?

Many people do not understand Twitter initially - they just 'don't get it'. Frequent questions and comments include "What is the point?" and "It's such a waste of time". But one of the fastest-growing business segments online is creating applications to make Twitter more useful for companies, and Twitter can add value to businesses in the following ways:

- Comments on Twitter are indexed by Google within hours, improving your search profile.
- Your tweets can drive traffic to your website.
- Company news can be seen by journalists and potential customers as it happens.

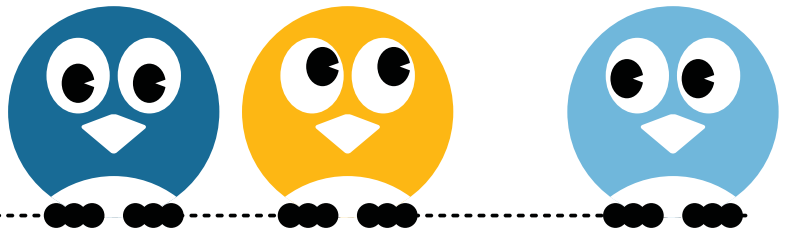
- You may have contact with people who may not normally take your phone call.
- Promotional messages can be promoted to a wider audience than your existing customers, with the explicit endorsement of those who retweet them.
- Twitter raises your company's online profile.

In addition, using Twitter you can:

- Promote time-limited offers - the last few seats for a movie starting in 30 minutes time, for example.
- Create and organise events online and 'tweetups' offline - using Twtvite.
- Make coupons for special offers for Twitter customers - using Twtqpon.
- Post jobs and get applications online via Twitter - on Twtjobs.
- Provide customer service and gain feedback from customers on products or services.
- Test and promote new products.
- Build mailing lists.
- Create a Twitter business card - Twtbizcard.
- Have conversations with customers.
- Monitor your brand.

Using Twitter, or any online tool, should be part of a wider marketing plan. Rather than considering a specific tool in isolation, think about your objectives and what your company is trying to achieve.





Once you have decided what you want to achieve, you can decide your approach. Good business tweets need to be informative, useful and or good enough to share. You can tweet about:

- New products or services (not hard sell).
- New blog posts.
- Asking or answering a question.
- Facts and figures.
- Local breaking news.
- Information that may be of interest to your customers or followers.

The best way to manage Twitter is to allocate ten minutes at the start of your day to update what you are doing. Note that if you open a Twitter account and don't use it, Twitter will close it.

How can Twitter generate sales for your business?

There are several ways to generate sales via Twitter. First, promote yourself as an expert, which can be achieved by:

- Tweeting tips on your subject.
- Promoting events such as a webinar.
- Answering questions that other Twitterers ask.

This may lead people to ask you to do work for them. You can use Twitter to look for business too. If you are a website designer, you can set up a search column in Tweetdeck to return results for 'website designer' or, more specifically, 'can anyone recommend a good website designer'. These results provide you with an opportunity to contact the person tweeting directly and to sell them your services.

Alternatively, you can pay for advertising on Twitter, using the services below or others:

- TwittAd. Twitter users can post ads on their Twitter profile.

- Advertisers select categories of Twitter users, demographics and location.

- Be A Magpie: An advertiser creates their ad message and selects keywords that will help identify the best Magpie-Twitterer for the campaign. The advertiser then sets their budget, giving them complete control over the spend on a single campaign, and the number of Twitterers that can be reached for this budget is automatically calculated and displayed. Magpie identifies the most influential Magpie-Twitterers for a campaign based on the selected keywords. If there are competing advertisers for a Magpie-Twitterer, an automated online auction will commence. Bid prices are guided by the budgets previously set.

What are 'tagging' and 'retweets' on Twitter and how do you use them?

A tag is like an electronic highlighter pen; it makes it easier to spot a particular word or phrase on a page when you're searching later. In Twitter, 'hashtags' that use the symbol # are used to #tag tweets. This means you can contribute to a conversation where a specific tag is used - for example, #interior design news or #marketing update.

A retweet (RT) is where someone repeats your tweet. It's like forwarding an email to all your followers. If your tweet is 'retweeted' - for example: RT @annmariehanlon Top marketing blog see <http://business2businessmarketing.blogspot.com> - it means that it will be seen by anyone who follows the person who retweeted you, giving you and your tweet more exposure.

blogspot.com - it means that it will be seen by anyone who follows the person who retweeted you, giving you and your tweet more exposure.

You can also retweet useful tweets yourself and share the information with your followers. The benefit of retweeting is not only that you share information with your followers that you and they might not have had access to otherwise, but also that your retweet is seen by the original tweeter who, if they are not already following you, may decide to follow you.

How do you find and get followers on Twitter?

It's not a business card competition. There are people on Twitter with tens of thousands of followers (they are known as 'whales') but, for most businesses, quality is a better plan than quantity. We do not recommend that you auto-follow people who follow you. Be selective, as otherwise you will waste lots of time reading tweets of no relevance to you or your business.

- **To find followers:** Use the 'advanced search' function in Twitter to find people with similar interests - for example, you can use #sailing to find people interested in sailing. Leading on from this, look at the followers of people you are following or find interesting. Using 'whois' and their name - for example, 'whois brianokane' - will show you their brief biography. Online tools - for example,

continued on page 82

Amazing Domain Prices

.mobi .eu .info .com .tel .fm

& So Many More. But hurry! Must end soon. Blacknight is ICANN accredited

sales@blacknight.com www.blacknight.com Intl: +353 (0)59 9183072
UK: +44 (0)844 484 9361 US: +1 213-233-1612



Who Should I Follow - will make recommendations based on your current followers and location.

● **To get followers:** Ask a question, asking your followers to retweet (repeat) it. Reply to someone else's question and their followers will see your response. Recommend people you're following on Friday, using #ff or #followfriday. Add links to photos, as these create interest. Use a URL shortener to make sure the



link fits within the 140 character Twitter limit. Add useful tweets which may be retweeted. Use #hashtags, as people will see you when searching for specific subjects.

A raft of Twitter directories are now available, including: WeFollow, Twellow, GeoFollow, TweetFind, Twitr and JustTweetIt. Visit them and get listed.

How can you harness your followers on Twitter?

Tips for using Twitter to harness followers include:

- Vary your posts - no one wants to see the same tweet repeated every few hours.
- Ask questions: "Can anyone recommend a good designer?" It shows that you are keen to interact and that you value other people's opinions. Some Twitter users have set up searches to pick up on keywords - in that case, a designer might respond directly to your request. Tweetdeck provides the facility to return search results for your keywords so you can respond quickly to those mentioning, for example, your company name.

The Twitter Language



Communicating on Twitter with so few words means that you need to be succinct. It also means that a form of Twitter shorthand has developed. For example:

- @username + message: This directs a tweet at another person which can be seen by their followers: @annmariehanlon we're attending the SME show in Dublin.
- D username + message: A D or DM sends a person a direct and private message. No one else can see a DM or Direct Message: D joannaakins Brian running late, delays in Cork.
- WHOIS username: Type a whois request into your Twitter box and it shows the short biography of the person, as long as their updates are not private: whois

joannaakins. (Twitter only lets you see this info for a few seconds.)

- GET username: This retrieves the latest Twitter update posted by the person but, if they have not tweeted for a while, it can take sometime: get brianokane.
- #hashtag: These are used to #tag tweets to make it easier for people searching on Twitter. They are the equivalent of Twitter keywords: #followfriday to see who people have started following.
- RT - retweet: These are like forwarding an email to all your followers. To credit the original tweeter, add "RT" plus the originator's username at the beginning of the tweet: RT @annmariehanlon this is a retweet example.

- If someone recommends you for #followfriday (when Twitter users encourage other users to follow a particular user to boost their followers), say 'thank you' and recommend them back if you think others might like to see their updates.
- Respond to questions or comment on tweets that other tweeters are posting.
- Direct message (DM) other Twitter users for more information.
- Respond to updates by saying 'thank you' for useful information.
- Search for mentions of your company name and respond to queries and complaints.
- Provide offers: 'Special offer for Twitter users, click here for details'.

What free software can you use to help manage Twitter?

One of the fastest growing industries online is creating applications or tools for Twitter. There are already over 100 applications to help you manage, or get the most out of, Twitter. They include:

- Mr Tweet: Makes recommendations on who to follow.
- Tweetburner: URL shortening service for Twitter.
- TweetBeep: Track who is mentioning

you. If you are not using Twitter, TweetBeep is a good way to monitor your brand.

- Tweet Later: Schedule Tweets over a period of time.
- TweetGrid: Live updates for any keyword on Twitter.
- Qwitter: Emails you when someone stops following you.
- Twitter Grader: See how you rank on Twitter.
- TwitStamp: Create a personalised Twitter badge.
- Tweetdeck: Makes Twitter easy to use.
- Twitterfon: iPhone/iPod touch application for tweeting on the move.
- Twitpic: Lets you share photos on Twitter.
- TweetMeme: Finds stories from Twitter for you to retweet.

Extracted from *Quick Win Digital Marketing*, by Annmarie Hanlon and Joanna Akins (Oak Tree Press)



continued on page 84

Using Social Media To Boost Business

Wading into the fast-moving flow of social media can be daunting for a small business. **GRAEME McQUEEN** asked ten firms who've taken the plunge about what works for them

Margaret Walsh

Neon SMS Solutions

Twitter users should use a tool such as Tweetdeck or Hootsuite. They make it very easy to manage accounts, leave comments and include features like stats and traceable links. If the user has a busy day ahead they can schedule comments the previous evening. Be informative and engaging. Don't over comment. I see many businesses now leaving overly personal views which do not relate in any way to their own or core business. For this, use a personal account.

Eamonn Grant

Flowers Made Easy

Twitter allows us to send offers and updates to a targeted audience of people who want to listen. If we send an offer to our twitter followers, we tend to see a big take-up. Don't pay someone to create a presence for you unless you have committed enough time and effort to turn your presence into a dedicated source of contact with your customer. Blank profiles, tweets from last year and old news on blogs is pointless.

Barry Kenny

Irish Rail

There is a democratic nature to Twitter. One warning to corporate users is to keep the suit on while you are tweeting. It's very easy to drop your guard. The initial problem with Facebook was that members were joining the Irish Rail Facebook page on a once-off basis to make a complaint. To counter this, we have used Twitter and Facebook to offer discount vouchers. We did a race-off between our Twitter page and Facebook page last week offering discount travel vouchers. There was a much higher take up from Twitter followers.

Dave Davis

Redfly Marketing

A blog is ideal to attract links to your content to help it rank in the search engines. You can't just throw up a Facebook page or create a Twitter account and be done with it. It's not a magazine



Dave Davis, Redfly Marketing

advertisement. You have to take it seriously. These are not advertising mediums. Start off slowly and give away everything you can (advice, products, support) all for free. Don't ask for anything in return. Learn who the influencers are and watch what they do. With blogging, make sure you create interesting content that you would want to tell your friends about. Eventually, you will be noticed as an expert in your field.

Iarfhlaith Kelly

Webstrong

The key to using social media properly is to get people coming back to you. You won't do that with loud sales messages.

Top 10 Tips For Successful Digital Marketing

1. Segment your target audience. Decide who your digital marketing is targeting in terms of age, geography and profile. If you're not sure, get help.
2. Create objectives. To measure the success of a campaign, you need to set smart objectives that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed.
3. Prepare your brand digitally. Operating online means your brand may need to adapt its logo, shorten its business description and organise some good photos.
4. Monitor mentions of your brand. If you're using digital marketing, you need to know if it's working.
5. Improve your website. Look at the keywords you're using and where your traffic comes from.
6. Make your website valuable enough to be shared. Add templates, useful tips and links so that others will retweet, share and drive traffic to your website.
7. Get professional help. There are great web designers, graphic designers and marketing professionals available to help to organise your website, brand identity, mobile and advertising campaigns.
8. Share. If you've found something useful, tell your networks. Don't forget to make sure others can share your information - include 'share this' or 'add this' buttons on your website or blog.
9. Get started. Look at the best networks to meet your objectives and generate sales for your business.
10. Check out the website www.quickwindigitalmarketing.com, an online resource for marketers, entrepreneurs and business managers who want to understand and use digital marketing for the maximum effect possible.

Instead, offer useful information that your audience will find interesting. Don't think of it as a one-way medium. Think of it as a conversation. Be honest. If you're not who you say you are, you'll eventually be found out. Online reputation is incredibly important and if you are known for being dishonest online then your reputation could be irrecoverably damaged.

Sian Phillips Whatswhat.ie

To make your listing look good, ensure you have a catchy bio with a link to your website if you have one. This way someone can find out more info about you or your business if they need or want to. Ensure you add an avatar (picture), preferably of yourself, as lots of people don't like to interact with someone hiding their identity. It can be very slow to start, but don't give up. It's handy if you already know someone on Twitter and look at who they are following or who is following them. Follow their contacts and the majority will follow you back.

Aisling Foley Aisling Foley Marketing

Companies which aren't actively using their Twitter accounts and tracking followers need to be careful. A lot of these non-active accounts have unwanted types of followers. There can be a lot of spam on Twitter, so it's important to check your followers regularly to block the inappropriate ones.

Randall Snare iQ Content

Use your blog to link to the services you provide, staff profiles and anything that showcases what your business can do. You don't necessarily need to produce different pieces of content for each medium; leverage the content you have. For example,

you can publish the titles of your blog posts on Twitter. In order for your social media presence to fit into your overall content strategy, you must have the people in place who are clear owners of that content stream. Nothing is worse than a fade i.e. months of latent Facebook, increasingly infrequent blog posts.

Michael Kane Curious Wines

Social media are not for advertising, or pimping how great you are, or constantly trying to push your product into people's faces. They're for interacting with customers and for making your company more personable and accessible. The benefits are in terms of customer accessibility and being able to engage in a two-way communication. Be yourself. I'm not sure you can credibly maintain an online social media presence with hidden agendas or disingenuous values. It should be the public face of who you are and what your company stands for.

Vincent Donnelly Movies.ie

The social media tools that attract the most traffic for us are Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. We spent a lot of time on Myspace and Bebo but there is a very noticeable slowdown on both sites. Digg was good for short-term traffic boosts but Digg users aren't loyal, they just want a quick fix. They'll read one story and then go elsewhere. Keep your content interesting and fresh. There is a fine line between spam and regular updates - be careful not to overdo it. Don't post too many business posts every day, and keep updates for important stuff, otherwise you'll lose followers. It takes time to build a following, so don't give up after a week.

