The **Essential Guide** to

twitter

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By now you probably have heard of the mini-blog service Twitter, but you may not understand what it is, why it matters and how best to use it.

We have written this free Essential Guide to Twitter -- an update to our Twitter 101 Guide released in May 2009 -- to better explain the benefits of the service, and to offer a few tips and tricks that you may find helpful for your organization and for you personally.

The goal of this guide is not to be an all-inclusive playbook for Twitter but rather to provide a general understanding of the free service and to show how others have used it effectively to communicate. If some of the Twitter lingo is unfamiliar as you read, please consult the Twitter glossary at the end of this guide for definitions of key terms.

For answers to questions not addressed in this guide, visit http://help.twitter.com or find other helpful guides by searching the Internet.

Now let's dig in to the **Twitterverse.**

The Basics

First and foremost, Twitter is about your personality and your brand. But it is also about establishing connections. While people use Twitter to find the latest news and information, they also are looking to connect with the individuals and brands they appreciate and to find other users who are talking about the issues that matter to them.

Here are other important fundamentals you need to know:

- Twitter is a community built on the idea of answering, in 140 characters or less, this simple but important question: "What's happening?"

- Creating an account is free. You can sign up at https://twitter.com/signup.

- We recommend using your real name as your Twitter account name -- also known as a "handle" -- to make it easy for users to find you.

- When opening an account, you can protect your updates to limit who can view them. But if you protect your updates, you also will limit the amount of people following you and reading your thoughts and ideas.

- Updating your account -- with a status message or "tweet" -- is as simple as typing what you want to say to the Twitter community and clicking send.

- The service is opt-in, which means that you have to choose to "follow" other Twitter users (known either as "tweeters" or "Twitterers") to get their updates and that other tweeters have to follow you. Lists of who you follow and who follows you are part of your account.

Twitter has become such a significant part of American and world culture that in April 2010 the Library of Congress announced that it will work with Twitter to archive all public tweets dating back to March 2006.

Why Twitter Matters

Twitter is unique in how it connects people directly. The service is like a large, never-ending group conversation, where people in your online network post links to news items, funny videos and their latest blog posts, pictures and thoughts. But Twitter can go further for you and your organization.

To help you better understand the benefits of Twitter, later in this guide we will examine several case studies of corporate, nonprofit, and political applications of the service as a means to connect with potential constituencies.

What Makes a Good Tweeter

Good tweeters stay connected to conversations; they listen and reply to others, and post useful updates for others. When people first start using Twitter, they often follow high-profile figures with many followers (like actor Ashton Kutcher or President Obama). However, you most likely will find that you care more about people you already know from other interactions. Often your favorite Twitter users will be your favorite bloggers, journalists, colleagues and closest friends in "real" life.

User-interface Tour

Twitter recently expanded its features to integrate more search options and trend awareness. The site likely will continue this trend of regular updates, given its already demonstrated willingness to change quickly and to accommodate its tech-savvy users' feedback and requests. The diagram below explains the functionality of the recently updated http://Twitter.com Web-based user interface.

1. The web box
Compose your tweet here.

2. Home
Here you will find the tweets written by users you follow.

3. Profile
Your profile shows your tweets and profile information, including your Twitter-sized biography, location, and following and follower counts.

4. Find people
Click here to search for other Twitter users to follow and invite your friends to join.

5. Settings
Click here to adjust your settings, including your profile picture, background, privacy settings and other profile information.

6. Following
This feature shows the number of people you follow.

7. Followers
This feature shows the number of people who follow you.

8. Listed
This feature shows the number of lists that include your Twitter handle, which is your username preceded by the @ sign (i.e., @davidallgroup).

9. Mentions
This is where you will find any tweets that mention your @handle.

10. Messages
Here you will find both private messages that you send to other tweeters and that they send to you.

11. Favorites
This field shows the Twitter updates you have marked as favorites.

12. Retweets
This section is where you will find the posts your friends or you have retweeted, as well as the posts of yours that have been retweeted.

13. Search
This feature enables users to search for people or topics being discussed.

14. Searches
Any searches you have performed and saved will show up here.

15. Who to follow
Twitter recommends other tweeters for you to follow based on those you already follow. Any users identified as "Promoted" are advertisements.

16. Trends
This shows the most popular keywords and hashtags -- words or phrases preceded by the # sign -- that are being used at any particular moment. Any trends marked as "Promoted" are ads.
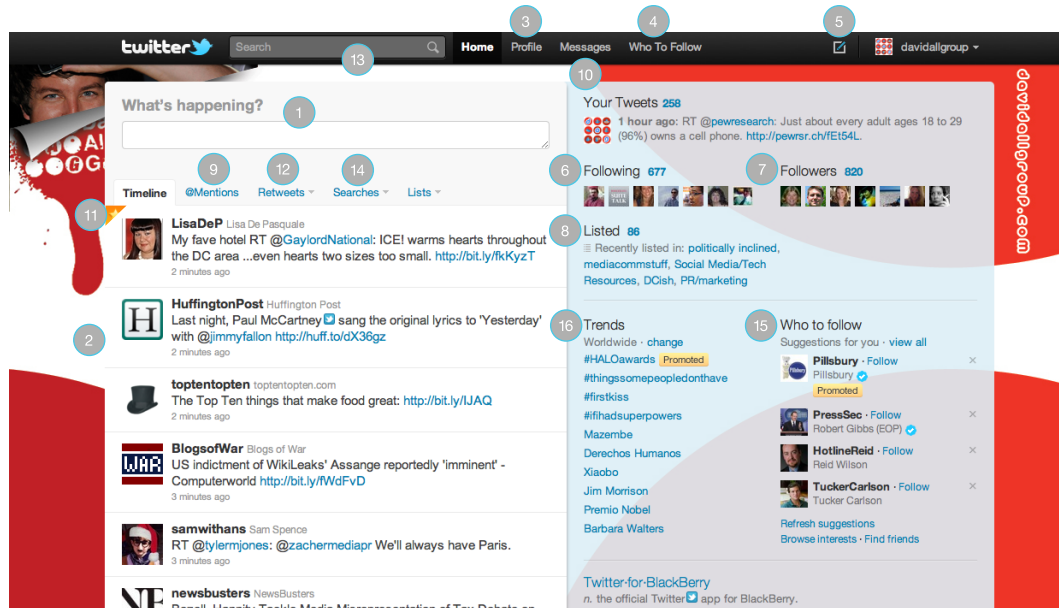
New Features of the New Twitter

The redesigned Twitter.com, released in fall 2010, fixed the well-known shortcomings of users not being able to view media or easily follow conversations among users by adding a "details pane" to Twitter.com. The feature makes the site sleeker and definitely creates competition for third-party Twitter applications.

Here are some of the improvements you will quickly notice with the new Twitter.

View multimedia on the site

Users no longer have to click shortened URLs by bit.ly or other services to watch YouTube videos or see pictures. The details pane makes it possible to view such content without ever leaving your Twitter news feed.
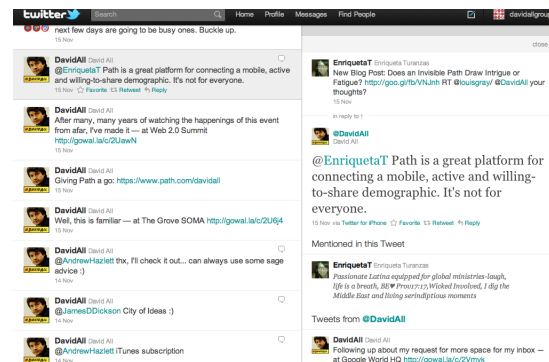
Follow conversations more easily

Have you ever been interested in a Twitter conversation between two people but could not follow it because you got lost in the tweets or had to go back and forth between accounts? The new Twitter solves that problem. It shows retweets and replies like a threaded conversation in the details pane.
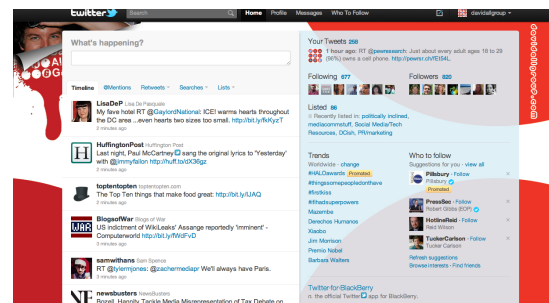
Connect through common interests

Twitter always has been able to promote conversations among people who share interests. The redesign enhances that capability. Now users can see quick and abbreviated snapshots of others in the details pane to see if they want to follow those new people. If you want to learn more about them, you can click from the details pane into their full profile pages.

Streamline your searches

One of Twitter's biggest flaws is the inability to easily find profiles by search. The new Twitter improved the process by making the search box larger and by creating the option to filter by location. The search box also is more conveniently located in a static spot at the top of Twitter.com, and saved searches appear in a scroll-down menu that offers better navigation.

The new Twitter is a definite improvement over the original version.

To Twitter or Not

@DavidAll's "Six Things You Need to Know about the New Twitter"

1. Videos and photos are viewable directly on the site. Twitter built its reputation on a foundation of 140 characters or less. That meant no multimedia frills. The best tweeters could do was embrace URL shorteners like bit.ly to drive traffic to YouTube, Flickr and other sites. The new Twitter changed the broadcast equation. Now users can open the details pane to see and watch the multimedia elements linked in their tweet streams.

2. Conversations are easier to follow. Twitter is a great tool for engaging other users in conversation. But it wasn't so great for the "tweeps" who saw snippets of those conversations sporadically thrust into their tweet streams. The details pane includes retweets and replies for each tweet, making it possible to follow threaded discussions without jumping among user profiles to connect the conversational dots.

3. More information about Twitter users is readily available. One of Twitter's strengths is its ability to connect people with common interests so they can share insights, ideas, tips and information. Another feature of the details pane makes the process of identifying those people less tedious. Clicking on any user's Twitter handle reveals both basic profile information and recent tweets so users can quickly gauge whether to follow that account. For each account, users can choose whether to allow retweets to appear in their streams or to send tweets to their mobile phones.

4. Users get glimpses of emerging and popular themes. Hashtags -- words or phrases within tweets that are preceded by the character # -- streamline the search process on Twitter and become trending topics when mentioned by enough users. Tweeters click the hashtags to see other tweets on the topic, but doing so used to take them to a separate page. The new Twitter offers sample tweets for each hashtag in the details pane. Readers still can click the hashtags to see more related tweets.

5. Search functions are more prominent and user-friendly. Besides adding hashtagged tweets to the details pane, the redesigned Twitter improved the search process by making the search box larger and moving it from the right sidebar to a toolbar at the top of the site. Twitter also offers filtering options, such as searching for tweets based on your location, and saved searches appear in a more noticeable drop-down menu. (See Search Engine Land's review of the new Twitter for more details and helpful screen shots.)

6. Advertisers gained visibility for "sponsored tweets." As noted in Advertising Age, companies (or politicians or anyone else who wants to sponsor tweets) can see in the details pane how many people responded to a tweet or who retweeted their information, all without leaving the tweet. They also can showcase their own photos or videos in an effort to generate online buzz.

What Makes a Good Tweet

The best Twitter users establish connections with others in the community. They do so by providing valuable information to their followers and adding to existing conversations. In other words, be helpful, be authentic, and remember to let your personality show.

How can you do this? This morning, you probably read a particularly interesting news article or blog post. Post a Twitter update about it and include the link to the story. Or perhaps one of your friends on Twitter just posted something you like. Retweet the post to your followers or reply to that person with your thoughts about the subject. Another idea is to post a picture you took on your phone at an event.

The possibilities are endless.

Here's an example of a tweet:

> "@DavidAll loves broccoli."

No one cares, right? But someone, somewhere does care, and David All found those folks on Twitter.

On a recent Sunday night, I was cooking some chicken and broccoli. I was thinking to myself that I should tweet about how much I loved broccoli because I've never really told anyone. But I was thinking, "No one cares about whether or not I like broccoli." So I conducted an experiment to see the reaction:
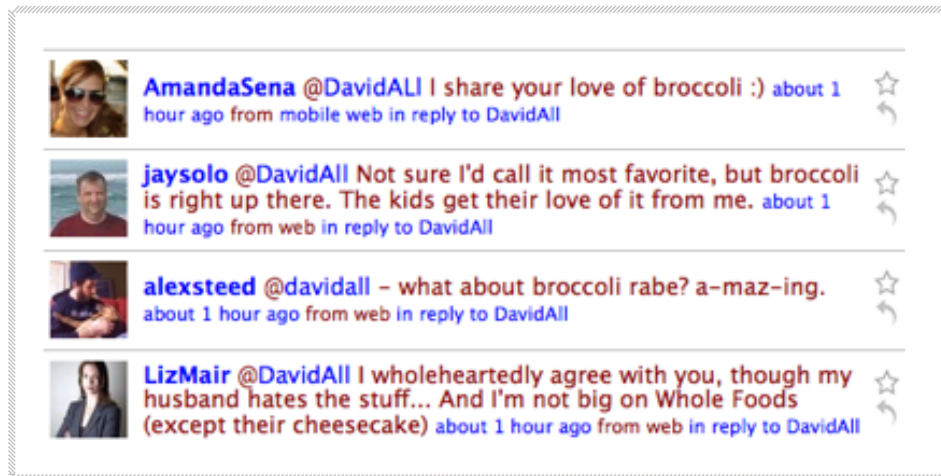
Lesson: You never know what tweets will motivate people to respond.
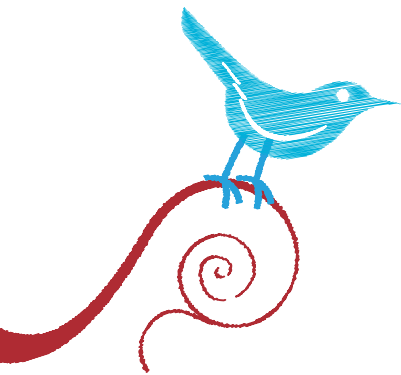
Conversing on Twitter

Twitter is a great medium for engaging other people in conversation, and there are three primary ways of doing so: replies, direct messages and retweets.

Replies

As you begin using Twitter, messages with an @ sign in front of a username will appear as part of your profile. This is called a Twitter reply and is a way of directly communicating with fellow tweeters.

Getting people to respond to your tweets within their networks broadcasts your conversations and can help you attract new followers. This is another reason why choosing a recognizable username is important. You can see all of the replies sent to you by clicking on "@yourname" on the home page.

Direct messages

Twitter also allows users to send private, direct messages between shared contacts -- those who you follow and who also follow you. If you are following someone, you most likely will be able to type "d username message" to send that person a direct message. You also can do so by clicking the "Messages" link on Twitter.com. Depending on people's privacy settings, you may not be able to send some users direct messages.
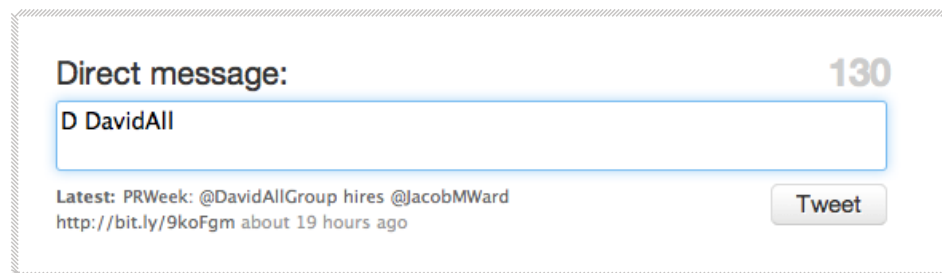
(NOTE: When you begin a tweet with a Twitter handle (@name), only people who follow both you and the user you are replying to can see the tweet. We recommend beginning a reply to another user's tweet with "Hey @name," though some tweeters save precious characters by simply adding a period before the @name. Example: .@DavidAll.)

Retweets

Retweeting, a means of sharing other people's Twitter updates, is a popular activity. Users retweet updates when they agree with them, find them interesting or relevant, or want to add their own commentary in context. Re-posting tweets that are relevant to your life, profession or hobbies allows you to join the conversation, gain new followers and give them important connections to like-minded groups.

(NOTE: Retweeting is different than an @reply. Retweeting is best for sharing, whereas an @reply is best for responding.)

There are two primary ways to retweet a post. The standard and most basic retweet option entails manually copying a user's update, pasting it into the submission box on your Twitter account and adding "RT" and the original tweeter's @name in front of it.

The second method is to use Twitter's automated retweet function. When you are using the Twitter website, a "Retweet" link appears at the bottom of every tweet. All you have to do is click on the link to retweet the post for your followers to see.

There are pros and cons to both options.

RT @DavidAll: My first check-in on Facebook Places is at the @davidallgroup http://twitpic.com/2g9z6s
4:46 PM Aug 19th via TweetDeck

davidallgroup

Pro:

- Allows you to comment on the tweet.

Con:

- Requires more steps and thus makes the process longer, although many mobile and other third-party applications have incorporated functionality that streamlines the process.

Automated Retweet

DavidAll Like reading books and discussing big ideas? Join BookClub at facebook.com/davidallgroup – first book "The Facebook Effect."
Thu Aug 19 2010 15:13:42 (EDT) via TweetDeck

Pros:

- Streamlines the process
- Protects the content being shared because it does not allow spammers to add fake links or comments
- Prevents confusion about who wrote the original tweet (for space reasons, the author may not get credit as the number of traditional retweets increases)
- When searching for a hashtag or keyword, the tweet with the most retweets appears at the top of the list
- Followers won't see the same tweet multiple times
- Can choose to ignore retweets from specific users

Cons:

- Cannot add comments, hashtags or links
- Harder for the user whose update you retweeted to see that you did so because it does not appear in his or her @ mentions section
- Updates do not appear in feeds of Twitter lists

Another type of tweet is becoming more common:

The modified tweet

Tweeters use this method when they want to call attention to a tweet but also significantly alter the content, add commentary or challenge the premise of the tweet. Modified tweets, which are preceded by "MT" rather than "RT," may be used to correct an error in the original tweet or to provide new information by linking to a relevant news story, video or picture.

Twitter as a Real-time Connector

Twitter can help connect people around a central theme or issue. For example, one site the David All Group developed for the Conservative Political Action Conference, CPACTweets.com, grabbed the latest tweets with the "#CPAC10" hashtag.

This made it possible for Twitter users to track and actively participate in CPAC conversations, meet new and old friends, and follow events at the annual conference in real time.

Twitter realizes the power of hashtags and has included a spot for them in its most recent version. In the new user interface, the "Trending Topics" section in the righthand column for viewers who are logged in to the site shows the most current items of interest, including hashtags.

The search function on Twitter (http://search.twitter.com) has become such an important resource that Twitter also includes it in a static position at the top of every page visited on Twitter.com. Other sites created before Twitter's internal search function was released provide viable options for monitoring Twitter conversations. Tweetscan, for example, is a helpful third-party Twitter search engine. Additionally, tweets now are being indexed for future searches by Google.

twitter tools

Twitter has spawned a cottage industry of third-party applications designed to make it easier for people to use the service without ever visiting Twitter.com. These apps make it possible for people to sign in to and tweet from multiple Twitter accounts at once; share pictures, video and audio; automatically generate tweets from their blogs and websites; and shorten links so they can fit within the 140-character limit for tweets.

Here are summaries of the most useful Twitter tools:

Tweeting services

Various applications connect with Twitter so you can tweet and manage your Twitter accounts without going to Twitter.com. TweetDeck, which bills itself as a product that lets anyone tweet like a pro, is more commonly used by individuals; CoTweet and HootSuite were created with businesses and organizations in mind.

TweetDeck users can add columns for different Twitter accounts, which display from left to right across a screen. Each column contains the information you choose, including feeds from your followers, replies and direct messages from others to you, and saved Twitter searches. People can share photos and record videos through TweetDeck, and the service automatically shortens links.

Like TweetDeck, CoTweet and HootSuite let people manage several accounts, track clicks on shortened links and pre-schedule updates for publication at later dates and times. But CoTweet also offers email notifications when Twitter accounts are mentioned in updates or receive direct messages, and it includes a feature for making assignments to people. HootSuite has more monitoring tools than CoTweet.

Another tweeting tool, Twitterfeed, is great for blogs and websites because it automatically generates tweets by connecting to the sites' syndication feeds.

URL shorteners

It is important to shorten the Web addresses, or URLs, of any links shared on Twitter because of the service's limit of 140 characters per tweet. Several URL shorteners are available, but bit.ly has the most functionality and is the most trusted and reliable. It lets users track the number of clicks on their links and on all bit.ly links by other users to the same URL. Users can customize the last few letters of shortened URLs by replacing them with keywords or phrases.

Pictures and videos

Including pictures or videos in tweets makes them compelling and popular. Multiple services allow you to upload and share pictures and/or videos. They include Twitpic.com, Yfrog.com and Twitvid. com. The service you use may depend upon the mobile or third-party application you use to tweet.

Twitter Counter

Twitter Counter lets users track the growth of Twitter accounts. It creates charts to illustrate the number of followers and people that users follow over time.

Mobile tweeting

The forced brevity of Twitter makes it a perfect service for mobile telephone usage, and TweetDeck and other services mentioned above have mobile applications. Twitter also has its own applications for iPhone and Blackberry users.

Are you still not sure if Twitter is right for you? Do you want to learn more about how others are using this unique utility? Let's jump into some case studies so you can see Twitter in action and learn from the experts.

Bypassing the Media: Iranian Revolution

In June 2009, large-scale rallies erupted across Iran to protest the re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The protesters considered it a "stolen election." Twitter's significance was on display during the revolution. It served as the only medium for effectively and consistently releasing and retrieving information about the revolution.

When Iran booted Western media outlets from the country, Twitter became the only link between Iranian protesters on the ground and the media outlets covering the story. Activists in Iran used the hashtags #iranprotests and #iranrevolution to share news on Twitter. Traditional news outlets, including CNN and Fox News, largely based their stories about the Iranian revolution on information found on Twitter, including the horrifying murder of a now-famous protester named Neda. The hashtag #neda was the most popular Twitter topic for days.

Twitter played such a crucial information role in the revolution that the U.S. State Department requested that Twitter delay its scheduled site maintenance (which would have resulted in Twitter being unavailable for a period of time) until after the protests had subsided. The department wanted to ensure that all important information could be relayed to users outside Iran. The hashtag #nomaintenance became popular to support the State Department's request. Twitter agreed to postpone the maintenance.

[Source: http://www.politicsonline.com/blog/archives/2009/06/twitters_role_i.php]
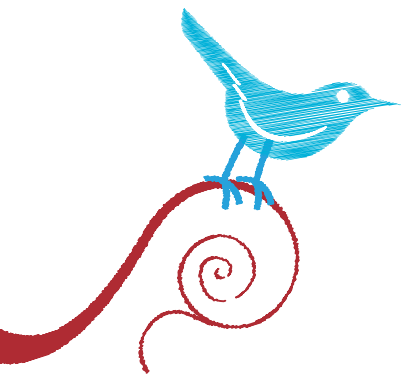
Lessons:
1. **The news cycle often drives what is popular on Twitter, but Twitter also can drive the news cycle.**
2. **Creating succinct, targeted hashtags makes it possible for people to more effectively report and track historic events on Twitter.**

Crisis Communications: The Toyota Recall

After concerns about the brakes on multiple makes and models of its vehicles caused Toyota to voluntarily recall 2.3 million automobiles [http://autos.aol.com/article/Toyota-sticky-pedal-recall/], the company faced negative reactions from the media and consumers -- especially on Twitter. Instead of ignoring the critical feedback on Twitter, Toyota used the medium to engage concerned citizens and tell its side of the story without running it through the filter of traditional media.

Toyota created a website called Toyota Conversations to post what it deemed to be the top tweets about Toyota, including press releases, news articles, videos and images. Many of the tweets were negative, but Toyota chose which ones to post. The site also integrated Toyota's Twitter Feed so users could see the company's message. Toyota thus promoted a positive message as it worked through the public-relations crisis.

Twitter can create and maintain an honest conversation about how companies can improve their standing with customers.

Lessons:
1. **Companies can use Twitter during crises to share their viewpoints about the controversies.**
2. **Twitter can help promote positive images for companies in crises.**
3. **Twitter can be used to maintain and repair the public images of businesses.**
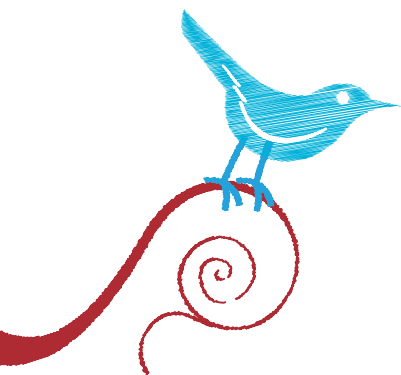
TWITTER IN ACTION
WHEN CRISES COME

Don't be an ostrich online. Trouble won't go away while you hide your head.

@Toyota

@MaxineWaters

@DonBlankenship

Called before Congress to answer pointed questions about a massive automobile recall, Toyota tweeted its testimony to push its side of the story into the public arena.

Rep. Maxine Waters, D-Calif., defended herself by tweet hours after House ethics charges were brought against her. Rep. Charles Rangel, D-N.Y., (@cbrangel) published an audio tweet in response to House ethics committee charges against him.

Massey Energy chairman and CEO Don Blankenship went silent on Twitter in the days after a Massey-owned mine in West Virginia exploded and killed 29 miners. But he eventually tweeted his thoughts about the tragedy, the recovery effort and media coverage of it.

[Source: Capitol Hill Tweet Watch Report, www.tweetwatchreport.com]

The Hijacked Brand: @BPGlobalPR vs. @BP_America

The April 20, 2010, explosion of the Deepwater Horizon oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico triggered what became the largest offshore oil spill in U.S. history and led to a public-relations nightmare for the oil company BP. A month after the spill began, on May 19, an anonymous person created a farcical Twitter account called @BPGlobalPR that opened with this tweet: "We regretfully admit that something has happened off of the Gulf Coast. More to come."

The BP critic, later identified as Leroy Stick [http://www.grist.org/article/2010-07-06-the-mystery-bp-twitterer-revealed/], repeatedly mocked the company with satirical jabs and portrayed BP as not caring about the spill. One tweet read: "Think about it this way, the ocean is like rootbeer and oil is like ice cream. We just made America a giant rootbeer float!" The @BPGlobalPR Twitter account gained nearly 60,000 followers in only a week, besting BP's official account (@BP_America) by tens of thousands of followers, and fooled many Twitter users into believing the account was managed by a real representative of BP.

BP had created its own Twitter account a year before the spill but did not use it frequently until after the accident. The company did not respond to the oil spill through its official account for seven days and did not start posting updates and other newsworthy information about the spill until the @BPGlobalPR account gained steam. By that point, the BP brand essentially had been hijacked on Twitter. @BP_America garnered only about 7,000 followers.

The delayed Twitter activity closely resembled BP's troubled attempts to stop the gushing oil and clean the ocean. The parody Twitter account became a fitting symbol of the tragedy and BP's response to it for many people.

BP's experience was not the first hijacking of a brand on Twitter. An account (@HJ_Heinz) created by a user with no connection to Heinz became the voice of the brand for two weeks before officials at Twitter changed the account name to @Not_HJHeinz to show that the account was not associated with the company.

[Source: http://prtini.com/lessons-from-the-heinz-twitter-imposter/]
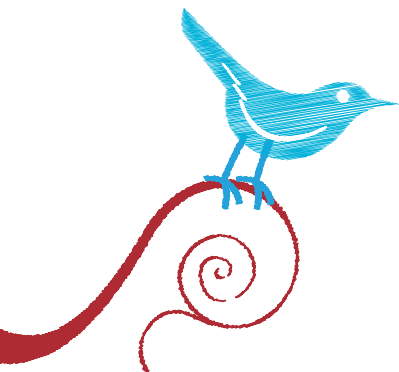
Lessons:
1. **Don't let your brand be hijacked on Twitter. Grab your company's handle and start tweeting as soon as possible.**
2. **Don't wait for a crisis to engage on Twitter. Build your audience and your online credibility now so your voice will be trusted if troubles arise.**

TWITTER IN ACTION

LIVE, FROM D.C. ...

One way to drive attention to an event is to "live tweet" it in real time. The practice is becoming more common in policy and political circles.
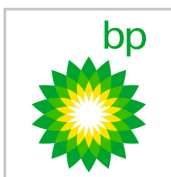
@BP_America

@UN

@timryan

BP America was slow to embrace Twitter as a communications tool after the Gulf of Mexico oil spill, but by summer the company regularly tweeted news updates from congressional hearings and news briefings about the spill.

The United Nations tweeted sound bites from its event to announce a global campaign against distracted driving.

A presidential visit is a big deal across the country -- big enough that Rep. Tim Ryan, D-Ohio, tweeted about his day with President Obama in Ryan's district.

[Source: Capitol Hill Tweet Watch Report, www.tweetwatchreport.com]

## Pitching the Perfect Game: Major League Baseball

Twitter has become an integral part of sports media and entertainment. It is an incredible medium for teams and leagues to closely follow the opinions of their fans and sports enthusiasts, and it helps them spread information and further their brands.

Sports teams across the country use Twitter to share news, updates and stories with their avid fans. Whether it is used to introduce game line-ups or report traffic situations outside stadiums, Twitter quickly gives fans the information they need.

Major League Baseball has been a Twitter leader for connecting with fans. When the MLB released its new version of Gameday, which allows fans to follow the play-by-play and statistics of each game from home, it included Twitter. Fans can sign in to Twitter through the "At Bat" program and tweet without leaving the screen, so they have an easy avenue to discuss the game. The tool also categorizes tweets with hashtags so the league, teams and fans can follow the Twitter action easily.

Teams are beginning to turn their games into places where Twitter users can gather to talk about their favorite teams. Last April, the San Francisco Giants hosted a pre-game "tweet-up," where sports tweeters met in person to discuss various topics. The event included a panel featuring: Biz Stone, one of Twitter's founders; Giants pitcher Jeremy Affeldt; and two local sports personalities. All of them use Twitter.

In the sports world, Twitter is a great way to engage the fans.
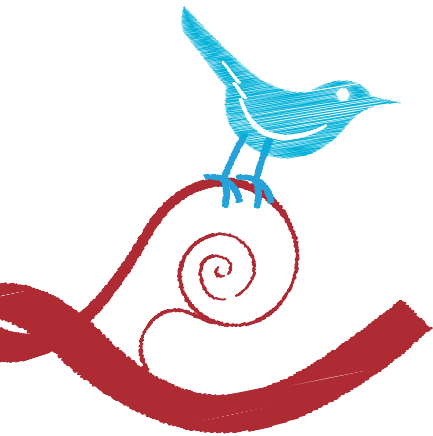
Lessons:
1. **Twitter can be used to spread information and updates about a team or a game.**
2. **Twitter can connect teams with fans in real time.**
3. **Twitter makes it easy to build new communities from an existing fan base.**
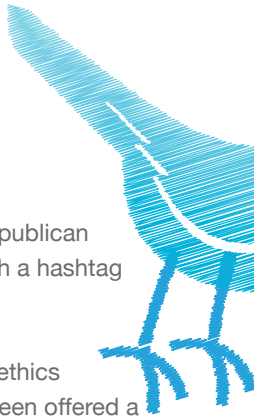
Raising Awareness: Hashtag Heat

Twitter is a great way to raise awareness about subjects in the political arena. The Republican National Committee did so in May 2010 by challenging the Obama administration with a hashtag aimed at White House press secretary Robert Gibbs: #AskGibbs.

The goal of the hashtag was to force the White House to answer questions about an ethics scandal. In February 2010, Rep. Joe Sestak, D-Pa., said in an interview that he had been offered a high-level job in the Obama administration if he would end his Senate primary against incumbent Arlen Specter, who switched his party affiliation from Republican to Democrat in 2009. Such an offer could have been a felony, but the White House would not address the concerns.

The scandal arose after months without a presidential press conference, rumors of White House staffers interviewing Supreme Court nominees instead of the press, and President Obama refusing to take questions at a signing ceremony for the Freedom of Press Act, all of which prompted the press and other critics to ask questions about transparency in the Obama administration. Coincidentally, Gibbs opened a Twitter account (@PressSec) at about the time the Sestak scandal broke. RNC Chairman Michael Steele seized that as an opportunity. He encouraged all supporters to tweet questions to Gibbs about whether the Obama administration offered Sestak a job so Specter could win the Democratic nomination.

Conservatives across the country quickly embraced the #AskGibbs hashtag, which was used more than 1,500 times in five hours. ABC White House correspondent Jake Tapper covered the Twitter angle to the Sestak story, showing how Twitter can influence traditional media.

#AskGibbs raised awareness of the Obama administration's reluctance to discuss the Sestak job offer. The RNC effectively used Twitter to develop a grassroots movement to challenge the press secretary, and the White House released a report in late May detailing the job discussions with Sestak. The report concluded that no laws were broken. By that time, Sestak already had defeated Specter in the May 18 primary.
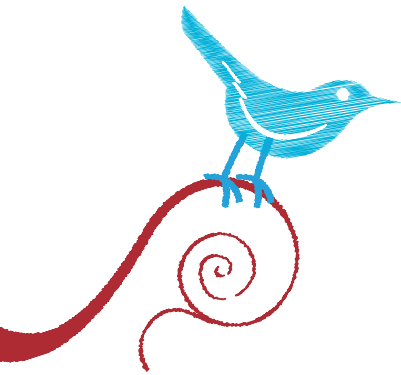
Lessons:
1. Twitter is a great place to engage the grassroots.
2. People will rally behind a creative hashtag.
3. A movement can grow faster on Twitter than any traditional medium.

TWITTER IN ACTION
TWEETS AND CONSEQUENCES

Twitter's biggest limitation is the service's content restriction. Tweeters have only 140 characters to make a point and perhaps include a link. That sometimes spells trouble with a capital "T."

@octavianasrCNN

@hambypCNN

@SteveForbesCEO

CNN's Octavia Nasr lost her job as senior editor of Mideast affairs for tweeting her "respect" for Sayyed Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah, a man she called "one of Hezbollah's giants," upon his death. She later called the tweet an "error of judgment."

Businessman Steve Forbes apologized after tweeting that the death of Sen. Robert Byrd, D-W.Va., was "good news" because it stalled a financial reform bill.

On the other hand, a timely, well-written tweet can have an immediate impact.

It didn't take South Carolina Lt. Gov. Andre Bauer long to call CNN's Peter Hamby and apologize for using a poor metaphor after Hamby tweeted that Bauer had compared needy people to "stray animals."

[Source: Capitol Hill Tweet Watch Report, www.tweetwatchreport.com]

Disaster Prep and Response: The Red Cross

Journalists often are astounded by the speed at which information spreads on Twitter during natural disasters. Survivors tweeted from their mobile phones when violent clashes erupted in Mumbai, India, in 2008, and someone posted a picture from a passing ferry via TwitPic moments after US Airways Flight 1549 made a miracle landing on the Hudson River in January 2009.

Twitter is a communications platform well-suited for disaster situations, simultaneously facilitating personal broadcasting and individual conversation. It is appropriate, then, that the American Red Cross (@RedCross), a nonprofit focused on disaster relief, has embraced an incredibly innovative and pragmatic use of Twitter.

The Red Cross uses Twitter to warn people of natural threats in their areas and to answer questions about impending conditions. The account also provides tips on disaster preparedness and posts live updates from disaster sites. Utilizing hashtags correctly and consistently, the Red Cross categorizes its tweets to reach the largest yet most targeted audiences possible.

In addition to its national presence on Twitter, the Red Cross has been developing a network of accounts for state and local chapters, like Oklahoma City (@redcrossokc) and St. Louis (@stlredcross). That approach gives people access to more detailed and local information. Furthermore, the Red Cross has developed an auxiliary account for its Safe and Well service (@safeandwell), allowing people to direct-message their status updates and contact information after disasters for inclusion in the directory at disastersafe.redcross.org.

The Red Cross aims to implement the next generation of technological innovation in disaster preparedness and relief by giving people access to instant, personal information and fostering interactivity during crises. The organization has discovered that Twitter is the perfect platform to achieve those goals.

Lessons:

1. **Twitter can transform mass communication.**
2. **A well-integrated Twitter strategy can revolutionize potential effectiveness.**
3. **Twitter is scalable, providing solutions for everything from personal communication to disaster mobilization.**

TWITTER IN ACTION

A NICHE FILLED

Twitter is an ideal tool for delivering messages to targeted audiences, whether in the political or commercial arenas.

@lisapjackson   @CDCemergency

Lisa Jackson, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency, gained a strong foothold in the online environmental community when she started tweeting.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention created multiple Twitter accounts to reach narrow audiences interested in specific subjects, such as emergency response, health and safety information, sexually transmitted diseases and the flu.

[Source: Capitol Hill Tweet Watch Report, www.tweetwatchreport.com]

Listening to Customers: Comcast Cares

In January 2008, Comcast aggressively refocused its mission toward customer service after several hundred bloggers started complaining about the company's track record. Comcast overhauled Comcast.com to include an area for people to comment on the corporate website, and company representatives started commenting on blogs.

Fast forward to April 2009, when TechCrunch's Michael Arrington (and several other people) started complaining on Twitter about their customer service from Comcast. Arrington (@TechCrunch) wrote about the issue on his widely read blog, and Comcast responded via a real customer-service representative on its Twitter account, @ComcastCares.

@ComcastCares proactively scans the Twitterverse using a free tool like "TweetScan" to identify people talking about Comcast. Customer-service representatives then reply, offering to help if necessary. It is a powerful approach because entire networks of friends see a visible, transparent two-way conversation between customers and Comcast. The David All Group has followed @ComcastCares from the beginning, noting its authenticity and modus operandi.

Comcast has expanded its Twitter support staff to include @ComcastBill, @ComcastBonnie, @ComcastGeorge, @ComcastScott, @ComcastSherri and @ComcastSteve. Their accounts have unified background branding and use a team approach to assisting users.

Comcast is effectively changing its perception of bad customer service by meeting its customers proactively on their terms and in their preferred space, rather than only when users call a Comcast customer-service center. Such calls usually yield few results.
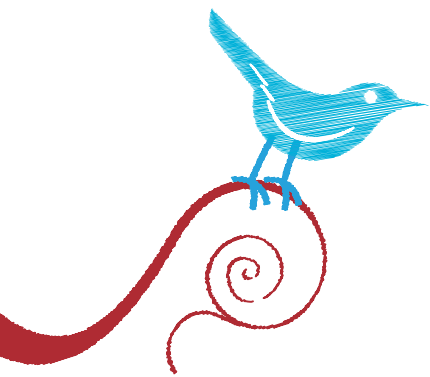
Lessons:
1. Twitter is a powerful customer-service tool.
2. A real person tweeting directly with customers can make a difference.
3. Communicate with your customers on their terms, not just yours.

A Dose of Personality: The Zappos Way

You might not expect a shoe-store executive to be behind the most popular brand on Twitter. But with more than 1.7 million followers, Zappos CEO Tony Hseih has used Twitter to create a corporate culture of open communication, excellent customer service and, most of all, fun.

In addition to utilizing the customer-service potential of Twitter like @ComcastCares does, Hseih spends most of his time on Twitter (his handle is @zappos) sharing fun notes from both his personal life and his corporate life. He even uses the picture-sharing service TwitPic to post personal photos. This effective, individual use of Twitter by a company executive has given a face to the unique Zappos brand.

Zappos uses twitter.zappos.com as the focal point of its conversation on Twitter. Displaying a stream of tweets mentioning Zappos and company employees on Twitter, the site acts as a constant reflection of news in the company, among its employees and especially about its customers. If there are complaints, questions or compliments, one of the hundreds of Zappos employees on Twitter, each with a distinct personality, will answer with a "J" -- just as if you were speaking with them on the phone.

Zappos is famous for its quirky, customer-first outlook on business, and the company has made perfect use of Twitter's one-to-one communications potential, lending to its current ranking as Twitter's biggest brand.

Lessons:
1. **It pays to have employees on Twitter.**
2. **Aggregating the conversations of employees can attract an audience.**
3. **Individual interactions are essential to good corporate communication on Twitter.**
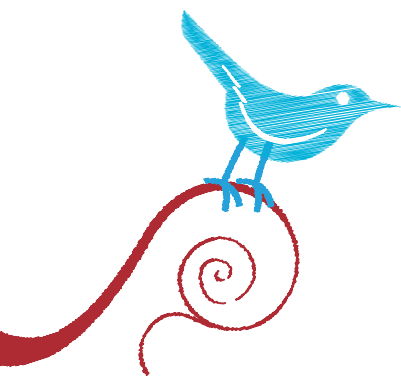
TWITTER IN ACTION
A SLICE OF LIFE

@RepShimkus

@EarlBlumenauer

@CathyMcMorris

The abbreviated nature of communication by tweet lends itself to brief glimpses into aspects of the lives of public figures that otherwise might go unremarked.

Rep. John Shimkus, R-Ill., tweets daily Bible passages. He continued the practice even after being mocked by a home-state newspaper.

When a blizzard pummeled the nation's capital in February 2010, Rep. Earl Blumenauer, D-Ore., tweeted about his exploits in the snow.

Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., announced her pregnancy to Twitter followers, and the birth of a daughter Dec. 1, 2010.

[Source: Capitol Hill Tweet Watch Report, www.tweetwatchreport.com]

top 10 twitter tips and tricks

1 Secure your personal and organizational Twitter handles now before someone else does. You need your brand.

2 Stick with It: "Getting" Twitter takes time. Its value will only become apparent if you use it.

3 Only follow users who interest you. Twitter will be most valuable if the conversation is relevant to you.

4 Stay connected: Download a mobile application (Twitter for iPhone or Blackberry) and a desktop client (TweetDeck).

5 Listen as often as you speak. Twitter is a two-way communications channel. Take advantage of that.

6 Twitter gives you 140 characters to inform and entertain, but make it easy for others to retweet your posts with your @name. Keep your tweets under 120 characters.

7 Use relevant hashtags in order to reach a larger audience. Follow the right people and read their tweets so you will know the best hashtags.

8 Be helpful: Respond to tweets seeking information when appropriate.

9 Everyone makes mistakes. Think before you tweet.

10 Ask questions: An easy way to grow followers is to get others to talk to or about you. (Try us. What Twitter tips did we miss? Tweet them to @davidallgroup.)

twitter glossary

Every new medium inspires its own jargon, and Twitter is no exception. Here are definitions of some of the more common terms you will see, in this guide and elsewhere:

@Reply
A direct reply to someone referencing an earlier tweet he had posted. This also can be used to initiate a conversation.

Direct message
Private messages that only the senders and the recipients can see. A direct message also may be called a "DM."

Fail whale
The image that appears on Twitter.com user profiles when Twitter experiences a technical problem.

Follower
Someone who receives updates from other users on Twitter by subscribing to (following) their feeds.

Follow Friday
A tradition where users recommend other tweeters by listing their handles on Fridays. Follow Friday tweets include one or both of these hashtags: #FollowFriday and #FF.

Geolocation
(Also known as geotagging)
A tool that enables Twitter users to include information in their tweets about where they are as they write.

Handle
Twitter usernames, which begin with the @ sign (i.e., @davidallgroup).

Hashtag
The basic form of categorizing, organizing and tagging updates on Twitter. Hashtags, which begin with the # sign, are used to find pertinent information regarding specific topics. Clicking on a hyperlinked hashtag on Twitter will produce a list of all tweets using that hashtag.

Listed
A tool that enables tweeters to organize their favorite fellow tweeters by subject matter, location, company or other identifiers.

Modified tweet
A tweet that a user changes or adds commentary to before retweeting it to followers. A modified tweet is preceded by "MT" rather than "RT."

Retweet
An exact copy of another Twitter user's tweets that you repost on your profile so your followers can read it. Twitter has an automated retweeting feature, but manually copied retweets begin with an "RT."

Trending topics
This feature ranks in real time the subjects that are being discussed most on Twitter.

Tweeps
(also called "tweeple")
A Twitter user's friends/followers.

Tweet
A message one posts to Twitter. Each tweet must be 140 characters or less.

Tweeter
(also called "Twitterers")
A term for a Twitter user.

Twinterview
An interview conducted on Twitter in a series of @ replies.

Twitterverse
A broad term describing all people who use Twitter, short for Twitter universe.

Unfollow
The action of ceasing to follow a user.

For even more Twitter terms, see the official Twitter glossary: http://support.twitter.com/entries/166337-the-twitter-glossary