



## ROUND 4: **LISTEN WELL on TWITTER**

- Launched: March 2006
- As of December 2012, there were more than 100 million users in the United States, 500 million worldwide.
- The Twitter concept evolved out of a brainstorming session that took place at the top of a slide on a San Francisco playground.
- The company's logo, a little blue bird, is officially named Larry, after Larry Bird, the former player for the Boston Celtics.
- JetBlue was one of the first companies to start using Twitter for marketing research and customer service.
- Users post 750 tweets per second.

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**I** talk about Twitter with almost the same affection as I talk about my children. It's had that much of an impact on my life since I started using it to reach out to customers in 2007. As an extrovert who can get to know a room full of people in just a few hours, I felt at home in Twitter's 140-word cocktail party environment. It was the platform that came most naturally to me, because it was perfectly suited for small bursts of quick-fire conversation and idea exchanges. If the only platform I'd had at my disposal in early 2006, when I first started trying to storytell about my family business, Wine Library, had demanded long-form

writing, like a magazine column or a written blog, the business would not be what it is today. Twitter's restrictions played directly to my strengths. I owe it part of my career.

Yet discussing Twitter poses a problem for a book dedicated to improving social media content, because on this platform, and this platform alone, content often has far less value than context. How can I say that when Twitter is one of this generation's primary sources for news and information? Because with few exceptions, like the micro-content gold that is Grumpy Cat, a brand's success on Twitter is rarely predicated on the actual content it produces. Rather, it correlates with how much valuable context you add to the content—your own, and that produced by others.

Before I explain, it's necessary to acknowledge that at the time of this writing, there are changes afoot at Twitter. Until now, thanks to its origins as a mobile text-messaging service, the beauty of Twitter has been its simplicity—two or three lines of text, a link, and maybe a hashtag. But in late 2012, the company bought Vine, the six-second looping video service, and innovations such as Twitter Cards now allow people to attach photos, videos, and music directly to their tweets, thus incorporating the advantages of other more vis-

ually exciting platforms like Facebook and Pinterest. These visual enhancements will pave the way for businesses to deliver content in ways that are fresh and unique to Twitter. For example, you could tweet out a puzzle piece and announce that if one thousand people retweet it, you'll tweet another piece of the puzzle. Once all the pieces are tweeted, the puzzle would reveal where people could go to get a twenty-five-dollar gift certificate. It will be fun to explore new ways to creatively execute jobs and right hooks in such a mobile-friendly, colorful medium.

But that's all still in the works. And I'm not even sure the Facebookification of Twitter will make that much difference to those brands that haven't already gained traction there, because the additional bells and whistles won't force marketers to change how they actually use the platform. Hopefully this chapter will, though.

The main mistake most marketers make is to use Twitter primarily as an extension of their blog, a place to push a link to content they have posted elsewhere. They'll also often use it as a place to brag, especially by retweeting favorable things people say

about them, a new form of humblebragging I call a “birdiebrag.” There is a time and place for both of these types of right hooks, but not to the extent that most companies rely on them. Twitter primarily rewards people who listen and give, not those who ask and take. Much of the time, to read a Twitter feed is to read a mind-numbing number

of right hooks. Yet if there has ever been a platform where engagement and community management have power, it’s this one. There’s a lot of talking and selling on Twitter, but not enough engagement, and that’s a travesty, because Twitter is the cocktail party of the Internet—a place where listening well has tremendous benefits.

## SPIN YOUR STORY

If Facebook’s main currency is friendship, Twitter’s is news and information. Go on Twitter and you’ll see eighty-five people and brands at one time announcing that Brangelina is pregnant again or there’s been another tornado in Oklahoma. Anyone can present news, and on their own, your tweets about your product or service are tiny drops in the deluge of information that hits people when they come to the site. The only way to differentiate yourself and pique people’s interest is through your unique context. Breaking out on Twitter isn’t about breaking the news or spreading information—it’s about deejaying it. News has little value on its own, but the marketer who can skillfully spin, interpret, and remix it in his or her own signature style can often tell a story that is more powerful and memorable than the actual news itself.

For example, if you’re a movie theater in

Minneapolis, you could tweet “Just in—a great review of Bradley Cooper’s newest movie from the *Star Tribune*.” This is a common way to tweet—a little content, a link to a website, and you’re done. But what if you put a little more than the bare minimum of effort into that jab? What if instead of offering the boring facts, you offered something fresh? How much more interesting would it be if you tweeted “The *Star Tribune* has lost its mind. This movie stinks!” and then add the link. Now that jab has some muscle behind it. Is it possible that panning something you sell will hurt sales? On Wine Library TV, I gave poor reviews to plenty of wines that were on sale in my store, and all it did was give people more reason to trust me. But if you were that worried about it, you could turn your negative review into a positive opportunity with a tweet like “The *Star Tribune* loves

the new Bradley Cooper thriller. We think this movie stinks. Read. Watch. Debate.” You’d then link to your blog, where you would not only have a copy of the review, but information on where and when your movie club meets every month. That’s a terrific right hook. You’ve now positioned yourself as the opinionated, provocative movie theater that offers a unique film-watching experience, and that’s a story

that people will be interested in following.

Today, entertainment and escapism are prized above almost anything else. Consumers want infotainment, not information. Information is cheap and plentiful; information wrapped in a story, however, is special. Brands need to storytell around their content to make it enticing, not just put it out for passive consumption like a boring platter of cubed cheese.

## EXPAND YOUR UNIVERSE

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**M**ake a statement, stake out a position, establish a voice—this is how you successfully jab your Twitter followers. But what about all those people who have never heard of you? How are you jabbing them?

Other than the easy mobile experience it offers, Twitter stands in a class apart from other social media because of the open invitation it gives us to talk to the world at large. On Facebook, Tumblr, or Instagram, you have only two options if you want to meet new fans and potential customers. First, someone might find you offline through a class, a book, an ad, or a brick-and-mortar store, and decide to follow you. Second, a customer might share a piece of your content, and his or her friend might see it and become intrigued enough

to follow you. Either way, you’re stuck waiting outside until that person decides to let you in. Even Facebook’s search engine, Open Graph, only allows you access to stories and conversations that have been publicly shared. Everyone else is off-limits.

Twitter users, however, have an open-door policy (except for a very limited number of private profiles)—they use the platform knowing their tweets are public. In fact, that’s the draw. People on Twitter are looking for attention; they welcome the spontaneous conversations that can ensue from a tweet. Strangers from around the world, many of whom will never meet in person, have been able to build robust online communities based on nothing more than a mutually

shared interest in seahorses or wrestling. And people love how Twitter has allowed companies to enhance their customer service. If they want to get any brand's attention, all they have to do is mention its name and they'll get a response, because that brand is out there, using Twitter to help it communicate with its customers and build community.

Actually, that last bit is wishful thinking. Many companies are still only halfheartedly paying attention to the online conversations people have about them, thus relinquishing control over how their brand is perceived and allowing the competition to step in and shape the conversation in its favor. Fortunately, there's a book available that offers detailed explanations of why and how Twitter can be one of a business's most powerful customer service tools. It's my last book, *The Thank You Economy*. Read it, it's good.\*

All (half) kidding aside, Twitter is a marketer's dream come true because it allows you to initiate a relationship with your customer. It's still the only platform where you can jump into a conversation unannounced and no one thinks you're a stalker. Here, you don't have to wait for

anyone to give you permission to show how much you care. At any time, you can use the powerful Twitter search engine to find people who are talking about topics related to your business, even if only tangentially, and respond, adding your perspective and humor—and context—to the conversation.

It wouldn't take much imagination for an office furniture retailer to engage with people who mention the company name, or words like *work, employee, employer, office, desk, Aeron, printer, scanner*, and other office-related terms. Think of all the interesting ways it could engage with people with these words on their mind, however: *deadline, backache, fluorescent, happy hour, raise, promotion, weekend, swivel, or clutter*.

Using Twitter Search this way helps you find storytelling opportunities with people who either already know about you, or who have expressed interest in topics related to your product or service. But what about all those consumers out there who would love you if they only knew you existed? Twitter makes it possible to reach them, too. You just have to know how to ride the cultural zeitgeist.

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\* How's that for a right hook?

## TRENDJACKING

In this chatty, 24-7 online culture, there is no better resource than Twitter trends for creating the real-time context as well as the up-to-date content so imperative to staying relevant. Twitter's trend-tracking ability is one of social media's most powerful yet underused tools. You can set your account to track worldwide, national, or even regional trends. Learning to jab with trends gives you tremendous power. You can tailor content to any situation or demographic, you can spark interest in your product or service among people outside your core group of followers, and you can scale your caring. Best of all, you can piggyback on other people's content, giving you a reprieve from having to think up fresh creative day after day. You'll still put out original content, but in this case, your content is the context you use to tell your story.

The night before I began writing this chapter, the television show *30 Rock* aired its series finale. When I went to Twitter the next day, as I expected, there it was in the list of top-ten trending topics for the United States. It seemed to me that if consumers felt like talking about *30 Rock*, marketers should be scrambling to tell their story within the context of *30 Rock*, too. Could talking about a defunct

television show really help you sell more candy, crowbars, or cheese puffs? It could if you're creative enough. If you were a brand trying to ride the *30 Rock* wave, the trick would be to look for the unexpected connections, not the obvious ones. Here's one: seven. The show aired for seven years. Has your company been in business for seven years? Do you hope to do something for seven years? Do you have seven in your company name? One brand does: 7 For All Mankind, maker of premium denim clothing—sometimes nicknamed “sevens”—often worn by Hollywood celebrities. Curious to see how the brand capitalized on the Twittersphere's free gift to their marketing department, I decided to check out their recent tweets.

A look on the 7 For All Mankind (@7FAM) Twitter page the day after the end of *30 Rock* revealed some light customer engagement—which is more than some companies manage, so kudos to them—a number of retweets sharing the nice things people have said about them or their clothing line—not so great, because that's birdiebragging, and too many brands are doing it—and a stream of traditional right hooks, such as “Love a good leather tee,” with a link to their product page. But

nowhere was there any indication that the brand had a clue about what was going on outside the world of fashion. It was a little ironic—is there any other industry that lives for trends like fashion? One of the most successful television shows of the decade just finished a seven-year run, and 7 For All Mankind didn't even mention it. What a waste. They can talk to denim lovers every day, but on this day they had a perfect opportunity to tell their story to people who weren't even thinking about denim, and they let it pass. More distressingly, they seem to be letting all of these opportunities go by. They didn't just opt not to ride *30 Rock*; their Twitter stream revealed that they weren't riding any news or current events, except the ones they created themselves through sweepstakes, giveaways, and sales.

7 For All Mankind is a booming company that sells a great product or it wouldn't have the cult following it has garnered in the decade it's been in business. And although its Twitter profile is lacking in cultural relevance, the brand does make a serious effort to engage with its followers and stay on top of the conversation around its product. But that's Twitter 101, à la 2008. By now they should be doing much, much more. It's fortunate that the company is such a fashion powerhouse (which is also why I thought they could handle a little constructive criticism); if it were smaller and just starting out, a habit of ignoring all the opportunities to tell its story outside the parameters of denim or fashion could hurt it. Consumers don't live in a fashion bubble; why should a clothing company?

## PROMOTED TWEETS

**C**reating context around trending hashtags only requires an investment of time, but buying a promoted tweet can be a great investment, too. On the same day that *30 Rock* trended, so did #GoRed, because the American Heart Association sponsored National Wear Red Day to raise awareness around the

fight against heart disease. Above the hashtag, there was an ad for Tide laundry detergent saying, "It's crazy how Tide gets rid of tough stains, but what about the stains you want to save?" Aha. Color. With #GoRed, Tide saw an opportunity to bring attention to its color-saving capabilities. That's a clever use of a hashtag.

It was micro, it was inexpensive, and it made an impression. Think about that. Consumers are spending 10 percent of their time on mobile and there is no more mobile platform than Twitter. Yet for all the consumer attention Twitter attracts, placing an ad there still only costs lunch

money compared with the price of a television ad. That was a smart use of Tide's media dollars. So many companies could have taken advantage of that opportunity. Where was Crayola? What about Target, with its big red bull's-eye? Or Red Envelope?

## USING TRENDS TO THROW RIGHT HOOKS

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**T**rending topics can be names or current events, but they can also be memes—words and phrases that have gone viral in the public sphere. These are low-hanging fruit, perfect storytelling fodder for any brand or business, especially local companies looking for a fun, creative way to differentiate themselves from their competitor.

On one of the days I was working on this chapter, the fifth-trending topic on Twitter was #sometimesyouhaveto. You can't get a better lead-in for a right hook. Literally anyone could adapt it to his or her needs:

A cheese shop could say, "#Sometimesyouhaveto eat a slice of Cabot clothbound Cheddar."

A fitness club could say, "#Sometimesyouhaveto use the sauna as incentive."


A lawyer could say, "#Sometimesyou

haveto call a lawyer to make your problem go away."

Taking advantage of hashtags is a great way for small businesses to get attention. That trending hashtag is getting clicked by tens of thousands of people. There is no reason why someone won't spot your version, like it, and go to your profile page to see what else you have to say. Once he's there, he can see the whole story you've been telling about yourself with your steady stream of jabs and occasional right hooks. He decides to follow you. Maybe he needs a lawyer. Maybe he has reason to believe that one day he will need a lawyer. Regardless, you are now that much closer to gaining a new customer when the time is right.




It could happen for a DJ in Miami named DJ Monte Carlo. While I was clicking on this trending hashtag, I spotted his tweet: "#SometimesYouHaveTo



**Results for #usopen** 

Related: #usopengolf, #merion, merion


**Top people** · View all

 **US Open Tennis**  @usopen  


Official Twitter of the US Open Tennis Championships. 2013 Dates: August 26 - September 9 | #usopen

**Tweets** Top / All / People you follow

53 new Tweets

 **KPMG Mickelson** @MickelsonHat 13 Jun

#FathersDay is around the corner. Do u have your gift picked out? Look no further than #PhilsBlueHat. Order yours at [PhilsBlueHat.com](http://PhilsBlueHat.com)

 Promoted by KPMG Mickelson

Expand

forgive those who hurt you but never forget what it taught you.”

I liked that. It hit my emotional center. I decided to follow him, and he wound up in my Twitter stream, where my colleague Sam could see it. I’m not a big clubgoer, but Sam is. Maybe Sam decided to follow DJ Monte Carlo, too. And maybe, in six months, Sam will be scrolling through his Twitter feed and he’ll see Monte Carlo throw a right hook announcing that he’s spinning at a club in New York City that night. And maybe Sam will decide to go, too.

Get it? This is not a far-fetched scenario; it’s how Twitter culture works every day. So get creative, have fun, and start experimenting with creating content on the

spot, because the trending topics you see one minute will be gone the next. They have short life spans.

Something else to realize is that just because a topic is not one of the top-ten trends on Twitter doesn’t mean it’s not worth paying attention to. The Twitter demographic skews hip and urban, but it doesn’t represent the only people talking online. You want to pay attention to what the rest of the world is interested in, too. Look for clues on Google trends. It skews young as well, just like all online data, but it reflects a broader population. During the 2013 U.S. Open golf tournament, the hashtag “#usopen” was, unsurprisingly, trending on Twitter. In response, KPMG

Mickelson, the “official Twitter account for Phil Mickelson’s hat,” promoted a tweet to followers of the hashtag, suggesting that golf fans honor their dads on Father’s Day by donating to a charitable anti-illiteracy campaign by buying a blue Phil Mickelson hat. KPMG Mickelson didn’t actually use the hashtag “#usopen” (in fact, if they’re not an official event sponsor, their legal department may not have let them use the hashtag) and yet, through strategic sponsoring, they came up as the top result for anyone checking that hashtag. They were smart about the hashtag they did use, too#—fathersday.\*

This example shows that KPMG Mickelson did something too many businesses don’t do on Twitter: They listened. It’s extremely hard to create a trending hashtag and bring people to you. It’s far better to listen, find out what’s trending, and bring yourself to the people. In this case, golf fans were already having the conversation. Promoting the tweet ensured that KPMG Mickelson’s message became part of that conversation. It was doubly smart to include it in the Father’s Day stream, as well.

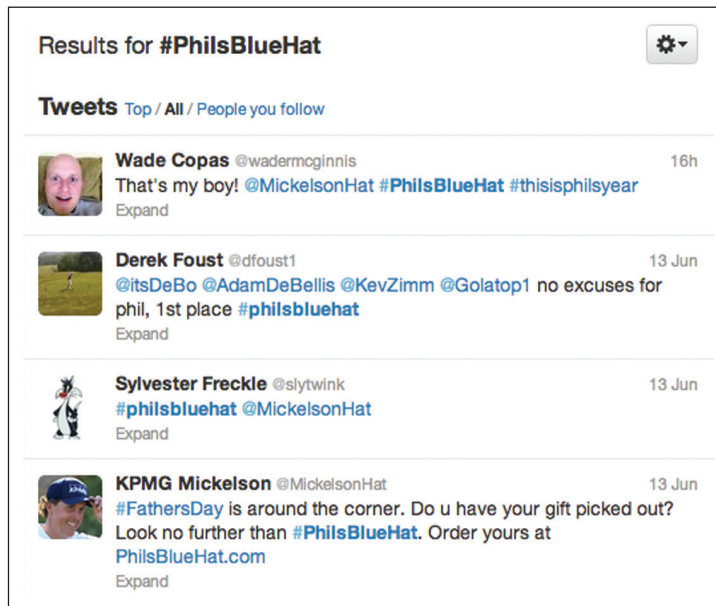
\* Notice that Twitter suggests that people interested in this hashtag follow U.S. Open tennis and not U.S. Open golf. I’m not sure if this says something great about U.S. Open tennis’s social media efforts or something terrible about U.S. Open golf’s, or if it exploits a gaping hole in Twitter’s algorithm.



This praise comes with two caveats:

1. Amazingly, even while KPMG Mickelson correctly joined trending conversations, they also unnecessarily included the hashtag “#PhilsBlueHat” in their tweet. How did their own invented hashtag do? A total of three people used it in the three days following KPMG’s original tweet. That’s embarrassing.
2. The link in the tweet doesn’t actually take consumers to make a purchase. It goes to KPMG’s Phil’s Blue Hat website, where it takes yet another click to buy the hat. Adding extra steps after a call to action wastes the consumer’s time.

Whether you jab or right hook, marketing moves like that prove that you’re up



to date, that you've got a sense of humor, and most of all, that you're paying attention. You'd be amazed at how far that goes

when customers are looking for someone with whom to do business.

## CHOOSE HASHTAGS CAREFULLY

**T**here's a skill to choosing hashtags. You can't just cover all your bases by tacking a bunch of hashtags onto a sentence. They won't work if they don't feel native to Twitter and natural to your brand. For example, Twitter is a hotbed of irony, but if your natural tone is generally serious and thoughtful, going ironic with your hashtags or suddenly adopting hipster vocabulary is just going to make you

look like a poser. Being cool has nothing to do with age; it has to do with how solid your identity is. Do not pretend to be anyone other than who you are. That said, don't take yourself too seriously, either. Be human. If you're not comfortable talking pop culture, find someone in your organization or partner with an agency that is. Whatever you do, however, stay true to yourself. Do not pretend to be cooler than

you are. Do not be the guy who hollered out, “Raise the roof!” a year too late. That’s how it sounds when you use hashtags and trending topics as indiscriminate marketing tactics, instead of incorporating select ones into your conversation. Listen. Entertain, through humor or provocation.

Entrepreneurs and small businesses may see the amount of work that has to go into keeping up on Twitter and wonder if they shouldn’t just give up and go home. There’s no way they can compete with larger companies that have extensive budgets and staff. A person has to sleep sometime. Yes, creating real-time micro-content is an enormous job. Yes, start-ups and small businesses will have to be selective about which trends are worth their time and money. But putting your effort into that kind of thinking will do a heck of a lot more for your bottom line than sitting around like a dope waiting for customers to come to you. And it’s way better than tweeting content that no one sees or cares about.

As a small business, you can gain an edge over larger companies when it comes to being nimble and authentic, two imperatives to successful Twitter marketing. Because you haven’t let your personality get squashed by a PR or legal department, you have more freedom to say what you think, to look for humor in unexpected places, and to be self-deprecating. That last one works like a charm. I just admitted in an interview for *Inc.* magazine that I peed in my bed until I was twelve years old. Can you imagine anyone in a Fortune 500 company getting that personal or irreverent? Neither can I. People love it when you acknowledge your humanity and vulnerability. You may be a lightweight up against a heavyweight, but you can be the lightweight who wakes up at 3 A.M., drinks a few raw eggs, and puts in two hours at the gym before the competition’s alarm clock goes off. People will notice your effort, and it will make a difference.

## SCALING THE UNSCALABLE

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**T**o see what that kind of effort looks like, take a look at the conversation Levi Lentz had with Green Mountain Coffee (full disclosure: Green Mountain

Coffee Roasters is a VaynerMedia client at the time of this book’s publication). Green Mountain Coffee was poking its nose far beyond its comfortable coffee burrow;

otherwise it never would have seen Lentz's tweet. All Lentz tweeted was "Say Hey' by Michael Franti is one of my favorite songs."

To his surprise, he received a reply from the verified Green Mountain Coffee Twitter account, saying, "We love that song! Isn't it motivational?"

On the surface, there is no connection between the topic of coffee and the bouncy love song Lentz was listening to. Green Mountain's jab is pure storytelling context—we're a brand that likes the same music you do. Now, what Lentz didn't know was that Michael Franti was working on a fair trade campaign with Green Mountain Coffee, so there was, in fact, a reason why Green Mountain was so interested in engaging with his tweet. However, the fact that he wasn't weirded out by the fact that a brand would contact him to talk about music proves how receptive people are to brands that reach out to consumers.

Coffee was not mentioned until Lentz brought it up, politely telling Green Mountain that he was just learning to like coffee, so he had never tried their products, but that he would definitely do so now. Green Mountain made some inquiries into his coffee tastes and followed up with a few recommendations. The conversation ended with Green Mountain asking Lentz to DM

his mailing address so they could send him a Michael Franti CD, just because.

Lentz knew he was being marketed to, but he didn't care. Out of the blue, a brand had struck up an engaging conversation, given him some information he was looking for, and offered to send him a gift. Of course he wrote about it on his blog. Then he wrote about it again a few days later when he received the CD in the mail, as well as another package containing a handwritten thank-you note for writing about the company on his blog, a coffee mug, and a sample of coffee.

By watching out for opportunities to introduce itself, Green Mountain Coffee garnered extensive earned media and gained a lifelong customer by being personable, charming, generous, and above all, real, with a perfect stranger. As any good matchmaker knows, when two people are reluctant to meet, you sometimes need to find a way to firmly nudge them into the same room so they can realize how compatible they are with one another. For those companies who learn to spin compelling stories from the threads of news and information floating through the Twittersphere, this social media platform is the most indefatigable consumer-to-brand connector that ever existed.

## COLOR COMMENTARY

### LACOSTE: Interrupting Its Own Conversation



Lacoste is a brand with a tremendous amount of staying power. I loved Lacoste’s alligator on my shirts when I was a little kid, and recently I’ve rediscovered the brand and started wearing it again. Reinventing yourself to your fans is no small feat, so kudos to Lacoste for pulling it off. Unfortunately, that’s the only praise they’re going to get from me, because this is one of the worst examples of a poorly thrown right hook in this book. It’s laughably bad. I know this because I laughed my face off when I saw it.

★ **Treats the consumer like an idiot:** In the text, Lacoste asks, “If you could do one thing today, what would it be?” That’s a great way to invite fans to engage. In a parallel universe, fans are posting comments like “Sleep!” “Ride a paddle boat,” “Travel to Mars,” “Promote whirled peas,” and in all likelihood, “Shop!”—which would be an ideal moment for the brand to respond directly to that consumer and build a relationship. It would be a great opportunity for the brand to show off the personality of its fans, which in turn should reflect favorably on its own persona. But in this universe, where someone at Lacoste isn’t thinking, the brand halts the

conversation before it even starts by answering its own question. It's as if Lacoste didn't trust that its fans would answer the way it wanted them to. Remember, it's "Give, give, give, give, give . . . ask," not, "Give, give, give, give, give . . . demand!"

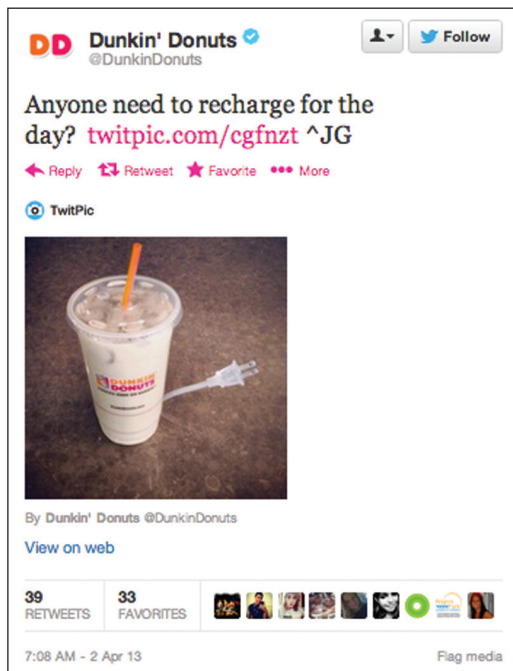
★ **Pointless link:** Like Zara on page 52, Lacoste seems to think that its website should be the hub of all its media outreach. If there's anything that brands should take away from this book, it's that there is no central hub anymore. Consumers are going to be coming through all kinds of portals, and forcing them to enter through the same door every time is going to make them tire of you. When customers click on this Twitter link, they're not taken to a special sale or even a promotion for the seasonal trends. They're just taken straight to the general website, which at the time of this writing features a blank-faced preteen.

Lacoste has more than 370,000 followers at the time of this writing. Of those followers, two saw fit to retweet this post. The link itself only received eighty-eight clicks. That's as bad as it gets. It's posts like this that are responsible for all the pointless noise on Twitter that makes it harder for the great content to get noticed. I can't even bring myself to say, "See you later, alligator," because if I see more of these kind of tweets later I may abandon the brand altogether.

## DUNKIN' DONUTS: Sweet, but Out of Date

This is a charming, lightweight jab to sell iced coffee. The copy is the appropriate length, the tone is right, and the image is clever. But I have to question why the creatives at Dunkin' Donuts decided to turn their iced coffee cup into a midcentury relic.

★ **Anachronistic image:** They would have come across as a much more modern brand if they had depicted the cup with an iPhone charger coming out of it instead of a two-pronged plug that could belong to an elderly uncle's bedside table lamp. It's possible that Dunkin' Donuts purposely used an old-fashioned plug to speak to the older demographic that frequents its stores, but if that's the case, they're speaking the right language in the wrong country, because the demographic that grew up living in two-pronged-plug homes doesn't have a particularly strong showing on Twitter (three-pronged grounded outlets became a required safety feature for new homes in the early 1960s). If it is possible for "Who is Paul McCartney?" to be a trending topic on Twitter during the 2012 Grammys, then it is equally possible that half the audience that follows Dunkin' Donuts on Twitter wouldn't know what the heck that thing is sticking out of the cup.



★ **One more criticism:** The tweet is signed "JG." I understand that Dunkin' Donuts is trying to humanize their brand, but in my opinion this is the wrong way to do it. You're putting your business at risk when you let anyone except your logo or brand build equity on these public platforms. What happens when JG moves on to Starbucks or McDonald's and people start asking, "Hey, where's JG?" Your brand needs a unified front and voice. This doesn't mean you don't appreciate the efforts of the people who work for you; it means that you have to ensure that everyone is working to build up your brand equity, not their own.



## ADIDAS: Slam Dunk

This Adidas Originals right hook is tremendous (yeah, the shoes are kind of whack, but . . .). I love where Adidas went with this for a few reasons.



★ **Cool picture:** They used a terrific picture of their product, clean but exploding with vibrant color. It's the kind of picture that will make a consumer scrolling through their stream stop in his tracks and take the right hook.

★ **Correct tone:** The copy is strong and builds up the story. It's written in the voice of the brand and target demo, even when they hit with the direct right hook, "Get 'em here." Often brands will write their copy with all the right slang and swag for a strong delivery, but when they go for the formal ask, that right hook, they switch to more formal corporate-speak, "You can buy them here." I love how Adidas carried the appropriate tone all the way through the right hook with "Get 'em here." Then

they got right to the point, linking straight to the product page, not their home page or some other secondary page that would have required more hunting and clicking.

You want to be gentle and subtle when you're jabbing, but when it's time to ask for business, go for it. Don't be bashful. Own it.

Good job, Adidas. Very, very, very well executed.

## HOLLISTER: Smart Strategy Gone Wrong

This is a really interesting case study because it represents a lot of smart strategy and a lot of awful execution all in one place.

★ **Brave creative:** Hollister deserves credit for understanding the power of Internet memes to reach a young demographic. In response to the huge popularity of planking—choosing a random location in which to lie facedown on the ground with your arms at your side—and its little brother, owling—choosing a random location in which to perch like, you guessed it, an owl—Hollister decided to try to spawn a movement toward “guarding”—holding your hands up in front of your eyes like you’re holding binoculars. They went for a big right hook in asking their community to tag and engage with their meme. It’s a bold move, and I love it! The problem is, though, that it’s ridiculously hard for a brand to create a meme. It’s not a particularly practical move, and consumers don’t tend to follow it. In general, brands should be following memes, not creating them. But Hollister tried, which is admirable.

★ **Clumsy hashtag:** Where they really went wrong is in choosing their hashtag. At the time that I first reviewed this tweet, a click on #guarding showed that security guards use it, and so do sixteen-year-old basketball players. Hollister doesn’t own the “guarding” concept, and so they should have chosen a more distinct hashtag to bring attention to the meme.

★ **Busy visuals:** Then there’s the photo they used. It’s colorful, but small and cluttered. There are too many things vying for your eye and the text is cramped. Hollister’s story could have been told through a tweet in a shorter, more streamlined way with a single up-close picture of a pair of pretty boys’ faces with the hashtag beneath.



## SURF TACOS: Feeding New Platforms

This isn't the greatest jab of all time, but I thought it would be a good idea to show some lightweight moves that won't revolutionize the social media world but do provide some examples of easy things you can do so you don't feel pressured to create masterpiece after masterpiece.

★ **Good cross-pollination:** Surf Taco has a respectable following on Twitter of about 6,400 followers. They have about 500 on Instagram. By pushing an Instagram picture on Twitter, they're wisely using their bigger pool of followers to increase the size of their smaller one. This is a strategy more people need to follow, although pushing Instagram to Twitter worked better before competition between the two meant that Twitter cut off seamless Instagram integration, so that it would no longer load natively. However, when you are trying to develop a following on a new platform, whether it's Pinterest, Instagram, Snapchat, or whatever we'll see in the future, it's important to use the platform where you have the most data to drive traffic to the new one (three years ago I was telling people to use their email service to drive traffic to Facebook). Siphoning data from place to place is an excellent strategic move to build awareness of your presence on a new platform.

★ **Appropriate aesthetic:** Surf Taco also clearly understands the aesthetic of Instagram. This isn't a particularly artistic or exciting shot, but at least they're not using a stock photo or a glossy product picture. It's a casual, natural scene from a real place, and based on the solid engagement it received, even from a relatively small community, it resonated with followers.

They also knew enough about Twitter users to include a hashtag, and a good one, too, though it might have been smart to include one or two broad hashtags, like “#baseball,” to try to earn even greater visibility.

All in all, not a bad play by a small New Jersey business.



## CHUBBIES SHORTS: It's All About the Voice

Ultimately, success in social media boils down to three things: understanding the nuances of your platform, using a distinct voice, and driving your business goals. Chubbies does all three in this, one of my favorite pieces of micro-content in this book.

The most powerful thing about this piece is the voice, which carries through this content from beginning to end. It's young, wry, irreverent, and entertaining—exactly what the demo is looking for when it comes to Twitter. The tweet itself shows that the brand understands the nuances of this platform. It is brief and spare, nothing but two hashtags that link to a meme that offers humorous suggestions of things that are superior, in

this case a cat named Pablo Picatso, to their competitor's product, cargo shorts. It's a ridiculous and funny comparison. Now, why did this meme work, when Hollister couldn't get much traction with #guarding? The hashtag. No one but Chubbies has any reason to create hashtags like #CargoEmbargo or #SOTO—Skies Out Thighs Out—so they have complete ownership. The hashtags are distinct enough to gain cachet to those people who decide to run with them. Chubbies didn't blow it by linking out to a product page, either.

You want to see ROI on social media? Tell a story that's good enough to get people to buy stuff. My creative team and I were impressed with this brand's commitment to upholding a strong voice and its attention to the nuances

of the platform. That raised our brand awareness, which got us talking about the shorts, which made us a little obsessed, which led me to buying eleven pairs, one for each member of the team. The VaynerMedia team's thighs will be out in Chubbies style.



## BULGARI US: A PR Company Gets in Its Own Way

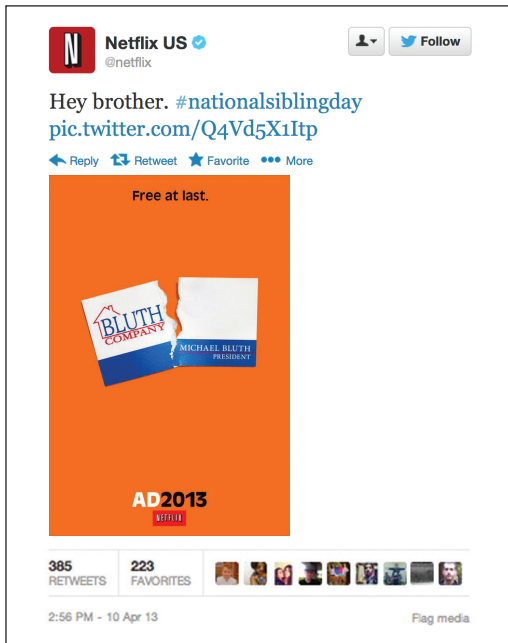
When my parents came to this country in the late 1970s, they became obsessed with Elizabeth Taylor. In fact, I'm confident that my grandmother's first two words in English were "Elizabeth Taylor." So I have affection for the icon, which is why I hate to see her poorly treated. This was surely a great event, melding two high-end, luxury brands. Unfortunately, Bulgari didn't commit to honoring Ms. Taylor online as much as they did offline.

Live tweeting events can get obnoxious when the only value the tweets bring are to the PR company trying to get impressions. That's what's going on with this tweet. The picture is so weak, an intern hiding behind a potted plant could have taken it. We could have chosen to criticize any of the twenty-three tweets they put out throughout the day but this one deserves special attention for being particularly terrible. It's hard to even see what's going on. Try this: Turn this page back, then quickly return to this page. Can you tell what you're looking at in a split second? You have to click on the link and look on a big PC screen, and then stick your nose close to that screen, to get an idea of what the sumptuous flower arrangements on the table looked like. But no one is going to make that effort, nor should they, because the picture holds zero value, either to the consumer or to the brand.

I do give Bulgari credit for mentioning the catering company. It shows heart for an international brand to publicly acknowledge a company with a 200-person Twitter following.



## NETFLIX: Simplicity Works



This is a perfectly executed jab, launched just days after Netflix announced that fifteen episodes of the long-awaited fourth season of the cult television show hit *Arrested Development* would air exclusively on their platform. Its success lies in packing a lot of power into a very simple package.

The picture is a clear reference to the show’s season-three finale, when a character quits the family company. And the copy is timely and clever. “Hey Brother,” a line frequently heard on the show, gave Netflix the perfect way to ride the hashtag wave of National Sibling Day. For the record, almost every day of the year has been designated an unofficial national day of something-or-other—use this knowledge well.

## AMC: Calls to Nowhere



This tweet feels schizophrenic—“Retweet if you love The Rock!NO!Watch this video!NO!Buy tickets!” In 140 characters, AMC managed to make three calls to action. That’s an accomplishment, but not one to be proud of. When you’re asking for three calls to action, you’re asking for no calls to action. The customer spotting this mishmash of links and short text coming through a mobile screen had to have been extremely confused. There’s just no way to know where to focus our attention first. AMC often makes some strong social media moves, but unfortunately, much like the GI Joe movies, this one sucked.

## NBA: Smart Partnering

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The NBA threw a great right hook here to raise awareness of their partnership with Kia and their joint MVP awards. Every decision shows finesse, from keeping the tweet streamlined and clear, to capitalizing the word “you” to help connect with their community. They repeatedly reinforced the Kia brand, beginning with the inclusion of the Kia Twitter handle in the tweet, to framing the NBA.com landing page—which opens with an article and photo announcing LeBron James as the winner of the MVP Kia Awards—in bold red with the Kia logo. I don’t know for sure that Kia paid the NBA for this fully integrated social media drive, but if they did, it was money well spent.





## HOLIDAY INN: A One-Way Conversation



So many public replies, so little value. Retweeting nice things said about you to your entire consumer base has only one name. It's called bragging. Doing it nonstop is called obnoxious. From April 21 to April 23, 2013, Holiday Inn spent most of its time retweeting the nice things people said about them to all thirty thousand of their fans, when instead they should have spent five minutes forming a deeper relationship with the fans who took the time to praise them. By the way, any time a brand of this size is following more people than follow it back, it speaks to just how severely they are misusing their Twitter account. It's a sign that they're gaming the system—following people in hopes that they will follow back. It's a cheap tactic.

Poor Holiday Inn is taking the heat in this book, but retweeting fan praise is a mistake that thousands of brands make every day, probably because PR companies love to tell their clients that it's a smart move. I'm telling you, it isn't. Retweets of this nature have little to no value to anyone who follows you. It's truly poor form, not to mention incredibly boring for your followers.

## FIFA: Breaking News



As I've said, businesses that want to compete in social media today need to embrace a dual identity. They will of course be the purveyors of a product or service, but they must also learn to act like a media company. This post illustrates exactly what that looks like. EA Sports FIFA is a video game for soccer lovers. But with this post, the brand shows that it understands that if it is to compete, it must become much more.

The tweet went out to announce that the teams for the UEFA Champions League semifinals had just been confirmed. Five or six years ago, soccer fans would have found this news out when it appeared at the bottom of the ESPN screen, and anyone who missed it would have read about it the next day in the newspaper. But on this day, a video game broke the news, if not to the world, then at least to anyone who followed it on Twitter. What did this jab do for the brand? The number of retweets was more than five hundred. Anyone who got their news here first turned right around and retweeted it to all of their followers. All those fans and their followers gave EA Sports FIFA the news credit. In addition, the brand reaped the rewards of nice levels of engagement, brand awareness, brand affinity, and probably tens if not hundreds of new followers—all by leading the media conversation around their genre. Those new followers represent many people who might be receptive when EA Sports FIFA throws a right hook in the form of an offer, coupon, or other call to action.

## TACO BELL: Getting It

This one is impressive, a truly awesome example of skillful trendjacking. #ThoughtsInBed was trending. Taco Bell jumped in and offered their answer in their typical snarky, cheeky, edgy voice. Obviously their efforts resonated, because out of only about

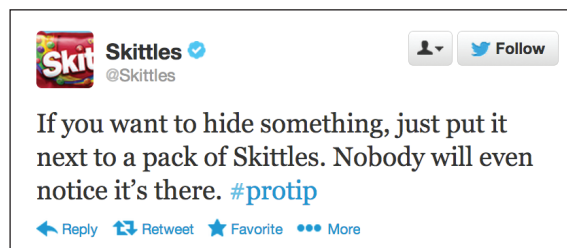
430,000 followers, they received almost 13,000 retweets. Why did the tweet perform so well? Because Taco Bell did exactly what they were supposed to do—they respected the platform, and they talked in the same voice as their consumer. They understand that the Twitter demo is a youth demo, and if you look at their stream, you can see that day in, day out, they're reaching out to their followers and consistently making contact, building enormous brand affinity in the process. They deserve the highest level of praise I can offer: They get it.



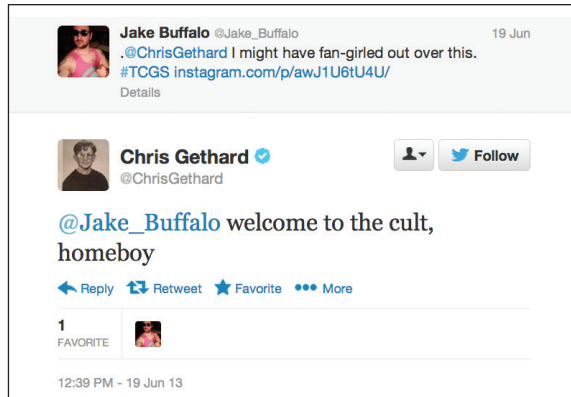
## SKITTLES: Hashtag Heaven

A lot of examples in this book make me want to cry, but this one made me smile. It probably made you smile, too. It's cute, it's funny, it sounds like a Skittles lover. The really smart thing they did, though, was to link their micro-content to an evergreen hash-

tag. It's a hashtag that never dies, its jokey, effervescent content ensuring that it remains relevant to anyone looking for a little humor. If Skittles keeps tweeting out micro-content like this, it has a long, exciting social media life ahead of it.



## CHRIS GETHARD: Hard Work That Will Pay Off



Comedians are an interesting demo on Twitter because an ungodly number of them use it to preview jokes, spread awareness, and throw right hooks like asking people to buy their DVD or come to a show. This upcoming comedian out of Brooklyn, however, has hit on the right formula. He tells jokes, of course, but he also retweets and engages, responding to and talking to fans and letting them know that he's paying attention and appreciating the time they take to let him know what they think. He's putting in a ton of effort that will result in big residual gains once he has a special or he decides to start throwing more right hooks.

## TWITTER: Clueless



Twitter helped my career in a huge way, so it's with a heavy heart that I have to criticize them for their stunning lack of engagement. They are in a constant state of push, putting out self-serving announcement after announcement, and make zero effort to build community. On June 6, 2013, they were in full-on brag mode, announcing their new partnership with WPP. That the platform itself has no idea how to natively storytell proves that we are still living in the early days of the grand social media timeline. Twitter has the capability to listen to people talk all day long. When it first bought Vine and millions of people were tweeting raves about the new product, why couldn't it even muster up the occasional "Thank you"? How could the marketing team not realize the importance of establishing an emotional connection with its users? If they had, maybe some of the people who flocked to Instagram after it launched video sharing might have stayed loyal to Vine, instead of sending it into a downward spiral. The world is emotional. If Twitter itself is not listening and reaching out on Twitter, how can they expect anyone to feel strongly about the platform? I have a lot of friends at Twitter and I'm curious to hear their opinions when they read this critique. I'm sure they'll have plenty to say.

## SPHERO: Nerding It Up



I love this in a big way. It's a perfect example of a brand that understands its audience and how to tell its story. They understand exactly who would buy a ball controlled by an iPhone. They used a video from a BuzzFeed link, which shows they speak their demo's native tongue. They get the audience, the medium, the language, the story. Even someone who didn't belong to the targeted demo would think this is cool.

Many start-ups struggle to tell good stories because instead of building community, they're focusing on fund-raising and getting an article about themselves published in TechCrunch. It's hard for a new business to strike the right balance among so many competing priorities. Sphero deserves kudos for managing to do it when so many others put it off. Truly, this is a perfect execution.

## FLEURTY GIRL: Flirting with Brilliance

A lot of people reading this book are small business owners with one-store locations. Fleurty Girl has five stores, but that's still small, and the owner's commitment to her community, both online and in-store, is impressive. Born and bred in New Orleans, owner Lauren Thom throws around acronyms like *NOLA*; she knows about the peach festival in Ruston; she retweeted to a New Orleans Saints player—she's speaking the native language. She probably hasn't built up a huge base yet, but she's working hard toward it. I wish more local businesses would put her

kind of energy into their media. There are ways she could add a little more spice and flair to her tweets to increase her retweet value. She could add hashtags, for example, to ignite emotions or laughs. When she tweeted, "I love peaches," an appropriate hashtag might have been #peachesfillthebelly. You need to do anything you can to get people to smile and burn a slightly deeper impression in your consumer's mind. Instead of wishing Darren Sproles a happy birthday, she could have looked up his age and matched it to the Saints player who wore that number during the 2012 season, so that the greeting becomes something a little more memorable, such as "Happy Ryan Steed!" Something like that would have been fun. I think she'll get there.





## SHAKESPEARE'S PIZZA: Delicious Local Flavor

I'm happy to praise yet another small business that has made a strong commitment to putting out good micro-content, and has a talented writer creating their copy, too. Pay attention—the third tweet seems like a simple response to Earth Day, but look at the clever hashtag. That hashtag shows that this company gets the psyche of a Twitter user, that it understands that it's those little moments that make consumers go “Ha!” that compel them to retweet to friends and put your brand in their feeds. Shakespeare's Pizza could have paid for a banner ad to get an impression, but no one would have cared.

The second tweet is on point, too. Anyone between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four is going to be all in. Heck, it will appeal to anyone with the mentality of a sixteen- to twenty-four-year-old—you know who you are, hit me up on Twitter. Shakespeare's tweets prove that a combination of creative writing and a deep understanding of what brings people to Twitter will lead a brand to overindex. They also made me hungry. For the record, I like mushrooms.



## **Questions to Ask About Your Twitter Content:**

Is it to the point?

Is the hashtag unique and memorable?

Is the image attached high quality?

Does the voice sound authentic?

Will it resonate with the Twitter audience?