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all about

twitter ...



What exactly is Twitter?

Twitter is a free social networking and micro-blogging service that enables its users to send and read other users' updates known as "tweets". Tweets are text-based posts of up to 140 characters in length which are displayed on the user's profile page and delivered to other users who have subscribed to them (known as "followers"). Senders can restrict delivery to those in their circle of friends or, by default, allow anybody to access them. Users can send and receive tweets via the Twitter website, Short Message Service (SMS) or external applications. (The service is free to use over the Internet, but using SMS may incur phone service provider fees).

The short format of the tweet is a defining characteristic of the service, allowing informal collaboration and quick information sharing that provides relief from rising email and IM fatigue. Twittering is also a less gated method of communication: you can share information with people that you wouldn't normally exchange email or IM messages with, opening up your circle of contacts to an ever-growing community of like-minded people.

In reality, Twitter is shaping up as the new beating heart of the real-time internet.

Imagine it as a worldwide 24/7 virtual cocktail party where everyone is standing around talking about things that matter to them. There might be one group talking about fishing, one group chatting about celebrities and gossip, and another talking about property investment. Twitter allows you to access those conversations and groups, meaning you can find niche audiences and join in those conversations and spread your messages to them. As people choose to follow you, they are signaling that they are happy to be exposed to your messages. They are most likely interested in the subject that you tweet about.

When you sign up with Twitter, you can use the service to post and receive messages to a network of contacts. Instead of sending a dozen e-mails or text messages, you send one message to your Twitter account, and the service distributes it to all your friends. Members use Twitter to organize impromptu gatherings, carry on a group conversation or just send a quick update to let people know what's going on. Increasingly, Twitter is being used as a business marketing tool as it can be used to direct prospects to your website, blog, forum etc.

The best way to make the most use of Twitter is not just answer the question "what are you doing?". Instead, answer: 'What's important to me?' That changes the conversation and makes value. It takes away some of the minutia and shows you want to talk about something that's more useful and interesting and that you want to share knowledge in your area of expertise. Twitter is therefore a vital part of your on-line "contribution currency" building strategy.

Twitter is not limited geographically or by time. It's an on-going real time waterfall of conversations, information, and breaking news that you dip in and out of. It's important to note that, like all social media, Twitter is a two way channel and you can only be successful with it if you engage in conversations and reciprocate within the community.

A brief history of Twitter:

Twitter's history is entwined with a few other Internet companies. Twitter's founders are [Evan Williams](#), [Biz Stone](#) and [Jack Dorsey](#). A few years before Twitter was born, Williams created Blogger, a popular Web journal service. Internet giant Google purchased Blogger, and Williams began to work directly for Google. Before long, he and Google employee Stone left the Internet giant to form a new company called [Odeo](#). Odeo is a podcasting service company. According to Williams, he didn't have a personal interest in podcasting, and under his guidance, the company temporarily lost focus. However, one of Odeo's products was just beginning to gather steam: Twitter, a new messaging service. Stone gave Twitter its name, comparing the short spurts of information exchange to the chirping of birds and pointing out that many ring tones sound like bird calls [source: San Francisco Chronicle].

As the service became a more important part of Odeo, Stone and Williams decided to form a new company with Twitter as the flagship product.

Williams bought out Odeo and Twitter from investors, then combined the existing company and service into a new venture called Obvious Corporation. Jack Dorsey joined the team and began to develop new ways for users to interface with Twitter, including through computer applications like instant messaging and e-mail. In March 2006, Twitter split off from Obvious to become its own company, Twitter Incorporated.

At the time of writing (May '09), it is believed that Twitter has around 5 million users, although that number is growing at a staggering amount per day!



Coming of Age:

The power of Twitter was fully demonstrated when it beat the traditional media networks to break the news about the [Hudson plane crash](#). Dramatic scenes from the emergency landing of a US Airways flight into the Hudson River were first seen on Twitter. User [Janis Krums](#) was aboard a ferry used to rescue stranded passengers, and uploaded the news-breaking photo to [TwitPic](#) from his iPhone during the rescue. His caption read 'There's a plane in the Hudson. I'm on the ferry going to pick up the people. Crazy.'

The flight took off from LaGuardia airport at 3.26PM, and was already in trouble less than a minute later. Krums' photo appeared on TwitPic just 10 minutes after take off, at 3.36PM. Traditional media outlet the New York Times was 'a bit slow to get news' of the incident onto its web site, running it as a breaking news item at 3.48PM but not covering it as a front page story until 4.00PM. Krums himself was interviewed by MSBNC 30 minutes after posting the image, but it was definitely Twitter that broke the story first and spread it around the globe.

Social media is an increasingly accepted method of communication, but equally important is its growing role in breaking stories such as the Hudson crash, and its use by world figures to get their message across. [Barack Obama](#) became the first President elect with his own [Facebook](#), [mySpace](#) and [Twitter](#) pages, nicely complemented by his personal [YouTube](#) channel. CNN senior political analyst Bill Schneider believes “Obama has invented an alternative media model”.



These traditional institutions breaking away from more conventional means, and embracing the social media revolution shows a resignation, willing or otherwise, to the fact that sites such as Twitter and Facebook are an integral part of the modern world.

U.S. chat show diva, [Oprah](#), tweeted her first tweet live on air (April 2009). Meanwhile, celebrity tweeter, the actor [Ashton Kutcher](#), beat [CNN](#) in a competition to acquire a million followers.

This is particularly interesting as it demonstrates my theory that Twitter is going to be most beneficial to the individual rather than corporations. By its very nature, Twitter brings social media and networking up close and personal, which favours the individual, although companies can also successfully use it, provided that they have an on-line branding strategy in place.

In May '09, the Whitehouse announced a new social media strategy that includes Twitter. In the President's Weekly Address, he called on government to “recognize that we cannot meet the challenges of today with old habits and stale thinking.” He added that “we need to reform our government so that it is more efficient, more transparent, and more creative,” and pledged to “reach beyond the halls of government” to engage the public. Obama sees social networking as a way to interact with the people and he uses Twitter as part of that strategy.



www.twitter.com/whitehouse

Benefits of using Twitter

Public conversations:

Twitter gives everyone the option of making discussions public. You can't do this with e-mail, and it's difficult to accomplish on a blog. If you believe that your exchange with others would benefit from public input, or if you just want to expose the discussion to others, you have that option. You can always take things private via direct messaging if you wish.

Immediacy:

When you just can't wait for information, Twitter is unbeatable for getting your question to a large group. It's impractical to do this with e-mail. People's inboxes are already cluttered with spam and you have no way of getting your message to people you don't know. Also, through “retweeting,” a message can reach a large number of people who aren't on your follower list. This brings new perspectives to the conversation and gives you the opportunity to discover people you wouldn't have otherwise met.

Retweeting:

While we're on the subject, don't underestimate the power of the retweet. When someone picks up your message and forwards it to their followers, it magnifies your reach and often recruits new followers in the process. Sending provocative messages that others retweet is a great way to build your following and your contact list for information-gathering and promotion. It's also a great way to show others what you consider is relevant, and to promote others – which is all part of the Twitter ethos.

Discovery:

When it comes to learning new things, Twitter is unbeatable, as it allows you to leverage other people's time and news-gathering. Twitter is the most efficient mechanism I've ever seen for discovering interesting information. Also, you know that comments and recommendations from certain people will be of particular interest to you, so you have the option of drilling down on individual profiles to see what they've been saying recently. Chaotic? Definitely, but that's part of the discovery process.

Searchable:

If you want to find out what people are saying about you right now, services like [Twitscoop](#) and [Monitter](#) enable you to instantly track mentions of your company, product, industry or whatever and to save them as [RSS](#) feeds for later browsing. You can do the same with [Twitter Search](#). [Google Alerts](#) currently doesn't index Twitter feeds, but [Filtrbox](#) does.

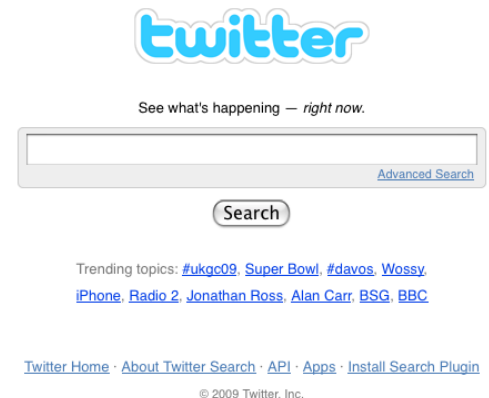
While you can use Twitter's search tool to find specific people, companies, and their messages ("tweets") on the service, [Hashtags](#) (#) allow users to sort topics into useful categories to revisit later. A hashtag is a word or string of characters that starts with a number sign. When a hashtag appears in a tweet, it links that word to its Twitter Search results page.

There is even a "location" search tool on Twitter, where you can search on people who live in your area.

It is my belief that Twitter will over-take Google as the main search engine. A Twitter search is organic and real-time, and you cannot pay to be at the top of the rankings.

Niche:

The more niche your expertise, the better, as far as Twitter is concerned. It allows you to connect with people interested in the subject of your area of expertise. It also allows you to follow experts in your field and learn from them, leveraging their time and knowledge. You can search on niche subjects and find information or people relevant to you and your business. With the vastness of the social media landscape, Twitter is an easy way to find people who are interested in hearing your messages or engaging with you in your area of expertise.



Why Twitter is Useful:

Twitter has many uses for both personal and business use. It's a great way to keep in touch with your friends and quickly broadcast information about where you are and what you're up to. But to suggest that is all it's good for is doing Twitter a massive dis-service!

For business, Twitter can be used to broadcast your company's latest news and blog posts, interact with your customers, or to enable easy internal collaboration and group communication. Here are some of the main uses of Twitter:

- Network, Network, Network. Twitter makes it easy to find and build relationships with people in your industry. Find contacts, build friendships, reap the benefits!
- Get exposure. Get you or your company known by building a network in your niche. Be vocal, be opinionated, and get involved.
- Stay informed. News breaks fast on Twitter. Get the latest scoops first [CNN](#) and the [BBC](#) both have Twitter feeds.
- Notify your customers. You can utilise twitter [RSS](#) feed feature to push news out to your customers. Get your customers to sign up to the [RSS](#) feed of your twitter. Use it to notify of new products or sales.
- Monitor chatter about your brand. See what people are saying about you or your brand.
- Monitor your reputation and respond. Using a tool such as [Tweet Scan](#) makes it easy.
- Provide live coverage of an event. Create a buzz and spark discussion of a live event.
- Keep your friends and colleagues informed of your whereabouts. If you travel frequently let your family, friends and colleagues know where you are quickly and easily. Twitter accepts updates from SMS so it's easy to post.
- Arrange a meet up. Set up a spur of the moment meeting. By broadcasting your whereabouts you can easily organise a get together with people in your network.
- Manage Employees and Projects. Your team can use Twitter to liaise with one another and keep each other up to date of any important happenings. You can set the updates to private so no one in the outside world will know your private business.
- Get advice. Use your followers as a "Collective Brain". [Robert Scoble](#) has 100's of followers and regularly gets over 1000 replies to questions he asks.
- Communicate Press Releases. Alert your followers or other people in your organisation about your latest press release. Keep the information flowing.
- Note Taking. Twitter is an ideal place to store random musings and thoughts. You can send an update to your twitter from any mobile device. Capture your creativity any time, any place!
- Find work. Use keyword searches to find people in your target industry. Then get to know them. You will be amazed at what can happen! Find new clients or customers.
- Manage your ToDo list. Some ToDo services such as [Remember the Milk](#) accept updates from Twitter. So you can "tweet" using a mobile device and have it feed directly into your ToDo list, handy!
- Inform and update event participants. Use Twitter to update conference or exhibition attendees of the happenings such as parties or key note addresses. If published times change this is a great way to push out information.
- Get some feedback. Ask you twitter network for comments, or an appraisal of you latest web page, report, or other piece of work.
- Push your blog posts. If you or your company has a blog use Twitter to inform your network of updates and boost your coverage. There's a few [Wordpress plugins](#) that will do this automatically for you. Check out [Twitter Updater](#).

- Fill Vacancies. Your network will be able to recommend prospective new freelancers or employees.
- Using an application like [TwitPic](#), you can direct people to photograph(s) via a web link . If you are an artist, this could be a picture of your latest sculpture. If you are renting out a property, it could be pictures of the property for let. Remember: a picture paints a thousand words!
- If you are a forum owner, you can use Twitter to direct people to your forum discussions.
- For fun: let's not forget that Twitter is fun and somewhat addictive to use. It's also easy and quick to get started, making it attractive to even the most technophobic people!

Summary:

As we learned at the beginning of this e-book, the simple dictionary definition of “Twitter” is “microblogging/social networking platform that places a 140- character limit on each individual post/tweet.” However, describing Twitter so would fail to encapsulate the power of this new omnipresent medium. Twitter can be viewed at as a “marketing tool, feedreader, tracking device, communication tool & news breaker” all rolled into one. Or, Twitter can be seen as a collective life stream of a community of which you are a member.

Twitter is hard to describe specifically because it is a social utility with more possible uses than a Swiss Army knife. New uses are being discovered every day and people are finding more and more creative ways of monetising it. Twitter is not a fad or a gimmick, it is definitely here to stay in my humble opinion and it will most benefit those that get started now, as it is still in the realms of “early adopter” territory here in the U.K.



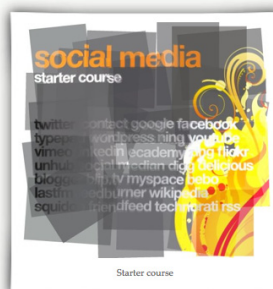
twitter handle: [@nicktadd](#)



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