U14587: ADVANCES IN BIOTECHNOLOGY (SEP-2017 TO DEC-2017)

Twitter Task 2: 'Finding your purpose'

Congratulations! You have made it onto Twitter. You have your own account. You followed a bunch of new people, and have a handful followers: Some of which you might know (your second and third Twitter accounts); your friends; a couple of dodgy spam accounts; and a few valuable 'real' accounts, which at the same time made you cheer and wonder where they came from, and what they expect.

This is the stage where a lot of new users abandon their accounts. The initial excitement has worn off. You tweeted a few times, but it feels like shouting into the abyss, and you wonder who is listening - if anybody at all. You decide that Twitter isn't really for you, and if somebody asks if you have a Twitter account, you aren't quite sure what to reply.

I call it the 'Stephen Fry' stage. There are a few accounts that every new user seems to follow. Usually these are Stephen Fry, BBC news, and depending on your interests, other news accounts, organisations you like, and the odd celebrity.

Of course, it is very unlikely that any of these accounts will read your tweets. Their primary purpose on Twitter is to 'shout'. They are likely to only engage with you if you address them directly.

So what do you do to get to the very exciting, rewarding, and slightly scary stage 2, where real engagement and networking happens?

You need to identify your purpose, and then your audience.

If your goal is networking, this is very easy. Just follow everyone who you would like to network with - researchers, journalists, politicians, writers, students, doctors, nurses, you get the picture.

The important thing is: You follow real people.

It is very hard to provide 'science news to everyone!' (believe me, I have heard this aim many times from budding science communicators). It is not possible to provide content in the format, language and detail of information that euqally engages young people, journalists, health care professionals and parents. You will need to narrow it down.

Finding your purpose

As new lecturer, I am doing the Postgraduate Certificate for Teaching in Higher Education this year. For our first task in Week 1, we had to deliver a 10-minute microteaching session. I chose to design a compact version of the biotechnology timeline task that we did in Week 1. It was in a small group setting of four other 'lecturer students' and a tutor. One participant was particularly

blown away. He was a paramedic with a background in pediatrics, and he had never particularly thought about biotechnology. However, seeing all the scientific break-throughs on one timeline, and realising how recent big innovations like genetic engineering were in our total history, totally blew his mind: "You talked about the explosion of new technologies, that only happened in the last twenty years, how much more of that is likely to come, and how we can't even imagine at this point what might happen. It made me think about the implications for my own profession."

Are there any biotechnology outlets that deliver clear and relevant information about advances in biotechnology to paramedics, nurses, and other health care professionals? Our department is part of the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, boasting three health-focussed departments. I am curating a list of Tweeters here, which are well worth following: https://twitter.com/AnneOsterrieder/lists/fhls-tweeters/members

Other ideas:

- Providing links to high quality biotechnology teaching resources for science educators. Many science teachers connect under the hashtag #ASEchat (Association for Science Education, http://www.ase.org.uk/) or https://twitter.com/hashtag/scichat?src=hash.
- Aiming at scientists and students, covering press releases that don't make the big press: http://www.eurekalert.org/.
- Similarly, covering primary scientific papers and reviews in an engaging way, which aren't available as press releases (far too many!).
- Delivering relevant content to end users of biotechnology applications, for example plant biotechnology content to farmers and plant nurseries (this can end up in heated debates though, if it comes to controversial technologies, so be aware!).
- Aiming at high school students (or younger!), covering biotechnology concepts in simple and casual language.

Feel free to steal one of these, or come up with your own one.

Making your purpose clear

After your group has agreed on what audience your account will cater to, your next steps are:

1. Adjust your profile description to reflect your purpose.

2. Post a few tweets aimed at your specific audience.

3. Find Twitter users from your target audience.

Use obvious key words in the Twitter search to get started, and follow 'real people'. You also quickly should find 'hubs' - for example, https://twitter.com/FarmersOfTheUK or https://twitter.com/WeParamedics. Their followers are your audience.

When you follow someone, they will check your profile and decide in about five seconds whether they want to follow you back or not. If your biography and your latest content reflect your purpose, you should gain new followers and interest in your account very quickly.

Learning outcomes

The Twitter group activity is linked to the following course learning outcomes and Brookes Graduate attributes. Being able to explain biotechnological concepts to your colleagues or your lecturers is one thing. Being able to research and identify relevant content, and communicate scientific topics to an audience with a different background, perspective and life experience can be challenging at first, but will be very valuable for your future career!

On successful completion of this module, students will be able to:	Brookes Attribute developed	Other GAs developed
1. Understand and explain key advanced concepts of biotechnology and its various applications.	Academic literacy	Research literacy
2. Discuss the use of genetic tools to develop transgenic plants and animals for research and biotechnological applications.	Academic literacy	Research literacy
3. Appreciate some of the ethical concerns and public perception of genetic technologies and applications, and engage in discussion about these issues.	Personal critical self awareness	Academic literacy Active citizenship
9. Research, review and synthesise the specialist literature for presentation.	Academic literacy	Research literacy Digital and IT literacy
10. Create and curate a professional Twitter account and critically evaluate its impact on themselves and their audiences.	Digital and IT literacy	Personal critical self awareness Academic literacy Research literacy Active citizenship
11. Learn independently or as part of a group, work collaboratively offline and online, and share ideas and resources.	Active citizenship	Digital and IT literacy

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