



Book Twitter Power

How to Dominate Your Market One Tweet at a Time

Joel Comm and Ken Burge
Wiley, 2009

Recommendation

Comm's book will alert you to the real business possibilities of Twitter. He guides new and intermediate Twitter users through the whole process of using Twitter productively, from creating a profile to building a following to measuring your success. He also explains how to get business results on Twitter and how to measure those results. While Comm covers the basics for beginners, even experienced users will discover tidbits that will improve how they tweet. *BooksInShort* needs more than 140 characters to recommend Comm's book, which gives corporate communicators, brand managers and individuals the information they need to do Twitter right.

Take-Aways

- Twitter helps companies build relationships, enhance brands, find resources and attract new Web site visitors.
- People post messages on Twitter in 140-character "tweets."
- People like Twitter's immediacy and easy two-way communication.
- For optimal branding, create a thorough profile on Twitter complete with your unique background story.
- Social media gives you access to millions of connections and prospects, but building a following on Twitter requires providing good, engaging tweets.
- Connect with your customers by keeping them up-to-date with early peeks or other opportunities.
- Successful businesses promote their brands on Twitter without being promotional.
- Third-party applications create interfaces a business can use to monitor or automate its Twitter activities.
- Starbucks uses its Twitter account to respond to customer queries.
- To see whether your Twitter strategy is working, track your followers and responses to your tweets.

Summary

Twitter: Powerful Social Media in 140 Characters or Less

The interaction between a person who posts original content and the people who reply to that content constitutes the social aspect of online social media. The content that emerges from these conversations builds virtual communities and connections that businesses can use to reach their markets and build brand loyalty. Twitter differs from other social media sites and from other blogs because its conversations take place in bite-sized, 140-character-maximum chunks, "because that's all that can fit through SMS [mobile text messaging] systems." Twitter isn't the only microblogging social media service. Facebook and LinkedIn each offer options for microblogging to update your current status. While these features don't have size limits like Twitter, their entries do tend to be short.

"The goal of using Twitter is to build relationships – especially relationships that can benefit your company."

The social media can connect your business to a large audience. Facebook "claims" more than 60 million "active" members. The Internet hosts more than 100 million English-language blogs. Twitter already has more than three million users with no end in sight, and its largest user group fits an ideal consumer demographic: professionals from 35 to 44 years old with good salaries.

"Social media is all about personal branding."

Blogs belong to the category of social media because they open the door to interactions among interested audiences, often with very targeted demographic profiles. While most social media sites are public, only people with access can enter or drive the conversations in a blog. Some membership sites provide communities for those with shared interests in niche topics. For example, photography sites offer an interactive community where people can connect and even sell their work.

“Web sites have users, Facebook has friends and Twitter has followers.”

Twitter, which benefited from word-of-mouth early on, has received more attention than other microblogging services. To use it, just sign up, write a short note called a “tweet” and start reading other people’s tweets. The people who track your tweets, called your “followers,” will see your notes, and you’ll see tweets from people you follow. Users can send quick messages for instant feedback without paying the fees that most communication companies charge. Journalism student James Buck showed Twitter’s reach when he was arrested in Egypt for taking pictures at a demonstration. He sent the message, “Arrested,” by cell phone to his Twitter followers. They told the U.S. Embassy and his university, which hired an attorney. Officials let Buck go the next day, though they jailed and mistreated his Twitter-less interpreter for three months.

How to Start Using Twitter

Picking a user name is the first thing you do when you join Twitter. Unfortunately, many people don’t think this through. Other people can find you by using the Twitter search engine or by adding your name to the twitter URL. (Try twitter.com/stevejobs, for example.) Pick a logical, relevant name so people can remember it. When you register, Twitter lets you download your contact list from various Web-based e-mail applications. Don’t do that right away, since your account won’t yet have any tweets and people generally don’t follow friends with blank profiles. Since following others is the best way to get people to follow you, set your promotional direction and then add some content before you broadcast.

“The benefits – and the fun – of Twitter aren’t at the beginning when you’re building your follower list.”

Decide what brand name you want to promote with your Twitter user ID: your name, company name, product or Web site? Your user ID (ABC Brands) isn’t the same as the personal name (Jane) you use in the “Name” field, so this decision depends on how you plan to use Twitter. You may want more than one ID, perhaps, one for business and one that’s personal, or one for each brand. Twitter allows you to protect your updates so no one can see your tweets unless you approve, but protecting your account makes it harder for you to use Twitter for marketing. Also, this is not the time to be camera shy. If you don’t upload a good photo in Twitter, people won’t take you seriously. You can upload an image, but a photograph has more impact.

“While there are strategies to make that process faster...no one ever builds a four-figure follower list overnight.”

Twitter lets you put a URL in your profile to link it to your Web site, a special promotion, a unique biography page or anything else. You can change it regularly to reflect your current projects or promotions. The last item in your registration is your biography, where Twitter “asks you to summarize your life in 160 characters.” A good “bio” states a few basic things about you and ends with a personal statement, like, “Wedding photographer, portrait pro and creative artist who likes to photograph his kids at embarrassing moments.” Now, you can choose one of Twitter’s backgrounds and be done, but a custom background offers more branding opportunities. If the thought of creating a background image with a sidebar paralyzes you, select a free template or recruit someone to design the background. It should be 80 pixels x 587 pixels on a standard 1898 x 1593 image using a maximum image size of 800kb. Make sure your brand’s profile and background reflect the story you want to tell. The last important thing in your settings is “Notices.” Choosing to receive a notice every time someone new follows you or sends you a private message ensures that you will act on the contact, whether to reply or to follow someone.

“Just as breaking news is now more breaking than ever, businesses can harness the immediacy of Twitter to innovate and build relationships like never before.”

Some people respond to and follow everyone, regardless of their bios and tweets. First find people you want to follow because of shared interests. No magic formula can help you choose people to follow, but Twitter does have a built-in search tool where you can enter keywords to find experts on various subjects, including your professional field. To determine which experts to follow, review their tweets and profiles. Reply to an expert’s tweet to build a relationship and maybe gain new followers if the expert answers you. To relay individual requests or avoid public view, send a personal or “direct” message. To garner an expert’s respect (and gain more followers), share a tidbit the expert doesn’t know or post a link to a valuable resource. Joining a conversation and sharing free information also attracts new followers.

“Part of the site’s appeal isn’t just the pictures; it’s the advice enthusiasts can pick up from experts working in their field and ready to share the benefits of their experience.”

Friends who use Twitter can give you a good start in finding and following people, but building a follower list takes patience. One way to build a business following is to offer a free e-book or a chance to win a prize. If you have a blog or a social media page, connect Twitter to it. Post a Twitter badge on your blog and send tweets to your Facebook account. Add your Twitter name to your e-mail signature, e-mail newsletter, business card and other communications tools.

How to Do Twitter Right

Failing to follow Twitter etiquette can affect your following, so heed these rules of conduct:

1. **“Don’t spam”** – Users recognize spammers because they follow lots of people and spew out pushy content, but few people follow them.
2. **“Follow style rules”** – Don’t tweet in all-caps. Remember that some people don’t know SMS texting language and its shortcuts.
3. **“Give credit for retweets”** – If you repeat someone else’s tweet, that’s a retweet or RT. Credit the first sender by noting “Retweet @username” before the original message.
4. **“Stick to 140 characters”** – Don’t break messages longer than 140 characters into multiple tweets. This confuses recipients; stick to one tweet at a time.
5. **“Follow people who follow you”** – People break this rule because they have no interest in some of their followers or they’re spammers. When you open a new Twitter account, build it up by “following back” your followers.

“Good content on Twitter needs to be entertaining. It needs to be informative. It needs to be valuable. And it needs to be short.”

You know you’re doing things right when your following grows and people refer to your tweets. Doing Twitter right means sharing valuable, insightful information, asking valid questions or triggering good conversations. You could also send a broadcast, a statement tweet that makes an announcement, shares new information or posts a famous quote. A broadcast doesn’t include another Twitter user’s ID or any links. To avoid boring people, limit your broadcast tweets.

“When your followers hit the ‘reply’ button to tell you what they think, they’re also going to be telling their followers what they think.”

Some members appear on Twitter only to announce new links from their Web sites by way of services like Twitterfeed that update their Twitter IDs every time they post something new. Not every user can pull this off since some people won’t follow users whose tweets are all links. You can share the occasional, “What are you doing?” tweet, but spice it up with interesting details. Instead of “About to take a nap,” write, “About to take a nap. Fingers already half-asleep. Summertime always does this to me.” Such notes give people insight into your personality, just as reading other people’s tweets tells you something about them.

Communicating with Customers and Your Team

Use Twitter to ask your customers for feedback about your products or services. They’ll love having a say and perhaps they’ll spread the word about you with their answering tweets. If you want to ask a question that you don’t want to air in public, send a direct message to your customers. Remember that Twitter feedback will be short. Set up alerts using services like Tweetbeep to track mentions of your company, competitors and industry. When someone mentions your business, you can respond. If people compliment you, take notice and thank them. If you are building a team, see if the potential members use Twitter. That may show you whether they keep up with social media and technology. You may want to set up a protected, members-only Twitter account for team members, particularly if some of them work far away from the parent office. Personal tweets remind members that they’re working with real people.

“The Internet might have changed some of the ways that advertising works, but brand building is still important.”

Third-party applications can save time and support your Twitter efforts. For example, some sites enable you to schedule tweets so you can spread your messages out without being on Twitter all day. You can take Twitter with you using mobile cell phone apps. Some Twitter apps let you cluster your followers by topic, location or another trait; and they let you use Twitter without going to twitter.com. “Yellow pages” for Twitter Web sites allow you to search for Twitter users by job, company, industry and other profile categories.

Build Your Brand on Twitter

Before you jump into Twitter, plan how you want to support your brand, what you want your brand to represent and how you want others to see it. Consider ways to tell its story. Mars, the makers of M&Ms candies, changes the background of its Twitter profile based on its current ad campaign. The brand’s creativity, sense of fun and skilled storytelling resonate with consumers.

“Even some of the world’s biggest companies have recognized the power of Twitter to drive home their message, and while not all of them are doing it correctly, a number have come up with some valuable models anyone can copy.”

To make the most of Twitter for your company, add a human touch. Starbucks’ Twitter account uses the company name and logo, but employees answer customers’ questions in a warm, personable way in its tweets. Smart firms’ tweets offer more than customer service, including tips, response to feedback, and targeted offers or coupons. When you promote on Twitter, avoid the hard sell. To relay a corporate message, be human but not too personal; for an individual brand, share your thoughts but don’t make constant offers. When staff members tweet for your brand, limit your control and let them show some personality. If you use Twitter for a campaign, continue using it after the promotion ends. You’ll have built up a following and, perhaps, some momentum. Sticking with Twitter will help your business stay in people’s minds.

“Plenty of smart companies are using it to build a brand, turn their customers into a community, and cement the name of their products in the minds of their market.”

Work on building relationships and gaining trust, so people feel drawn to your site. Write tweets that link to entries on your blog and use Twitter to get people to read it. For example, send a tweet explaining the value customers will get from a blog entry. When people receive more information and see value, they will click on your link. To drive your followers to read your blog, reply to their tweets, answer questions, share advice and do things for them. Involve people by asking them what they’d like to read on the blog. The same applies to promoting affiliate links or getting partners to register on your site. Maintain the final say on content since you know your audience.

“Use your account for good purposes. Use it to make friends and help people. It’s a jungle out there, so be careful and play nice.”

To avoid any legal ramifications of your Twitter use, maintain normal social restraints while using Twitter; that is, avoid hurting others, revealing secrets, breaking contracts, appropriating other people’s brand or infringing on their copyrights. If you’re not sure what to do, ask a lawyer.

Measuring Your Success

Since Twitter doesn’t provide statistics, how can you measure your success? To collect your own stats, test your tweets and then track the number of times people retweet your original tweet or reply to you. You can track the followers you’ve retweeted or replied to, and record the number of followers you have before and after a tweet. Of course, some followers might follow for reasons that are unrelated to that tweet, but over time you can get an idea of what works. Tie trendy Twitter topics to your tweets for more visibility. And, while you’re tweeting, have some fun.

About the Authors

Joel Comm, the author of *The AdSense Code* and *Click Here to Order*, speaks and writes often about Internet marketing and making money online. His business partner **Ken Burge** is president of InfoMedia, Inc.
