Twitter Secrets

How Short Messages Can Make A Big Difference To Your Business

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INTRODUCTION — WHAT IS TWITTER AND WHY DOES IT WORK?

I've seen a lot of ideas turn up on the Internet. Some of those ideas I've recognized right away as killer apps. I just knew that they would be a valuable addition to an online publisher's moneymaking toolkit and help all of us generate a little more cash from our websites.

The rise of video, for example, has already changed the way I interact with my users.

Other ideas I could see would never fly.

Every so often, for example, someone comes up with a new way of embedding ads into images — and giving the photographer the money. Maybe that's going to work one day but as long as there are plenty of good quality, low-cost and even free photos available, I don't see any reason to give a share of my ad revenue to someone else.

Sometimes though a system comes along that just makes me go "huh?" At first, I can't understand why anyone would use it.

Then I try it.

And after a while, I can't understand how I managed without it for so long.

Twitter is one of those ideas.

The system really couldn't be any simpler. It lets anyone send a message no longer than 140 characters that answers the question "What are you doing now?"

You can send that message at any time from your computer or from your mobile phone, and it can be seen by anyone who has chosen to follow these messages.

That's all there is to it.

Told you it was simple.

And yet, it's also incredibly addictive and for business owners, very valuable too.

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Ever since I stumbled onto Twitter, I've given myself sore thumbs typing messages. I do it all the time, and I love it. It's fantastic fun, like writing a personal blog but without the effort.

The pleasure alone would be a good enough reason for me to recommend Twitter but Twitter isn't just good fun. It's also proved to be a very valuable and easy way of finding new users and customers, a powerful networking tool and an excellent way of picking up useful information.

In this report, I'm going to explain what you can do to get the most out of Twitter.

I'll start by talking about the most important thing you'll need to know on Twitter: how to build a following.

That's vital. Although every message — or "tweet" as they're called on Twitter — is public, if no one knows you're there, no one will know to read them. I'll talk you through some of the simplest and most effective ways to build up followers.

I'll then discuss what you can do with the people you pick up on Twitter. That's vital too.

Twitter provides a fantastic opportunity not just to introduce yourself and your services to new people but to keep those people very close to you. It can help to bring them into your life and make them feel like valued friends.

I'll explain how to do it.

I'll then go on to talk about some of the real benefits that Twitter can bring a business owner.

The first is brand extension. Twitter can be a very effective branding tool for any business. I'll discuss how you can do it and what the rules are for effective brand-building with Twitter.

I've said that Twitter is simple. The principle behind it *is* very straightforward but the system has another, very powerful strength: the people who use it.

Not only are millions of people using Twitter, but many of them are knowledgeable and experts in a range of different fields. Many of them too are happy to provide help if you ask them — and on Twitter, you can.

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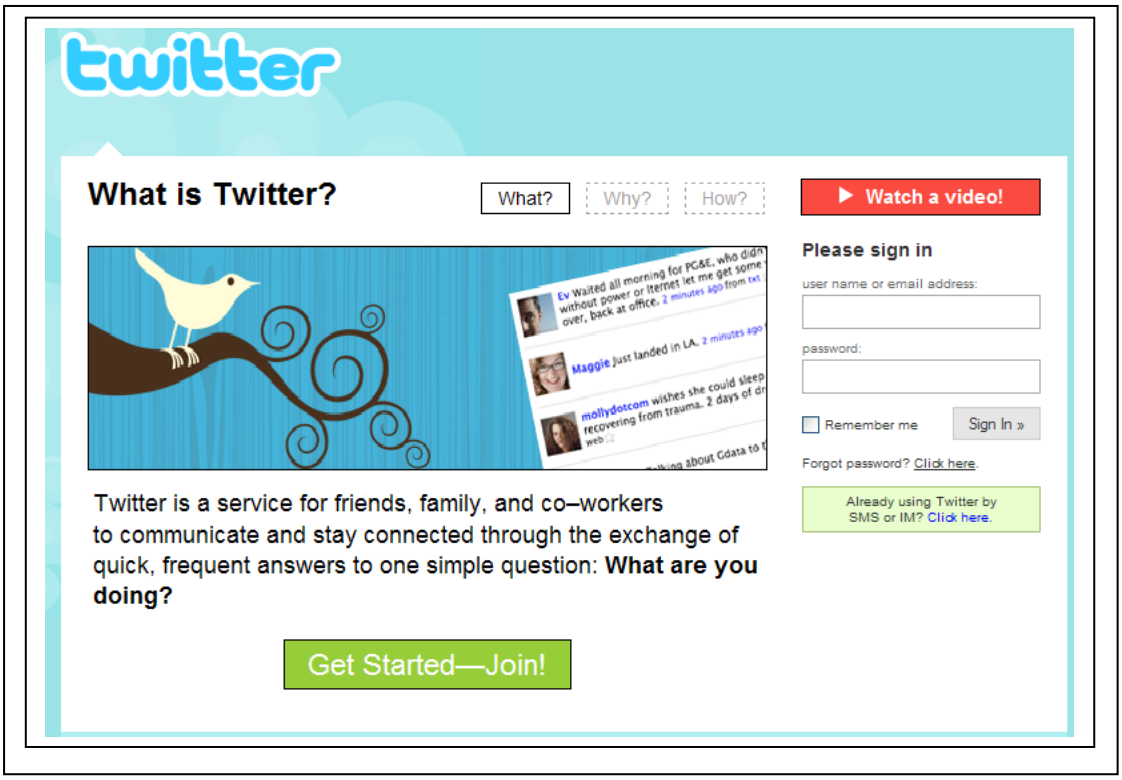
That's another resource I'll discuss in this report.

Blog posts can also be promoted using Twitter and finally, like Facebook, Twitter has also created a network of add-ons and applications that help its users get even more out of the service. I'll introduce you to some of the most useful.

You can think of Twitter as a giant virtual water cooler. It's a place where people come to chat, get to know each other and network. If you want to make use of that network, you have to be there and have to be twittering.

Let's start by talking about finding people to meet.

1. BUILDING A FOLLOWING ON TWITTER



Websites have users, Facebook has friends and Twitter has "followers." They follow your messages — and in the process, they follow your life.

Unlike users or Facebook friends though, followers don't have to make any effort to enjoy your content. The tweets that you write can come to them, even directly to their mobile phone if they want.

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But like users and Facebook friends, followers are valuable. The more followers you have, the further your messages will reach and the more influence you'll have.

As always on the Internet, it can take time to build a large community of readers — certainly more time than most impatient publishers like to commit. But it's worth the effort and there are a number of things that you can do to reduce that time and build your list quickly.

The most important is the piece of advice that remains golden whatever you're doing on the Internet:

Produce content that's interesting, fun and valuable.

Tweets are supposed to describe what you're doing right now but they can also include opinions, announcements and conversations. You can write anything you want. You can even include links in your tweets to send people for further reading. Clearly, *that* can be very useful!

But if all you do is tell people about your new product or try to send them to some affiliate site, you'll soon find that you have no followers at all.

Don't forget that many of your followers will be receiving your tweets on their mobile phones. That means that they'll be paying for them. If they don't think that they're getting value for their money — whether that's entertainment value, advice value or any other kind of value — they'll stop following.

You might not have to pay money for followers on Twitter — and there's no way to advertise yourself on the site. But you do have to pay with good content... written in 140 characters or less.

In fact though, your strategy to build a following begins even before you write your first tweet. It begins with your profile.

1.1 Creating An Inviting Twitter Profile

Writing about yourself is never much fun. That's especially true when you're doing it for business. You have to find the things in your life that are interesting to others, make yourself appear a professional and do it all without boasting or sounding vain.

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Usually, that's pretty hard.

Twitter makes it very easy.

It only gives you 160 characters.

That's right, you get just 20 more characters than you have to write a tweet to describe your entire life history.

What a relief!

That means you can't go into detail, talk about all the things you've done and what you do for others. All you can do is choose one or two of the most important facts about you and write a sentence.

My bio, for example, just says:

> *"Husband, Father. Author. Speaker, Teacher. Generally Nice Guy."*

You could follow exactly the same model, or you could produce your own. If you published a sports website, for example, you could write something like:

> *"Football fan, youth coach and all-round sports nut with dodgy knees."*

If you had a site about photography, you could create a bio that said:

> *"I've always got a camera with me and I shoot far too many pictures."*

Do you see bios like these leave room for just one or two basic facts about you? That's all you have room for on Twitter, and it's all you need.

There are two other things you can put on your Twitter profile though, and they're both just as straightforward.

The first is a photo.

If you don't add a photo to your profile, you'll appear on the page as two strange circles. That's not very attractive, and worst of all, it makes you look like you're not serious about your time on Twitter.

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When people have added their photo they'll expect to see yours in return.

Remember that the picture itself is going to appear very small though, so it's a good idea to use a close-up of your face that makes you recognizable even as a thumbnail.

And finally, you can choose to change the design. That lets you play around with the colors and add a background image if you want. It's a good opportunity to personalize your page — and if there's a particular product you're trying to promote, then using that as your background could be a good idea.

Jason Van Orden is a podcasting expert. His profile on Twitter (https://twitter.com/jasonvo) uses a ton of information about him as its background. It's one way to get around the 160 character restriction... and yes, you also get to include your URL.

1.2 Look For People You Already Know

The easiest way to find followers on Twitter is to look for people you already know. Twitter is popular enough now for there to be a good chance that at least some of the people in your address book are already twittering away.

Twitter makes it easy to find them by taking a leaf out of Facebook's page. It can scan your Web mail and compare your contacts to the people in its own database.

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Alternatively, you can use the site to send people you know an email inviting them to join Twitter, or you can enter the names into Twitter's search engine.

It's a good place to get started and it will make you feel that you're not alone on Twitter.

But what it won't do is help you to reach people you've haven't met before. To do that you have to be a little cleverer.

1.3 Become A Follower

You have to become a follower. You can follow all sorts of people on Twitter. You can follow people you know, people you don't know and people you'd like to know.

Each time you become someone's follower, you turn up in their list which means that they can see who's following and so can everyone else.

You don't have to ask their permission — all tweets are public unless the twitterer restricts them — and you don't have to wait for them to approve you. All you have to do is hit the "Follow" button and that person's tweets will appear on your page, and if you want, on your mobile phone too.

It's going to take a little time though. Finding strangers to follow can be as simple as tossing someone's name into the search engine to see if they're on the site but it's much more fun to follow through people's contacts.

Once you've found someone to follow on Twitter, you can see who they're following and who's following them. If any of those people look interesting, you can add them to your follow list — and continue.

Eventually, you could find yourself following hundreds of people — I'm following over 500 myself — and many of them will choose to follow you in return.

Obviously, you won't be able to read every tweet from every one of the people you're following when you do this, but you should be able to dip in and pay attention to the people you're most interested in.

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1.4 Join The Conversation

So far, I've been describing Twitter as though the information flow was only one way. That isn't the case at all. While the main use of Twitter is to let other people know what you're doing, thinking or listening to at any moment in time, the service also acts like a public, slow-motion Instant Messenger.

You can ask questions and provide answers to the questions other people ask.

In fact, the ability to get great answers on Twitter is one of its biggest strengths. The entire site acts like a giant forum in which experts on all sorts of subjects are willing to lend their advice to almost anyone who asks for it.

It's something that makes Twitter a very valuable resource, and I talk about it in more detail later in this report. For now though, bear in mind that at the end of every tweet is an arrow that lets you respond. Every time you do so, you contribute to someone else's conversation. That makes you a valuable part of the community — and it increases the chances that other people will follow you too.

Go ahead, make my day. Tell me what you think.

Building a long list of followers doesn't happen overnight and there are no shortcuts. It comes as a result of networking on the site, of providing good tweets that other people want to read and being active in other people's discussions.

It's the reward that comes from participating on Twitter, and best of all, it's a lot of fun to do.

But while having lots of followers is nice, you want to be able to generate income from them. In the next chapter, I'm going to talk about one of the ways in which Twitter can help a growing business.

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2. KEEP YOUR TEAM CLOSE AND YOUR CUSTOMERS CLOSER

It's a conundrum. Twitter relies on tiny little posts and yet the effect is massive. It's certainly been massive for the people who created the site but it's also huge for relationships between people. Now readers of my blog and followers of my tweets can see what I'm doing and what I'm thinking throughout the day.

Instead of relying on an occasional blog post, they get brief updates that, because they only take a second to write, come in on a regular basis.

Now I'm not a distant friend who sends occasional letters. I'm the guy in the next office who they pass in the corridor.

That makes a huge difference to the way any online entrepreneur interacts with his team, his customers and anyone else involved in his business.

In this chapter, I'm going to discuss how Twitter can help improve your communications.

2.1 Teambuilding With Twitter

Perhaps the most dramatic effect comes when you're working with a team of people scattered in all sorts of different places.

This happens often now. I outsource some of my company's tasks to people around America and even around the world. Lots of other entrepreneurs do the same thing. These days you don't need to be in the same office as someone working on the same project to get the task done. As long as they've got an Internet connection — and you can rely on them — your team members can all be thousands of miles apart.

While telecommuting means you're not limited to your local labor pool, it does have its disadvantages. A team member you never see and never talk to can feel remote. The connection between you isn't the same as that between you and someone in the same building. They'll feel left out of the loop and they won't be up to date with the changes happening in your company.

That means they'll be less able to help with those changes and there's always the risk that they'll be left behind.

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When you're all Twittering though, it's much easier to see what everyone is doing.

You can see what they're working on, the team members can see what you're up to and you'll all feel much closer.

Those tweets don't even have to be work-related. While a tweet that tells everyone in the team which aspect of the project they're building now will certainly be helpful, a quick note offering a prediction for the night's ball game or revealing what's in their grocery bag can be useful too.

That's because of Twitter's power as a virtual water cooler.

It's a place where people come to hang out, shoot the breeze and talk about things that aren't really business-oriented at all.

And just as those sorts of random conversations make people feel closer to each other, so tossing out random thoughts on Twitter can have the same effect.

You could say what you're doing, add a link to a blog you're reading, or reply to someone else's tweet. The frequent reminders keep everyone in each other's minds and the thoughts themselves let everyone understand who the writer is.

2.2 Getting Close To Your Customers

The effect of team members twittering to each other should be a team that feels closer and works more efficiently. It comes as a result of better understanding and greater communication.

Just imagine then if you could do the same thing with your customers — or at least your most important buyers.

If you knew exactly what they were thinking and what they were doing throughout the day, you'd have a fantastic understanding of what it would take to keep them happy and buying from you.

You'd know their frustrations, you'd read what makes them satisfied and you'd be able to craft solutions to problems they raise on Twitter.

You'd have a massive advantage over your competitors.

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In practice, of course, following customers is a little harder than persuading team members to tweet. You can't shoot them a quick email encouraging them to use the site.

But what you can do is look to see if they're on the site already, and if they aren't there tell them about your tweets. Following you might be enough to persuade them to sign up and post their own.

Twitter's first function is as a communication tool. Even though the size of those communications seems ridiculously small, it does work and the effects can be very real. That's true whether you're using Twitter to communicate with colleagues or to keep track of customers, and those benefits will come without any effort at all.

If you put in a bit of effort though, the effect can be even greater. That's what I'm going to talk about in the next chapter.

3. USING TWITTER TO BUILD A BRAND

Southwest Airlines is just one company that uses Twitter to talk to customers and build a brand.

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Google's AdSense program really spoiled everyone. Until AdSense came along, most advertising was about brand-building. No one really expected people to act as soon as they saw an ad.

Instead, they just hoped that people who saw the ad would remember the name of the company next time they were in a store, and buy the product.

Google changed that, but only slightly. Brand-building is still important.

If you want people to know who you are and remember the name of your business, you have to keep putting it in front of them and you have to continue to interact with your buyers.

Twitter has proven a very valuable way of doing that and it hasn't been lost on many big corporations.

Just some of the companies you can find on Twitter include Carnival Cruise Lines (twitter.com/CarnivalCruise), Delta (twitter.com/deltaairlines), Jetblue (twitter.com/JetBlue), Dell (twitter.com/Direct2Dell), Amazon (twitter.com/amazondeals), Forrester (twitter.com/forrester), GM (twitter.com/GMblogs) and my favorite, M&Ms (twitter.com/msgreen).

All of these companies (or products) are using Twitter to build a loyal following with their customers and promote their brand. In this chapter, I'll explain some of the most important things to bear in mind when you do the same thing for your business.

3.1 Get The Design Right

We saw on Jason van Orden's Twitter page how the background of the profile can be a useful way of providing more information than you can squeeze into a bio.

But you don't have to be as explicit as Jason was.

You just have to come up with a design that makes your brand memorable and that sums up you or your company.

Southwest Airlines, for example, used an image of its planes' tail as its photo and chose a sky as its background image. That's very simple but it's also very effective.

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Readers can see immediately whose page they're reading and they understand what the company does.

M&M's Twitter page used the green candy to push the brand in the run up to Valentine's Day. Note how they matched the color scheme and graphics with the subject of the campaign.

M&M went a little further. Instead of creating a page that promoted the product generally, they used Twitter to promote the idea that green, not red, is the color of love — and that their green candies were symbols of love too. The profile used a green a background with a picture of Eros as a green M&M, and the company's website (http://www.mms.com/us/coloroflove/) linked back to the Twitter page where people could discover "love tips, quips and personal appearances."

It was certainly memorable and the image alone was enough to help the page to stand out.

The bottom line is that if you rely solely on the default design that Twitter supplies, you're wasting an opportunity.

That background is valuable advertising space and it's just what you need when you're using Twitter to build a brand.

3.2 What To Say When You're Building A Brand

Getting the design right is important. It's so important that if it's not something that you feel confident enough to do yourself, then by all means hire a designer to do it for you.

There's not too much to design so it shouldn't cost you a huge amount of money, and the results should certainly be worth it.

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But no one is going to come to a Twitter page just to look at the background. Nor are they likely to come to your Twitter page more than once.

Your followers will come to your Twitter page to see who you are and they'll sign up to read your messages.

That means that your tweets are always going to be the most important aspect of your Twitter presence.

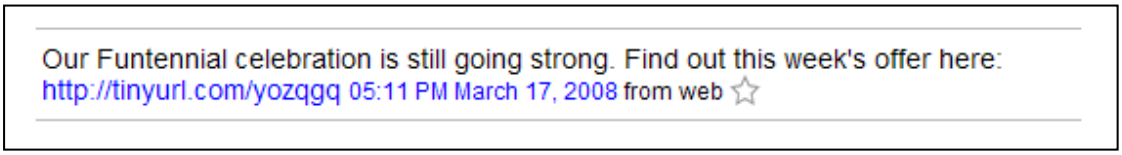
Yes, it's true that content is king on the Internet. But on Twitter, what you write in your messages is perhaps even more important than the quality of the content on your website. Because you can't include pictures, media or any other distractions, whether people choose to follow you or not will depend entirely on whether your tweets are interesting, informative and fun to read.

You have to get the message right.

Fortunately, that's not too hard to do. There are a number of things that you can include in your Tweets to keep people following, reading — and buying from you. An effective Twitter presence will include a mixture of all of them:

Valuable Offers
Special offers are standard marketing practice and they work on Twitter as much as anywhere else. Reward followers for reading your tweets by giving them exclusive deals that they feel they can't get anywhere else and you'll give them an incentive to keep reading.

You'll also give yourself some extra sales.



Carnival Cruises lets customers know about its special offers with announcements that link to its website.

Even an online publisher could do this by mentioning a great deal being offered by one of its affiliates. Include either your affiliate link in the code or link back to your Web page and you could well generate some useful commissions.

There is a danger here though, and it's a pretty big one.

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The strength of Twitter is in its ability to bring distant people closer. Because messages come in whenever the writer feels like it and because they don't have to say very much, they feel very human.

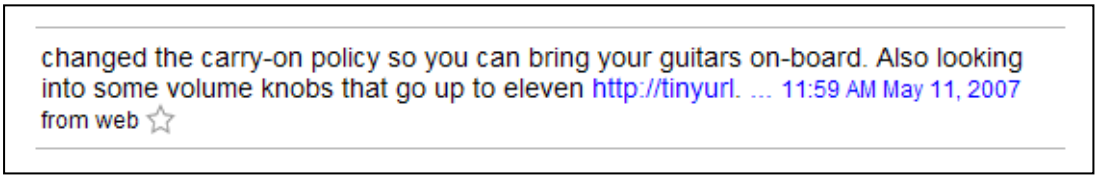
That's something you want to keep.

Make lots of special offers and you'll lose that human touch. People will feel that they're reading corporate information, and they'll be less inclined to follow.

There's no golden rule about how many promotions is too many. It all depends on what else you're saying and who's following you. If you're making offers more frequently than one in five tweets though, then you're probably doing it too often.

News

At least some of the rest of your tweets are likely to be made up of news items.



Delta tells its followers about its new carry-on policy... and its corporate twitterer adds a human touch too.

This is where things can start to get really interesting. Usually one of the most important rules for releasing news about a company is whether it passes the "Who cares?" test.

In general, no one cares what companies are up to. If your local medical clinic had just repainted its waiting room why would you care?

You wouldn't care unless that information actually affected you. If the clinic had changed its phone number or fired your doctor, then you'd want to know.

If it's changed color, who cares?

On Twitter, that rule still holds at one level. News announcements that affect the reader are always going to be the most interesting. But even an announcement that you've bought a new laptop or that you've redesigned your blog can still appear on Twitter and be interesting to read.

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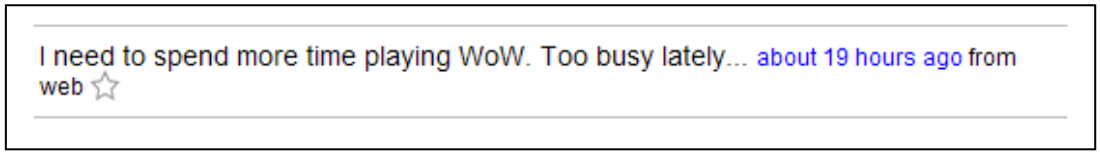
If it's the sort of gossipy fun stuff that could get tossed around a water cooler, it can work on Twitter.

Random Thoughts
People write all sorts of strange things on Twitter. It's one of the service's attractions. It's as though people have put a window on the side of their head and are letting the rest of us peek in every now and then to see what thoughts are passing through.

Yes, it's a bit nosey and it really shouldn't be very interesting.

But boy, is it!



Just one of my random thoughts. I get them a lot...

Tweets like these are certainly the easiest to write. You could just say what you're doing, hoping to do, have just finished doing or are planning to do next.

But they aren't actionable. Tell your followers that one of your affiliates is running a special offer and include the link to your site, and you can expect people to click through.

Break news about a blog post that you've just put up, and you can expect people to come and read it.

Write a tweet that tells people that you're thinking of eating a donut and to blazes with the calories, and the best you can hope is that they'll smile... and feel closer to you.

That's the benefit of these sorts of tweets: they create a better relationship with your followers.

You're not just the owner of a website or some blogger on the Internet a million miles away. You're a real human being who thinks, works and feels guilty about eating donuts.

That sort of feeling can do wonders for the connection you have with your customers and with your readers.

Replies

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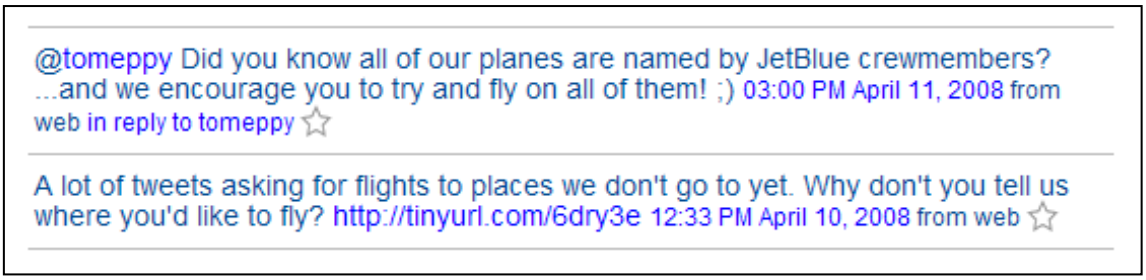
I've pointed out how replying to other people's tweets can be a good way to build up a community of followers. But replies are also another form of tweet that anyone can see.

Best of all though, they show that you're available to anyone who wants your help or advice.

JetBlue Airways uses these sorts of tweets a lot. A large portion of its tweets are made up of answers addressed to the company by its customers, and they also go out of their way to encourage people to write in.



JetBlue keeps its tweets interactive by answering questions and persuading people to write in.

This is a great strategy to use because it really does put you in close contact with your followers. It's what that virtual watercooler effect is all about.

But that's not the best reason to make sure you're active on Twitter and answering your questions.

The best reason is that it's the most fun.

3.3 Writing The Tweets

You might be thinking by now that all this sounds great. Twitter looks like a lot of fun. It appears to be dangerously addictive. And it can have a big effect on your readers.

But who's got time to sit and type messages half a dozen times a day, however short they are?

This is where the difference between a corporate tweet account and a private tweet account is important.

The tweets of big companies like Delta and Carnival Cruises aren't written by the corporations' CEOs. They're written by employees or public relations firms who have been given the job of promoting the company's brand on the Web.

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You can do the exact same thing.

Hand over the job of writing your business's tweets to someone in your office. Let them be your company's Twitter presence. Give them the freedom to be human and to write about their own interests as well as your company's.

And tell them to mix up each of the different kinds of tweets too.

You'll still get the familiarity with your followers that only Twitter can bring. But you'll do it without any effort and your helper will probably enjoy it too.

(Of course, you don't have to do this if you don't want to. There are plenty of big names on Twitter writing their tweets themselves because it's fun. Once you try it, you'll probably find yourself fighting your employee to see who gets to write the tweets first.)

Twitter has already proved itself to be a valuable branding tool, and big companies are piling in to make the most of it.

In the next chapter, I'm going to discuss another valuable service that Twitter provides: expert help on a range of different topics.

4. TWITTER AS THE ULTIMATE HELP DESK

Sometimes you don't need 140 characters to get something incredibly valuable out of Twitter. In April 2008, a graduate journalism student at Berkeley was photographing a demonstration in Egypt.

During the demonstration, he sent one word on his mobile phone to Twitter:

"Arrested."

His followers on Twitter saw the message and alerted both Berkeley and the US Embassy in Egypt. The next day a lawyer hired by the university got him out of jail. (His local interpreter wasn't so lucky.)

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Now I'm not saying that if you get arrested, a quick tweet from your mobile phone will have you back in front of the television before the commercials are finished.

But what is true is that close relationships that develop on Twitter have made it a place where people ask for help on all sorts of topics — and receive it.

That could be advice on where to find a good programmer. It could be a request for search engine optimization advice for your website. It could even be tips for good products to promote on your pages.

It could be about anything at all because just about everyone is on Twitter.

In this chapter, I'm going to explain who you can ask for help from and how you can ask for it.

4.1 Turning Your Followers Into A Help Desk

The easiest way to find help is simply to ask the people you know if they can supply it.

Obviously, this is always going to work best when you have a giant follower base. The higher the number of people following your tweets, the greater the chances that one of them will be able to lend a hand.

That means that as you're building your followers, it's worth paying attention to what each of them does and considering the sort of help they might be able to offer in the future.

Choose to follow a Web design expert, for example, and you should be picking up some interesting tweets that could help generate your own design ideas. But if you can get the designer to sign up as one of your followers, then when you ask a question about Web design, there's a good chance that you'll get a professional answer.

It's also worth looking at the number of followers your followers have. If you can get followed by a few people with large audiences, there's always a chance that your requests for help will be passed along or that their readers will click through to see your tweets.

Followers with lots of followers of their own can provide outlets to plenty of help.

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4.2 Finding Top Twitterers

So you can try to build up a follower list that's packed with people with useful skills, and who have lots of friends.

You could also try approaching some of the big names on Twitter.

That's always going to be harder, not least because you can never tell whether they're typing their tweets themselves or having one of their assistants do it for them.

But can you imagine if you could send out a question asking about a problem with your Mac and had Steve Jobs answer? (Yes, he's there.)

Or more realistically, if you asked for help with your affiliate program and received a response from Shawn Collins?

Or if you wanted advice on becoming a professional blogger and picked up a tip from Darren Rowse.

All of those things are possible.

That doesn't mean they're going to happen — the big names often get lots of questions and rarely have the time to answer them all — but one of the most impressive things about Twitter is the quality of the advice that it's possible to receive, and the quality of the people who supply it.

4.2 Asking For Help In A Way That Gets Answers

On Twitter, to get valuable advice and real help all you have to do is ask for it.

So how do you ask for it?

You could certainly come straight out and ask if anyone knows a good programmer or can tell you what they think about your new site design and how it could be improved.

That would be very simple and depending on the size and make-up of your followers, there's a very good chance that it would give you results.

You could also ask your followers to pass your message on to help you find the assistance you need.

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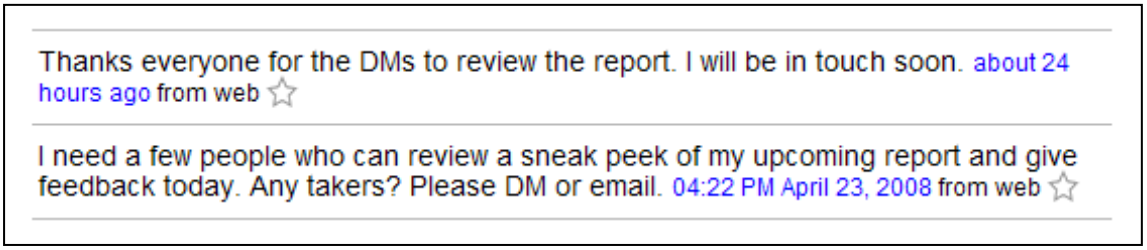
That would let you make use of their networks and it might even bring you new followers as well.

But you could also be a little cleverer. Jason van Orden, for example, once asked his followers for volunteers to review a report he'd written.



Jason van Orden gets reviewers — and readers — for his report.

That was a great way of getting objective opinions on a report before he released it. But it was also a good way of publicizing it and delivering readers. Had Jason simply written:

> "I'm releasing a new report. Read yours here."

he would have picked up some readers. By making his question an appeal for help however, he makes it look more appealing, less like a promotion, and he gets some valuable feedback too.

4.3 Getting Help From Conferences

I'd like to say that Twitter is the best place to find the help you need for your business.

But that just isn't true.

Conferences are much better.

I'm a huge fan of conferences. I think they're fantastic places to learn new skills, become aware of outstanding opportunities and meet other entrepreneurs keen on starting joint ventures and bursting with ideas.

I don't understand why everyone doesn't go to a conference.

I do understand why everyone doesn't go to *every* conference. That would take far too much effort.

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One of the most effective uses for Twitter then, is to follow tweets from people attending conferences.

That's never going to be as effective as being there in person but it is still valuable.

If you know someone — or even better a group of people — who are attending a conference, make sure that you're following their tweets. You should be able to pick up an idea of what people are saying, the sort of advice they're offering and the questions people are asking.

It might even be possible to tweet back with your own questions for someone at the conference to ask on your behalf.

I still think that you should be attending conferences. But if there are some that you can't make, Twitter can still help you to get a taste of what you're missing.

Twitter can provide help on just about every topic you can think of. But there's one topic that it really excels at helping: promoting a blog.

That's the subject of my next chapter.

5. PROMOTING A BLOG ON TWITTER

When publishers first started writing blogs, they were meant to be nothing more than online diaries, a place for people to write their thoughts and feelings... and let anyone read them who wanted to.

They've become much more than that.

Today, blogs are a very effective publishing system. They've evolved to become online magazines rather than personal pages.

The benefit is that publishers can now write about anything they want — and get paid for it too.

The disadvantage is that they're no longer personal.

If readers used to come to blogs to find what the writer was doing or thinking now, today's blogs are often not even written by the bloggers themselves.

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The first thing that Twitter can do for a blog then is to bring back the personality of the publisher.

Bloggers can use Twitter to give readers a peek behind the scenes of their business, provide quick notices about their plans and the posts they're working on, and answer direct questions put to them by readers.

Sure, you can also do all of this on your blog — and ideally, you should.

But when your blog really takes off, it's unlikely that you'll have time to respond to every comment your posts receive. Articles about your blog are also likely to be less interesting to your readers than posts about cars, photography or whatever it is that users are visiting your site to see.

Twitter can gives publishers of blogs an alternative space to get closer to their readers, even when they're using content written by professional writers.

But what if you want to bring in new readers or increase the views of occasional visitors?

Twitter can help there too.

5.1 Announcing Your Blog Posts

The principle is very simple. If you were to put an ad on AdWords to promote every blog post you publish, you'd have to pay a lot of money. Assuming you got the arbitrage right, you might make a small profit. But you'd need a lot of visitors to make it worthwhile.

Placing an announcement of a new blog post on Twitter is a very easy way to let lots of people know about it.

Darren Rowse, the publisher of Digital-Photography-School.com and the blogging expert behind ProBlogger.net, does this all time. His tweets contain a mixture of news announcements about his blogs, personal comments and answers to readers' questions.

As you'd expect, it's a perfect combination from someone who makes a very handsome living out of online publishing.

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You don't have to do anything too spectacular here. You could just include the title of the blog post and a link. That's all you have to do.

Darren Rowse's Twitter updates contain a perfect combination of personal information, blog announcements and reader responses. Together his tweets help to reinforce the loyalty of his readers.

But in terms of direct ad revenues there is a limit to what you can get out of this.

Biz Stone, one of the founders of Twitter, is also one of the most popular users of the site. He has just under 9,000 followers. I have around 1,000 at the moment, and I'm feeling very good about it.

Those numbers aren't enormous. If one in ten of my followers were to click through to a blog post, I'd get 100 extra views. If 5 percent of them were to click on an ad, I'd get five extra clicks.

That's not going to make me rich.

But of course, the people who see my tweets aren't restricted to my followers. Lots of people click through without adding me as a follower and some of them will click on those links.

More importantly though, anyone who has added me as a follower is likely to be very interested in what I do. My post announcements then will serve as a reminder to stop by and check out the latest on

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my blog or watch one of my videos. I can expect a much higher clickthrough rate from my Twitter followers than I can among almost anyone else.

And I can use my followers as a resource for my blog as well.

5.2 Twitter As A Resource For Post Ideas

In the previous chapter, I pointed out some of the ways in which you can use Twitter as a help desk. It's got just such a personal feel that complete strangers are always going to be willing to lend a hand. (Biz Stone, who appears not to have a car, has twittered that people keep offering to lend him theirs.)

Ask your followers what sort of posts they'd like to see on your blog then and you're likely to get swamped with ideas.

That makes life very easy for you.

At the beginning of every month, you could just ask your followers what issues they'd like to see covered on your blog in the next few weeks.

No more beating your head against the wall trying to think up new content. And no more wondering if people are going to like the concept either.

Before you write about a particular subject, you could just ask your followers what they think. If everyone says it sounds a bit dull or asks how you're going to deal with this aspect or approach that problem you haven't even considered, you can start thinking again.

You won't have to wait until you've been sweating over the post for a couple of hours to discover it isn't going to work.

And of course once you've written it, you can be sure that when you announce that it's online you'll have an audience for it.

Announcing your new blog posts on Twitter can help to create a few more views and win you some extra revenue. Using your followers as a resource for post ideas can help to keep your blog focused and informative.

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But the biggest benefit that Twitter offers online publishers is always going to be a closer, more personal relationship between you and your readers.

That means that they'll visit more often, are more likely to act on your recommendations and there's a greater chance that they'll link to you.

There's one more way that Twitter can help a publisher though.

You can use it as content.

I'm going to explain how to do that — and much more — in the next chapter.

6. TOP TWITTER APPLICATIONS

One of the things that really makes Twitter fun is that it comes with lots of optional add-ons. Twitter allows programmers to write applications that anyone can use and which extend the power of Twitter.

Some of them are a little odd. (I've yet to find a good use for Twitter in Second Life.) But some of them are extremely helpful. (There are all sorts of applications that let you send and follow tweets without opening your browser, for example.)

That makes for hours of exciting experimentation — just the sort of thing that tech-minded people love to do.

On the other hand, if you want to skip straight to the most useful apps, here are some that I recommend.

Putting Twitter On Your Blog
Actually, the first application isn't strictly an application. If you're writing a blog in Wordpress, then there's no shortage of plugins that will let you integrate your tweets with your content.

If you're not using Wordpress though, you might struggle.

Remy Sharp, a coder who writes a blog at RemySharp.com, has a free script that integrates Twitter onto any Web page. It's a little complex but nothing too serious. Just download the script and follow his step-by-step instructions at:

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http://remysharp.com/2007/05/18/add-twitter-to-your-blog-step-by-step/

Twitter Feed
This is much easier. Twitter Feed sends your blog updates to Twitter automatically. Just enter the URL of your blog's RSS feed, tell it how often you tweet, and your followers will always see your post announcements.
http://twitterfeed.com/

TwitThis
You've probably seen all the buttons at the bottom of blog posts urging people to Digg the article or send it to StumbleUpon. With TwitThis, you can also ask them send an URL of the page together with a brief description to their Twitter followers. Very neat.
http://twitthis.com/

Tweetscan
Searching on Twitter isn't particularly efficient... unless you're using Tweetscan. It's just a great Twitter-specific search engine that's very useful when you're looking for people to follow or ask advice from.
http://www.tweetscan.com/

Snitter
Twitter might be based on a website but you don't actually need to open your browser to use it. Snitter is a desktop application that works like an IM messenger. You can watch the tweets come and go while you continue working.
http://getsnitter.com/

This is just a few of the many applications available for Twitter. The site itself has more on its download page (http://twitter.com/downloads) and there's even more on the Wiki page (http://twitter.pbwiki.com/Apps). Have fun!

CONCLUSION

Twitter is surprising. The idea is ridiculously simple. But the benefits — and the enjoyment — are both incredible. It's addictive, it's fun and it's effective.

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For Web users it's a great way to keep in touch. For online publishers, nothing makes readers and customers feel closer.

In this report, I've introduced some of the ways in which Twitter can help with online marketing.

I talked about building a following on Twitter, and I discussed how the site can enhance loyalty and familiarity among colleagues and customers.

I then talked about building a brand with Twitter, and reviewed some of the main ways of writing tweets.

I also talked about using Twitter as a massive help desk filled with experts who can't wait to supply advice and suggestions. And I discussed ways in which you can use Twitter to support and promote a blog.

Finally, I recommended some of the most useful applications that extend Twitter's reach and make it even more effective.

I'm having a ball using Twitter, and I love the effect it's had on my relationships. I could tell you how much fun you'll having using too, but the only way you'll really find that out is to try it yourself…

You can follow me on Twitter by visiting my page at:

http://www.twitter.com/joelcomm

Be sure to click the FOLLOW button under my name!

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Joel Comm is an Internet entrepreneur who has been building successful web sites since 1995. Dedicated to providing a family-friendly Internet experience, Joel's flagship site, WorldVillage.com, continues to be a popular family-safe portal. Joel is the co-creator of Yahoo! Games and author of the New York Times Bestseller, *The AdSense Code*. Joel makes frequent appearances at Internet marketing conferences and seminar, conducting workshops and training others in the latest ways to make money on the Internet. He is the host of the world's first Internet marketing reality show, The Next Internet Millionaire.

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AskJoelComm.com – Question submission page
AdSenseChat.com – Google AdSense Member Forums
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