



twitter

levelten
INTERACTIVE

Best Practices Guide

Your Business, Twitter & You!

A LevelTen Interactive Best Practices Guide

By now you must have heard about Twitter. Probably something about how it will revolutionize the social media and marketing scene. Maybe you first heard about it during the Summer of 2008 when Barack Obama (@barackobama) was making headlines for his innovative use of social media. Or perhaps you've seen it during an episode of the Rick Sanchez show on CNN (@ricksanchezcnn). No matter how you first heard about Twitter, the simple fact is that its use is widespread - from major corporations to small businesses and your next door neighbor.

The Origins of Twitter

Twitter was a small start-up just several years ago, and was founded by Jack Dorsey (@jack), Biz Stone (@biz) and Evan Williams (@ev) after management bought out their former podcasting company, Odeo. Twitter was used in various forms internally at Odeo, but didn't take off until shortly after it won the 2007 South by Southwest Web Award in the Blog category.

From that point on, Twitter exploded in popularity - and now it's time for YOU to start using it to improve your business and grow your presence within your community.

But how do you do that?

First step is -

Sign-up For An Account

Go to www.twitter.com and follow the signup instructions there - trust me, it's easy! Once you have your profile set-up, you'll want to add 3 of the most important sections of your Twitter page - your photo, website link, and short bio.

Your Photo

In the Twittersverse people like to follow other people, so you'll want to be sure that your photo emphasizes this. Clear face shots are best, but you can use whatever you want. Try not to use a company or corporate logo, however, that can be used in a custom designed background, if you wish.

Your Website

As far as your website - being that the focus of this article is on Twitter for corporations, you might want to think about linking to your business website. If you have a blog on your site (you should), then go ahead and link to that. You want your link to be of some

value to your followers, which is why a simple link to your home page probably won't work.

If you don't have a blog - just link to any section that may be of value to a new follower - a news feed, press release section, or other online community feature.

Your Bio

Your bio will probably be the first thing that a potential follower reads from your twitter page (other than your name of course!), so make it good. Often times people will make the decision about whether to follow you based only on your bio, so you'll want to make it as clear and human sounding as possible.

One of the keys to being successful on Twitter is emphasizing the human aspect of your character.

You do not, under any circumstances, want to come across as a corporate "bot". People don't listen to corporate bots - they listen to other people. Remember this simple fact, and you'll do well.

Try to use a few key phrases and words in your profile that give insight into what you do professionally, as well as what some of your interests might be outside of work. If you need an example, see my profile - [@levelten_colin](#).

So your signed up for Twitter, and you've got a rockin' profile - now what?

Start Following People

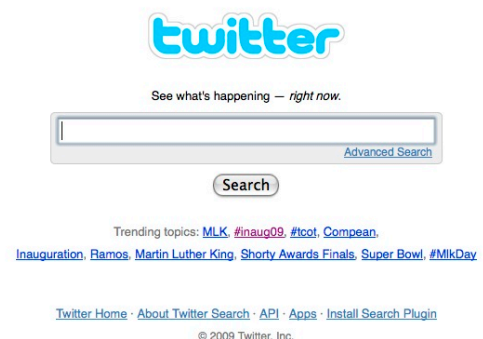
The best ways to find other users to follow on Twitter are a combination of several methods.

Established Services

[Search.twitter.com](#)

Use [search.twitter.com](#) to search for keywords/phrases that people are talking about. If you find a conversation that interests you, click on the user to be taken to their profile page. From there, simply click "follow", and their updates will show up in your twitter stream.

This is also a great method for keeping up with conversations about your business or brand. Want to know what people think about your new product? Run a search for your name and

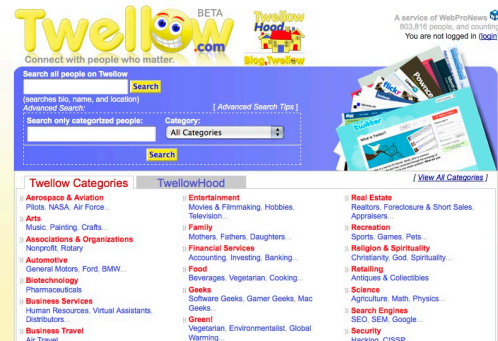


subscribe to it via RSS - you'll know as soon as someone uses your name, and you'll be able to respond accordingly.

You can even get into some advanced search operators, which can help you find people in your geographic area. Next time you visit search.twitter.com, try using the search term “*your keyword*” *near:[insert city name]*. For example, if I'm interested in people talking about the Dallas Cowboys, I'd probably search for “cowboys” near:dallas.

Twellow.com

Twellow.com is one of many Twitter directory sites. There are others out there, but this is the one that I happen to like the most. You can search for Twitter users by category or through a keyword search, just like Google. Here's a query to start you off – “[dallas + internet](#)”. Search by what interests you, and who you might be interested in talking to.



Be sure to login to the site using your Twitter username & password to claim your profile. Just like a web directory, you can add your listing to various categories. This is a good way for people to find you! And best of all, it's completely free!



Mr. Tweet helps you easily build meaningful relationships by looking through your network and tweets. He will regularly:

1. Suggest good people and followers **you are missing out on**
2. Recommend you to enthusiastic users **relevant to you**
3. Regularly update useful stats of your **Twitter usage**



[Mr. Tweet](http://Mr.Tweet)

Mr. Tweet is a service that analyzes your Twitter network, and provides you with a list of users who you should be following. Mr. Tweet updates this list about every 2 weeks. You'll have to follow them to get results, and your first round of results can often take several weeks to get to you.

My recommendation is to hold off on Mr. Tweet until you've grown your network a little - once you have, however, Mr. Tweet can be an invaluable tool.

Twitterholic.com

For those ultra competitive Twitter users (yes, I'm one of them) it's essential to remember that it's not about how many followers you have, it's about the conversations you're having.

But, if you do care about things like follower counts and rankings, Twitterholic is the site for you.

#	Name (Screen Name)	Location	URL	Followers	Friends	Updates	Joined
1.	Barack Obama (BarackObama)	Chicago, IL	http://www.barackobama.com	165,414	188,762	263	1.9 years ago
2.	Kevin Flores (KevinFlores)	San Francisco, CA	http://kevinflores.com	88,707	140	1,762	2.0 years ago
3.	CNN Breaking News (cnnbrk)	Everywhere	http://cnn.com/	85,084	1	582	2.1 years ago
4.	Leo Laporte (leolaporte)	Petaluma	http://leoville.com	75,857	628	1,703	1.8 years ago
5.	Twitter (twitter)	San Francisco, CA	http://twitter.com	54,969	30	234	1.9 years ago

Twitterholic provides rankings of Twitter users by followers, updates, friends, and join date. You can even see the list of top Twitterers in your city.

Twitter.Grader.com

Much like Twitterholic, Twitter Grader attempts to assign a grade and a ranking to each individual Twitter user. Twitter Grader, part of HubSpot's lineup of Grader products (Website Grader, Blog Grader, Facebook Grader, etc.), is powerful in that it attempts to score each user on a predetermined set of criteria - much like a search engine.

Twitter Grader also ranks users by city, which can help when you're trying to find the best people to follow in your town or city.

WeFollow.com

WeFollow.com is another take on a twitter user directory. Only in this directory, you can classify your twitter account with three distinct sets of tags. For example, I may want to classify myself using the tags #dallas, #socialmedia, and #redsox, since I live in Dallas, use social media, and cheer for the Red Sox.

On the WeFollow.com website, you can also run searches to see all members who have tagged themselves with a particular term. So if, for example, you wanted to follow people who were interested in Cooking, you could search the site for all users who tagged themselves with #cooking, and then follow each one of them.

New Services

TweepML.org

TweepML is a service that allows anyone to create a custom Twitter list. Once the list is created, it's very simple to follow everyone on the list with a simple click of a button, saving time and energy for you!

To get you started, I've created a basic list, check it out, and be sure to try out the "follow all" feature.

[The Masterlist: Top Power Twitter Users in Dallas, TX](#)

Twitter Lists

Twitter Lists is a new feature for Twitter.com, which is slowly being rolled out to all users. Much like TweepML, Twitter Lists will allow you to create custom lists of Twitter users, which can be saved and viewed by other Twitter users.

My recommendations

The key to remember with following people is to do it slowly. One of the most important statistics to watch in Twitter is your following:follower ratio. Those who follow thousands and only have a few followers are seen as spammers. You don't want that. If you provide people with quality content and good conversation, people will find you, and your follower count will grow gradually to numbers you couldn't imagine.

Twitter can be a powerful tool for your brand if you learn the rules and interact with the community correctly - otherwise people will ignore you, and your efforts will be a waste of time.

Following Etiquette

Yes, believe it or not, there is an etiquette to following people on Twitter. The polite thing to do would be to follow back everyone who follows you. While in theory, this may be the best strategy, in practice it might not be.

There are plenty of people out there who think you should follow everyone who comes your way.

Others say you should be more selective, cutting down on noise and being selective about the conversations you engage in, thus potentially giving each message a little more weight.

Having tried both, my recommendations would be to be selective about who you follow back - you want to make sure the person you follow back is a real person, and that they aren't simply trying to sell you something, or worse, one of Twitter's dreaded spam bots.

To see stats on who is, or isn't following you, check out friendorfollow.com.

Using Twitter

I could easily write an entire book about the best way to use Twitter. There are multiple uses, from personal networking, to friendship building to a simple news feed and discovery engine. For this guide, however, I'll go over the strategies that will make you a successful Twitter user, and how to manage your account on a day to day basis.

First of all, you won't stick with Twitter for too long if you don't find ways to manage it. As your follower count increases, you'll find it difficult to pay attention to it every day.

To make using Twitter as painless as possible, I'd recommend downloading one of these Twitter desktop clients. Those of you with iPhones or Blackberries will be happy to know that there are Twitter apps for those as well, but that's beyond the scope of this guide.

[Seesmic Desktop](#)

I personally use Seesmic Desktop. If you have multiple Twitter accounts (i.e. - managing them for several different clients), it makes it easy to track and use them at one time. Seesmic also lets you create groups of Twitter users, making it easier to interact with those people who you like engaging with. It also integrates your Facebook account, and any Facebook Pages you manage. Seesmic also provides integration with various URL shorteners (see the *Link Shorteners* section) and photo services. Seesmic Desktop does require downloading and installing Adobe Air first, however.

In the future, Seesmic will be rolling out an iPhone App version of their desktop client.

- [Adobe Air](#)

[Tweetdeck](#)

Another popular Twitter desktop client is Tweetdeck. Tweetdeck offers much of the same functionality as Seesmic, but is a bit more polished, as it's been in its current format longer than Seesmic. Tweetdeck does have a popular iPhone App, which allows you to sync your accounts between the iPhone and your Desktop. Tweetdeck also requires installation of Adobe Air.

- [Tweetdeck](#)
- [Adobe Air](#)

There about as many Twitter clients as there are letters in this paper. Some other clients worth noting, [HootSuite](#) (for agencies and marketers), [CoTweet](#) (when multiple people run the same account), plus a multitude of iPhone and Smartphone apps (Twitterific, Tweetie, TwitterFON, etc.) And that doesn't even begin to touch on all the services that will cross post content from your other social networks (Facebook, FriendFeed, Posterous, ect.) to your Twitter account.

Interacting with the Twittersphere

(There's an entire [Twitter terminology dictionary](#) – check it out if you want to learn some of the interesting Twitter vocab.)

So – you've created your profile, you're following some cool Tweeples and you've installed your desktop client. Now it's time to have fun!

When an interesting conversation or statement shows up in your Twitter stream, reply to it! Offer your two cents, share a link, argue – whatever!

You should also be updating your own account with statements, thoughts, ideas, links, etc. Borrowing from a [Chris Brogan](#) post – “don’t think of it as ‘what am I doing’ think of it as ‘what has my attention’”.

DO NOT under any circumstances, use your Twitter account as a means for pushing ONLY your business related content. It’s fine to push it every now and then, just don’t make it the focus of your account. People use Twitter to be connected to others, converse, and learn - they don’t want to be harassed by corporate advertisers.

Remember that site traffic or other business goals should be considered secondary to the growth and development of your network. In this day and age, conveying the idea of industry thought leadership and transparent business practices can be more important in the long run than your bottom line ROI. If you stick with Twitter long enough, and build a solid network (don’t ignore offline interaction with your online friends) - you’ll be able to harness the power of the network for some of your more selective business ideas.

The Art of the Retweet



A retweet, in Twitterland is, as one user put it - “the ultimate compliment”. A retweet is simply one Twitter user promoting another user’s Tweet. It’s like saying, “hey everyone, this is cool - check it out!”

As a Twitter user, you should be actively promoting content and Tweets that you find interesting, so be generous with your retweets.

As a business Twitter user, one of your goals is to get your messages retweeted by as many people as possible. This not only expands the reach of your message, but helps to grow your network, and increase your “thought leader” perception. But how do you do this?

In the web, you’ll often hear the phrase - content is king. It’s no different in Twitter. Offer your followers something of value, either an interesting opinion on a blog post, a cool piece of news, or something else you find interesting on the web. Keep your post

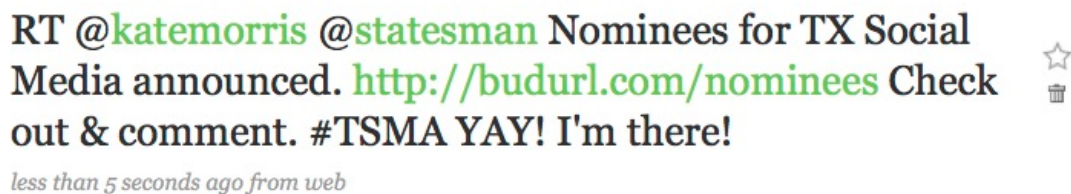
short, however. With regular Twitter updates, you have 140 characters to work with. With posts you want retweeted, keep it to 60 or 70 - you'll see why shortly.

How to Retweet

Without using one of the Twitter clients mentioned above, a retweet can be a little tedious.

Notice in the first photo above, I used "Retweeting" before the name of the Tweet originator. This can also be shortened to just, "RT" if you're on a character crunch.

Sometimes, you'll find yourself retweeting a retweet. In this case, use the name of the original Tweet author, as well as the name of the person you're retweeting - so, it'd look something like this:



FYI - the "#TSMA" in this tweet is something called *hashtags*, which we'll cover later.

Retweeting using a Twitter client

The great thing about a Twitter client like Seesmic Desktop or Tweetdeck is the ability to easily retweet another user. Simply hover over the users icon to be presented with 4 options, one of which being a retweet. Click the icon, and the retweet will automatically populate in your update field in the proper format.

Tone of voice

Be yourself! Obviously, keep it professional – but don't be afraid to have fun, and please, show some of your personality! You shouldn't keep your conversations to strictly work topics – even though that might be the focus of your account.

Like I've said multiple times in this guide, and will continue to say - Twitter - and all social media for that matter, is about being human and not being afraid to let your

idiosyncrasies and personality show. People will only listen to you if you're interesting - and you are - so let that show!

What are Hashtags?

Hashtags are Twitter's way of classifying and categorizing long, cross-Twitter conversations centered around a particular topic. For example, if I were live-Tweeting (continuous Twitter updates of a live event) the South by Southwest festival this year, I might end all of my posts with #sxsw. That way, if anyone wanted to reply to the meme, they could and also end their posts with the same hashtag.

What's the point?

Well, services like hashtags.org keep track of this classification system, and can tell when a particular topic is trending and who's replying to the conversation. For example, say you're running a guerrilla marketing campaign for a client, and you're putting on an event aimed at generating conversation in the social media realm. After the event, you can check for hashtags that relate and instantly see all conversations about the event (alternatively, you can do a keyword search with search.twitter.com).

Other Twitter Tools

Bots and Automators

At the risk of opening this guide up to massive debate (which wouldn't necessarily be a bad thing), I find bots and automators to be useful - in certain situations, and handled in the proper manner.

There's a debate in social media circles about the usefulness of Twitter and other social media bots. Some (most, I think) view them as "Twitter cheating", and find their use to be annoying and completely against what social media is all about - human interaction.

I fully admit that in my early Twitter days, I did use automated Direct Messages and other bot-like tactics. I've since corrected the error of my ways, and no longer use automated Direct Messages. If you're wondering what an automated Direct Message

#hashtags

The screenshot shows the #hashtags website interface. At the top, there are tabs for 'Tags' and 'People'. Below this, a list of trending hashtags is displayed, each with a count of tweets and a recent tweet snippet. The hashtags listed are: #inaug09 (441), #cparty (577), #tcot (13640), #mlkday (238), #gaza (10896), #is09 (244), and #mcp (169). Each entry includes a small profile picture and a snippet of the most recent tweet for that hashtag.

is, it's like receiving unsolicited e-mail spam. Once you start getting active on Twitter, you'll no doubt receive some (or lots) of these.

That said, I do still mix in select bot-like tactics into my Twitter stream, although what I do now provides value and good content to my stream.

Now, thanks to the Twitter API, I'm able to tie in my other social networks to my Twitter account. That way, when I make a new post on my Posterous blog, or update my Facebook page, or share an item from my Google Reader, or check in with Foursquare or Gowalla, it sends an update to my Twitter account as well.

As for scheduling tweets, I find it a necessary evil when managing multiple Twitter accounts for several clients. Unfortunately, there just isn't enough time in the day (or CPU power) to keep up with 5 or 6 Twitter accounts, giving each the time and attention they deserve. With a Tweet scheduling service, I can schedule useful tweets for those in-between days, when I don't have time to devote to a particular account.

When using a tweet scheduling service in these situations, it's important to remember, again, that Twitter is not just for promoting your own content. Try to mix a variety of post types - links to other content, some to your content, engaging questions and the like. If you do it this way, and don't come across as self serving - you'll be fine. Just make sure you devote a day or so a week to each client's Twitter account so things don't get stale.

A good automation tool:

- Tweetlater.com

Link Shortening Services

You only have 140 characters to work with for each update, so it's important to maximize your character count wherever possible! When sharing links, the easiest way to do this is to use link shortening services like tinyurl.com, is.gd or bit.ly. These are free tools that take a typical long URL, and shorten it into only a few characters.

TinyURL.com

One of the first link shortening services, TinyURL features a browser toolbar & a custom URL service.

Is.gd

Is.gd compresses your URL into an ultra tiny string, and keeps their service about as no-frills as possible.

Bit.ly

Bit.ly has almost become the defacto URL shortner for many Twitter users. What's great about bit.ly is that it offers statistics and reporting for each URL that you shrink. For marketers, this is fantastic, as you're able to get an indication on how engaged your Twitter audience is.

There are many other URL shortening services out there, even some that come with tracking service, or who pay you each time a link is clicked.

If you're running a Twitter client like Seismic Desktop or Tweetdeck, these applications will shorten your URLs for you automatically, using a mixture of the different services.

Other information

This is by no means an exhaustive guide. If you have questions about any of this, feel free to send me a direct message (again, www.twitter.com/levelten_colin). If I can't answer, there is an entire world of Twitter resources out there if you search for it.

Remember to stay human, don't be a corporate bot, let your personality show and don't use your Twitter account as a means for pushing your own content.

Follow those tips, and you'll do just fine.

Here are a few places to start for some other best practice ideas:

- <http://www.chrisbrogan.com/50-ideas-on-using-twitter-for-business/>
- http://darmano.typepad.com/logic_emotion/2008/12/twitters-10-commandments.html
- http://darmano.typepad.com/logic_emotion/2009/01/the-art-of-the-retweet.html
- <http://www.chrisbrogan.com/best-social-media-advice-from-this-site/>

Enjoy Twittering!