

Twitter: Useful for Your Business, or Business Hype?

When Twitter first launched in 2006, it was seen as a way to get real-time information about what was happening around the world. Twitter has since taken on many different purposes from national and local news updates, business brand messaging to celebrity sightings. Many businesses have successfully used Twitter to build customer loyalty, including [Subway](#), [Dominos Pizza](#), and [Coca Cola](#).

How Does It Work?

With just 140-character instant message posts (called Tweets) you can communicate with anyone, anywhere, at anytime—think text messaging to many people at once. Individuals can “follow” you—or watch your tweets—and you can “follow” almost anyone without waiting for confirmation.

Who Tweets?

When you consider if this is the right venue for generating visibility for your company, think about how Twitter demographics match those of your target customers. Here’s a summary:

- 53% of Twitter users are female
- 47% are between 18 and 34 years of age
- 31% are between 35 and 49 years of age
- More than 50% have a college degree

Surprisingly, many teens prefer text messaging to Twitter. So if you focus on that market, you may find that Facebook, Myspace or text messaging is the best option for you. Take a look at these two articles for more demographics information:

Twitter Benefits

- **Quality vs. quantity:** You don’t need to have 10,000 followers in order to get traction with Twitter. Quality is more important than quantity. Having a conversation with your followers—no different than you would your customers—is critical.
- **Provide value:** By posting “how-tos” or answers to frequently asked questions, you will gain followers easily because they will trust you to solve their problems in the future.
- **Thought leadership:** Increase your visibility as an expert or trusted resource in your niche based on the type of content and correspondence you have with others online. Being re-tweeted (RT) by others could make your message go viral because all of their followers will see what you said.
- **Broad company participation:** Twitter allows companies with multiple locations or departments to have many accounts that are managed as separate entities. This helps you customize your message and gain followers unique to the consumer or neighborhood you are targeting.
- **Promotions:** You can run contests and giveaways without incurring advertising expenses or restrictions.
- **Reach:** You can have an unlimited number of followers—customers, prospects, local media and friends.

- **Increase web traffic:** Tweets are a way to drive traffic to your website, your blog or your location.
- **Market and competitive research:** By using the Trending Topics feature, you can see what is the current and top-of-mind of your potential customers. Also, by using Twitter's search tools, you can monitor what your competitors are saying.
- **Partnerships:** This platform is a quick way to prequalify vendors and suppliers, see what value they are adding online and "test-drive" their knowledge base by viewing their tweets, even without following them.
- **Organized and Focused Marketing:** You can create relevant lists within your target audience—enabling you to better group them, listen to their feedback and gain valuable insights about their interests and behaviors.

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Challenges of Twitter

- **Time consuming:** Just like many other aspects of the web, you (or your team) could spend hours getting caught up in the pure size of the Twitter community. Make sure your time investment has an objective.
- **Tendency to Sell:** Twitter—just like other social media—is about building genuine relations. It's about interacting and conversing with your followers. Don't fall into the trap of the "hard sell" to your customers or you will alienate them.
- **Community strength:** As with any online or offline community, the strength of the community is measured by the strength of its participation. With Twitter, all your followers see responses to your tweets, creating a robust community between you and your followers.
- **Consistency:** To benefit from Twitter, small businesses need to be consistent and purposeful in their use. Sporadic use will result in negligible results.

Just like all types of marketing strategies, Twitter should be used in conjunction with a marketing campaign and not as the sole resource for building your brand or growing your business. If you think Twitter is for you, here are some additional articles to give you more ideas.

Additional Resources

Reaching Millions with Twitter: The Whole Foods Story

<http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/reaching-millions-with-twitter-the-whole-foods-story/>

Twitter Etiquette

<http://www.chrisbrogan.com/a-brief-and-informal-twitter-etiquette-guide/>

Timing your Tweets for Effectiveness:

<http://danzarella.com/weekends-and-afternoons-show-the-highest-twitter-ctrs.html>

Interesting demographic statistics:

<http://www.istrategylabs.com/2009/02/twitter-2009-demographics-and-statistics/>

<http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/new-study-reveals-facebook-better-than-twitter-for-marketers/>

See the average age of Twitter users compared to Facebook, LinkedIn and MySpace:

<http://www.socialmediatoday.com/SMC/78505>

Read more about Twitter lists: <http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/how-to-market-your-business-with-twitter-lists/>