

# How to make the most of Twitter for marketing

(but is it really worth it?)

Twitter is the current darling of the social media world. But, for every one person pronouncing the coming of the latest great marketing platform, there are 100 small businesses coming to terms with the fact that it's not, in fact, the [virtual] promised land.

“ When it comes to effective marketing, Twitter is about PR and profile building, not lead generation. ”

Is this problem down to this new social media platform itself, or is it through lack of strategy on the part of the user? As much as we can't promise that your business will benefit from Twitter, we can give you a few tips to get you moving in the right direction.

## Introduction

Twitter is a micro-blogging platform. Basically, that means you write snippets of information (limited by 140 characters) and people choose to follow you if they think you have anything interesting to say.

You also choose to follow other people, commenting and interacting with other 'Tweeters'.

Twitter is easy to use and very flexible. You can post a tweet from your PC, your smartphone and even auto-post tweets based on specific criteria.

One of the most attractive aspects of Twitter is the ability to create links to your website or Blog. As an overall tool, this invites spammers, but with the right mix of conversation, you can create relevant attention.

If you come to Twitter with an attitude simply to sell and market your business, offering little value for your followers, you won't see any benefits. But, if you are looking to nurture a communication channel, you may just have found the tool for you.

It's a fine balance between marketing and conversation. Many people, with a commercial intention, are making the mistake on Twitter that people are willing to be sold to - they're not.

## Strategy

It is imperative to have a strategy that has the potential to create a marketing channel on Twitter - just one of many your business should already have in place. Twitter should not be the only focus of your efforts, rather a complementary channel alongside your other marketing activities.

It's important that you know what you want and who you want to connect with before you start. It's also important to know what is realistic with your expectations because Twitter will not deliver you new customers as a rule.

Twitter is a very different marketing machine. A subtle approach is required if you plan to engage people. It's web 2.0 at it's most refined - quick collaborative conversation that's not necessarily 'controlled' by the brand.

In fact, when it comes to business use, Twitter is more about PR than anything else. A mass communication device that has built in feedback.

So, if you are the kind of organisation that people don't necessarily talk nicely about - eg. Housing Associations, councils, etc. - you may end up fire-fighting more that spreading your word.

## Strategic profiling ▼

So, you are taking the plunge and creating a profile in Twitter. Here's some initial thoughts:

### Are you going to set up your profile as you or your business?

There is an argument that in the social space, how can a business be social? There will always be an agenda, right? This is a valid point, but, if no-one in your organisation is prepared to stick their necks out and promote the business, you may have to opt for a company profile.

ASOS have a great mix with a number of tweeters offering a mix of the corporate and individuals.

### Who are looking to connect with?

This is an important point because it will determine what you speak about and the language you use.

Who you choose to follow is also important. If you are looking to be recognised as an expert, following every Tom, Dick and Harry will not enhance your credibility.

Are the people you really want to connect with even on Twitter? Perhaps, this route could do you more harm than good.

### Geography

A much overlooked aspect of many business online strategies is geography. If your audience is based locally, this has to be a massive factor in building your profile. Discussing local stuff (relevant to your business objectives) will catch local search. Your location should also be clear in your profile.

### What to say?

It's also worth thinking about the time you have to tweet in your working day and what you are going to talk about. If your intention is to link to your website often, it needs to be value content, not sales pages. Do you have any value content to link to and if so, how much? Otherwise your words will soon dry up.

## What's the story? ▼

One thing you may want to think about is changing your overall 'headline' profile.

One Twitter feed we run is for Basingstoke, offering links to events and news for the town. Some links come to us and we retain the moderation of this growing conversation.

If you can broaden the narrative in a pertinent way, with you being central to the conversation, you may pick up more relevant followers.

## Setup ▼

Your profile needs to be realistic, even if (like a dating website) it restricts your audience. Better to be realistic and focused, rather than courting lots of inappropriate people.

### Chose a name which is short and easy to remember

A short name will make it easier for people to talk about you and share your messages by re-tweeting.

Retweeting is when someone copies your message and posts it to their profile, crediting you with a **RT**. 140 characters doesn't stretch far so a short name will make this easier for other users. Also, try to avoid non-regular characters (like underscore \_) as you will need to keep explaining them when sharing your username. This can create confusion.

### Create a succinct profile and place yourself geographically.

This will help your search. It's important for someone to be able to quickly look at your profile and make a snap decision about you - because they will. The more relevant you are to them, the more likely they will follow.

### Design

Create a memorable Twitter Avatar icon. People will judge you by your picture. Does your avatar stand out from the crowd? Check out Nat Johnson's Avatar, it makes me smile every time.

Why not get creative with your Twitter background? Refrain from placing a sales pitch up - a mistake many small business owners make - it will distort your credibility, but there is no reason not to brand your background.

## The What Next?

If someone is interested in following you, what link (URL) are you offering them in your profile?

It's been suggested that making a specific Twitter landing page on your website is a good idea, because you can create a specific message, tailored to a Twitter audience.

Potentially, you will never 'make the sale' directly from Twitter (especially B2B), but, you could turn a stranger into a friendly prospect, if you can continue the conversation away from Twitter.

It could be that this page encourages someone to sign up to your newsletter, for instance.

## Conversational

Twitter is conversational in nature. Yes, some media publications use it purely to publish links to articles, but it's more about conversation. **That means that you have to listen, just as much as talk.**

Use Twitter search to find people talking about the things you want to join in the conversation with.

If geography plays a part in your strategy, use advanced Twitter search to find people local to you.

## What to say

It's not for us to tell you what to talk about on your Twitter profile. but stay on subject and add a bit of personality into the mix - either your own, or your brand tone-of-voice.

“ If your brand has a tone-of-voice, you need to use it, even if you only have 140 characters ”

## Two-way

Link to other people by using the @ symbol.

You can re-tweet (RT) something someone else has tweeted for your followers. Be brave and credit other people and organisations, even if they could potentially be competition. They are part of a conversation you can not control, it's better to join in rather than end up talking to yourself.

## Links

Link to relevant articles your followers may find interesting. Some, but not all of these, can be your own. Using tools like Tinyurl.com, you can create short link names to fit your 140 character limit.

## Create conversation

There is nothing to stop you starting a conversation. Why not ask a question that may get a response? You can often get recognised in a niche by being someone who has a relevant argument to offer and stimulates debate.

Staying vanilla will not always attract interest.

## Who to follow

Following people should be enabling for you as a Twitter user and not just an automatic thing that you do. Follow publications, experts and peers in your chosen field, people who have something worthwhile to say.

There is a phenomena on Twitter whereby people like to collect followers. All these people are doing is following each other to boost their numbers. This does not, however, create an effective Twitter profile.

Expect lots of people to follow you, especially if you tweet something that has a specific keyword in. (Some people use automated systems that pick up on set words and automatically follow you.)

It can be very tempting to follow them back to boost your numbers. But, if you have the time, check out who is following you and gauge whether they are worth following back. **Do not feel obliged.**

It's about quality, not quantity.

## When to sit back



Some people use Twitter with nothing to lose. They can be offensive and aggressive and you may be in their sights for one reason or another.

You, however, have your brand sitting behind you, so you need to let some conversations happen without getting involved. As much as it would be great to 'fight back', they are no doubt prepared to go further in a slanging match, so best let it fizzle out.

If you have been staying on subject, writing useful Tweets and linking off to many sources, it may just be that a quality conversation isn't taking place on Twitter - **quality** being the operative word.

Remember, it is interaction and profile you are looking to build. Do not judge your success on how many followers you have managed to snag.

## When to stop



If you have spent hours and hours on Twitter and simply can not see the benefit, you have one of two choices.

1. Learn more about how Twitter works. See what the successful people in your niche are doing and refine your own strategy.
2. Give up. It's not a sign that you have done anything wrong, it's more a case that Twitter doesn't work for you.

Remember, there is currently a certain amount of Twitter hype. There are also thousands of accounts that have been set up and given up on. The retention rate of Twitter in America is something like 40%: 6 in 10 people give up.

## Summary



Marketing is about creating profile for your business and engaging with customers and other relevant audiences. Twitter is simply another quick and easy (and free) way of doing this, but it is not the only way.

You could even argue that because Twitter is free, it will be non-effective, simply down to the amount of companies using it diluting the value.

Twitter has proven itself to be a great platform for personal branding, with celebrities [especially] embracing the medium, but for brands - especially business-to-business - can it really offer value for the time spent?

We, are still not convinced with Twitter, but are still Tweeting. We are creating links to our value articles and web tools and are hooking up with plenty of local businesses. (mainly our peers).

Return on investment of time spent, perhaps not. A simple route to create profile, yes. @theescape

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