



## Twitter Q & A

### *Practical answers to the most common twitter questions*

By Drew Zagorski  
February 2010

People are still all a-twitter over twitter. There's still a lot of confusion and mystery about what it is and how to use it as a business tool. And many people aren't sold on its value as such.

Before I jump into the Q&A, it's important to understand what twitter, at its core, really is. In short, twitter is a mini-blog. If you are a blogger you know the value of that exercise and how it helps you gain visibility and status. Twitter is the same concept, except you do it in the parameters of 140 characters, versus an open ended posting. Like a blog, a tweet is an open invitation to engage and it will live on the web indefinitely (remember that - so don't put something out that you can't take back if you need to!).

So, with that in mind, here are several of the common questions that get asked and some quick answers...

#### **1. What's the point? Why should I care about what someone's doing?**

In and of itself, twitter is pointless. But when you factor in the ability to follow and be followed, that's where you'll realize value. You'll be able to connect with people with whom you have something in common and you'll be able to keep dialed in to what's going on in your industry. That's why you should care about what others are doing. Not necessarily that they're going for a walk now, but keeping your fingers on the pulse of your industry, your customers, your competitors. It's also a tool to dialogue - remember, it's a mini-blog, and that means it's an open conversation, though you can use it as a broadcast only tool, as well (see below).

#### **2. What is retweeting all about and do I have to do it?**

Retweeting is the viral aspect of twitter. It's word of mouth. If you see something that would be of value to your followers (customers, prospects, colleagues, etc.), retweet it. Pass it along. That's the huge opportunity for you. If you're tweeting valuable, relevant stuff, people will pass it along. When you do retweet and are involved in a conversation, you can use hashtags to track those conversations. To answer the second part of this question, no, you don't need to retweet. But keep an eye on what's floating around out there. There's a lot of good information and it can be very useful to you and your followers (their followers, and so on). Pass it along by retweeting.

#### **3. OK, so how do I retweet?**

When you see someone's tweet, there's a small "arrow" next to their tweet. If you feel like responding, click that arrow and it will automatically load their name into the text box. Type your answer in 140 characters and submit. Using the reply feature will make conversations easier to track and find.

You can use the Direct Message (or DM in the twitter vernacular) tool to send a message to a single person or a specific group. However, you can only do this with people who are following you.

#### **4. Why only 140 characters?**

140 characters is the size limit of mobile text messages using SMS (Short Message Service, a technology standard for mobile devices).

#### **5. How do I find followers or people to follow?**

Use the Find People tool or the twitter search tool (search.twitter.com). You can search by name, by terms and words, company names, locations, etc. You can also use other tools such as Twellow (the twitter yellow pages) and # hashtags (put the hashmark in front of your term - i.e. #beaverton).



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#### **6. I've been on twitter for a while... why aren't people following me?**

There can be several reasons. Do you engage enough? That is, do you share enough information, rather than simply taking it and do you engage in conversations? Have you been active for a long enough time and do you follow others regularly? Remember the mini-blog thing? If you've followed my Grey Matter columns in the past, you'll know that I always refer to blogging at its best as an ongoing conversation. People who are committed to twitter are there to engage. Twitter isn't as high maintenance as a full on blog, but you still need to chime in once in a while.

#### **7. How does twitter help me with SEO?**

If your tweets are public, they are published for everyone to see... and that means everyone. So select your public material carefully. You don't want to share your secret sauce with the competition. If you publicly tweet it, the world will see it, including Google. Google does index tweets, so be sure to link back to content on your site or your blog to drive traffic there. That's how you'll benefit on the SEO front. You can make your tweets private so they will be visible only by those you follow. There are toggles on the Account page that allow you to select the "make my tweets private" option.

#### **8. How can a small business use Twitter effectively?**

Twitter is a great way to stay in front of people. If you have an e-newsletter, tweet when you send it out to let followers know about the content in it. Maybe there are several content areas you can tweet. Use twitter to let your followers know about events you'll be participating in (trade shows, association gatherings, etc.). How you use twitter depends on how you want it to fit in your marketing mix, and if your audience is dialed in.

#### **9. Is it OK to use twitter simply as a broadcasting tool?**

Certainly. But try not to use it exclusively as a broadcast tool. It's real value will come when you engage, as mentioned earlier.

#### **10. I'm on several social networks, are there tools that will help me tweet to all of them?**

My personal favorite is HootSuite, but there several good tools out there. Take a look at TweetDeck, Twhirl, SocialToo, and CoTweet as well as HootSuite. In addition to these there are some other cool tools to help with tweeting. Because of the 140 character limit, you'll want to use a link shortener. My favorite is bit.ly, which I've mentioned in previous Grey Matter columns. Others worth looking at are ow.ly, tinyURL and twurl.

For managing twitter in general, Tweetdeck, as well as Seesmic Desktop and Twhirl let you see your followers tweets, reply to and send DMs, and follow or unfollow people. They also help with setting up groups, handle searches, and much more.

#### **I'm In...**

As many of you know, if you've been reading Grey Matter for some time, I was not very fast to jump on the twitter bandwagon. Over time, as I've researched, read and actually used twitter, I've come around, however grudgingly, to see twitter for what it is. And that is as a tool in the marketing toolbox. It can be powerful when used right, and useless - as anything can be - when ignored. The bottom line is to be clear about how you plan to integrate it into your overall marketing and communications. Some tips:

- ☞ Don't over indulge and swamp people in the minutiae of your daily life - tweeting every 30 minutes about what you accomplished in the previous 30 minutes - the weather or that you've



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updated your check register isn't really that important to people. This will only make people ignore your tweets because you'll have established a rep for being irrelevant.

- ☞ Be relevant. Offer info of value, even if it doesn't originate with you. Retweet, and prosper.
- ☞ Engage - You don't need to burn hours on end dinking around with twitter, but get engaged. Every few days, take a peek at what people are sharing, add a comment or retweet if you believe your followers will benefit from something and it's relevant to your business.
- ☞ Do the twitter thing if it really makes sense and you can at least commit to occasional participation.

While I'm all in, I still believe that twitter is a 'nice to have' tool. If you're not twittering it's not the end of the world, but if your constituents are in the twittesphere, you should be there too.

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