

Lumen PR provides marketing and PR consultancy to technology companies.

We understand technology, and we understand business.

Contact:
Nick Daines
Director
Lumen PR
+44 (0)115 8412109
nick@lumenpr.com
Twitter: @nickdaines
www.lumenpr.com

A Business Guide to Twitter

We get asked by our clients if using Twitter can benefit their company. The answer is not necessarily clear – usually it can help, but it's not as important as the media hype might suggest.

You need to step back, and really see how to integrate Twitter into your existing communications activities, to achieve real benefits.

What is Twitter?

Twitter is a free social networking and micro-blogging service that allows users to send and read each others' updates, called 'tweets'. Tweets are text-based posts of up to 140 characters, displayed on the author's profile page and delivered to other users - known as followers - who have subscribed to them. Senders can restrict delivery to those in their circle of friends or, by default, allow open access. Users can send and receive tweets via the Twitter website (<http://www.twitter.com>), SMS text messages or external applications such as [TweetDeck](#).

Twitter is currently perceived to be used mostly by innovators and early adopters, but in the last few months it is rapidly moving towards being mainstream.

Over 75% of all Twitter users joined in 2009¹ and over 10,000 new accounts are opened every day. However, over 35% of Twitter users have 10 followers or less, and 9% of Twitter users don't have any followers. Although men and women follow a similar number of Twitter users, men have 15% more followers than women.

Individuals and organisations tend to be seen as interchangeable on Twitter. Companies are using Twitter as a broadcast platform, but its true strength is to engage with followers or stakeholders in a two-way conversation. Not all industry sectors are using it widely, while some – such as the publishing media (newspapers and trade press) – are mature users.

What Motivates People to use Twitter?

The reasons why people listen to other people's tweets are varied. They can include:

- Entertainment
- Discovery – stumble across new information and people
- Ambient intimacy (build an emotional link with geographical distance being irrelevant)
- Up to date news and information
- Being part of a story / helping it spread
- Forecasting and trend spotting

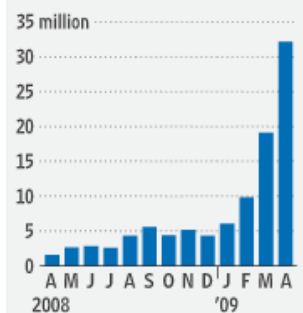
This means your need to consider these points for your tweets. The principles are the same as for any communications campaign: who do you want to reach? Why? What do you want to communicate? What do you want your audience to do when they receive your message?

Business uses for Twitter

We are seeing many great proactive examples of where Twitter is being used for PR purposes. These include:

- Breaking news – news is happening first on Twitter. It is a great way to push your story out.
- Complement existing customer relations – communicating directly with your stakeholders.
- Praise and criticism – allows you to engage in a two-way dialog with both friends and foes.

Taking Off
World-wide unique visitors to Twitter.com



Source: comScore

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- Crisis communications – an opportunity to respond immediately before a situation escalates.
- Crowd sourcing – for product development and survey customer satisfaction.
- Lead generation – developing or expanding into new markets.
- Opinion polling – ask questions and get feedback.
- Professional networking.
- Seek and create media opportunities – respond to journalist's tweets.
- Used at events to create a 'backchannel' for user feedback and to extend event participation.
- Recruiting.

Monitoring, Following and Followers

Not only do you need to communicate, it is also important to monitor what is happening on Twitter and react accordingly. By adding hashtags (#text) in your tweets, other Twitter users can better search and follow everyone's contribution to a single community conversation. Afterwards, they then can decide if they want to follow you permanently.

Followers to a company's tweets will fall into groups, which you will need to decide how to communicate best with:

- People talking about your brand or industry
- Prospects
- Customers
- Influencers
- Experts
- Others such as students and spammers

Examples of use

Consortium ([@taraconsortium](https://twitter.com/@taraconsortium)) is a UK company that runs regular business to business trade shows. For its East Midlands Business Live event, it sourced key note speakers directly from Twitter.

Journalists are using Twitter to communicate news, or to alert followers to news on their website. In fact, some journalists now prefer to accept story pitches via Twitter, although this is an exception rather than a rule.

To Tweet or Not?

There is no right or wrong answer, and Twitter cannot work in isolation. If you're not ready now, perhaps it is time to evaluate the best use of Twitter for your business. Here is a list of questions to get you started:

- Why should we use Twitter?
- What is our agenda?
- Who do we want to listen to us?
- Why would they communicate with us?
- How will we keep them engaged?
- Do we have the time to commit to this?
- Who will manage the Twitter updates?
- Do we need external help?
- How will our Twitter updates be integrated with other PR, IR and marketing activity?

Next Step

Sign up! It's painless. Go to <http://twitter.com/account/create>.

For help, go to <http://help.twitter.com>

Useful links:

- www.lknowtweet.com (post questions)
- www.mrtweet.net (suggests people to follow, and provides statistics)
- www.socialbrandindex.com (Twitter business directories)
- tweetlater.com (schedule tweets and automatically follow anybody who follows you)
- www.twilert.com (set up search terms and email alerts)
- www.twitterholic.com (establish popularity of Twitter users)
- Wefollow.com (follow people by similar interests)
- www.search.twitter.com (search and identify trending topics)
- <http://twitter.pbwiki.com> (useful information)
- <http://hashtags.org> (see what's being talked about)