

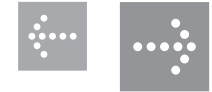
from twainee to twitterati?

a beginner's guide to
navigating Twitter



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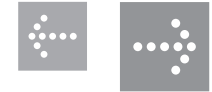
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your first steps



So you've heard all the fuss about Twitter and have decided that you'd like to know more. Great. This guide has been written with you in mind. Its purpose is to:

- Explain how Twitter works
- Help you decide if Twitter is worth a go
- Help you focus on what you want from Twitter
- Help you register, log in and get started
- Give you tips on building your contacts
- Learn from others' mistakes
- Suggest some useful resources.

Let's assume you're ready to get started, as a trainee - or Twainee, to use Twitter terminology.





twitter staples



Before you begin, it's useful to get a sense of the Twitter basics.

Twitter is a social networking service which you can access by internet or mobile phone. People send each other short messages (up to 140 characters in length - typically a sentence).

It's also known as 'micro-blogging' because people typically post brief messages about their life, sometimes with pictures and video links.

Twitter is based on the question "What are you doing?" You post messages, called 'tweets' on subjects that interest you. Each time you post a message, it will appear on your profile page, or 'Twitter stream'.

As 140 characters is the limit, using Twitter makes you focus on what's important. And over time, you'll find new ways of keeping things concise; ask a simple question, post video and media links, make a comment or tweet hot news items. The main thing is that you make an effort to communicate with other users.

If you use the default settings when you sign up, all your tweets will appear on a public timeline, so anyone can see them. If your tweets interest someone, they may choose to 'follow' you and become part of your network of 'followers'. In the same way, if you find a post interesting, you can follow the person online and they will become your 'friend'.

When you follow someone, you opt-in to see all the messages they post.

It's difficult to gauge exactly how many people are using Twitter, although www.hitwise.com confirmed that more than 14 million unique visitors had used the service in March 2009. The web-based Twitter service is also among the top 300 most visited UK sites (not counting mobile phone users). Increasing media coverage and high-profile celebrity endorsements mean that Twitter continues to attract new users and therefore it's worth taking account of as part of your organisation's communications strategy.



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the pros



So what are the prime benefits of having a Twitter account?

Speed - it's quick and easy to use

Versatility - you can tweet from a computer or on-the-move from your mobile phone

Branding - it's a way of promoting you, your organisation, your latest product or service

Timely - you can pick up hot news stories as increasingly people are becoming 'standby reporters' all over the world

Feedback - you can sound people out and get their views on a wide range of topics

Profit - for many businesses, it's a good way of raising product awareness and boosting interest/sales

Networks - if you're looking to expand your network of business contacts, there are usually plenty of people that may be useful - potential buyers, suppliers, complementary businesses and so on

Friendship - you can keep in touch with friends and family and let them know what you're up to





the cons



At the same time, there are some potential downsides and it's useful to be aware of these before you start twittering away.

Noisy - the huge amount of posts mean that it can sometimes be hard to sift through piles of low-level tweets to find the gems you're looking for

Banal - some tweets are meaningless, strange or both

Sales-driven - Twitter has a high proportion of self-appointed 'mavens', 'experts', 'gurus' and so on. The phrase 'self-praise is no recommendation' springs to mind...

Distracting - with such a huge variety of tweets, it's easy to spend ages online sifting through information. So if you're a business owner or head of an organisation, you may want to revisit your social media usage policy (if you haven't already)

Permanency - whatever you tweet will be rolling around the Internet for keeps, so think before you post; that's even more important if you're posting with your brand name. In a well-trodden story, a US PR agency representative made derogatory comments about Memphis just before he made a presentation to FedEx in that very city. Unfortunately the client was watching, made a public complaint and a Twitter legend was born

Changeable - although your tweets are permanent, friends and followers can change like the weather. That's part of Twitter life, as interest waxes and wanes much quicker than real life - so don't take it personally if you lose a few followers here and there! Quality is what counts in the long run

Risky - Twitter is just one egg in your communications basket. It's a free service now, but may not be in the future (if, of course, it exists in the future). So use it as one element of your strategy, rather than over-relying on it





tweet - to who?



Before you start tapping away, think about why and how you want to use Twitter.

Is it just to see what all the fuss is about? To promote your brand to customers in a niche market? To position yourself as an expert in a particular field? To find like-minded contacts in your sector? Or to tell friends and loved ones that you're working late, tired or watching a new film?

With so many Twitter users online, you can expect a diverse range of postings. These vary from people tweeting breaking news stories (such as the Hudson River air crash) through to someone telling the world what they've just had for dinner.

So before you start tweeting, do think about what you have to say, and who you want to say it to.

Here are some of the typical 'tweeple' you'll find on Twitter. Please note, Twitter time is much shorter than real life so accounts can change and be deleted very quickly. (That's shorthand for 'don't blame us if the links don't work anymore'.) We've also included some examples of popular accounts, but these aren't recommendations...!

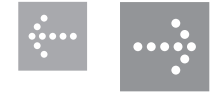
Twainees - new users emerge every day. Often distinguished by "Not sure how this Twitter thing works" type of posts

Marketers and PRs - includes people offering tips and tricks on marketing, online search and journalism, through to hard-sell 'buy this book/software/product' posters

Other professionals - designers, architects, entrepreneurs, IT specialists and many more besides

Media contacts - a wide range of media contacts and journalists tweet - including multiple **BBC** and **Guardian** accounts, **Channel 4 News**, **CNN**, and specialist titles such as **Inside Housing** and **Wired UK**





Personalities - anyone who tweets inspirational, comedic, conversational or provoking tweets. Diverse examples include **Tony Robbins**, **Jim MacMillan** and **James Malach**

Brands - increasingly companies are using Twitter to build product awareness, provide advance notice of price cuts and generally engage with their customers. Examples include **Starbucks** and **ASDA**

Twitterati - also known as the 'tweet elite' or 'rock stars', attracting thousands of followers.

This category includes celebrities (such as **Lily Allen** and **Ashton Kutcher**), politicians (notably **Barack Obama**, although **Tom Watson** and **Harriet Harman** are relatively popular in the UK) and experts in various fields (such as **Guy Kawasaki**, **Gary Vaynerchuk** and **Robert Scoble**)

Be aware that Twitter also attracts its fair share of spammers. Some are easily spotted because they follow thousands of people with only a few follow-backs. Others repeatedly tweet plugs for a product (sometimes just posting the same message time and time again).





getting started



To create a Twitter account, you need to visit www.twitter.com and click on the 'get started - join' button.

You will then go to a sign-up screen where you need to enter your first and last name, a user name, one-line biography, password and email address. From a branding perspective it can be helpful to use your real name, or organisation name; it depends what type of messages you want to tweet and whether an employer will object to this or not!

When you're creating your user profile, always add a picture if you can. Otherwise the default picture option looks pretty impersonal and screams 'newbie'. You can also tailor your profile background and colours.

Apart from choosing one of the default options, you can upload a pretty picture, organisation logo or some other creative option.

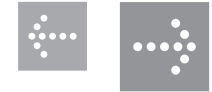
Now it's time to learn the lingo and dive in. The key things you need to know are listed below.

@replies - To reply to a tweet, you need to type the @ symbol linked to someone's username. So to reply to tbgkerry, you'd need to type in @tbgkerry and your message, then press send. If you're using the web version of Twitter, you can also press the arrow to the right-hand side of a tweet and it will automatically generate the @username function in the panel at the top of the page

Retweets (RTs) - If you see a great tweet and think it will interest other people, type RT in the tweet box along with a summary of the message. This acts in a similar way to word-of-mouth marketing - you're telling the world that you were impressed by a particular post. Most people will appreciate you circulating their information

Direct messages (DMs) - If you follow someone and they follow you back, you can also send them direct tweets that don't appear on the public profile. To use this function, select the 'direct messages' row in your profile, choose a recipient from the drop-down box and type your message in the panel directly below





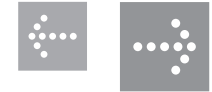
Browsing topics - Use the search box on your profile page to look for topics that interest you, as this will generate lists of related tweets for you to browse. If you spot something that interests you, click on the username for that tweet and you'll see that person's profile. If you like what they post, click the 'follow' button and you'll join their band of followers

Browsing people - If you find someone interesting on Twitter, try checking out the people that they're following (the profiles will appear on the right-hand side of their page, in rows of boxes). You can click on any of the boxes to go to those users' profiles and it's a good way of building your network

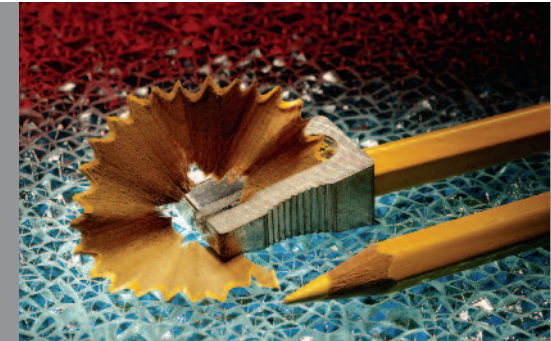
Trending - Use the 'trending topics' column to browse the most popular items currently on Twitter

So now you're ready for your first tweet. Make it a good one! Avoid the "I don't know what I'm doing" type of post if you can, it's a well-trodden route. Talk about something that interests you, or something that you want feedback on... the idea is to engage people, after all.





sharpen up



As you get used to navigating Twitter, you'll find there are plenty of people ready to offer tips and tricks to improve your experience. Here are a few ways you can sharpen up your game.

Desktop applications - lots of people use software or websites to make Twitter easier to manage. Two of the most famous are Tweetdeck and Twhirl. With Tweetdeck, for example, you can reply, retweet, send a direct message, or highlight a favourite posting at the touch of a button. Searching and filtering names and topics is a doddle too - perfect to keep track on your brand

Followers - when you're building your first followers it can be a bit daunting.

But it's quality, not quantity that counts. If you need a helping hand to get started, follow [@kerryhames](#) and we'll follow you back

Follow backs - if you're tempted to follow everyone who follows you, here's a word of caution. If you don't find someone's tweets interesting now, after a few days or weeks you could find them pretty annoying. Remember, all your friends' postings will automatically appear on your page. So be careful who you follow!

Friend or Follow - this is an online service where you can monitor who you're following, and who isn't following you back

Shortened references - if you're including website links when you

tweet, sometimes the URL can eat into your 140 character 'allowance'. Using a desktop application like Tweetdeck makes this much easier, as there is a 'shorten' facility which can automatically condense web links and add them to your tweet

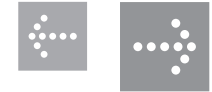
TwitterGrader - this website is useful for tracking your relative popularity or 'grading' on Twitter. You can also search by location to check out the 'tweet elite' in your part of the world

Twitpic - this free service lets you post pictures to reference in your tweets

TwitterholiC - this site lists the top 100 Twitter users globally, based on follower numbers



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off you go!



We hope you've found this Twitter guide useful.

Follow the rules and you could be on your way to joining the Twitterati. Maybe not as popular as **stephen fry** or **mashable** just yet, but you need something to aim for!

If you've got any feedback, we'd love to hear from you. Please contact our marketing team on +44 024 7656 0440, **e-mail us** or send a tweet to **@tbgagency**.





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