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twitter

A Beginner's Guide to Twitter

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Twitter is the current "in thing" on the internet. You can hardly go through the day without reading about Twitter in a newspaper, hearing about it on the radio, or having messages from contacts begging you to join Twitter. But should you?

Let's find out.....

WHAT IS TWITTER?

Twitter is a "microblogging" service. Essentially it is a means of typing up to 140 characters - no more. Those characters will appear on your own Twitter web page, in what is effectively a message "inbox" of Twitter messages for people who opt-in to receive your material, in an RSS feed and on mobile phones as a text message (hence the 140 character limit). Twitter also allows you to reply to other people's entries and you can send direct messages to individuals who use Twitter - a sort of instant messaging service.

SOME TWITTER TERMS

Someone who uses Twitter is called a Twitterer and the collective noun for a group of Twitterers is Tweepers. When you type anything into Twitter you are sending a Tweet. When you read Tweets you are said to be Tweeding and when you are writing a Tweet you are Twyping...! There are plenty more terms at this [glossary](#).

WHO USES TWITTER?

All sorts of people use Twitter. There are business people, celebrities, teenagers - in fact anyone...! And they are all finding different ways to use the system.

SOME WAYS PEOPLE USE TWITTER

Emergency services use Twitter to provide updates on ongoing crisis situations. News organisations use Twitter to deliver headlines. Companies use Twitter to act as a replacement for the old "in-out" board showing who is in the office. Entrepreneurs use Twitter to find joint venture partners. Dell uses Twitter to advertise special offers. Teachers use Twitter in the classroom to help pupils learn. Internet Marketers use Twitter to direct people to their web sites. Celebrities use Twitter to gain publicity. Professors use Twitter to pose research questions. Families use Twitter to pass on personal information. Web site owners use Twitter to drive traffic. People use Twitter to connect with people.

THINGS YOU CAN DO WITH TWITTER

You can automatically connect any RSS feed to your Twitter account using [Twitterfeed](#). This means, for instance, every time you write a blog entry, or post something into Ecademy, the headline can be automatically sent as a Tweet. This brings extra readers to your blog, to your Ecademy profile and to your web site.

You could use [Tweetlater](#) to set up Tweets in advance. This could be used to deliver a series of tips on your specialist topic, for instance a "tip of

the day". Each tip could include a link back to your web site, bringing you extra traffic, or simply would help establish you as an expert in your field.

You could use [Twellow](#) to find other people on Twitter in your field or topic area. You could then connect with them so you can do business together. Or you could use Twellow to find potential customers.

In fact, there are now hundreds of tools which enhance Twitter. Find out more at [Twitter Applications](#).

And if you need any ideas on how to use Twitter, check out these [101 Business Ideas for Twitter](#).

HOW DOES IT ALL WORK?

When you sign up for Twitter you will only be visible on the "public timeline". This is a massive message board where every Tweet is shown second by second. It may be interesting to look at - but it will waste your time...! During the sign-up process you can get Twitter to check your email address book to see if anyone you know is already a Twitterer. If they are, you can then send them a message asking them to follow you.

"Following" is being able to see the Tweets your chosen people are posting. You only get to see the Tweets of people you really want to. So, when you sign up with Twitter and you send a message to your fellow Twitterers they can decide whether or not to follow you and see your Tweets. You can then follow them in return. In this way you can get to see every Tweet your contacts make - and they will be able to see yours.

Now the clever bit...! Because your contacts have other contacts which you don't have, they can pass on or "re-tweet" your Tweets if they think their contacts would be interested in what you say. These people then get the chance to follow you - and then they can re-tweet and so on and so on. This is one of the ways you build your network. Also, your contacts can reply to your Tweet, which will also be seen by all of their followers, further spreading the word about you. Assuming your Tweets are interesting or useful, they will soon attract followers to you and you will build up a nice list of people who you can keep in touch with, even do business with or sell things to,

USING TWITTER

Twitter can be used directly at the Twitter web site. However, it isn't that pretty or that functional. Instead, many "Twitter clients" have been developed which run as a desktop application on your computer. There are several of these available for both PCs and Macs and a full list is at the [Twitter Fan Wiki](#). One of the most popular for the PC is [Twhirl](#). The Mac has [Twitterific](#) and there are applications for the [iPhone](#) amongst others. Whichever application you use, it sits in the background and every now and then collects the latest Tweets from the people you follow. You can also use the applications to send a Tweet yourself, reply to Tweets, send direct (private) messages to Twitterers, even share pictures via Twitter. In other words, these little programs allow you to run Twitter without having to go near the web page or even open your browser.

The applications can also alert you to certain kinds of Tweets, maintain an ongoing search of Tweets for particular keywords or simply stay in the background, quiet as a mouse, just waiting for you to look at it when you wish. They are extremely flexible applications which all do much the same

thing and you should look at several to find one which works best for you. My favourite is Twhirl.

MANAGING TWITTER

Some people appear to spend their life on Twitter. That's dangerous of course because the seductive nature of the service can mean you spend more time than you want using Twitter, taking time away from your day-to-day job. I've coined another Twitter word for constantly using Twitter for no real reason, [Enterotwittus](#) and you can read more about it at [my web site](#). Essentially, you need a strategy for using Twitter otherwise you could waste time with it.

For instance, your Twitter strategy might be to post a Tweet or two each morning before you start your real work. Then, using RSS feeds you can automatically send Tweets for your other activities, such as postings on Ecademy, your blog and so on. Or, you could spend 15 minutes each afternoon searching on Twitter or Twellow for people who could be potential customers or partners. You can then follow them and hopefully they will reciprocate and follow you as well. Then you could post a Tweet about some project you are working on to act as a signpost to the things you get up to. Do that every evening, say, and you'll soon start collecting followers who may well do business with you. Another strategy may be simply to Tweet at lunchtime every day about what web sites you are reading - that simply alerts people to your subject area and helps establish your reputation as someone who has their finger on the pulse of a particular topic. There are dozens of potential strategies you could come up with - but be sure to have a plan.

FINDING OUR MORE ABOUT TWITTER

There are several useful guides to Twitter. There is my own booklet on [How to use Twitter in Business](#) - that's a download from my web site for you. [Mark Shaw](#) has teleseminars and other support at [TwitterHelp](#). Read his blog, as well at [MarkShaw.biz](#). You should also join the [Ecademy Twitter Club](#), where there are over 1,800 members all helping each other discover more about what Twitter has to offer.

So, SHOULD YOU TWITTER - YES OR NO?

Yes you should Twitter. Why? Well, apart from finding new customers, discovering additional business partners, enhancing your reputation, keeping in touch with clients, organising family life and generally communicating with people, there is another important reason why Twitter is becoming an essential business tool. Ever since the birth of the Internet there has been communication between people. It started with simple messages, then quickly became email, which has changed little since it began in the early 1960s. But it is slow; it depends on each party in the transaction being involved in a send and receive. The sender may have a slow server and the receiver may only look at their messages once a week. It has real value, of course, but in the rapid global business world we now live in, it does have limitations. And then there is spam.

For years people have dreamt about Instant Messaging. And it is available and hugely popular. But in spite of some attempts, it is not really that "open". If you send messages via one Instant Message system, people

on another system cannot receive them, unless you all subscribe to multiple accounts with different services. Hardly user friendly.

Twitter, on the other hand, can be viewed by anyone, anywhere, anytime. It is true universal instant messaging. You don't even need a PC - a mobile phone will do. As a result, Twitter is now delivering what has been wanted for years - instant contact between any people, anywhere in the world. No other system has been able to achieve that; true, I admit, some have got close. But none with the simplicity of Twitter. And that's why it is proving immensely attractive to people.

Rather like Google swept away the stuff and nonsense of the periphery of search, with a simple interface asking what do you want to search for, so Twitter has taken instant messaging and made it simple. That means it is bound to succeed; indeed Twitter's traffic is currently doubling month on month and it is now in the Top 100 web sites both in the UK and the USA. That success also means one thing - it is inevitable your competitors will be using Twitter. You can try and stand King Canute-like to stop the Twitter tide, but you'll soon get your feet wet. Twitter looks like it is here to stay and that means you should seriously consider its role in your business - now..!

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Consultancy,
workshops and
support to help
your business
grow and profit
from the effective
use of the Internet

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