Strategies for Effective Tweeting:
A Statistical Review

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Introduction

Several years ago, words like Twitter, Tweet (💬), hashtag (#) and Retweet (🔁) were part of a vocabulary limited to early adopters in social media. Today, it's hard to watch television, look at an advertisement or walk down the street without seeing a prompt to Tweet or use a particular hashtag.

With a social network that has 140 million active users1 producing 340 million Tweets per day, Twitter has firmly established itself as a key player in the social space, and brands agree. According to research by Buddy Media and global research firm Booz and Co.2, 77% of marketers listed Twitter as one of their top three priority social platforms.

Our research reveals that Twitter is particularly powerful at driving "amplification" for brand messages. In fact, 78% of user engagement with a brand's Tweets is in the form of Retweets, while replies, which form the basis for "conversation," make up only 22% of engagement. Twitter drives a lot of traffic elsewhere on the web, too, as users can also take action on Tweets by clicking links. According to Buddy Media data, link clicks account for 92% of all user interaction with Tweets. That's a lot of clicks.

As with any social network, it is not enough to simply publish content and hope for the best. Instead, you need to know when to Tweet, what to Tweet and how often to Tweet. That's why Buddy Media conducted an in-depth study to provide guidance on these topics and more. The result is our latest research report, "Strategies for Effective Tweeting: A Statistical Review." The report is a companion to our Facebook data report, "Strategies for Effective Wall Posts: A Statistical Review."3

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1 http://blog.twitter.com/2012/03/twitter-turns-six.html
2 http://www.booz.com/media/file/BoozCo-Campaigns-to-Capabilities-Social-Media-and-Marketing-2011.pdf
3 http://forms.buddymedia.com/whitepaper-form_review-strategies-for-effective-facebook-wall-posts.html

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Methodology

Between December 11, 2011 and February 23, 2012, Buddy Media analyzed user engagement from more than 320 Twitter handles of the world's biggest brands.

Three primary success metrics were reviewed in relation to Tweets:

- Reply Rate: number of replies as a percentage of followers

- Retweet Rate: number of Retweets as a percentage of followers (includes manual retweets)

- Engagement Rate: a combination of the replies and Retweets factoring in the number of followers
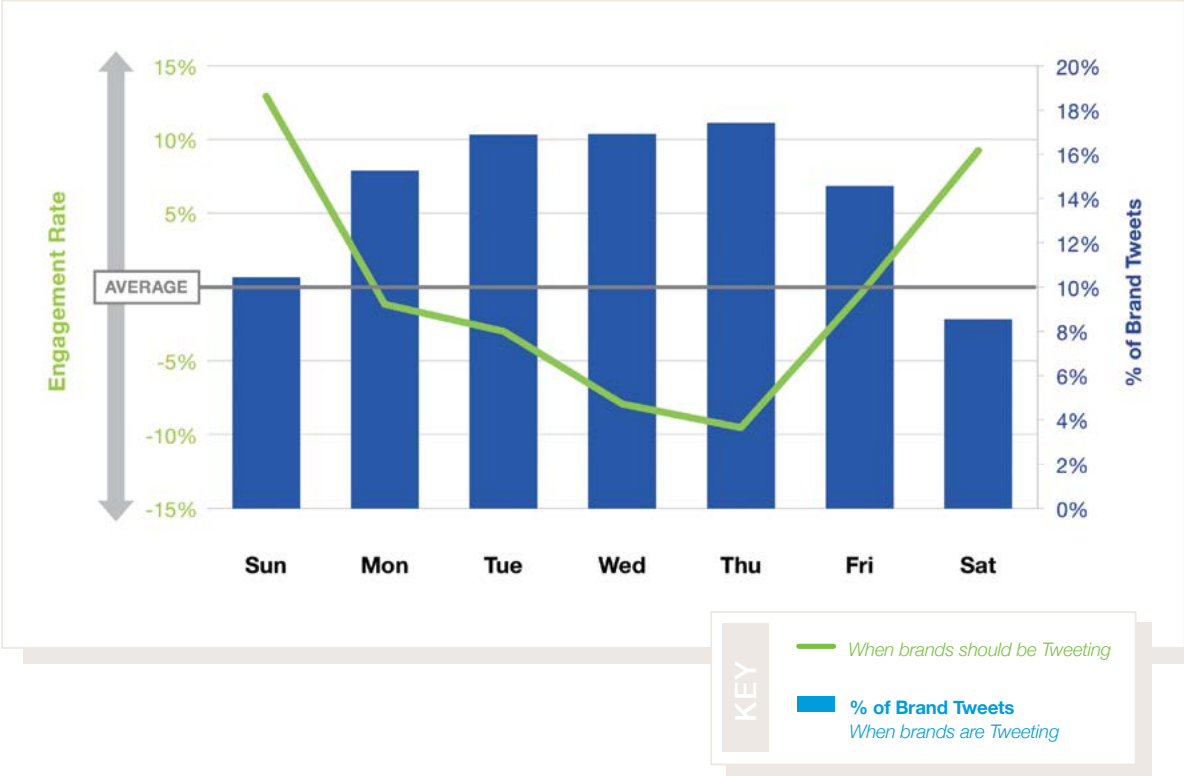
All analysis in reference to Tweet timing and scheduling is based on Eastern Standard Time (EST).

KEY   =TWEET   =RETWEET   =REPLY   # =HASHTAG

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Weekends Are Good for Relaxing and Tweeting

Twitter engagement rates for brands are 17% higher on Saturday and Sunday compared to weekdays, but brands don't take advantage of this trend.

In fact, only 19% of all brand Tweets are published on weekends even though engagement is highest on these days. Brands are wasting time posting on Wednesdays and Thursdays when engagement is the lowest. Scheduling content when it is most likely to get engagement is key. Brands should leverage the scheduling functionality of social publishing tools, like ConversationBuddy™, so they can Tweet on weekends even if no one is in the office.

KEY

— When brands should be Tweeting

■ **% of Brand Tweets**
When brands are Tweeting

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Best Days to Tweet by Industry

Clothing and Fashion: Weekend Rules

Though engagement for clothing and fashion brands is highest on the weekend, only 12% of Tweets for the industry occur on Saturday and Sunday. In fact, the weekend produces 30% higher engagement rates than average for this industry, while Thursday produces the lowest engagement. This may be because followers interact more with these brands when they have time for leisure and shopping.

SUN MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT

Entertainment: Sunday and Monday Are Key Days

Compared to the rest of the week, Tweets published by entertainment brands on Sunday and Monday receive 23% more engagement than average, while Thursday receives the lowest engagement. Followers may be more engaged with entertainment brands on these days as they try to prepare for the upcoming week in terms of movies, concerts and other events.

SUN MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT

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Publishing: Tweet Away on Saturday

Publishers are missing a major opportunity to engage with followers on Saturdays. Engagement on Saturday is 29% higher than average, which indicates followers are using their Saturdays to catch up on news and current events. Yet, only 7% of brand Tweets occur on this day. Publishing brands should Tweet on Saturday to get the most engagement.

SAT

THU

FRI

SUN

MON

TUE

WED

Sports: Tweet on Weekend, When Big Games Are On

Not surprisingly, people are far more likely to engage with sports brands on Twitter during the weekend. In fact, the engagement rate is 52% higher on Saturday and Sunday than during the week. Monday sees the third-highest engagement behind the weekend days. This reflects the fact that most major sporting events are held on the weekends, with active discussions occurring on Monday as people digest weekend sports recaps. However, only 9% of brand Tweets are published on Saturday, which means brands are missing an opportunity to create additional content to drive engagement.

SUN

SAT

MON

TUE

WED

THU

FRI

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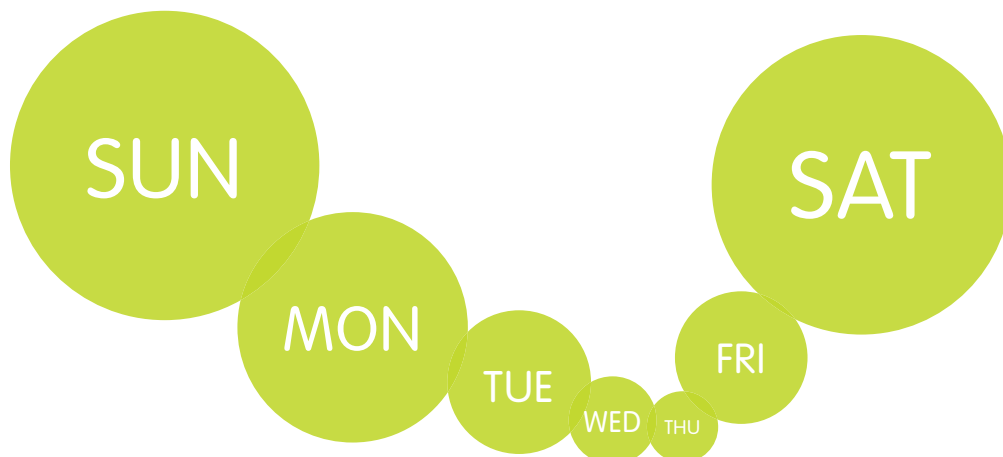
When Followers Are Busy…
Give Them Tweets

When brands Tweet during "busy hours" (8 AM - 7 PM), they receive 30% higher engagement than Tweets that fall during "non-busy hours" (8 PM - 7 AM).

This even includes Tweets published on Saturday and Sunday. Twitter is the source for real-time brand news, and followers use this social network to be the first in the know. Fortunately, 64% of brands are already Tweeting during "busy hours" and capitalizing on this trend.


8 AM - 7 PM
"BUSY HOURS"

8 PM - 7 AM
"NON-BUSY HOURS"

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Use Different Social Networks for an "Always On" Conversation

While Tweets during "busy hours" receive significantly more engagement, Facebook posts show the reverse trend.

In fact, posts during "non-busy hours" receive 17% higher engagement on Facebook than those posted during "busy hours."41 This is because Facebook posts can remain at the top of a user's News Feed based on their EdgeRank scores, even if posted while the user is not on Facebook. With Twitter, Tweets are quickly pushed out of sight by newer Tweets due to the sheer volume of Twitter activity, making them harder to find when they occur outside of "busy hours."
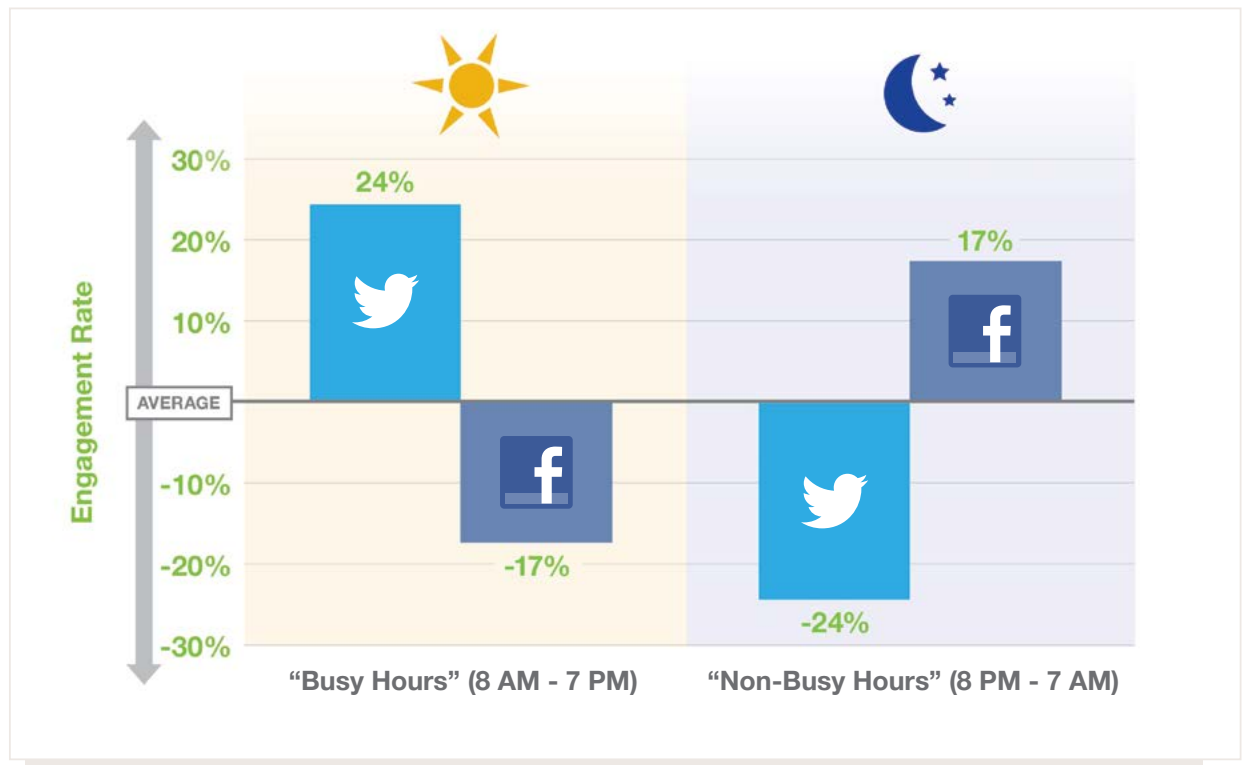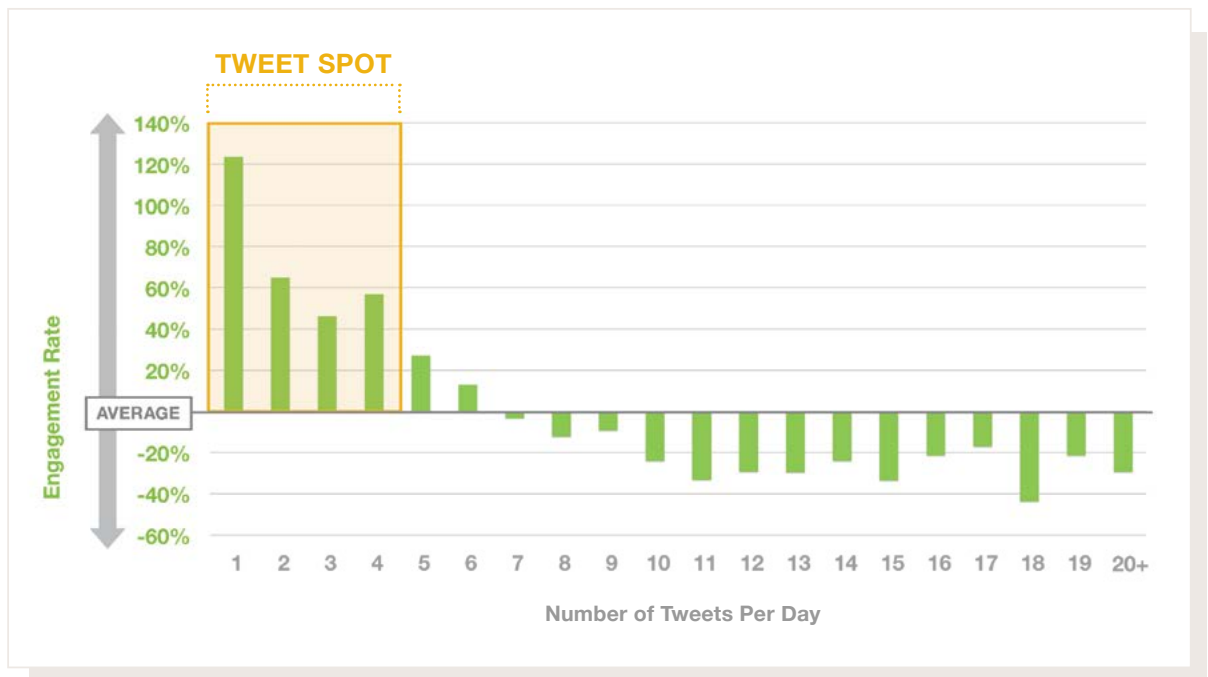

Hit the "Tweet Spot"

While most followers embrace a healthy amount of brand Tweets, it's important to figure out how to pace your Tweets throughout the day.

Plan your Tweet schedule according to the days your Tweets perform best, and Tweet more frequently on those particular days.

Don't overdo it though – there's an inverse relationship between daily Tweet frequency and engagement. So the more you Tweet per day, the less engaging your Tweets may become.

TWEET SPOT

Engagement Rate

140%
120%
100%
80%
60%
40%
20%
AVERAGE
-20%
-40%
-60%

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20+

Number of Tweets Per Day

Tweets Perform Best When Kept Short

Frustrated with only 140 characters? You actually get better engagement if you use even less!

In fact, Tweets that contain less than 100 characters receive 17% higher engagement than longer Tweets.

Plus, leaving a little room in a Tweet allows followers to insert their own text before your content.

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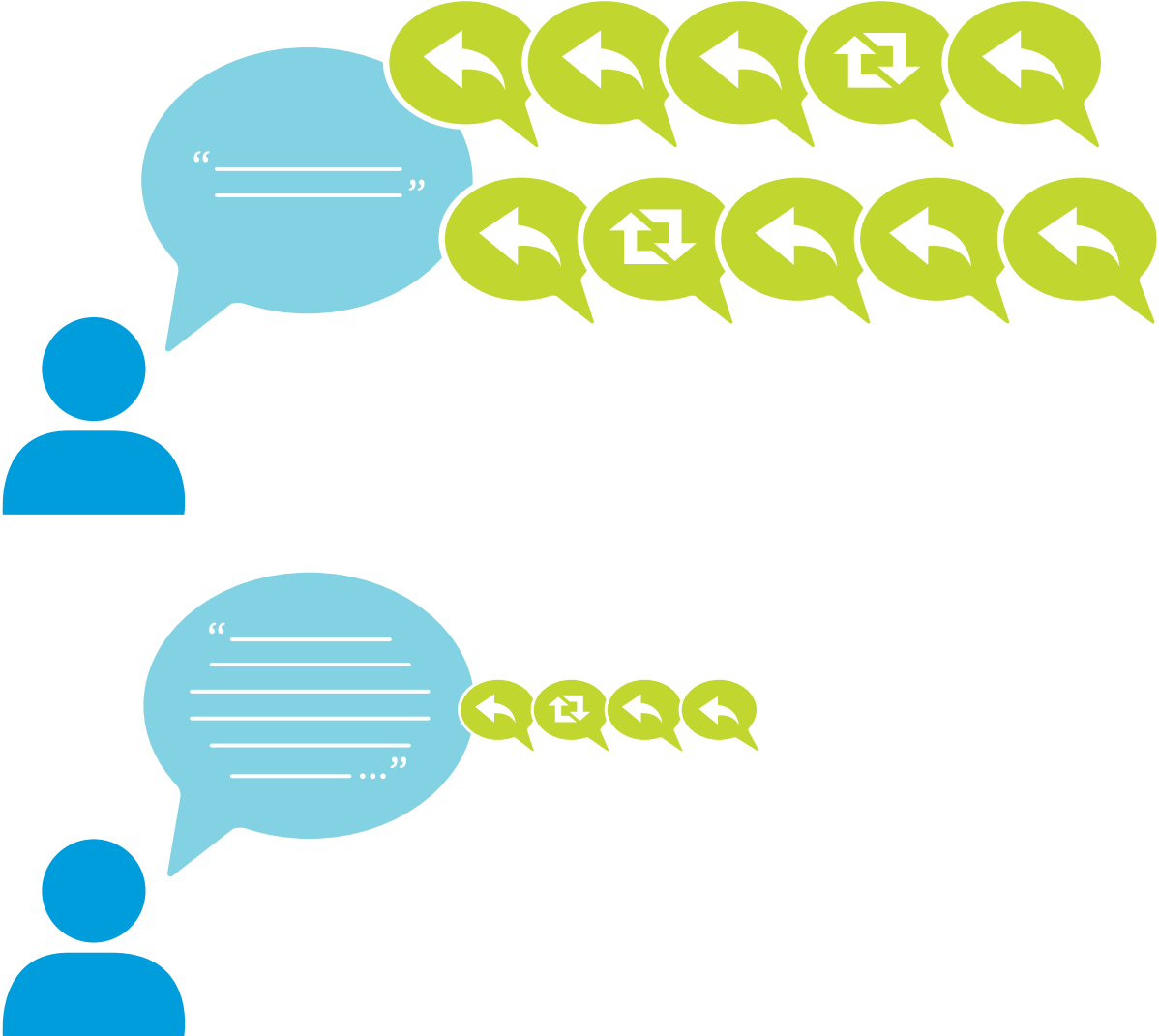
Links Drive More Than Just Clicks

One of the greatest strengths of Twitter is its ability to drive traffic elsewhere on the web. A link with a short, enticing description can often prove irresistible for followers to click.

While there's an almost even split between Tweets that contain a link and those that do not, Tweets that contain links receive 86% higher Retweet rates than Tweets with no links.

So, Tweets with links not only drive a lot of traffic to desired destinations, but they also amplify your brand messages to more than just your followers.
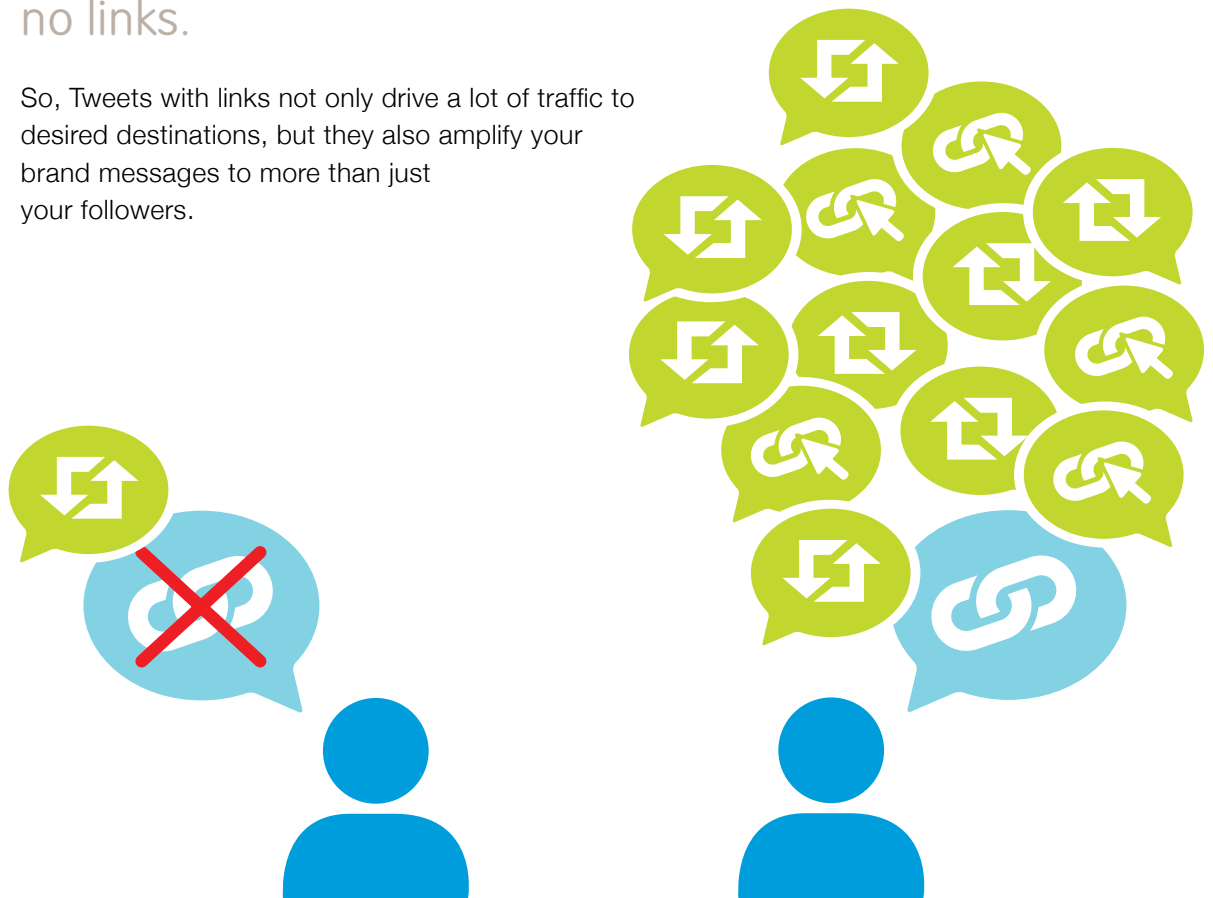
Engagement Dies When Links Don't Work

We've all seen it before: a Tweet pops up with a link that you really want to click, but you can't click the link. Though the extra effort required to paste it into the browser is not significant, it may be enough to take you elsewhere on the web. This is often the result of a simple formatting error in the Tweet. In fact, 92% of all linking errors can be attributed to not inserting a space before the actual link, thus forcing users to copy and paste the link into a browser.

In ConversationBuddy™, spaces are automatically inserted before every link to ensure they are always clickable.

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Use Hashtags and Watch Engagement Rise

The #hashtag is a staple of Twitter, and even made its way into the Oxford Dictionary5 several years ago. Used as a popular way to identify themes or topics within a Tweet, the hashtag can also increase engagement for brand Tweets.

In fact, Tweets with hashtags receive two times more engagement than those without hashtags.

Still, only 24% of Tweets contain hashtags, meaning many brands are missing out on another huge opportunity to increase engagement.

5   http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/hashtag

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Don't Overuse Hashtags

Even though hashtags increase engagement, it is possible to overuse them.

Limit hashtags to one or two per Tweet. Our data shows that Tweets with one or two hashtags have 21% higher engagement than those with three or more hashtags. Tweets that use more than two hashtags actually show a 17% drop in engagement.

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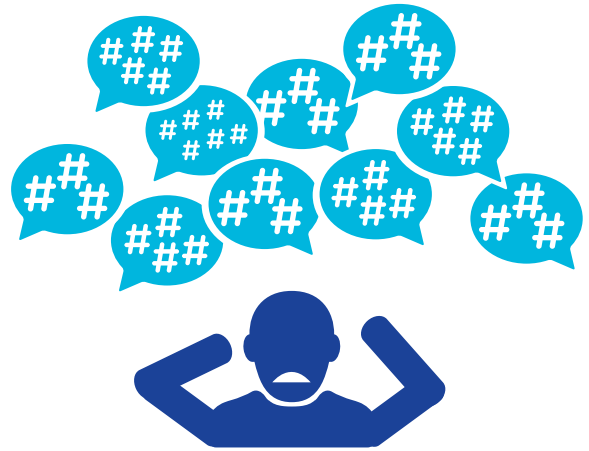
An Image is Worth Many, Many Retweets and Replies

Even though followers can't instantly see an image on Twitter (like on Facebook), regular publishing of images still has a profound impact on Twitter performance.

In fact, Tweets with image links (such as pic.twitter.com, yfrog.com, instagr.am and twitpic.com) have engagement rates two times higher than Tweets without image links.

Ask Followers to Retweet and They Will Listen

Sometimes, it's simply not enough to produce great content in Tweets. Go the extra step and ask people to Retweet. It can make all the difference!

In fact, Tweets that specifically ask followers to "Retweet" or "RT" receive 12 times higher Retweet rates than those that do not use this call to action.

Despite evidence that supports using this clear call to action, less than 1% of brands actually implement this amplification strategy. Asking followers to Retweet is an easy and extremely effective way to get ahead of your competitors!

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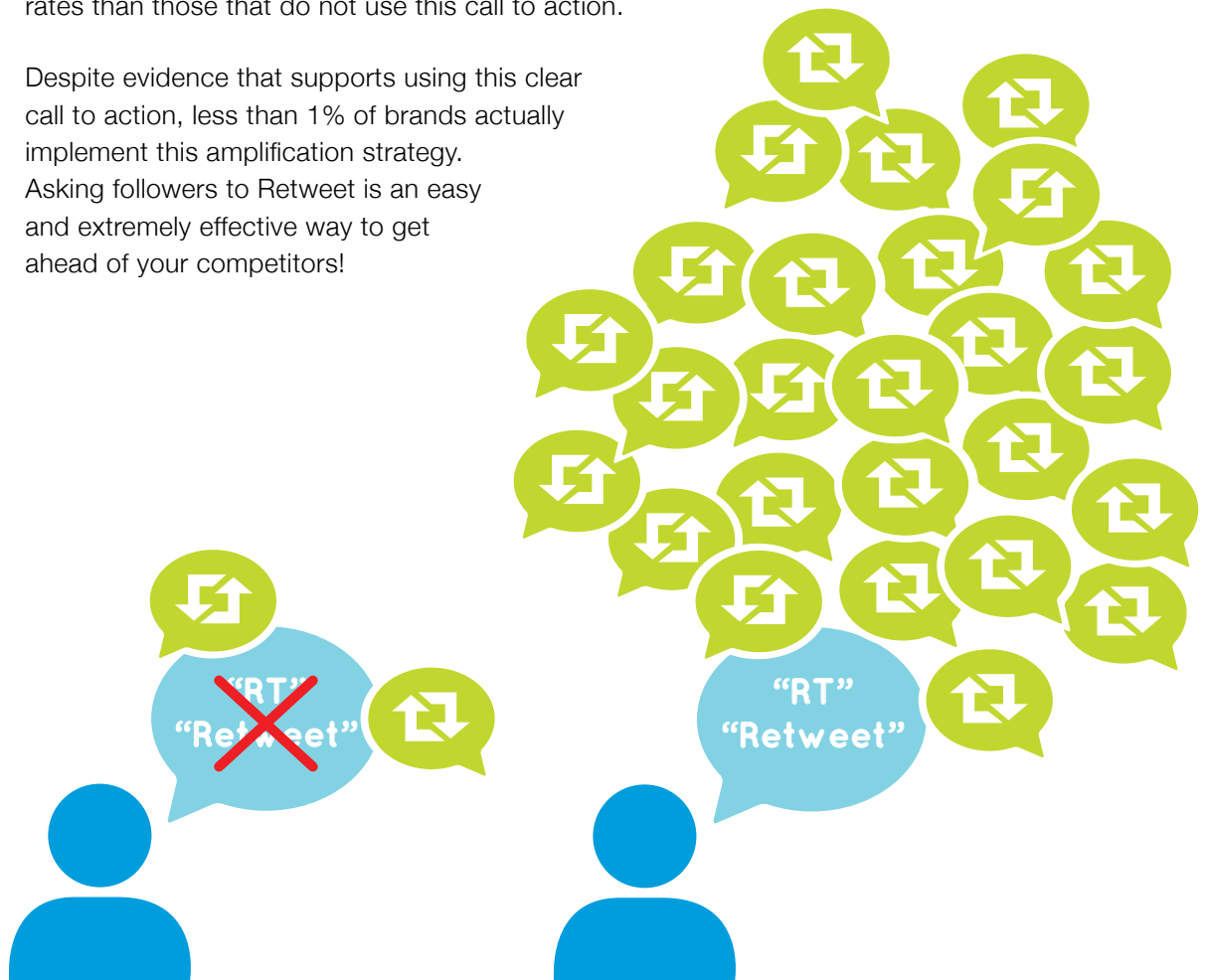
Spell it Out: R-E-T-W-E-E-T

Giving followers any type of "Retweet" call to action is extremely beneficial to amplifying your Tweets.

Data reveals that when followers are specifically asked to "Retweet" (by spelling out the whole word), the Retweet rate is 23 times higher than average!

Compare this to a Retweet rate of only 10 times higher when followers are asked to "RT" (shortened).

AVERAGE

"RT"

"RETWEET"

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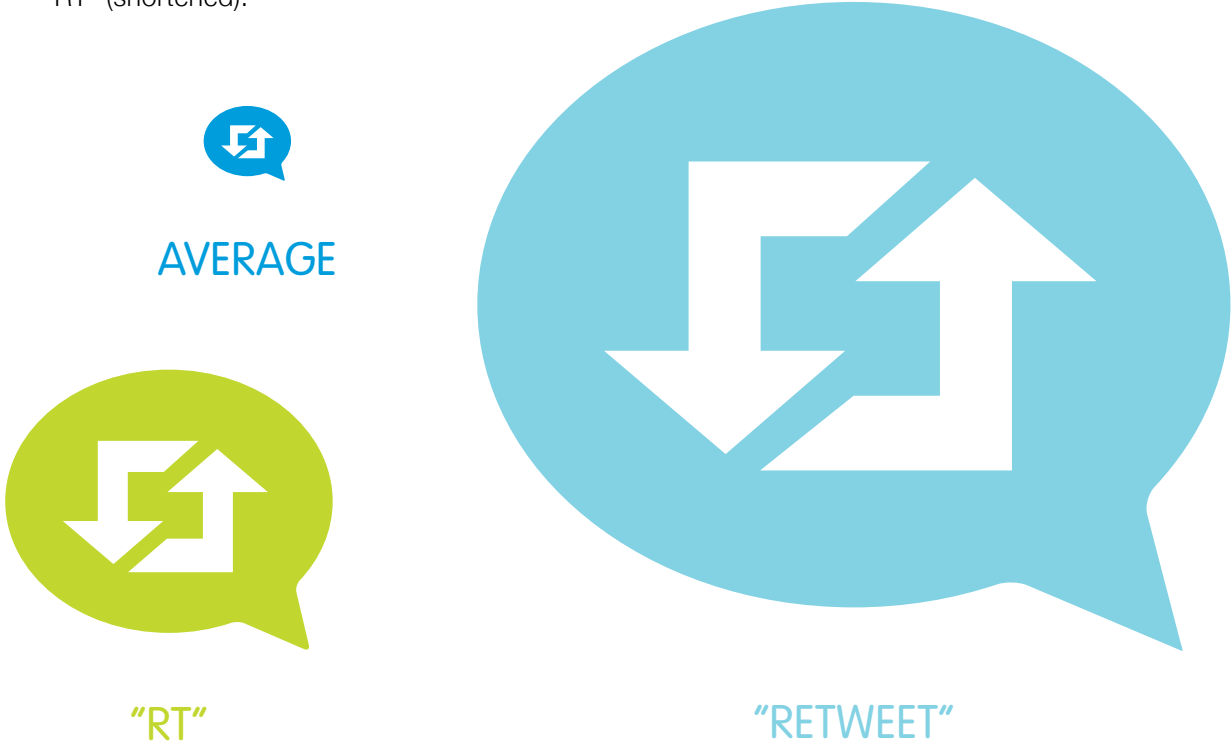
Conclusion

Twitter is a great way for brands to quickly and easily engage in two-way communication with a massive global audience. As more and more people use the social network, it is critical to understand the best practices for engaging with followers on Twitter.

While each brand has its own strategy, these best practices offer proven tactics to effectively communicate on Twitter.

Use these best practices as a basis to begin finding your voice on Twitter, and then further tweak to optimize Tweets based on how your followers respond.

- Tweet on the days that are best for your industry (which are often weekends). Leverage the scheduling functionality of tools like ConversationBuddy™ to automatically publish planned Tweets.

- Use both Facebook and Twitter to create an "always on" conversation. Engage with followers on Twitter during "busy hours" (7 AM - 8 PM), but post to Facebook fans during "non-busy hours" (8 PM - 7 AM).

- Tweet four times per day or less.

- Use less than 100 characters per Tweet.

- Add links to Tweets to drive higher Retweet rates.

- Ensure links are clickable by placing a space before the URL.

- Include hashtags in Tweets, but don't use more than two per Tweet.

- Use images to drive the highest engagement.

- Use a "Retweet" or "RT" call to action to prompt followers to Retweet. Spell out "Retweet" to get the highest engagement.

We hope this data is helpful for you as you continue to maximize your presence on Twitter.

Did you find this report helpful? Tweet this report and recommend it to your followers!

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Tweet Cheat Sheet

☐	Tweet on the days that are best for your industry (which are often weekends). Leverage the scheduling functionality of tools like ConversationBuddy™ to automatically publish planned Tweets.
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☐	Use images to drive the highest engagement.
☐	Use a "Retweet" or "RT" call to action to prompt followers to Retweet, spelling out "Retweet" to get the highest engagement.

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