Mind Tools Club

Using Twitter for Work
Using Social Media Effectively

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When some people hear the word "Twitter," they automatically think of wasting time. After all, how can you have time for work when you're updating your followers about what you had for lunch, or the gossip from your 2 p.m. staff meeting?

It's true that Twitter can be a **distraction**. But it can also be an important resource for both personal and organizational growth. And knowing how to use Twitter effectively, and the common mistakes to avoid, is vital to getting the best from the service.

In this article, we'll review how to use Twitter to grow your career and benefit your organization. We'll also look at the basics of Twitter.

What is Twitter?

Twitter is a social networking site that allows users to connect with each other and send short messages, or "tweets," about what they're doing or thinking.

Your "followers" see your tweets in a rolling feed, called a timeline, when they log into the service.

Tweets can be trivial – we've all heard the "what someone ate for breakfast" example – or they can be significant and valuable, for example, when they highlight key news, or articles written by thought-leaders in your industry. It's up to you to choose the type of information you follow!

Twitter Definitions

Here are some useful definitions for new Twitter users:

- **Tweet** – a post on Twitter.

- **Timeline** – your "feed" on Twitter, where tweets made by people you follow are published.

- **Hashtag** – The hashtag symbol (#) can help people track different topics to find information easily. Simply put the # symbol in front of your tweet's most relevant word, or use it to "tag" a tweet under a certain category. For example, #leadership or #mindtools.

    You can search for other tweets tagged with a particular hashtag by clicking in the hashtag when you see it in your Twitter

timeline.

- **Followers** – These are your friends or connections – the people who are following your tweets. Your tweets will appear on their timelines. (All tweets are technically "public" and searchable unless you decide to make your account private. Be careful what you say!)

- **@ Replies** – If you want to tweet to someone else, use @ right before that person's username. For example, tweet "@Bob45 I saw your tweet. Interesting!" – and your follower Bob will get the message in his timeline (if he follows you) or in his "@mentions" column (if he doesn't follow you).

  If you put the person's name at the very start of the tweet, as in the example above, only you, him, and people who follow both of you will see the Tweet in their timelines.

  If you put his name elsewhere in the message, everyone who follows you will see the tweet. For example, this would happen if you tweeted "Me and @Bob45 are working on a new marketing proposal."

- **Profile** – Potential followers may read your profile, as well as your latest tweets, to decide if they want to follow you back. There's also space on your profile for a web address, and you can customize the colors and images.

- **Retweet** – Retweeting is when you tweet someone else's tweet to your followers. This helps your followers find useful information. It's also a sign of respect, and it can help you build credibility and develop your network on Twitter.

  To retweet, simply type RT @ and the person's username (to give the person credit), and then copy or type the tweet. For example, type "RT @Bob45 CEO will make big announcement today. Stay tuned!" You can also retweet directly on the Twitter website without the need to copy or type the tweet.

  If you want to give a person credit for a link or idea, you can also say "via @Bob45" in your tweet.

Tip:

Before you retweet, make sure it's on a subject that you want to be associated with. Don't just retweet for the sake of it!

Personal Use

Although it's easy to find yourself spending too much time on Twitter, the site offers some great benefits to help you grow professionally. For example, you can:

- **Stay informed about industry trends** – Follow people or organizations that lead your industry. This allows you to stay

updated about your field. Trade publications and magazines often have informative Twitter accounts as well.

- **Network** – Establish and strengthen professional relationships. **<u>Twellow</u>** can help you find industry-specific groups and people to follow on Twitter.

- **Brainstorm** – Ask your followers for ideas – or, if your team is on Twitter, brainstorm back and forth. This is especially useful when you're working with a virtual team, or when you don't want to spend time getting together for a meeting. (If you want a more secure environment for brainstorming or information sharing, take a look at **<u>Yammer</u>**.)

- **Advance your career** – Some people use Twitter to find new jobs or training opportunities. Organizations often post jobs on Twitter, so this is a great way to quickly see openings. Networking through Twitter can also lead to some great career and learning opportunities.

Tip:

If you're concerned that Twitter will distract you from other work, specify certain times to check your timeline, or use Twitter to take a break from other more demanding tasks. For instance, you may decide that you'll only check Twitter just before lunch, and at the end of the day.

Organizational Use

There are several ways to use Twitter to help market your organization:

- **Branding** – Help to establish and grow your organization's brand and image.

- **Engagement** – Get feedback, run contests or giveaways, and respond to customer questions. This personal engagement will build trust and loyalty with customers and vendors.

- **Marketing** – Publicize upcoming changes or promotions in your organization.

- **<u>Customer service</u>** – Use Twitter's search feature to discover what people are saying about your organization. Once you discover a conversation, you can handle any customer complaints or thank people for their feedback.

- **Recruiting** – Advertise open positions.

So, what's the secret to success for using Twitter effectively for your organization?

- **Identify yourself** – When you set up your organization's account, identify who you are in the company profile. Potential followers like to know with whom, specifically, they'll be communicating.

- **Use Twitter regularly** – Don't send a dozen tweets and then not log into the site for a week. Instead, set specific times, every day, to **communicate** with followers.

- **Leverage other media types** – Twitter is "viral" in nature. So make sure that you promote your Twitter account on your organization's other communications, such as email signatures, web pages, brochures, and so on. This will give you the best chance of gaining a good following.

- **Be careful about what you write** – Tweets can stay on the Internet forever, even if you delete them. You may also want to consider creating a
procedure or guidelines if various people will be involved in your organization's Twitter account. Some companies also post a disclaimer.

- **Align Twitter with the other parts of your organization** – Make sure that your use of Twitter is aligned with your organization's overall strategy, and its other communications.

- **Be patient** – It can take time to build a following on Twitter, and to understand how to use it effectively. So start off slowly, and be patient as you build your following.

Writing Tweets

Use the following guidelines when creating your tweets:

- **Use a strong headline** – Most followers simply scan Twitter, so your "headline" should be effective and authentic enough to capture their attention.

- **Keep it short** – Twitter allows only 140 characters, so your messages must be **simple** yet powerful.

- **Stay well below the 140-character limit if possible** – Try to stay at 120 characters or below to allow room for followers to add comments to any retweets.

- **Write clearly** – Use the same good writing rules you would use when writing any professional document. Grammar and style – and proofreading – still matter with Twitter. Our Bite-Sized Training **Written Communication** can help you with this.

- **Link to further sources if required** – Your tweets are limited to 140 characters, but you can link to further sources such as

web articles, blog posts, or images within your tweet if you need to. (URL shortening services such as **bit.ly** or TinyURL are useful for this.) This is also a great way to generate more traffic to your organization's website.

Tip:

It's natural that if you use Twitter, some co-workers may think that you're not doing "real work", or that your time could be better spent doing other tasks. If co-workers or your boss are skeptical about Twitter, ask them to read this article! Our Bite-Sized Training session on **Winning Support for Your Project** can also help you get their support.

Etiquette and Common Mistakes

There are some unwritten "rules" for using Twitter effectively:

- **Don't automate all of your tweets** – People want to hear from other people, not from automated messages sent several times per day.

- **Thank people for retweeting** – If practical, thank people who take the time to retweet one of your tweets.

- **Use Direct Message (DM) for long conversations** – If an @reply conversation with someone goes beyond one or two tweets, then use DM.

- **Be personal, but professional** – Your followers want to be engaged with you or your organization. So, be funny and witty if that's appropriate. Be personal, but avoid uninteresting tweets such as "Staff meeting at 2:00!" Be authentic and interesting.

- **Keep it useful** – If you tweet a link or share an article, make sure it's something that your followers will find useful or valuable.

- **Don't self-promote too much** – Remember, you want to engage your followers, not sell your company so much that your followers no longer want to pay attention. Balance your promotions with genuinely helpful information, advice, and articles.

Key Points

Although many people think Twitter is just for fun, it's also a rich source of information for professionals. Use Twitter to network with others in your industry, find a job, or improve your organization's brand and connect with customers.

It's important to use Twitter effectively. Log into the site daily, and send information that's relevant to your followers. Be personal and interesting, but write carefully – tweets may stay online forever. And always try to thank followers who retweet your posts.