Getting Involved on Twitter

By Nancy McCord, President of McCord Web Services LLC

What is Twitter?

Twitter is a micro blogging application. Twitter "posts" known as "Tweets" are only 140 characters long including spaces. They are mini updates on what you are doing, reading, or wanting to share with others in an immediate interactive environment. Twitter will never replace true blogging, but Twitter has a unique place on the Web as a way to communicate in an "instant messaging" type format that has been embraced by the "20 something" crowd and tech savvy types.

Why Should You Use Twitter?

You should consider using Twitter as it provides an immediate news feed on what you are doing and experiencing in life in a very simple to use way. You can text in to Twitter via your cell phone or post Tweets, or updates, online using your browser. You can even connect your blog to Twitter to show your blog posts as they are published; getting broader syndication of your blog using the Twitter platform. Twitter is simply a new way to connect with others and one that is very hot right now on the Web. If you are into "cutting edge", you should be using Twitter.

How to Use Twitter

It is easy to get going immediately with Twitter. Just go to www.Twitter.com and set up a free account, invite your friends from your address book, and start posting your updates. You can browse for other Twitter users using keywords and click "follow" on their profile to add their comments to your own personal Twitter home page. What I find great is that others will Twitter about cool things they have found on the web and provide links. You can tap into the buzz in your industry through Twitter; seeing what others think is cool or important. On Twitter, there will always be some users who will spam you; posting every 15 minutes, or bore you with what they are eating for lunch, but if you can overlook those mundane posts, there is still value in watching Twitter several times throughout the day.

Twitter Etiquette

There are a few things that I should mention in regards to etiquette on Twitter. First, for your business Twitter account, don't spam people with silly life details. Don't post every 15 minutes. I have defriended prolific, mundane, Twitter spammers as my whole home page gets filled with their drivel. Make sure that you aren't spamming others with your Tweets. Use Twitter judiciously at first, and don't post more than three to four times a day. I know the first day I used Twitter I must have posted every 20 minutes as it is fun, but to get the most out of Twitter be courteous to others and hopefully they will treat you likewise. If not, just defriend them by clicking "remove" on their friend profile.

Here's another big tip for new Twitter users, when you see @mccordweb (insert a user name for mccordweb) on your Twitter page, this is a Twitter post shared with the world, but really directed to a specific Twitter user (in this case, me McCordWeb). Don't interject yourself into this personal conversation.

If you have a personal remark, sensitive item to share, or comment about another, use a direct message in the Twitter control panel. It is like sending an instant message and keeps the message off your Twitter public page and off the public page of your recipient. Keep personal things personal.

Consider hashing your Tweet for indexing by Twitter and search engines. Hashing is kind of like tagging. Use #webdesign (insert your own keyword instead of webdesign) to start your Tweet with, if it is about web design. This helps search engines and other Twitter users to find topics that are hot quickly.

If you decide to use a URL in your Tweet, make sure to change your URL to a Twitter-friendly version by using www.TinyURL.com to change your URL. Just copy your long URL from your browser address bar, and then go to www.TinyURL.com and paste your long URL in and Tiny URL will give you a little small URL that will not take up too much space in your Twitter post or rip apart a blog template layout.

Twitter for Business

Do yourself a favor and set up two accounts when you start on Twitter. Set up one for family and friends and one for business associates, colleagues, prospects, and watchers. Keep your personal information off your business account. Stay focused on-topic and accessible to grow your business exposure with your business account.

Many businesses are using Twitter as a way to showcase new products, introduce new services, point out features, and to provide newsy updates throughout the day.

Twitter for Pleasure

You can really have a lot of fun with Twitter with friends and family members. You can keep your friends and family updated on the "real you" with texting and Twitter. It is a very cool way to give regular updates to those who care. In this case, people WILL want to know what you ate for lunch and where you ate it. I think that this is Twitter at its most fun.

Not only can you text from your phone to post on Twitter, but you can receive Twitter updates from your network to your cell phone as well. If you have a small network you won't be overwhelmed with texted updates but if your network is large you could suck up all your cell phone bandwidth quickly if you are not careful.

Cool Twitter App's

I have a few applications that I like for Twitter. Here are a few, links to websites, and what I do with the applications for my own Twitter use.

Twuffer – I love this one, it is a Twitter post scheduler. Some people feel that it defeats the immediacy of Twitter posts but I like it as I will schedule Tweets on days that I am not blogging to keep my followers advised of things I find important. It is easy to use, allows you to Tweet ahead, and lets you select a posting schedule by day and time.

Twitter Feed – This is another one of my favorites, allowing me to post my blog posts, from The Web Authority, directly onto Twitter. It also allows me to post my Tweets back on my blog (by installing a widget) in my blog template. Very cool cross interaction!

Twitter Grader – This one is a vanity application that allows you to see where you stack up against other Twitter users. Twitter Grader measures the power of a Twitter user based on followers, number of updates, and posting frequency. My score is a 72% and my Twitter feed is 73,105 out of 312,091 as of November 14th.

Tweet Beep – With this application, you can manage your online Twitter reputation. Alerts will be emailed to you whenever a Twitter user Tweets about your business, name, or domain. You select the alert criteria and what to watch for using Tweet Beep.

These are just a few of the applications that I like to use with Twitter. As Twitter is new and very hot, there certainly will be more in the works for this next year so keep an eye out. If you find one you like make sure to share it with me.

The Bottom Line on Twitter

Twitter is growing not only in popularity but in reach. I have just seen that LinkedIn is now showing Twitter Feeds in their new Company Buzz module. In an effort to build on the immediate popularity of Twitter, both Facebook and LinkedIn recently added a "status update" bar to their applications in a Twitter-like interface.

So, what are you doing in under 140 characters: I am... this time you fill in the blank. Twitter is fun, easy to use, and a hot web property. Hopefully this special issue will help you to get going with Twitter too. Feel free to invite me as a friend when you set up your account, my Twitter business ID is McCordWeb or invite me by email using nancy@mccordweb.com. See you there!