short & sweet

THE WHYS AND HOWS OF TWITTER
for Communications Professionals

JULY 2011
Today information isn’t broadcast. It *flows*.

An idea can start anywhere: in a comment thread or YouTube video or email or offline at the bar or dinner table. From there it might make it to a blog post or Tweet. Then it could be retweeted, indexed by Google and shared by a few people on Facebook. From these places it could be read by an editor or a reporter or producer, who includes it in a piece in a newspaper or magazine or show. That piece can be shared in a comment thread or on YouTube, and the whole thing starts again. The flow is constant.

As a communications professional, it is your job to keep your organization in the news and top of mind (and heart) of your supporters. In a noisy media world, it has become increasingly difficult to break into the flow of information and get your media signals to the right people. The key to succeeding as a communicator in this environment begins with recognizing that all media is social, and like any social situation, you cannot be a wallflower.

**No medium lets communications professionals see and enter the flow of information better than Twitter.**

Once you immerse yourself in Twitter as a media tool, you will be able to:

+ Share your organization’s expertise, data and stories directly with your audience and their networks.
+ See what individual media people are talking about and working on every day and participate in those conversations.
+ Measure the impact of your communications both qualitatively and quantitatively.
+ Listen to conversations about your brand or issue to find new audiences and influencers that can inform future messaging strategies.

**Twitter is important because it can help you be a better communicator.**
HERE IS WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THIS GUIDE

*What Twitter is and how it can help you and your organization*

This section will help you, the communications professional, and your organization not only become better informed and more efficient in your communications, but it will also allow you to gain an understanding of how and why information moves in this new media paradigm.

*How to use Twitter* as yourself and on behalf of your organization, including: Getting started; monitoring and listening; linking, hashtagging and retweeting; dos and don’ts for tweeting on behalf of your organization; and a daily 30 minute Twitter routine to help you stay focused.

*A Twitter cheat sheet* to provide helpful reminders as you begin to get the hang of the medium.
Twitter is a tool that connects users through short, real-time updates. Updates are 140 characters or less and can be written and read not only on the Twitter website, but also through cell phone text messaging, apps for smart phones, browser add-ons and other software.

Individuals, organizations and brands can express and share a lot in those 140 characters:

+ **LINKS TO ITEMS ON THE INTERNET** like news articles or blogs posts. Seeing what content is shared, how it is shared and who shares it will help inform communications work through all media.

  - **Daves_Tweets123** Daves_Tweets123

  - **janejaneson** Jane Janeson

+ **COMMENTING IN REAL TIME** about a big event – you can see in real-time how people respond to and share events and messaging.

  - **Daves_Tweets123** Daves_Tweets123
    OMG I can’t believe Kris won American Idol

  - **janejaneson** Jane Janeson
    Obama just mentioned malpractice reform in the State of the Union

+ **SHARING UPDATES ABOUT CONFERENCE OR OTHER LIVE EVENT** – this creates a real-time ‘cloud’ of interaction online around real life interactions.

  - **Daves_Tweets123** Daves_Tweets123
    OMG I’m at the Justin Bieber concert! He’s covering N’SYNC LOL!

  - **janejaneson** Jane Janeson
    At the neighborhood clinic panel at Healthcon2010 – good discussion happening about marketing services – how does your org find time?
+ **THOUGHTS OR LIFE UPDATES**, which may seem trivial (and often are), but can be a rich data source to discover how people talk about and feel about topics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daves_Tweets123</th>
<th>Brought hummus and carrot sticks for lunch, but I’m going to treat myself to a donut sandwich LOL!</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>janejaneson</td>
<td>Time Warner cable is really ticking me off</td>
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## WHAT CAN TWITTER DO FOR ME?

Twitter can help you do your job better. Get excited.

**Twitter is a lens through which you can observe the flow of information and culture.** As you get the hang of looking at Twitter, you won’t only *receive* information as you do by visiting websites, reading papers and magazines, or watching the news, you will also *perceive* where information comes from, where it’s going today, and where it might go tomorrow. Understanding how information travels is critical to making sure *your* information travels.

**Observing and participating can help build relationships with reporters** who are increasingly using Twitter as a resource and outlet. This doesn’t mean you can start pitching media people on Twitter (well, you could, but please don’t right away). It means you can observe in real time who reporters are reading and researching, the kinds of headlines and news items they are sharing and their opinions on the key stories in the news cycle. Referencing and interacting with these reporters not only when you want something, but as a regular conversation, can help position you as a valuable source in your issue area. Email pitches from you in that reporter’s inbox will be better informed and tailored, as well as having a more familiar name attached to it.
For example, here we see editors at Scientific American, Prevention and Time discuss climate negotiations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Username</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Tweet</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>siobhannnyc</td>
<td>Siobhan O'Connor</td>
<td>Cancun climate change summit deal is reached <a href="http://gu.com/p/2ynxy/tf">http://gu.com/p/2ynxy/tf</a> (via @dbiello) Looks pretty weak to me.</td>
<td>11 Dec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dbiello</td>
<td>David Biello</td>
<td>@siobhannnyc Think of the Cancun compromise as what should’ve happened @ Copenhagen last year... &amp; setting the stage for Durban next year</td>
<td>11 Dec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bryanrwalsh</td>
<td>Bryan Walsh</td>
<td>@siobhannnyc Cancun was the easy part - they’re headed towards a huge headache next year. Alternatives will be needed.</td>
<td>11 Dec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>siobhannnyc</td>
<td>Siobhan O’Connor</td>
<td>@bryanrwalsh Cancun was the easy part - they’re headed towards a huge headache next year. Alternatives will be needed.</td>
<td>11 Dec</td>
</tr>
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…while ABC News’ Jake Tapper and The Atlantic’s Ta-Nehisi Coates talk about things to do in DC:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Username</th>
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<th>Date</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tanehisi</td>
<td>Ta-Nehisi Coates</td>
<td>In DC tonight. Anyone know a good old school go-go spot? A thirty and over set...</td>
<td>11 Dec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jaketapper</td>
<td>Jake Tapper</td>
<td>@tanehisi that tweet made me sad</td>
<td>11 Dec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tanehisi</td>
<td>Ta-Nehisi Coates</td>
<td>@jaketapper I’ll have a shot for you, good sir.</td>
<td>11 Dec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jaketapper</td>
<td>Jake Tapper</td>
<td>@tanehisi please do! Admiring your work from afar, would love to see you sometime. Talk to Neil ever?</td>
<td>11 Dec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tanehisi</td>
<td>Ta-Nehisi Coates</td>
<td>@jaketapper Neil came to DC with me on this trip. We had a blast. We’ll give a heads up next time.</td>
<td>23 hours ago</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
You can also build relationships with other influential people, who are increasingly important in all media. Depending on your issue areas and goals, the most important person to connect with may not be a New York Times editor, but rather a particularly internet-savvy professor who is read by congressional staffers, program officers at important foundations, CEOs, bloggers and reporters (as well as that The New York Times editor). For example, here is Washington Post writer Ezra Klein discussing a New York Times column with economists who blog:

Communications pros now work in a world with priority inboxes and spam filters, depleted budgets for shmoozing and a minutes-long news cycle. Perceiving and reacting to the flow of information is critical to moving your information.
WHAT CAN TWITTER DO FOR MY ORGANIZATION?

Tweets are the new press releases. When you are reading the news, keep track of how many times you see the words “in a tweet” versus “in a press release.” Think about CNN. How many times lately have you seen a reporter walk over to a giant screen showing an image of a tweet or twitter feed? Have you ever seen them show a verbatim press release on screen? People – reporters included – no longer look for timely news in their inboxes.

A well-maintained Twitter presence can help frame your organization and its leaders as major players to other organizations, staffs of public officials, and journalists. You are the experts in your field, not reporters and editors. People in your organization have great insights and knowledge on current events and policy debates, sharing these publicly can position the organization as an authoritative and important voice to users interested in the organization’s topic. For example, Lilith Magazine shares American Jewish World Service (AJWS) news directly with followers.

Here Peter Long, Blue Shield of California Foundation’s President, shares his policy opinions. Chad Bolick, Business for Social Responsibility’s Director of Global Partnerships, shares who he’s meeting with:
An active Twitter presence can raise the profile of problems the organization addresses and the solutions they provide. By generating and spreading relevant chatter and links in the real-time flow of information, an organization can increase the visibility of its issues among decision makers, voters and media. For example, Environmental Advocates of New York (@greenwatchdogNY) plays a central role in New York State political and environmental discussions on Twitter:

**thegreenboriin** Kim Borin
Thank GWD 4 the tweet RT @greenwatchdogNY NY Gov Paterson's statement about new Executive Order on Fracking http://bit.ly/dPY1fx #eco
11 Dec

**mokkikunta** Luis Alves
#FF Taking no prisoners:) @tweetingdonal @dominique_e_ @1txsage1957 @greenwatchdogNY @2greenfish @plutoniumpage @shoq @climateprogress
11 Dec

**freedommary** Mary Burrowes
@greenwatchdogNY Unbelievable. Patterson has to actually consider whether clean water is better than not? I think Cuomo will be a better Gov
11 Dec

**catskillfishing** Tony Ritter
@NickReisman @recordonline @greenwatchdogNY @frankbrill Good chance that NYS Governor Patterson will veto...[CONT] http://tl.gd/7ei539
11 Dec

**Azrllndsey** Alan Lindsey
@greenwatchdogNY Only fracs of less than 80,000 gals. are being approved nowadays, so large fracs are already under moratorium.
10 Dec

**NYCHiker** NYCHiker
@greenwatchdogNY I'm very surprised he hasn't signed it already. Do you think he’s waiting for a signal for Gov-Elect Cuomo?
10 Dec
OKAY, HOW DO I DO THESE THINGS? Glad you asked...
TWEETING BASICS

You should become familiar with Twitter and how people use it, before diving in yourself or on behalf of your organization. Follow people who share things that are valuable to you, but be sure to include people who are also outside of your professional field - follow your friends, colleagues, favorite celebrities or sports teams, etc. Remember, when you start tweeting on behalf of your organization, those tweets will show up next to all kinds of information in your Followers’ feeds, not just next to other information about your issues and work.

STEP 1 SIGN UP

1. Go to twitter.com and click the big yellow Sign Up button.

2. Sign up. If you are using Twitter in a professional persona, use your full first and last name - your username should be as explicit as possible (“jjaneson” or “jane janeson,” work better than “omgitsmejane” or “scrapbookist”).

3. Follow people. Twitter will suggest users to follow. Finding your friends and colleagues first and then browsing who they follow is also a great way to get started. If you are interested in particular topics, you can find lists of people at the website Listorious (http://listorious.com/). Additionally, if you read something interesting online or offline, check to see if the author is on Twitter and follow him or her. **Remember:** Following a user is not an endorsement; you do not have to follow back anyone who follows you; and you can always unfollow people if they stop being useful.

4. The updates from the people you follow will appear in your Timeline. Get curious and read, click on links, see who is talking to whom, follow people you want to watch and unfollow users who end up not being useful.

#howto

CREATE A LIST

Lists are user-created bundles of Twitter users around topics. Lists can be used to keep up with specific media beats, peer organizations, or your own organization (see http://twitter.com/fentonprogress/lists/fenton-tweets)

1 / When signed into Twitter, click “Lists” to the right beneath the update box.

2 / You will be asked for a title and description and whether or not you want your list private or public. Public lists can be viewed and followed by anyone and are a good way to show you know what’s going on in your field (like “New York Area Economic Development Pros” or “Healthcare Experts”). Private lists are also useful, since you probably don’t want people to see (“My Most Hated Enemies In The New York Area” or “Healthcare Experts I Have a Crush On”).

3 / When the list is created, you can search for people you want to include in the list.

4 / When you have your lists set up, you can add and subtract users as you browse with the list button.
STEP 2  
**MONITOR & LISTEN**

You should observe for a while before adding your own voice to the flow:

+ Search for words and users (make sure you save a search for all spellings of your own organization) on the top navigation bar. You can save searches you use often so that you can check them out with one click. For example: @janejaneson, who works for a healthcare reform nonprofit, will want to check saved searches for the #HCR (the hashtag for healthcare reform), #HCRA2010 (hashtag for the upcoming healthcare reform association conference), and also searches for her organization: “People United for Health” or “PUH”. @janejaneson can also save searches for her favorite band “Arcade Fire” and her neighborhood “Mount Parkside Heights”.

+ Some find it easier to follow people in your timeline through apps like Echofon or Tweetdeck

+ Use third party tools like Topsy, which shows how widely shared articles are on Twitter and provides information on the influence of users

### #howto

**DO A TOPSY SEARCH**

Topsy is a great way to see quickly who is paying attention to a topic and what they’re saying about it:

1. Copy the URL of a story you want to see move on Twitter and paste it into the Topsy search bar.

2. You will see a total number of users who shared that link on Twitter, including influential users (determined by an algorithm); words and hashtags used in the tweets; and the bios and follower ratios of the users.

You can also search with keywords to see all links shared on Twitter that match – this can show what website is the most influential on Twitter for sharing the same kind of news

STEP 3  
**START TWEETING**

Type your tweet in the “What’s happening?” box - the number below will indicate how many characters you have left.

+ To include a link, you have to shorten it so that it fits into the 140 characters. Go to http://tinyurl.com/ or http://bit.ly/ and follow the instructions to make the link shorter, then copy and paste it into your tweet. You can install a button to make this process even easier. Make sure you say what the link is. For example:

> janejaneson Jane Janeson

My friend @Daves_Tweets123 posted a great list Top Ten Arcade Fire live videos at his blog:

To retweet, or share a tweet with your followers, click “retweet” under that tweet. Note that the tweet will show up in your followers timeline verbatim with the original tweeter’s image and “retweeted by” you next to that.

To “old school retweet,” which allows you to comment on a tweet someone else tweeted: type any comment you have, “RT @username” and then copy and paste the tweet you are retweeting (yes, that’s a ridiculous sentence). For example:

janejaneson Jane Janeson
My cranky uncle should try this // RT @ezraklein Choose your own (health insurance) adventure: http://bit.ly/1234

To use a hashtag, which flags your tweet for people looking for the subject, type “#” immediately before the tag. You’ll want to do a search to see if a hashtag is being widely used before you try it. For example:

janejaneson Jane Janeson
So excited! Just booked #ArcadeFire to open #HCRA2010!: http://bit.ly/1234

Then click “Tweet.” You did it!
YOUR DAILY 30 MINUTE TWITTER WORKOUT SESSION

1. Check out your saved searches on the right navigation bar to see what people are saying about your issues and interests. As you go through the searches, you can:
   + Retweet or respond to tweets about your issues
   + Follow people who are buzzing about your issues or complaining about a problem you address

2. Check the @Mentions tab and “Your Tweets, Retweeted” (under the “Retweets” tab) to see who is replying, referring or retweeting you. Make sure to respond to people who ask you a direct question.

3. Also, check out any journalists’ Twitter feeds who write on your beat to see what they are up to and retweet and respond when appropriate.

4. In your regular reading, post original links that your followers will find interesting or useful.

Okay, now exhale and begin cooldown.
HOW TO TWEET LIKE A PRO

So you are a Twitter user for at least a week or so and you know which kinds of tweets are annoying and which are helpful; what organizations do to make you slow down and take a closer look at an their updates and what they do to make you pass over them quickly. You are ready to get in the driver’s seat behind your organization’s name and logo. Here are some tips:

Maintain a consistent, professional style for your organization’s handle

A consistent, professional style will help you seem accessible and real, but also authoritative. You can be laid back and informal:

+ **Refer to overlapping interests as well as your work or issue** - reference news and sentiments that are corollary to your work or affect people and culture directly. For example, if you are working on ocean issues, share how pollution hurts surfing and recreational fishing.

+ **Express emotion when appropriate** - Cool! Great! Finally! Bummer. Dang. Yikes! Gross! HA! NO! Wha?! etc. are fine reactions that show you care about what you work on and that a real, live human being is writing.

+ **Make jokes and puns when appropriate** (but only funny ones)

...but also professional and adult.

+ **Spell out words when possible** - “Thanks,” not “thx,” “great,” not “GR8,” “to be” not “2 B” - not only is this less professional, but if you are not spelling out key words, they aren’t searchable.

+ **No smileys :), frownies :(, winkies ;) or any other emoticons (unless you’re into that sort of thing)**

+ **No LOLs...or ROFLMAOs or WTFs for that matter**

+ **Proper punctuation if possible** - absolutely no multiple exclamation marks!!!!!!!!!!!

Post things that add value

Post consistently, but do not post things that won’t be valuable to your followers. Here are some ideas for Tweets:

+ **Useful links to news items about your topic** - ones that you find in your regular reading, or retweet those from others, even if it comes from a “competing” organization.
+ **Links to updates or resources from your blog** - this is original content, which is valuable, and can help build traffic for your site. Be sure to say what the link is explicitly. For example, “our study released today finds that transit funding has dropped 40%: "http://bit.ly/1234" works much better than “check out our new study!" http://bit.ly/1234”.

+ **Calls to action**, such as petitions or calls to contact Congress - include a link to more information whenever possible.

+ **Open questions** - Ask your followers to chime in. For example: “What programs would you like to see get funded by Obama’s Great Lakes Restoration Initiative fund?” Make sure you are looking out for replies so you can respond and foster more discussion.

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**Reference people, groups, and subjects**

This is key - Twitter is a big deal because it is a referencing medium that operates in real time. It is the most accurate way for people (and Congressional staffs, media, etc.) to search for what is happening and what people are talking about right now. Before you hit the “Tweet” button, ask yourself:

+ **Is the link you are posting a news story or blog post?** Reference the handle of the writer if possible, the outlet if not.

+ **Are you referring to a public official, celebrity or organization?** See if they have a Twitter handle and use it — their staff will be looking for it.

+ **Are you referring to a state, city or specific topic?** If it has a hashtag, use it if you can.

+ **Spell out important terms.** Remember terms like “Hudson River” work better than shorthand like “The Hudson” - it is the term people interested are searching for and that followers are keeping an eye out for.

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**And most importantly:**

+ **Is this useful? Would I read this or click on it?**
At Fenton we’re asked “How many times should I Tweet?” or “How many people should I follow?” Because good use of Twitter is more about becoming part of a flow more than issuing messages one-way, we like to use checklists of activities to run through every day rather than providing arbitrary numbers. Here’s one to clip and tape to your computer until you become a Twitter maven:

### tweet cheat sheet

**Do this at least every day**

1. Scroll through your Timeline - what are people buzzing about?

2. Check out your saved searches
   - Retweet or respond to tweets about your issues
   - Follow people who are buzzing about your issues or complaining about a problem you address

3. Check the @Mentions tab and “Your Tweets, Retweeted” - respond to people referencing you when appropriate

4. In your regular reading, post original links that your followers will find interesting or useful

**Before you tweet, ask:**

- Is this useful? Would I read this or click on it?
- If there’s a link, is the language you use to say what it is as explicit and enticing as possible?
- Should you refer to a writer, outlet, public official, celebrity, or organization on Twitter?
- Is there a hashtag to use?
- Is everything spelled right?
Fenton opened its doors in 1982 to create issue campaigns that serve the public interest. We have been part of some of the defining movements of the past quarter century, from ending apartheid to curbing global warming. Today, Fenton is the largest public interest communications firm in the United States with offices in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C. We combine decades of expertise with creativity and innovation to accelerate progress on today’s most pressing global and national issues.

To download a free copy of this and other Fenton guides, visit www.fenton.com.