

A man with short brown hair, wearing a dark suit, is holding a large white megaphone to his mouth. He is looking directly at the camera. The background behind him is a bright orange and yellow sunburst pattern.

Twitter

MARKETING SECRETS



Twitter Marketing Secrets

This is NOT a free ebook. You do NOT have the right either to sell this ebook or to give it free. This ebook is for your own use. You cannot sell or share the content herein.

DISCLAIMER AND/OR LEGAL NOTICES: The information presented in this ebook represents the views of the publisher as of the date of publication. The publisher reserves the rights to alter and update their opinions based on new conditions. This ebook is for informational purposes only. The author and the publisher do not accept any responsibilities for any liabilities resulting from the use of this information. While every attempt has been made to verify the information provided here, the author and the publisher cannot assume any responsibility for errors, inaccuracies or omissions. Any similarities with people or facts are unintentional. No part of this ebook may be reproduced or transmitted in any form, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any informational storage or retrieval system without expressed written, dated and signed permission from the publisher.

Table Of Contents

Introduction	5
The Holistic Approach	6
What Is TWITTER?	7-10
How Much Does Twitter Cost?	10
Free of Charge	11
Not Monetized Yet	12
Why Should I Join Twitter?	14
It's A Branding Tool	15
Networking and Making Connections	15-17
Knowing Your Customers.....	17-20
The Traffic Factor	24
How Do I Join Twitter?	26
Starting Your Network.....	30
What's The Deal With This 140 Character Limit?	34
You Should Do This.....	35
You Should NOT Do This.....	36
What Do I Tweet?.....	37
Who Should I Follow?.....	43
Who should you follow?.....	47
How Can I Attract Followers?	50
The World Wide Web Of Twitter Tools	53
Twitter As A Traffic Tool	59
The Dangers Of Twitter	65
Keeping The Twittersphere happy!.....	67
Conclusion	68-70

Introduction

Twitter has attracted a lot of attention. Everyone from your great-grandma's roommate at the nursing home to the kids in the skate park even the news crew at CNN is talking about Twitter.

The Internet marketing world is examining it from every angle, trying to find a way to leverage its power for maximum profit. The critics and cynics are mocking it incessantly. Along the way, a slew of ebooks, special reports, guides and handbooks for using Twitter have hit the market.

Most of those guides do one of three things. Some merely present a little basic information about how to get started and the mechanics of using the service.

Others focus on ways to exploit Twitter for quick financial gain. Finally, there are a few industry-specific guides to Twitter use, which combine basic how-to information with some core networking advice.

We want this publication to be something different. Yes, we'll discuss the basics. This will be a report designed for those who already know their way around Twitter and for those who've never logged in before. When you're done with this publication, you'll be ready to be an active participant.

Yes, we'll cover the moneymaking possibilities of Twitter. It is a tool and one of the biggest reasons people want to use this tool is to build their businesses. However, we're coming at Twitter from an alternate perspective.

We're going to be looking at Twitter in a way that shoots past short-term profits and fast traffic driving. We'll cover the way you can use Twitter to enrich your life and the life of others, not just on how you can bump the total on your bank account.

The Holistic Approach

That kind of "holistic" outlook toward Twitter is the real winner. It should give you the opportunity for a richer online experience, and happily, following its recommendations should help you to build a solid foundation for using Twitter to your business advantage at the same time.

If you want to know how to make a quick "killing" with Twitter, you'll probably uncover a few things here that would allow you to concoct that kind of scheme. That's not our goal, though.

We want to talk about this rapidly growing social networking tool in terms of its maximum long-term advantage. That means establishing a context for Twitter use, and discussing it in ways that won't stop with raw traffic totals and follower numbers.

It's an exaggeration to claim that Twitter has changed the Internet in any monumental fashion. It doesn't allow you to do anything that you couldn't have done before it hit the scene, mechanically speaking.

You could use instant messengers and social networking sites like Facebook or Myspace to do almost everything Twitter does.

Twitter just makes it easier. And it provides a much larger (and rapidly growing) user base, which multiplies the effectiveness of existing techniques.

In fact, Twitter makes things so much easier that you shouldn't ignore it. You should understand it. And you should understand how to do it.

WHAT IS TWITTER?

Twitter.com is a website. You can create an account on that website and then use it to communicate with others in short "bursts" of 140 characters or less.

It's been described as a more feature-rich instant messenger by some and as a micro-blogging platform by others. The labels, however, aren't that important.

The best way to understand what Twitter does is to understand what happens. Users "follow" other users. That means they see the messages posted by those users when they log into the service.

You might follow Adam. If Adam posts a comment mentioning a great website he found and its link, you'll see that message. If you share a helpful hint in a comment, those who follow you will see it.

As you spend time on Twitter, you will find new people to follow. Others will find you. That happens via search functions, your own promotion of your Twitter link, "word of mouth" recommendations between other users, and by users (including yourself), taking a moment to see who those they know and trust are following--and who follows them.

This allows you to build a network of contacts that may share common interests or perspectives. You're then able to share your ideas, discoveries and opinions with that group quickly and easily.

You can make connections with other Twitter members, learn about things that are important to you, and share in the larger conversation in a way that will benefit the community.

This is a good place to introduce one of the key facts that should shape your understanding and perspective toward Twitter. Twitter is a tool, not an end.

The Twitter experience is completely unique for every user. Your network of followers and those you follow will be different from Adam's. Adam's favorite ways of interacting with others on Twitter may differ from yours considerably.

In the end, your experience and his might be radically different.

Those who fail to understand that the platform's flexibility makes it difficult to generalize limit their Twitter potential. They only see one way of doing things or they assess the value of participation in terms that aren't inevitable and may have very little applicability to others.

There are those who use Twitter as a substitute for the old office water cooler. It becomes a place used exclusively for socializing. People Tweet about their favorite television shows, what they ate for breakfast and how much their feet hurt after a long run the day before. Others respond and share their own tales. It's a purely

conversational atmosphere that has little or no discernible business value.

And that's just fine. Some people want to use Twitter to make connections that way.

The problem is that critics see that aspect of Twitter and dismiss the entire site as nothing more than a bunch of people running around talking about themselves to no one in particular.

They make it seem like an exercise in self-indulgence, a kind of online narcissism that has no real value. That's because they don't see the value in making those purely social connections, but it goes deeper.

It also stems from the fact that they don't see other networks. They don't know that Adam has built a network of people who, like him, are interested in creating new software applications to help disabled children.

The critics don't see that "pod" exchanging ideas, links, information, support and insight. Those who dismiss Twitter as mindless jibber-jabber don't see the way parents and software designers are interacting to do something wonderful.

The same critics don't see a network of entrepreneurs sharing marketing tips and advice for handling business more efficiently. They don't understand that for these individuals,

Twitter is like a very valuable ongoing Chamber of Commerce meeting or business development group.

If you've wondered whether Twitter was anything but noise and nonsense, you can rest easy. There's a lot of craziness and triviality out there in the Twittersphere, but there's also a lot of important and meaningful things happening.

What is Twitter? The better question is probably "What do you want Twitter to be?"

You have the chance to mold your network and participation in ways that make the most sense to you to accomplish the things that are important to you.

That might mean sharing bad jokes with others who love groan-inducing one-liners. It might mean poring through the details of actuary tables with other insurance industry experts. It might involve getting to know your customers better or finding new prospects.

The fact that Twitter gets the "micro-blogging" label creates some confusion for people about what it can really accomplish. They may wonder why they need a second, smaller blog on a free host.

It is true that Twitter functions as a micro-blog, but what people should realize is that there are real distinctions between traditional web logs and micro-blogs.

Those differences include a different kind of communication (more thoughtful and lengthy missives vs. quick "info-shares"), structure and style.

A micro-blog is a chronological record of notes or published information. In that sense, it's a smaller version of a blog. However,

the application and value of the format is entirely different from regular blogs.

In the end, it doesn't really matter how you label Twitter. Is it a no-frills Facebook, a high-frill instant messenger, a micro-blog, or a giant online chat room with a few additional controls?

Sure. It's all of them. And none of them. The user defines what Twitter really accomplishes, regardless of the label applied.

That's why we think of Twitter as a tool you can use to create something unique and important to you. Twitter is not a "place"; it's a collection of individually-constructed spaces.

Hopefully, you'll develop an idea of what you want from your Twitter as we continue our march through the Twittersphere.

How Much Does Twitter Cost?

One of the reasons underlying the startling growth of Twitter is the price tag associated with its use. There isn't one. Twitter is free.

That's right; you can get involved with one of the most potential-laden communication points on the constantly expanding Internet for nothing.

Free of Charge

And this isn't one of those deals where there are "free accounts" with limited functionality and "paid accounts" that let you use all aspects of the service. Twitter is just flat-out free to use.

You might be wondering how that works. How can anyone afford to provide so many people with a fully functional system without charging any money in the process? It's a question many people have asked.

You see, Twitter has an interesting history. The core concept was designed without a great deal of consideration for monetization. The idea was to create an interactive micro-blogging platform anyone could use.

The developers saw tremendous potential in Twitter and believed that it would attract a massive fan base. Ostensibly, someone could find a way to eventually profit from that huge collection of users.

So, Twitter received the funding it needed to go into operation from venture capitalists who saw potential in the idea.

It grew stronger and faster than anyone might have expected. But it's still living off that VC cash. Twitter still doesn't have a profit model.

It's Not Monetized...Yet.

Obviously, that state of affairs can't last indefinitely. At some point, Twitter will need to find a way to be sustainable and profitable without injections of operating capital from the outside.

Does that mean you should worry that Twitter will eventually demand some money in exchange for your access? Probably not.

Every time that potential is raised in discussion, the user base of Twitter reacts quite negatively.

It appears as though a “pay to play” model would probably slow new sign-ups to a crawl while shrinking the existing user base considerably.

Even the idea of “tiered” memberships seems unlikely based on user response to the idea. It’s unlikely that you’ll have to pay Twitter at any point in the near future.

You may have to put up with some advertising, though. Selling ad space on Twitter seems like one of the simplest mechanisms for monetization.

Assuming it’s done in a sufficiently discreet manner, the presence of some advertising probably wouldn’t crush Twitter’s popularity. You might end up with a few ads on the sidebar of your Twitter page or even a few via Tweet.

There’s also the chance that another company could purchase Twitter and leave it as a free service, finding a way to profit from the increased exposure and the development of a relationship with Twitter users.

Only time will tell. Right now, however, Twitter is free. There’s no reason to believe it won’t remain free in the future.

And, if Twitter does become a “pay to play” option, you may have found ways to make it valuable enough to you to justify some expenditure by the time that happens.

Why Should I Join Twitter?

If we're explaining things the right way, you should already be getting a sense for some of the reasons to make Twitter part of your "online life".

Before we start getting into the nuts a bolts of Twitter use, however, let's discuss the benefits of participation more explicitly.

We'll return to some of these concepts and the strategies associated with them in greater depth as this guide progresses, but a quick review of the perks to being a Twitterer seems to be in order.

It's low-risk and simple. As noted, Twitter participation won't cost you a dime. The only expense you'll incur is the time you spend on the site.

Fortunately, that's manageable, too, if you want to experiment a bit before becoming a full-fledged participant in the community.

You can set up a new account and begin "playing" with Twitter in less than fifteen minutes. You can toy around with it for a little bit to decide how much time you want to invest in its use. That makes it an incredibly low-risk endeavor.

Plus, actual use of the site is simple and intuitive. You'll catch on in a hurry. The simplicity of Twitter is one reason why it's so popular.

You should join because Twitter has a lot going for it and very little working against it. You're not losing much, if anything, by giving it a shot and exploring its landscape.

It's a Branding Tool

For those who want to connect their Twitter use to their business, the branding capabilities of the site are amazing. Twitter gives you a chance to connect with other people who share an interest in your business (either as peers in your industry or as potential customers).

You can become an active participant in your sector's discussion, increasing your name recognition and that of your company in the process. It's a great way to make a name for yourself and to inexpensively show a chunk of the world what you're really all about.

We're not talking about directly driving online traffic or producing sales here (more on that later). Instead, we're talking about the ways you can build a reputation and credibility by being a valuable and helpful voice in the dialogs surrounding your business.

Networking and Making Connections

This is another professional and business perk to Twitter use. You can use the site to build a valuable series of business connections.

The person with whom you share an idea today may very well become your partner on a new initiative in a few months. The person who shared that great link to new industry data may very well become someone to whom you can refer people for assistance in a particular area later.

Anyone who's been involved in business of any type recognizes the value of networking. There's a reason that the Rolodex was once on every businessperson's short list of things to grab in case of a fire!

Twitter is your chance to connect with others in your field and related fields without spending a dime. Imagine an industry conference that you can attend every single day, whenever you'd like. That's Twitter.

One of the most amazing aspects of this networking is the fact that the "caste system" that's usually in place is much less pronounced.

If you have an idea for a crispier, tastier cornflake and you're experience in the cereal business is limited to being a sales rep for a small regional breakfast cereal company, you're not going to get face time with a decision-maker at Post or Kellogg's. You can drive up to Michigan and walk into company HQ, but you're never going to get past the receptionist.

That's the old caste system. Sales reps from Mom's Cereal in Alabama don't get walk-in appointments with General Mills executives.

Twitter dissolves some barriers. You can follow the "big shots" in your industry and, if you're providing value to the conversations in your field, they're likely to start following you.

This is one of the few arenas where an entry-level type can actually forge a meaningful connection with someone higher up on the corporate ladder in the same industry. The usual barriers to interaction aren't there.

That cuts both ways, too. If you're up near the top of your company's organizational flowchart, Twitter might give you a chance to make some connections with those you don't deal with on a daily basis. That would include very bright people who are just entering the field and to potential customers, too.

You'll find that you're able to learn a lot--and to provide a great deal of valuable insight--to people that you just don't ordinarily see on a regular basis.

The current economic mess has made the value of Twitter as a networking tool easy to spot. There are countless stories of people who have suffered lay offs due to economic problems who were able to secure new jobs or freelance projects quickly via Twitter.

Those people had used Twitter as a networking tool and had developed a reputation for themselves as a competent, interesting, and motivated people who could be an asset anywhere.

Some of them did little more than Tweet the fact that they had been laid off and were looking for something new. The offers showed up quickly. Others actually tapped into their networks asking for advice or information that could be of assistance. That information led to greener pastures.

This is a feature of Twitter that, again, cuts both ways. The success story isn't just the person who found a job. It's also the story of an employer who was able to find a wonderful employee or collaborator because of his or her involvement with Twitter.

Knowing Your Customers

This is another business-related Twitter benefit. You can tap into Twitter's user base to find people who are interested in your product or service, or those who might be a part of your target demographic.

By interacting with them and getting to know them, you're able to develop a better idea of how to meet their needs, expectations and desires.

In a sense, Twitter can become a free opportunity for you to conduct some loose focus group research or market research just by asking questions. It can also be a wonderful way to test your ideas with a segment of the population your business is targeting.

There's probably nothing more valuable to businesses than an understanding of how their theoretical customer base thinks. Twitter gives you a chance to build relationships and to get an idea of what's really going on.

You can get that priceless information straight from the horse's mouth without spending one red cent. And that allows you to conduct your business in a way that will actually provide greater value to your customers or clients.

Social Uses

Sites like Twitter are often labeled as "social networking" or "social marketing" properties. The word "social" is in there for a reason. It's really at the base of what's going on.

Twitter is a platform for making human connections; Social connections. It's a device you can use to build relationships with others.

We've already discussed a few of the ways that can be valuable in terms of business--and we have others coming--but there's also an innate value to socialization that deserves mention.

By and large, Twitter users spend a great deal of time at the computer. That's how they find out about Twitter in the first place. Their jobs or lifestyles put them behind the keyboard a great deal.

Twitter allows those people to build a network of "online friends". It also allows them to connect to their "flesh and blood" friends via the Internet.

The cynics and critics can mock Twitter as a place where everyone is yelling out what they're having for lunch or how much they hated last night's episode of Lost all they want, but there is actual value to those connections.

Do you care what everyone in the world is having for lunch? Of course not. Are you interested in knowing that your girlfriend is going to try that new Brazilian steak place?

Probably. She can give you a review, tell you what's on the menu, let you know about the prices and warn you to avoid the lousy desserts.

Is it groundbreaking information? Will it change your life? Of course not. Does everything we need to do online (or offline for that matter) need to be of Massive Significance? Of course not.

There's a reason old guys used to sit around in front of barber shops playing checkers and talking about the weather. There's an explanation for those little outings we take with friends that are stuffed with fairly trivial chit-chat.

We like the interaction. We enjoy hearing the perspectives of others. We glean clues about personalities, places, and how the world operates by being social creatures.

Twitter can serve that function for those who may not have regular access to the morning water cooler conversation at the office.

Can you tell that we get a little worked up when people dismiss Twitter as “trivial” because many Tweets aren’t earth-shattering nuggets of new information?

Look, being social is part of being human. We won’t argue that the personal conversations and tidbits shared on Twitter are a full-featured replacement for face-to-face human interaction, but they still have real value. Those who don’t see that aren’t looking very hard.

The Traffic Factor

If you’ve been reading about Twitter online, you probably realize that one of the reasons so many people are developing a love affair with it, particularly those in the Internet marketing community, is its ability to drive traffic to websites.

Here’s what we’re talking about. You have a website. You also have several thousand followers on Twitter. Every time you write a Tweet encouraging people to visit your website, you’ll get a nice little flow of traffic.

That’s it, in a nutshell.

This is such a huge consideration for many who plan to make Twitter part of their plans that we're going to address it in greater detail later in this book.

We'll discuss the ways one can make this work. We'll also discuss the ways that you can try to generate traffic with Twitter tend to backfire with some ugly consequences.

For now, just realize that Twitter does have some potential to generate significant traffic to your sites. And, of course, more traffic generally leads to more sales!

Learning and teaching. We're jumping back and forth a little bit between the "harder" marketing aspects of Twitter use and the "softer" benefits of being part of the conversation.

That's intentional. As we mentioned in the onset of this guide, we want you to understand how Twitter and involvement with the site can really work for you.

That means breaking down both the aspects of Twittering that directly produce revenues and those that have strong underlying value even if you can't directly link to them to a single sale.

Among those advantages is learning. That's right, learning. You can learn from Twitter.

More specifically, you can learn from those you follow. They're going to share links with you. They're going to share ideas. They'll expose you to new information.

Twitter isn't your traditional classroom. The information and perspectives come from people of all types and you need to filter their

messages carefully because not all sources are quality sources. In that sense, it's no different than the Internet as a whole.

Overall, though, it is different and it does provide a very unique learning opportunity. That's because you're not just reading, you're interacting. And it's because you're selecting the people with whom you're interacting.

Those factors allow you to fashion something of an online classroom in which you can learn a great deal.

This isn't a standard classroom, though. In this particular setting, the teachers and students exchange roles with one another, seamlessly shifting from standing in front of the class to listening to the lessons of others.

You have a opportunity and, we would argue, an obligation to serve as a Twitter teacher, too.

You add value to your network of followers by providing them with things that matter--actionable information, smart insights, good ideas, and the lessons learned through your own experiences.

Supplying that kind of information works to your advantage on two different levels.

First, by providing value to others you reinforce your value as a resource and increase your standing and perceived expertise. Remember when we discussed the branding value of Twitter? Much of that stems from your willingness to act as a teacher.

Second, by providing a quality experience for your followers you're adding value to Twitter in general. Twitter will continue to flourish for only as long as people are making a point of providing something meaningful.

There's a growing sentiment in some circles that Twitter is eventually doomed. They argue that hordes of spammers and wannabe moneymakers will overrun the system, using it merely as a method of spamming links in ill-conceived schemes designed to drive fast traffic.

Unfortunately, there's merit in that perspective. Twitter has a large audience and spammy types can think of nothing more irresistible than playing the numbers game. Wherever many gather, they tend to show up.

Too often, their appearance ruins the venue. We've seen the blogging world wrestle with spammy comments. Many argue that the prevalence of comment spam has mitigated the potential conversational and networking advantages of blogs as a result.

We've seen it in other areas, too. For awhile it appeared as if Myspace was going to crumble under the sheer weight of spammy updates launched with regularity by those who first built a network of "friends" by taking advantage of people's willingness to "add" just about anyone.

Twitter should be able to survive the mounting onslaught. That's only true, however, because of its flexibility and the control it gives users to quickly "unfollow" undesirables.

To its credit, Twitter has demonstrated a willingness to ban the robot accounts that exist to do little more than spam real users with links. That's another reason to believe it has a future.

The best way to stave off an eventual failure at the hands of overzealous marketing, however, is for users to make a point of contributing something of value.

As long as there are good Tweets out there, providing insights and perspectives that aid or entertain others, there's reason to believe the system will continue to thrive.

That forces a decision on the part of users like you. You can either contribute to the quality of the Twitter experience by interacting in a meaningful way and by taking your turns at the teacher's podium, or you can hope for the best.

Being a teacher makes a lot more sense.

Always remember that your Twitter is a community or network that you've built. You have responsibilities as a citizen of that community. Twitter works because people learn. People only learn when users like you teach.

Staying in the know. As more and more people use Twitter, those who don't are finding themselves on the outside, looking in.

Today, people make announcements via Twitter. They point out the latest news and developments while using Twitter. "Memes" spread via Twitter. It's becoming a hub for online communication.

If you want to stay abreast of what's going on in your part of the world, you need to be "plugged in". The outlet for that power is a Twitter membership.

No, you won't be a horribly informed and woefully outdated person if you don't spend time on Twitter. It is possible to function on this planet without a Twitter account.

That being said, it certainly is a lot easier to keep in touch with the world, your industry and people who matter to you if you are involved with Twitter.

If you were the last person you knew with an email account, you undoubtedly felt a little "left out" of the conversation until you got one. It's the same thing here. People are talking and sharing via Twitter and that makes it the quickest point of contact for getting that information.

We've provided some perspective about why people are so excited to join Twitter and several of the advantages it can produce. Hopefully, this information is making the idea of involvement increasingly attractive to you.

Are you getting a sense of the things you might be able to do with Twitter? If so, it's time for you to get involved.

How Do I Join Twitter?

Before you can get involved, you need to sign up. Fortunately, you don't need an invitation and you don't need to set aside a few hours to make that happen. Becoming part of the Twitter community is a simple proposition.

Start by visiting Twitter's new account page. You can navigate to it from Twitter.com, or you can use this URL:

<http://twitter.com/account/create>.

In all honesty, the sign-up process will be finger snap simple for anyone who's been online for any length of time.

We're going to provide you with some sign up pointers, but there's no reason to hash over every stop of a very easy process. If you become stuck (and you won't), visit Twitter's help guide. It will provide you with just about anything you might need to know. The URL is: <http://help.twitter.com/portal>, just in case you miss the links on the Twitter site.

That will tell you how to sign up, but there are a few details you should keep in mind as you set up your account.

Your username: While some businesses set up accounts using their business name, most Twitter experts don't recommend that approach. Instead, they advise members to use their own name as their username for the site.

Why? Because Twitter is all about making those one-on-one human connections. People like to know who's on the other end of a

conversation and part of what often drives them toward social networking sites is the opportunity to get to know people.

So, if you can create a username that consists of or includes your real name that might not be a bad idea.

This isn't a hard and fast rule, though. You will find some people who use a "handle" or a business name who really add a lot to Twitter. It's one of those things that can probably help you, but using your name as an identifier isn't an absolute necessity.

However, there are handles to avoid. This would include anything that has a strong likelihood of offending other people.

You don't have to be bland and un-opinionated to function on Twitter and we're not advising that you water down your personality. However, obscene or borderline obscene usernames tend to backfire.

They don't create controversy or interest. They advertise likely immaturity and make people doubt the value of the comments that will be offered by the person behind the handle.

If you decide that you need to be "ILoveB00bs24-7", you can expect to deal with a small number of followers. You can't be surprised when people fail to take you seriously, either.

Just answer the questions. There are some people who feel the need to shove in as much extra information as possible at every turn. Some of these folks show up on Twitter.

A perfect example? You might see a profile for Bob Billings. Bob, unable to resist the urge to just provide his name when Twitter asked

for it, had to write "Bob Billings, www.bobbillings.com, Owner of Bob's Big Bundle of Bucks Marketing, Inc."

This guy should relax.

He will get the chance to share the information he wants to share.

When you try to trick the signup form, like he did, by stuffing too much information into a blank, which only asked him for his username, you will not get the results you intended. Remember that this will eventually show up on your profile next to the word "Name:"

So what will you get by tricking the system?

First, you create an ugly profile that looks sloppy and desperate.

Second, it communicates to others that you're there for the self-promotion at the expense of legitimate social networking. The combination of those two factors will make people less likely to follow you.

Basics. Create a good password and find a place to keep it so that you don't lose it. Use your primary email address, too. You might just be experimenting with Twitter, but you'll probably fall in love with it.

So use login information and passwords that you'll remember so you don't need to start over with a new account once you're "sold" on the service.

Photo. You're going to be prompted to upload a graphic. That avatar will appear alongside all of your Tweets and on your profile page.

You absolutely must have a photo as you sign up for Twitter. Period. It doesn't even necessarily need to be a picture of you, but you must have something.

Why? Because the default image used in place of an avatar is widely perceived by others as a potential dummy or spam account. The nefarious souls who would love to overrun Twitter with their spam rarely take the time to add a photo to their profile.

The default image is the symbol of the fakes on Twitter..

Use your own image if you have it handy. Remember, it's all about making personal connections. If you don't have your own photo, get one.

In the meantime, you could use your company logo or some other photo that has some genuine meaning and connection to you as a placeholder until you do have your own image.

Don't be vain and don't worry if you don't think you're the most photogenic person in the world. There are some very successful Twitterers with thousands of users who are, quite frankly, homely!

Twitter is, if nothing else, something of a merit-ocracy. If you're interesting and valuable, you'll get followers. Even if you look like you're about to sneeze in your picture!

Of course, it's always better to have a nice picture of yourself than a cringe-inducer. The point is that you're always better off being yourself than using some stock photo of someone else.

Once you're done answering the usual handful of questions about yourself, you'll have an account in place. At that point, it's time to set up your profile page.

Profile pages can be as simple as just letting Twitter set up a default version or as complicated as creating custom background images on your own. When you're just starting, you can go with a default layout. We'll discuss one way to tweak your profile later in this guide.

Twitter will make sure all of the necessary information shows up on your profile page. If you filled in the blanks correctly, you should be ready to roll. Or to Tweet, that is.

Starting Your Network

Now that you have an account, you can start unleashing your wisdom on the Twittersphere right away!

Unfortunately, no one is really going to see any of it. When you start with Twitter, you aren't following anyone and no one is following you, either.

Before you can really participate in any meaningful fashion, you'll want to start following a few people and get a few followers of your own.

How do you do that? There are many different ways you could go about it. We're going to talk about some mechanisms that could actually be used for this purpose later in this text.

You could get started, for instance, by promoting your Twitter profile or by using some of the third-party tools that can enhance the Twitter experience.

We think there's an easier and more efficient way to dip your feet into Twitter's waters, though. That's the method we're going to espouse for getting your Twitter network up and running.

You want to start by following someone who interests you. If you're on Twitter for the sake of business, that might be someone in your line of work.

If you're getting involved because you want to learn about a specific subject matter, you might choose someone who knows something about that field.

Where do you find them? One of the easiest ways is to use Twitter's own search function. You can access it at this URL: <http://search.twitter.com>.

This is a little Twitter search engine that you can use to find people who have recently discussed topics of interest to you.

Let's illustrate by pretending that you're in the business of selling refurbished Beta VCRs. You might be looking for people who have a fascination with all things 1980s or you might want to start by trying to find someone who really shares your interest in the obsolete technology.

You could search for "beta VCR" and discover that TonyExample posted about the topic three hours ago, Tweeting that, "I love my old Beta VCR. Fun watching St. Elmo's Fire!"

You could then click on Tony's profile to learn more about him and to see his past Tweets. It turns out that he's a real fan of retro electronics and that he has a strong interest in 80s trivia and related matters. Tony runs a website dedicated to stories about one-hit musical wonders for the 80s, too.

This is just the kind of person with whom you want to connect. So, what do you do?

Right on his page, you'll see the button that allows you to "follow" him. Click it and you're going to start seeing all of Tony's Tweets.

There's also a decent chance that Tony will follow you if your profile makes your similar interests clear. Just to be sure, though, you're going to offer up your first few Tweets--even though you don't have an audience.

These Tweets are going to reveal a little bit about what you're doing. When people check your profile, they'll see them and have a better idea of what you're all about.

So, type up one or two Tweets that announce that you're new to the service, what you hope to discuss, and the kind of connections you'd like to make.

Now, go back to Tony's page. You'll notice that on the right side of the page there's a place you can click to see all of his followers or all of the people he follows. Take a look at both.

When you see someone who looks like he or she might share your interests, follow them. You don't need to follow a million people right

now, just pick a handful of folks who look like they're the kind of people with whom you'd like to network.

Before you know it, your screen will start filling up with the Tweets of those people. And you'll start to notice that some of those Tweets start with "@" followed by another handle. This means the people you are following are conversing with those other individuals.

Click on their names, too. Find out if you'd like to follow them. Go deeper and find out about their followers and those they follow.

Now, you're going to soon discover that at least a handful of the people you've followed are following you.

Now, you have a little network. And you can start Tweeting with a purpose. It's time to get involved in the conversation!

As time goes by, you'll find more people to follow and others will begin following you, too. You'll also be able to use some great tools to build your network and to find the people with whom you'd like to connect.

This simple method, however, is a great way of getting started. It's a nice, organic system by which you can begin to tap into Twitter and its user base.

Congratulations, you have a network.

Now you can really Tweet!

And that brings up a few issues....

What's With The 140 Character Limit!?

You're going to notice that the little box into which you type your remarks, or Tweets is pretty small. You're not going to get the chance to write any long missives on Twitter.

You have 140 characters per Tweet. That's the cap.

That's 140 characters, not 140 words. You'll be shocked how short that is. It doesn't give you a lot of room to say your peace.

Why does Twitter limit users to such short Tweets? There are some good reasons.

First, it increases site efficiency. It encourages remarks because people don't need to set down with a half-hour of time budgeted to write a long expositive essay. It allows for fast, informal information exchange, which encourages participation.

Second, it makes the site easy to use. 140 character text blocks are relatively small, allowing you to see several at one time while you're logged in. If Twitter allowed longer blocks, they'd fill the screen, making it easier to miss the Tweets of those you follow.

Third, it prevents abuse of the system. If an un-automated spammer has to limit his Tweets to 140 characters, he can't dump a heap of links on his unsuspecting victims at one time.

Regardless of the reasons, though, you have 140 characters per Tweet. You need to get used to using that limited space to your advantage. Here are a few recommendations about what you should do and what you should avoid.

You Should Do This

First, you should start paring down your language and focusing on efficiency. You don't have room for introductions, conclusions or asides. Learn to write directly without unnecessary text. Practice makes perfect.

Second, don't worry about the length of links you might want to share. Sure, some URLs are 140 characters long in and of themselves. That's okay, because you can use a URL shortening site to solve that problem.

A URL shortening site will allow you to input a full-length URL. It will then spit out a shortened version you can use. What it really does is create a page using a shorter URL that redirects to the original content.

There are a variety of sites at which you can shorten URLs. The most famous is <http://tinyurl.com>. They've been around a long time and most users will immediately understand what they're seeing when they see a TinyUrl link. You may also check <http://turboURL.com> and <http://cli.gs>

Third, stick to making one point at a time. You might have three things to say, but you're going to find it very difficult to squeeze them all into that little box. On Twitter, you want to share ideas singularly when you can.

Fourth, you can eliminate the extra spaces. Some people are accustomed to only putting one space after a period or colons.

Those of us who grew up in the age of touch-typing and who learned on actual typewriters were usually taught to place two spaces after periods and colons.

That can be a hard habit to break, but you can safely break it on Twitter. A single space will suffice in those circumstances and your text will still be easy to read.

Fifth, take a look at your Tweet before you send it off to do its thing. Make sure you're making sense and that that you didn't come up with something hard to understand, misleading or confused due to the need to compress it into that 140 character block.

Sixth, use the counter to help your editing. Twitter provides you with an indication of how many characters you have left to use. It also let's you know when you go over.

If you do fly past the maximum, start poring over the tweet to find places to trim the fat. The counter will let you know when you have everything squared away.

Seventh, learn to love the ampersand. That's the little symbol that shows up when you hit SHIFT+7 on your keyboard. You know, this one: "&".

It's amazing how many times you can save yourself a few valuable characters by using the instantly-recognized and universally understood stand-in for the word "and".

You Should NOT Do This

First, you don't want to rely too much on abbreviations. It's true that there are many people out there who are becoming very talented at deciphering telephone texting abbreviations, but that doesn't always make them a good match for Twitter.

Sure, the occasional "LOL" is just fine. It's also handy to abbreviate long words in somewhat unconventional ways when you're meaning will remain fully intact. However, no one wants to spend time trying to "translate" a Tweet.

Use words, full words, and write in real sentences. It makes a difference.

Second, try to avoid multi-part Tweets. This is a conversation, not a soliloquy, right? Besides, when you break your Tweets into separate parts, it really doesn't always have the desired effect.

Other people in your followers' networks may be offering their own Tweets between your multi-part saga.

Every once in awhile, a two-parter may be in order to get an idea across. For the most part, however, you're doing yourself a favor by sticking within the 140 character guideline. That's really the accepted norm and it's that way for a reason: It works.

Third, don't sacrifice readability in order to make your Tweet fit. Sentences, you'll remember from back in grammar school, have subjects, verbs and objects most of the time. If you Tweet in super-streamlined gibberish, it's not going to have the desired effect.

Have you ever sat in traffic behind someone with one of those personalized license plates that just don't make sense?

It's a little annoying--and that's in a situation where you really don't have a vested interest in making heads or tails of the information.

Tweets that don't read well are a lot like those personalized plates, only they occur in a situation where your followers really would like to know what's on your mind.

Twitter is considered a micro-blogging platform. The "micro" part of the equation is strictly enforced by the system's character limit. Learn to act within that boundary and as you go, you'll soon begin to understand why it's more ingenious than it is over-restrictive.

It gives you freedom from having to write a long essay every time you want to say something and it keeps Twitter moving along at a nice clip.

It can take a little while to get used to the 140 character limit, but you will get used to it. Practice and experience will make staying "in bounds" second nature in short order.

What Do I Tweet?

Now that you're ready to Tweet, you might wonder what to say.

The short answer, and the most accurate, to "What do I Tweet?" is, "Whatever you want".

You can Tweet about anything and you can do so as often or as seldom as you' like. There aren't any Twitter rules that prevent your from Tweeting about that ingrown hair on your underarm. There's no requirement not to Tweet they lyrics of Sir Mixalot's "I Like Big Butts" over and over again.

You're the boss, Tweet whatever you want.

Of course, be prepared for the consequences.

If you're Tweeting junk, you're not going to get the most out of your participation and you're going to annoy your followers along the way.

They'll start dropping you like a hot rock until you're right back to where you started moments after sign up.

You can say whatever you'd like. What you should say is another matter.

The best way to approach the whole thing, as a beginner, is to wait until you see someone offer a Tweet that you feel is interesting or that deserves a follow up comment. Then, offer that follow-up.

Remember Tony, the guy who lives in the 80s? Let's say that he Tweets something about how he can't find a programming guide for

his vintage Beta VCR. You just happen to know that he can download a copy at <http://ObsoleteBetaVCRGuidesAndRelatedSundries.com>.

This is right in your wheelhouse! Tweet it!

You can reply to Tony's Tweet by clicking on the little arrow on its bottom. That will make "@TonyExample" appear at the beginning of your Tweet. That signifies that you're talking to Tony.

You might write "@TonyExample: You can find the manual for that Beta VCR at <http://bogus.tinyurl.com>". (Remember: We shorten those long URLs).

Now, this isn't necessarily about what to Tweet, but this is a perfect opportunity to illustrate how Twitter works. TonyExample might reply to you with "@You, Thanks for the tip! Now I can program the thing!"

Every one of Tony's followers who looks is going to see that he's chatting with you. Some of them are going to find out who you are, especially since Tony is thanking you for help.

People are going to check your past Tweets and your profile. There's a strong chance many are going to like what they see. You just earned some more followers.

Now, with that little aside out of the way, we can get back to a discussion about what you should Tweet. Starting by replying to elements of existing conversations is a great way to start because it helps you to learn the rhythms and norms associated with Twitter.

Shortly, though, you'll begin to feel like you're fitting right in and you'll want to start a few conversations of your own.

Whether you're replying or discussion-starting, here are a few guidelines you can follow to help you decide what to Tweet.

You should feel free to Tweet things that will:

Provide your followers with value

Interest your followers

Help you reach your personal Twitter goals

Ask yourself these questions.

First, is it interesting to your followers? That's probably the most important factor to consider. If the stuff you're saying isn't appealing, valuable or interesting to anyone else... Well, it's probably better left unsaid.

Second, is it honest and authentic? That's a huge thing with Twitter and other social networking sites. The idea is to create these great conversations between people who share interests or beliefs.

Yet there is a potential business consideration to the process, too. And there's also that whole thing that happens when we know we're being watched.

All of those factors can combine to produce a little unintentional insincerity. We try to put our best foot forward and that can occasionally lead to some unnecessary misrepresentations.

There's no need to crawl through the human psychology of all of this. What's important for our purposes is to recognize that authenticity and honesty are very good things, and that they're at the heart of why social networking can work.

As such, we need to be on guard against insincerity even when it's accidental or well intended.

In other words, offer the information for the right reasons and be yourself. Easy.

Third, are you presenting it correctly? This goes back to the discussion of how we structure Tweets within tight guidelines but it also has something to do with tone.

You're a participant in a conversation when you're on Twitter. That means you don't want to be the wallflower that never opens her mouth. It also means that you don't want to be the overzealous boor who infuriates everyone with his loud and obnoxious statements of opinion.

You can have and express your opinions on Twitter. You can even have friendly little debates to change your perspective and to learn more. You don't, however, want to be the know-it-all who yells opinions like facts and who monopolizes conversations.

In other words, use good manners. Your mother would be proud of you for that and it's going to get you a lot further along in terms of Twitterspheric success than will being a jerk.

Fourth, ask yourself about your motives. Seriously. This can end up making a great deal of difference in how you approach Twitter. Why are you there and are your Tweets really promoting that objective?

If your Tweets don't fit into the overall plan, you have two choices. Lay off the Tweet or adjust the plan.

Who Should I Follow?

Earlier, we talked about a quick way of jump-starting the process of building a social network on Twitter. In a little while, we're going to discuss some other tools you can use to find people to follow.

There's a tendency among new Twitter users to do everything they can to build a massive following as quickly as they can.

That's an understandable instinct and it's no surprise that it's particularly pronounced among those who are considering the use of Twitter as a marketing tool or as a traffic-creation strategy.

One of the easiest ways to build a large following is by following others. As such, you'll see many users who follow everyone in sight, knowing that most of them will return the favor.

Hey, if you want to have a few thousand followers in record time, start following everyone and their pet dogs. Many users are habitual reciprocators and you'll end up with many names on your Twitter list right away.

The problem with following all of those people is the fact that it's going to really crush the quality of your Twitter experience from an actual social networking point of view.

If you're following Cliff the meat-cutter, who loves to regale his network with tales of the price of meat in his shop, Denise the schoolteacher with a single-minded obsession about state testing standard, Eli the frat boy who wants to discuss keg stands and Fun4Life, a robot who just keeps throwing out affiliate links every half-hour, you're not going to have a really enjoyable experience.

Instead of making connections and communicating with people, you're going to find yourself shifting through a lot of junk that simply doesn't have meaning to you.

Much of it may have meaning to others--butchers have an interest in the pricing of lamb chops and teachers will care about state assessments--but is that really what you want out of Twitter?

Did you sign up to hear a lot of cross talk?

Of course not. And that's why one of the things you need to do occasionally is to cut down on the number of people you are following.

That means taking a look at the people in your list and trying to determine which are adding value to your experience and which are just filling the screen with material that doesn't matter to you.

It can take some guts to cull your list down to size, too. That's because the same reciprocating spirit that turns following into followers works in reverse, too.

If you stop following the frat boy and his hearty partying crew of friends, you can count on your follower count dropping.

That's uncomfortable for some people.

There are those who don't like losing followers out of ego. They want that big number under followers as evidence of their authority and popularity in the Twittersphere. They can take it almost personally if someone drops them from their reading list.

There are also those who don't want to lose a follower because it means losing a prospect. If your primary goal on Twitter is to put sales offers and links in front of people in order to generate traffic, it's hard to take an action that might reduce your follower total.

Every person on your list, after all, is a potential customer. Some may be a long shot, but one never knows...

Some people don't like giving up on following others because they feel like it's somehow rude or insulting to the person on the other end. As such, someone will suffer through a million Tweets about the best way to carve a chuck roast even though he or she is vegan.

Look, culling the list of those you follow is an essential part of making Twitter work. The alternative is a cauldron of noise and irrelevance that defeats the purpose of participation.

Dropping those who don't seem to share your interests and who aren't discussing things that are valuable to you is okay. It doesn't mean you hate the butcher, the teacher or the party animal.

It just means that you don't match up with them in terms of how you want to use Twitter. They should understand that and you shouldn't worry about bruising anyone's feelings by not following them.

You shouldn't maintain a too-long list of those to follow just for the sake of keeping your follower totals up, either.

If the extent of your relationship with someone is based on the fact that you followed one another and are now in an unspoken pact designed to protect each others' Twitter stats, that doesn't really do a lot to add value to your online experience.

The likelihood of any of those kinds of people becoming a meaningful customer or following one of the links you Tweet is minimal, too. You aren't losing a great deal if they drop you because you drop them.

Now, there is a workaround to all of this. There is a way to follow everyone without having to sort through all of the static. It involves the use of a third party tool that will help you organize your Twittering and to create "groups" that you can hone in on while ignoring others.

This might be a great solution for someone who simply refuses to ever risk losing a follower because they want the massive raw numbers as part of a traffic-driving campaign or because they believe the status of having a massive following (which may require following many people) is a key part of their overall Twitter goals.

Personally, we think that maintaining those followers and following them in return is a little disingenuous and that it stands in opposition to the real purpose of social networking.

The idea is to connect and to make legitimate connections with others. It's not about boosting statistical totals by, in essence, pretending to pay attention to others.

If you're not following for a reason and you don't have any intention of really communicating with those you follow, you're not really using Twitter as its intended and you might be contributing to the kind of behavior that makes proper use more difficult.

So, we've decided that you should probably cut down on those you follow from time to time. That really doesn't answer the question posed by this section of the book, though. The real question is who should you follow?

There's a simple answer to that. Follow people who are going to add value to your network.

That simple answer, however, covers a more complicated process by which that determination can be made. There are a few things you really need to do before deciding if you should be following someone.

Who Should You Follow?

Here are a series of questions to ask yourself that can help guide your decision-making.

Are they active participants? Take a look at how often they actually Tweet and what they say when they do. Some people are on Twitter to read, not to write. Others set up accounts and then fail to follow through with Twitter.

You don't really need to follow accounts that are dead or that seem to be on life support.

Are the two of you a good match? Similar interests? Same industry? Tweeting about similar things? You know the drill. You have goals for your Twitter involvement and you know what kind of people you should be following in order to reach those goals.

Do they provide something meaningful? Look over those past Tweets and see if the kinds of things they're discussing seem to have any resonance with you.

Even if someone is working in your field and expresses similar interests in his or her profile, you might still not see a great deal of value in following them if they prefer to use Twitter to socialize when you want professional development or when they don't actually seem to Tweet about anything related to your shared interests.

Are they human? Yes, this is a sincere question. There are a plenty of robot accounts out there that are designed to rack up the followers in an effort at later selling something to them.

While it's usually possible to discern real human beings from these little programmed monsters, there are times when making the differentiation requires a little bit of attention.

Do you see a chance for some fun? We haven't really talked about fun lately. Fun matters.

You want Twitter to be enjoyable. When you look at someone's profiles and past Tweets, does it seem like something that you'd like to read? If it's the kind of stuff that would make you happy or if the Twitter user in question seems like someone you'd like to know, give it a shot.

You can always unfollow later if things don't turn out to be as fun as you had hoped.

You might have financial growth as a priority, but there's no reason to turn that into a reason to avoid a little enjoyment. Besides, those fun

give-and-takes can often blossom into business relationships over time.

The flipside of “Who should I follow” is “Who should I not follow?” That’s actually an easy question to answer.

Don’t follow people randomly; unless that’s the kind of Twitter experience you want. If you want to build a valuable network of people based on shared interests, you won’t get it by following everyone.

Don’t follow the spammers. If you happen to be doing a research project on Twitter junk, it might be okay. Otherwise, you’re not doing much more than clogging up your conversational stream and giving the spammers encouragement.

Don’t follow anyone you wouldn’t want to talk with under regular circumstances. It makes sense to give anyone who meets the previously discussed criteria for following a chance.

However, if it turns out that someone isn’t adding anything to you or your network, feel free to cut them loose.

Here’s a perfect example. You find someone who’s involved in your industry and who actively Tweets on the subject. You seem some common ground and you follow them.

Shortly thereafter, however, you notice that this person has a tendency to shoot out dozens upon dozens of “weak” Tweets one after the other.

It clogs things up and you find their rapid-fire delivery of barely-interesting items less than productive. At that point, you might as well cut bait. The fishing isn't working.

How Can I Attract Followers?

This whole following thing works in two directions. You follow people and people follow you. In order to build a functioning network, you have to work on both sides of the equation.

We've discussed the ways you can find people to follow (and we'll discuss a few tools that might make that a little easier in a bit). Now let's turn our attention to the other side of things. How can you get people to follow you?

Here are a few ways to attract the people you want as part of your chunk of the big ol' Twittersphere.

First, you can gain followers by following others. We've discussed the way that works already. People have a tendency to follow those who are following them, at least initially. That may be motivated by a sense of courtesy or by recognition of shared interest.

Regardless, it does work. In fact, it's the fastest way to gain followers.

Second, you can find followers by consistently providing good information and insight within your Tweets. We ran through a little case study of how that can work earlier.

When you start having one of those “@” conversations with someone, everyone in that individual’s follower list is going to see your name and they may be interested in seeing what you have to say about things.

There’s also a little thing called a re-tweet that really works wonders in terms of generating followers.

A re-tweet (abbreviated RT) is when someone takes one of your Tweets and shares it with his or her social network, crediting you in the process.

If you provide excellent Tweets that contain real value, some of your followers will undoubtedly feel like sharing that perspective with their followers. They re-tweet you in order to do that.

When that re-tweet hits, it can be powerful. Others may see the Tweet and do the same. Before you know it, your Tweet is all over the place and countless individuals are now aware that you’re a meaningful contributor to the Twittersphere.

They’ll check out your profile and past Tweets and may decide that they’d like to follow you.

Being a quality participant in the conversation can spur new followers in a third way, too. Your followers may make an effort to recommend following you to others.

When others see that you’re offering something special, they’ll share that with others. You can get many followers based on those endorsements.

If you’re out there posting good Tweets, an audience will “find you”.

Third, you can actively promote your Twitter page and invite people to follow you. This is a great way to attract followers by leveraging your other online activities.

Do you have a blog or a website? Add a link to your Twitter page in order to make it easy for those readers to follow you. You can even build a cool looking “follow me on Twitter” badge to place on your site in order to help things along.

Do you participate in online forums or discussion groups? Do you subscribe to any listservs or mailing lists? Include your Twitter ID in your signatures or membership profile pages. Do you have a mailing list to whom you market?

Make sure your readers know where to follow.

Promoting your Twitter page is a great way to bring people into your fold. It also adds potential value to your other web activities.

When push comes to shove, the best way to build a good follower base is to continually provide good Tweets. If you can make it clear to the world that you’re someone worth listening to, they’ll listen.

Think about the people you might follow. Why would you follow them? What would you want to see from them? If you can embody those things, you’re sure to collect your own cadre of followers.

At the same time, there’s no reason not to find followers by promoting your Twitter page or by following others.

The World Wide Web Of Twitter Tools

Twitter has taken off like wildfire for a number of reasons. It's productive. It's easy to use. It fills a need in the marketplace. There's another reason for the growth: Twitter has made a point of opening its API up to third party developers.

As such, people are inventing and testing new Twitter tools every day that can enhance your experience.

This is a lesson learned, in part, from Wordpress. The free blogging platform has massive market share, in large measure, because of "after market" components.

Those plug-ins, widgets and add-ons have made Wordpress incredibly flexible, powerful and robust.

We're seeing a similar set of circumstances with Twitter.

You can use Twitter "as is", but most people will soon discover that they can get more out of their involvement by using some of the many third party tools.

We're going to discuss some of the most popular and most promising Twitter tools. The list isn't comprehensive (even if it was, it would be outdated tomorrow) but it should give you a good idea of ways to find maximum value in Twitter.

Some of these tools will continue to grow in popularity. Others will disappear when someone else invents an even better mousetrap. All of them, however, are illustrative of the ways third parties can make Twitter an even more powerful tool.

LoudTwitter. LoudTwitter is a tool you can use to integrate your Tweeting with your blogging, if you have a blog.

You set up your account at <http://loudtwitter.com> and you'll be able to send a collection of your daily Tweets to your blog in the form of a single post.

You can double the content value of our Tweets this way and let those who might not be on Twitter but who do read your blog a chance to find out what's on your mind.

TwitThis. Twitter is a big world of potential customers, clients and contacts. You want to do everything you can to be part of the action. That can include encouraging other people to Tweet about you even if you aren't actively involved in Tweeting the stuff yourself.

That's what TwitThis does. It's not really part of Twitter use, per se. Instead, it's a little button that makes Tweeting about something a quick click process for readers.

You can put TwitThis buttons on your blog posts or web pages. If the person reading it finds the content impressive enough to Tweet, they can do so by clicking the button.

It integrates their Twitter account with your content. That's a great way to increase the dissemination of your content to the Twitter crowd.

Go to <http://TwitThis.com> to learn exactly how to make this part of your web-based efforts.

TwitterFeed. Here's another tool designed to bring your blogging and your Tweeting together. Instead of publishing your Tweets to your blog, TwitterFeed announces your new blog posts via Twitter.

Setting up an account at <http://twitterfeed.com> is easy. It's also basically a "set it and forget it" situation. After you're locked in, your Twitter account will automatically Tweet an announcement every time you publish a new blog post.

TwitterFeed is a great tool, but it certainly doesn't replace the need for real Tweeting, even if you are a prolific blogger. Announcing the things you're doing is a perfectly normal part of being on Twitter. Doing it all automatically without engaging in any real discourse, however, is not.

Use things like TwitterFeed as part of your overall plan, not as a substitute for real involvement.

TweetDeck. TweetDeck is arguably the most popular Twitter tool around. You'll see many Tweets that say, "sent from Tweetdeck" on them because so many people have fallen in love with the tool, located at <http://www.tweetdeck.com>.

Tweet deck is a small footprint piece of software that runs on your desktop. You can see your incoming Tweets, respond to them and send your own Tweets right from your desktop.

It also allows you to set up real time searches to stay abreast of subjects that are of high interest.

TweetScan. If Twitter has a weakness, it's probably to be found in its search tools. Luckily, things like TweetScan can help solve the problem. TweetScan is a Twitter search tool that digs through the text of actual Tweets in order to provide the user with results.

Remember how we recommended using Twitter's search tool to find those first few "seed" people to follow? TweetScan could do the job, too. In fact, it probably does the job better.

It's a great way to find the people you'd like to follow and to learn more about those who might be following (or mentioning) you.

This is only a sampling of the various Twitter tools available.

There are tools to make it easier to Tweet from your mobile device. There are tools that will allow you to write Tweets in advance that are later put up automatically.

There are tools that allow you to separate your followers into groups, to make it easier to hone in on certain "conversations" while eliminating the unwanted "noise" of others at certain times.

If you can imagine it, there's probably a tool for it. If not, there will be one soon.

With so many tools to choose from, you might wonder which ones you should be using and which ones you can ignore.

That's going to depend on the individual user and his or her goals with respect to Twitter use. However, there are a few basic principles you can use to decide whether implementing a new tool is worth your time and effort.

First, does the tool really fit with the way you want to use Twitter?

If you're not interested in turning your Tweets into blog posts because the nature of your blog and your Twitter activity aren't a perfect match, you can probably take a rain check on LoudTwitter and TwitterFeed, for example.

If you don't want to Tweet when you're not going to be there to follow up on a conversation, those Tweet schedulers won't make much sense to you.

Think about your reasons for using Twitter and consider how effectively any given tool will be in that regard.

Second, date before you marry. In other words, when you find a potentially valuable tool, take a few minutes to run it through its paces and to test it out.

You might find that there's something about it you don't like. You may also find that it has an application that makes it even more valuable than you imagined.

Test new tools before deciding whether they're going to be a regular part of your Twitter repertoire.

Third, consider whether the tool is there to make Twitter better or merely to exploit its potential. Some tools are great. They make life easier for the user while actually improving the usability of the service.

Some tools exist for very little reason other than rapidly and sloppily automating processes that really should involve the human touch.

You need to decide for yourself if an individual tool is really something that's going to improve the Twitter experience in a real way or if it's just a short-cut gimmick created to exploit the system.

Twitter As I Traffic Tool

Anyone who has a website wants more traffic. It's the lifeblood of any successful online enterprise. If you're selling something, collecting email sign ups, hoping for ad clicks or doing anything else that produces an income, you want more traffic.

In fact, generating and driving traffic is probably the top concern of most site owners.

It's no wonder that when people see the massive participation levels at Twitter that they start thinking of the service as a way to get more eyeballs on websites.

There are some very good reasons to get excited about Twitter and traffic.

First, it's relatively easy for anyone who puts his or her mind to the matter to generate over 1,000 or more followers very quickly. If you can get even a fraction of those followers to visit a particular website every day, it could be valuable.

Second, the only thing better than traffic is targeted traffic--and that's what Twitter would seem to promise.

If you're able to put an invitation in the form of a link in front of a few thousand people who have a genuine interest in the topic, that's more valuable than sending five or ten times as many "random" people to the same site. Traffic is great. Targeted traffic is better.

Third, social networking is hot right now. It's attracting a great deal of attention and it's growing very quickly.

People understand that and believe that the best way to increase their traffic flow is to hop on that bandwagon and to take advantage of the trend.

Fourth, it's "list marketing" without the headaches. Some people perceive Twitter as a list marketing style traffic situation without the hassles and legal restrictions of marketing via email.

If you're sending out a mailer, you need to make sure all of the recipients opted in to receive it. You need to deal with deliverability issues. You are forced to set up an auto responder and to manage it. You have to make it easy for people to unsubscribe.

It's hard work.

People see their Twitter followers as a list that's easier to use.

Your followers are receiving the information voluntarily. Delivery is nearly guaranteed by Twitter. You don't need to set up auto responders or to provide unsubscribe options. It's all neat and self-contained. Plus, it takes only 140 characters to get the word out.

By now, you might be getting a little excited about Twitter traffic. If you do business online, you should be. It can be a great way to get people to your site and, if you're doing things the right way, you should be getting some quality visitors in the process.

We don't want to toss a wet blanket on Twitter traffic and we do believe it can be very valuable. There are a few things you should realize, however, before you start sketching out a way to make a fortune by using your Twitter account.

First, preliminary research suggests that overall sales and conversion rates are higher with search engine traffic than with social networking traffic. That includes traffic from Twitter.

That doesn't mean Twitter traffic is "worthless". It does, however, mean that you can't assume similar rates of conversion when plotting out strategy.

Second, you need to remember that putting a message in front of 1,000 followers doesn't mean nearly as much as you think it might. Why? Well, not all 1,000 followers will see the message.

Some won't be logged in and won't ever look back to see what you might have Tweeted on Saturday night. Some might have networks that are so busy that your Tweet just gets swept away in a tidal wave of incoming Tweets.

When you add in the usual issues with respect to securing a decent click through rate on any mailing or offer, you can see that Twitter traffic isn't quite the magic bullet some seem to pretend it is.

Third, right now the Twitter audience is a pretty savvy bunch. The service is still relatively new and early adopters are, generally speaking, an experienced group of users.

That means they've spent a lot of time online. That means they may have a little "ad blindness" and may not be as interested in following obvious promotional efforts as you might hope.

It also means that you'll need to have your "A" game if you're hoping to market anything computer-related to this crowd.

Fourth, the social networking world is still populated by many people who are willfully resistant to marketing. They have a negative view toward those who would use social networking as a route to profit.

These “purists” aren’t what you’d usually consider top-tier prospects.

Those factors don’t eliminate the value of Twitter traffic. They just put it into perspective a little bit. There are so many people running around screaming about the “unlimited traffic potential of Twitter” that it’s important to realize that reality is slightly more complicated.

Overall, though, traffic from Twitter can be a really valuable resource and anyone who is using the service and who has non-Twitter web property needs to consider its potential carefully.

The traffic is worth pursuing. The question is, “How do you pursue it?”

The obvious answer to that question, Tweeting links to your sites like a madman, is one of the worst.

Here’s what’s going to happen if you spend your time encouraging your social network to visit your site at the expense of engaging in legitimate communication.

You’re going to convince people that your motives for participation are entirely self-serving. That’s a huge turn-off. It’s going to result in low click through rates when you do try to promote and it’s going to lead people to stop following you.

So, you have to ease your foot off the accelerator a little bit and devise a better plan to capture Twitter traffic. Here’s an outline of what you can do to make that happen.

First, realize that you can gain some traffic from the link in your profile. Thus, if you're providing quality information and insight, you're going to get people who "look you up" and follow the link.

In other words, one of the best ways to get those Twitter users is to let them find you instead of going out and "recruiting" them.

Second, understand that the only way you're going to get by with offering a slew of Tweets inviting people to visit your sites is if you have a solid, serious and inarguable record of providing real value to people.

Twitter users recognize the trade off. It's okay to do a little self-promotion if you're evening up the score by providing real value to your followers. If they know you and understand who you are, they'll actually be interested in checking out your stuff.

If, on the other hand, you're not well known to them and you spend time promoting yourself, it comes off poorly.

Third, you really should let people know that the sites you're recommending are your own. Often, users are tempted to just Tweet "Check out this awesome site where you can find the best deals on turnips" because they don't want to seem like self-promoters.

When people put two and two together, it makes those folks look a lot worse than they would've otherwise. You're better off coming clean and Tweeting "I sell turnips and I have some great deals".

That's honest and it gives those who loathe the use of social media for marketing a chance to avoid it without infuriating them.

Fourth, the bar for your site's quality goes up. Twitter is based on trust. You trust those you follow to tell you things that matter and to provide accurate information.

Your followers want to trust you to provide them with sound recommendations and insight.

Thus, if you're going to push your own site, you need to be very sure that it's of a high enough quality to offer your followers something meaningful.

There's nothing more irritating than following someone Twitter who generally provides great information but who is willing to then send his followers off to his latest low-quality "get rich quick" scheme affiliate link.

Here's a good question to ask yourself. "If the site wasn't mine would I still recommend it?" If not, you should get that property up to snuff before you start pitching it your followers.

Here's the bottom line about using Twitter as a means of traffic generation. Twitter is a social networking tool first, a traffic-building tool second. In order for it to really work as a traffic producer, it needs to first work as a networking tool.

People will listen to what you say. They will follow your link. They will allow you to self-promote.

They won't do any of those things, however, if it's clear to them that it's your primary purpose for involvement. If communicating with them, learning from them, teaching them and building real

connections is secondary to shilling your links, they'll smell it a mile away.

If you want to use Twitter to drive traffic, you need to use Twitter the right way.

It's all about establishing the right context and acting in moderation. If you can manage those two tasks, you can use Twitter to develop a solid stream of high-caliber site visitors.

The folks who find it easiest to develop large Twitter-based streams of traffic are those with a great deal of name recognition and who have an established reputation for being "in the know".

Is that you? If it's not, it could be. That's the beauty of Twitter for marketing purposes. It gives you both a tool for branding and a means for then using that tool as a way of driving traffic to your web properties.

THE DANGERS OF TWITTER

Twitter doesn't have any medically recognized side effects and it comes without a warning from the Surgeon General. That doesn't mean that it's completely free of dangers, however.

There are few potential Twitter pitfalls about which you should be keenly aware.

First, remember that just about everyone in the world can read your Tweets. The people who follow you, obviously, will get them live. People who don't follow you can find them via your Twitter URL. People who don't even know Twitter from Twister might find them via a search engine.

You should act accordingly. Unless you're using the direct message feature (where you're interacting exclusively with another party), consider every Tweet you make part of the public record.

If you have axes to grind, embarrassing tales to tell, or any other "maybe I don't want the whole world to know this" information, don't Tweet it.

Second, understand that the power of Twitter does cut both ways. If you use it effectively and with integrity, it's a great way to build your reputation and credibility.

If you use in appropriately or behave in a way that's wholly inconsistent with the expectations of other users, it can backfire on you.

Twitter can paint a great portrait for you. It can also put a lot of egg on your face. The outcomes are within your control and you should consider the potential benefits and damages of your use of the system.

Third, it's easy to be sucked into Twitter. You can spend all day exchanging notes and observations with others. You can create a massive network of very interesting people who have a great deal to offer and that can be almost addictive.

You want to use Twitter enough to make it part of your overall online strategy, but you don't want to become so obsessed with it that it begins to steal time away from other key pursuits.

It may seem silly to warn grown adults not to get too wrapped up in a social networking tool, but people do find themselves failing to meet

other obligations because they just couldn't pry their eyes away from Twitter.

Moderation matters. Use Twitter enough to accomplish your goals, but don't glue yourself to it for long chunks of the day. Using Twitter the right way means not overusing it.

When you look at the "risks" associated with Twitter and compare them to the potential benefits, it isn't a very close competition. Twitter is an incredibly powerful way to accomplish numerous goals.

All it takes is a little care to avoid the potential pitfalls associated with it.

Keeping The Twittersphere Happy!

If there's one point that we've tried to hammer home in this guide, it's the notion of responsible use.

Twitter may be nothing more than a tool, but it's a tool that connects you to living, breathing human beings. That means there's a real social component to its use--and an ethical component.

You probably don't need a lecture on good citizenship, but it's impossible to close this guide without reminding you of why using Twitter with honesty, integrity and authenticity is so important.

That's the only way you can get the most out of the tool. This is one of those great situations where doing things the right way produces the best possible results.

It's also the best way to insure the long-range value of the system. The presence of genuine users who are looking to create the best possible experience for their followers serves as the best means of protecting Twitter's long-range viability.

In Conclusion

So, are you ready to use Twitter, or what?

Hopefully, we've given you a good set of reasons to get involved and have shown you enough of the nuts and bolts to hit the ground running.

Twitter is big. And it's growing. It's one place that you can't afford to skip as you make your online travels. It's also an option that provides you with some incredible opportunities.

Remember, there is no single Twitter experience. Everyone interacts with the site and its membership differently. It's up to you to create a positive network that provides you and other participants with the greatest possible value.

We've outlined some of the ways to do that here. In the end, though, it basically boils down to trying to be helpful.

That's right, Twitter is sort of an online proof of the concept of Karma. If you send out good things, you'll get good things in return. If you poison the well, you'll eventually end up taking a sip of the water yourself.

When you start to think about Twitter and social networking exclusively in terms of your own obligations, however, it begins to lose a little of its attraction. There's nothing like responsibility to scratch up something shiny.

That's why we want to include this look the biggest phenomena to hit the web in years with a little bit of optimism and a reminder of the joys of Twitter use.

Where else can you make your name, abilities and skills so well known so quickly?

Where else can you make connections with experts in your field and people who have something valuable to offer you?

Where else can you engage in free market research and become part of a living community that happens to be part of your business' target demographic?

Where else can you immediately ask questions and expect prompt, meaningful responses from those in the know?

Where else can you develop a "fan club" that's going to be interested in your products and services--people who will follow your links when you share them?

Where else can you find a simple and fast online opportunity to exchange ideas, thoughts and even jokes with a diverse global population in real time?

The answer to all of those questions? Nowhere.

Twitter is the best option for all of that and more. Period.

Now, get started. It's time for you to make your mark on Twitter. Join in, become part of the conversation.

Look, you know the situation. Twitter is a monster.

When actor Ashton Kutcher wants to share a snapshot of Demi Moore's derriere, he links to it on Twitter.

There's a Chinese dumpling restaurant in New York that does business out of one of those mobile food service trucks. They tell their loyal fans where to find them on any given day using Twitter.

Immediately following a recent plane crash, the news team at CNN was using Tweets from others and their links to phone photos they took to build a story.

People are making sales every day with Twitter. People are building friendships and business partnerships. They are asking questions, finding answers, gaining insight and profiting from that growing pool of Tweets.

Twitter isn't a flash in the pan. It's already far too big to fall into that category and it's growing every day at a lightning fast pace.

Get in there. Get involved. Reap the advantages that come with this amazing social networking tool.

Happy Tweeting!