



What can **Twitter** do for my business?

By **Guy Levine** Illustration: **Ian Whadcock**

Heard of Twitter? Of course you have. But did you know it can expose your business to a huge community of potential customers?

Twitter is taking over the world.

Like all good ideas, when it was first launched in 2006, not many people knew about it. And then the celebrities came along: Wossy (AKA Jonathan Ross), StephenFry (AKA Stephen Fry) and Schofe (AKA Philip Schofield). Nearly all of the Dragons are twittering away as well. Now it's in the public domain - big time. Is it a Facebook slayer?

Twitter's uses get more wild and wacky as time goes on. I recently came across a "twinterview" (<http://tinyurl.com/ao36ls>), which is an interview conducted entirely via Twitter. This poses an interesting constraint - each question and answer can only be 140 characters, including letters, spaces and punctuation. I wonder how Parky would get on.

So, why is it so important for businesses to Tweet? Yes, it played a significant part in installing Barack Obama in the White House but what could it do for you?

Twitter is like any other marketing medium online or offline: the more attention you receive the better; the more email addresses in your in-house database, the more potential sales you will make; the more website visitors, the more leads generated. The more Twitter followers you have, the more attention you receive and the bigger your opportunity.

When your followers exceed 200, magic things start to happen when

you post updates and special offers. But beware: Twitter causes all kinds of reputation management issues. Say someone buys from you and they're not happy with the product or service. They're just 140 characters and the click of a mouse away from telling thousands of people. You'll need to monitor this.

How to get Tweeting

Sign up at www.twitter.com. You'll then be faced with a little box, an update button and not much else. First thing to do is to follow some people. To do this, either search for them on Google (type in "James Caan Twitter") or, if you know their username, simply type "follow jamescaan" into the little box and press update. You'll now see any updates the person you're following is making. A great way to start is by following the big users and see what they do.

Get Tweeting with the best of them

Start entering your own updates. You could update people on what you had for dinner but it's really not that interesting. Rather, try to make your updates a mixture of breaking news, hot topics, useful information and a bit of personal stuff to break the ice. When you see a conversion

that you can add value to or want to join in, simply start your message "@username", then type your message. This alerts the other person that you're speaking to them, and also allows their followers to see the conversation. Make a valid point and people will start to follow you.

Tweet to the next level

For the tech savvy, signing up to Twitter's "rss feeds" related to your brand name, your key employees' names and your competitors' names will let you know any time those keywords are mentioned.

If you're still not convinced, visit search.twitter.com. From this page, you can search all the conversations

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on Twitter. Search for your brand name. Anything come up? If it's good feedback, you've got nothing to worry about. If it's bad, I'd suggest you join Twitter, start engaging in the conversations going on about your business

and find out how you can improve. If your search brings up nothing about your business, you're missing out on the hottest internet marketing opportunity of the moment.

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