

REFRESH PR'S HELPFUL GUIDE TO...TWITTER FOR BUSINESS

This guide is for people who wish to manage a twitter feed on behalf of a company. Twitter is very simple to use; as a microblogging site it allows updates of up to 140 characters of news and information to be uploaded at any one time and we are big fans – when it's used properly.

The purpose of this short guide is to help companies set up and then manage their own twitter accounts. Some will choose to outsource the groundwork and take control when the account has grown to a decent size and others will leave the twitter feed outsourced long term. Many things will impact on this decision; none more so than time.

Introduction

There are three basic reasons for a company to use twitter:

- **Customer service** – to keep close to customers, to find out what they want, what they think, to answer questions and provide instant feedback on availability of stock etc
- **Sales** – to raise awareness, announce new products, post promotions – and potentially help with SEO for a website
- **Brand awareness** – to get across the personality of the brand, to achieve buy in from a customer base, to reinforce key company messages, to be seen as a thought-leader, to spread breaking news first

Depending on the aim of the twitter feed, it should be managed by the correct department. So decide whether it would sit best with customer service, the sales team or the communications team.

Getting set up

Set up a twitter account via twitter.com, choosing a name for the newsfeed that is as near as possible to the company name so people recognise it as a legitimate account. Ensure the company logo is uploaded and the account links to a handheld device, such as a Blackberry or iPhone, so updates can be seen instantly even if the twitter manager is away from his/her computer. Fill in as much information as possible about the company too in the “biography” section.

Once the account is live, download a piece of computer software to help manage the twitter account. This will enable you to see your connections' updates without having to constantly refresh your web browser, for example. We recommend TweetDeck, but HootSuite is preferred by others, for example. On downloading TweetDeck, follow the instructions on the screen to set up different columns. We recommend having columns for:

- All friends
- Mentions
- Direct Messages
- Variations of the company name
- Trending: Worldwide
- Any hashtags you are running with (see later in this document)

TweetDeck helps manage both company and personal Twitter accounts in one place, as well as ensuring the addition of custom search columns and keeping track of new followers.

A note about monitoring

The more followers a twitter feed gains, the more people see a company's news. When it's good news, this is very good – and when it's bad it can lead to potential disaster within minutes. News spreads instantly on twitter and for this reason, a team should be put in place to monitor the account for as many hours as possible in a day. If a company exports to countries further afield like Australia or America, timezones can play an havoc with monitoring the feed - followers could be tweeting 24/7 about a brand – leaving the stream unmonitored for a long period which can have serious consequences.

Basic definitions

- Followers - people who follow your updates
- Following - other company/people's updates that you want to see
- @RefreshPR – someone is sending us a tweet, and everyone else can see this. You may do this if you want to draw a particular company or person's attention to something
- D RefreshPR – this is a direct message (DM) which only you and the sender of the tweet can see. You can only DM someone if they are following you and you are following them
- RT @RefreshPR – a retweet would be done if you feel the news is worth spreading to your followers
- # - a hashtag would be placed in front of a word if it's a trend you wish to pick up on. For example, when running a promotion, #win will be a popular search term for those who like to enter twitter promotions, so including this in the tweet will ensure you are picked up by these people

In our opinion, a good twitter feed will have a large number of followers and follow a small number. This shows to others that the tweets are worth knowing about. A ratio of 3 followers : 1 following is good.

What to tweet

Remember, people want to follow those who tell them things they didn't already know, seeing tweets that are useful, constructive, informative and amusing. A feed needs to add value and give people a reason to want to pay attention to tweets. Remember, anyone out there can see your news on twitter, from a journalist to a customer to a competitor. Therefore everything posted must be neutral – it would be unwise to express any opinions about news stories, political events or controversial headlines. This can be done on an individual's news feed – but please remember that everyone can see it.

Growing a company's presence on twitter means persistence. Monitor, watch and follow key influencers within the sector – and learn what people want to see and hear. Follow people who have a good ratio of followers:following, use LinkedIn to see who else is on twitter – and have a look at who your followers are following too.

In the early days be prepared to spend a lot of time on identifying like-minded people, potential customers, thought leaders and even journalists who could pick up on your news. One tip for getting someone to follow you is to RT one of their posts, for which they will be grateful, or to recommend them as a valuable person to follow through the 'Follow Friday' (#ff) trend. The investment in the early days will pay off – but do be mindful that this is not a five minute job. And as you gain followers, monitoring will take over the recruitment of followers.

Quick tips:

- The tone of the twitter feed should match the company's corporate tone and not deviate to avoid mixed messages
- Monitor for positive and negative comments. Reply to the negative ones immediately – if they've made their feelings on twitter public, message them back for all to see that the problem has been sorted out
- Aim to tweet at least one non-response update each day. You'll most likely have tweets to reply to as well, especially at peak trading periods
- Try to 'own' a day of the week where your company does something different. This could be 'Winning Wednesday' or 'Freebie Friday' – when an offer or promotion is tweeted – or it could be a blog which is released at the same time each week. Customers get used to looking out for a competition to enter on these days
- Organise your followers into lists eg Marketing Professionals, Customers etc
- www.bit.ly is a very useful website – it simply shortens a URL to a unique link. Creating an account on here means that when a Bit.ly link is inserted into twitter (or anywhere else online), the number of people clicking on the URL can be measured – making it easy to analyse whether a sales promotion was successful in driving visitors to a particular website, or readers to a particular blog (etc). As it shortens the URL, it leaves more characters in the twitter feed to use too
- Keep an eye on your competitor's twitter accounts and watch what they are doing

Summary

Setting up a twitter feed is the easy part. Maintaining momentum is harder as it really does require resources and dedication. It's not just a case of posting updates; the important thing is to continue to monitor and follow more people so that the effort you're putting in to updating twitter is seen by more and more people.

Remember, it's worth it in the long run and will pay dividends. As social media continues to move at an unprecedented rate, it's worth questioning if you can afford NOT to be on twitter; soon this will become standard just like Facebook and email – there are already numerous other new developments on the horizon to watch out for.

Finally, if in doubt see <http://mashable.com/guidebook/twitter> for the best guide to Twitter – it's then all about trial and practice. Good luck and enjoy it!

Document prepared by Refresh PR February 2013. For more information about building a presence on twitter please contact one of the team at Refresh PR: info@refreshpr.co.uk or call 0161 212 1695.