

THE HOW AND WHY OF TWITTER

Are you feeling left out because you are unable to decode the mysteries of Twitter? Are you completely overwhelmed by the jargon of Twitter? Then this article is just for you. Here we are demystifying Twitter and making it really simple. Which is what it actually is!!

WHAT IS TWITTER?

Twitter is a way of communicating with a large number of people at the same time. These people usually share common interests with you.

Twitter is nothing but a text-messaging service, which can be sent to a lot of people at the same time. The messages you send are the 'tweets' and they should not be more than 140 characters long! The bunch of people you send your message to are your followers! Reportedly, Twitter was designed to be read on a cellphone, though many read it online.

Twitter is also called a microblogging site as the tweets are short and sweet, a microblog! On Twitter, without followers, you cannot have an existence. It is your followers who subscribe to receive your messages.

The most important aspect of Twitter is its social element as well, as it allows users to monitor each other's messages or updates. So it is actually a type of publishing tool that can be either public or private. Twitter can be easily used to follow thousands of users and listen in and enter into conversations conducted among multiple users anytime and at any point. The real magic of Twitter is that you can find real-time information that matters to you.

WHY JOIN TWITTER?

Twitter is a source of information, mostly valuable. You will get messages from the people you follow on your homepage, so it's rather like a personal newspaper. And the best is that the headline will always interest you, as you have chosen to follow that person! You not only get the latest news, but also learn more about interesting topics and get the latest scoop in real time.

UNDERSTANDING TWITTER TERMS

- **Tweet:** It is what you say on your Twitter account, all within 140 characters. It can be a noun as in 'tweet' or a verb as in 'tweeting!! Some people use 'twittered' or 'twittering'. Every single tweet you make has a permalink, which means that there is now something that can be linked to it. This is what makes Twitter different from other chat systems. This tweet of yours is now public and is easily searchable.
- **Twoosh:** If you have the knack of posting a tweet in exactly 140 characters, then it is a twoosh. It is a real skill to post a twoosh.
- **Tweeple:** The people who are on Twitter are simply Tweeple!
- **Tweetup :** It is when Tweeple meet in person.
- **Followers and Following:** There is a clear-cut distinction between a 'follower' and a 'friend'. People who follow you on Twitter do not give you permission to follow them neither do the people you follow have to follow you. There is nothing reciprocal about the relationship in Twitter, unlike other social network site, like Facebook, where if I am your friend, you are mine and we can read all about each others messages and posts. You can also follow other Twitter community members' posts, either by navigating directly to the Twitter site, subscribing to that particular Twitter RSS feed, or getting Twitter posts sent to your mobile device or e-mail inbox.
- **@replies :** This is used to reply to someone in Twitter. Just hit the reply arrow in your client or

on the web, and the client will insert the users name with an @ sign. It will also indicate which tweet you were replying to, to make things easier and clearer. This is especially helpful to reply to specific tweets as it makes the conversation easier to follow later. This @replies setting is actually the first setting you should change when you sign up for Twitter. You should set it to show replies from anyone rather than just the replies from people you follow, or then you may end up missing a lot of the conversation.

- **Retweet or RT** : If you like a tweet, you can 'retweet' it, that is you are resending to your followers. Usually, the RT will include credit to original tweeter, for example, RT @BarackObama, followed by the tweet. Several Twitter clients have a 'retweet' button to make the task easier for you.
- **Twitter #Hashcodes or Hashtag** : This is the # symbol used to mark keywords or topics in a tweet. It is an informal way to 'tag' something to a category or categories.
- **Tiny URLs** : These are shrunken URLs, so that they will fit into your tweets. Most Twitter clients shrink URLs.
- **TwitPic** : This is a service which allows the sharing of pictures on Twitter.
- **Direct Messages** : These are private tweets between two people. Here, you can only DM people who follow you.
- **Nudge**: This allows you to send a note to a twitterer encouraging them to tweet more frequently. You can only nudge people who are tweeting from a mobile phone.
- **Timeline** : The messages that you receive from others whom you follow will show up in a readable stream on your homepage timeline. You will have a new page of information to read each time you log in, once you have a few followers.
- **Top Tweets** : These are popular tweets that have caught the attention of other people on Twitter. It is simple to use Top Tweets to quickly find the updates that other users are finding interesting , and helpful at this very moment!

There are currently over 2,000 Twitter applications to help users sort through all their tweets. Some are Twitturly.com, which tracks the most popular URLs (or Web links) being shared across Twitter, Tweetdeck and Twhirl, which help you manage and organize your tweets.

HOW TO START TWEETING

1. Sign up for a Twitter account.
2. Pick a Twitter client and set it to notify you as per your preference.
3. Choose about 20 people you would like to follow. Try to make it a good mix and don't just follow celebrities or news sites. Choose people whom you find interesting, like businesses you love, people you know, celebrities, or news sources you read. You can easily find interesting people to follow, by seeing who those you know or admire are following. Keep looking for other interesting people to follow. You can always unfollow people.
4. **Take Twitter with you**: The beauty of Twitter is that it is portable. You can link up your Twitter account to your mobile phone or download a Twitter application to begin reading tweets on the go. You will enable to get traffic updates while commuting, the latest scores on a game and so on. Twitter provides endless possibilities.
5. **Build your tweet**: Start to twitter by using other people's tweets by reacting and replying. Retweet messages which you like or reply with your reaction to a Tweet. New users will realize that others are more likely to find your messages if they are retweets or replies.
6. **Be fancy**: Once you become familiar with Twitter, explore its advanced features and include photos or videos in your Tweets, or consider connecting your Twitter account to your blog,

Facebook, or website .

7. Find friends on Twitter : Twitter has a tool that searches your email address book to find the Twitter accounts on your list of people you email frequently. This also makes it easy for the people you email to find you on Twitter, provided that you have 'opted in' to be searchable by your email address. Your friends who have your address in their address book will see your Twitter profile in their own search results. Until a user has specifically chosen to be found by email address, his or her corresponding Twitter username will not show up in anyone else's address book searches. You can make yourself available on Twitter to people who know you by your phone number. This can be done through the Settings page , clicking on the Mobile tab and check the box, 'Let others find me by my phone number' box.

WHY USE TWITTER?

After knowing about Twitter, let us see why people want to join Twitter. What is about it, that draws more and more people to it every day? Let us remember that Twitter first and foremost has a lot of personal uses. But it can be used to add value to your work life! It can even provide the much needed break you need, depending on how you will like to use it. And of course, Twitter is gaining popularity among celebrities as a way to reach fans, get new projects and so on! On the other hand, Twitter can be effectively used for self-promotion and marketing. This involves active user engagement.

- **A way to microblog:** Twitter started out as a microblogging site and this still is one of its first uses. It is so simple and easy to post a quick tweet and tell everyone what you are doing or what is the latest update in your life, or just how you are feeling! It's a great way to connect your friends and families to your daily life. The 140 character limit of Twitter is actually a liberating experience. No need to slog over a post. The tweet is over in a matter of minutes, with just the basic facts. Twitter has actually scaled down the blogging platform so that a link to a news item and a few words of opinion are done in the shortest of time and also provide information.
- **Easier Group gatherings :** Twitter is actually nothing but a way to send a SMS on a larger platform. Its like text messaging combined with a conference call, so that it makes a group gatherings easier. It simplifies the way that a group can meet up, whether for pleasure or business!
- **Keeping abreast with the news:** Twitter is an excellent way to keep track of news, as almost everyone has adopted Twitter as a way to communicate, right from newspapers to TV news channels, radio channels and cable network, everyone is one Twitter. So, you are never far away from the latest happening in the world! It is a fact that some technically related news is broken exclusively over Twitter.
- **Quick fixes:** Have a question you need the answer to urgently? Just post it in Twitter, and the more friends or followers you have, the better answers you will get. Rather, people are found to be eager to answer questions on Twitter.
- **Job hunting :** Just tweet that you are looking for employment and you may find that dream opening! Often, many companies have started to post their job openings on Twitter. So take advantage of the employment power of Twitter!
- **Latest updates:** Get the latest news about books, movies, café's, restaurant, shops, just about anything. You can get numerous opinions on all of these and more. Just ask for it on Twitter, and see the response flow in. You can then decide whether it is really worth while to

splurge on that movie ticket!! Even businesses can use Twitter as a means to inform event participants and latest event happenings/changes. This is a simple, effective and hassle-free way of disseminating information, especially when there are no means to set up a direct mobile link between the participants and you.

- **Make friends.** Twitter is after all a social network. It allows you to connect with people outside of your usual circle. You can add followers you find interesting. And you never know, a Twitter acquaintance can become a lifelong pal.
- **Gameplay :** Gaming activity on Twitter is fast becoming popular. There are several third part games that allow interaction with Twitter accounts, like Spymaster.
- **Business networking.** Twitter makes it easy to meet new people and bring people together. The strength of Twitter lies in its networking, that is casual and informal and which sets the tone.
- **Customer notification:** You can set up a Twitter feed with the sole purpose of notifying customers when you bring in new products. Your customers can subscribe through mobile or RSS for instant notification. In addition, Twitter can also be used to provide mini-updates for one-on-one clients.
- **Find potential customers :** Twitter has the ability to help you find potential customers or clients. You can simply type keywords related to your product on Twitter Search and then follow users. Then, start to tweet about topics similar to your product and then you can close in on prospects away from public channels by using direct messages or offline communications. This however requires discretion and skill.

Apart from these, you can vent your rage and nagger through tweets; you can tell your local political what you think of him through a tweet; you can even turn the tide in political events by tweeting on the issue.

Twitter is not for everyone, but to know why everyone is singing its praises, do try it out, and you will be hooked!