

Using Twitter to Join the Conversation

Millions of Internet users have flocked to **Twitter**, a messaging application that has become the rage among the technorati, attracting more than 12 million registered users to date. Top tech industry analysts, PR and marketing pros, editors and writers, social media influencers and corporate executives can be found at all hours of the day “tweeting” their thoughts or providing links to sites that deliver critical information.

Many communications professionals see the growing community of influencers congregating on Twitter as a gold mine of valuable contacts. But that is where the potential problem begins. If it is a gold mine, it is one that must be mined carefully. Don't view Twitter as simply another channel through which you can pitch editors and other influencers. Instead, view it as a means to establish relationships with those who, in the long run, could help you and your clients.

Here are six tips on how to get involved with Twitter and other microblogging services to create meaningful relationships with key influencers:

1. First, get in the game: The first thing you need to do is to sign up and participate. This is an extremely simple process. Given Twitter's popularity, it should be your first stop. Also consider signing up with

FriendFeed, Identi.ca and several others. A simple **Google** search on the term “Twitter” will turn up thousands of articles that will likely cover many of the competing services worth investigating.

2. Choose your friends: Services like Twitter are of little value unless you find the right people to follow. Once you find and start following people with interests similar to yours, and once you start posting your own thoughts for others to see, you will begin to attract your own followers. When you find a few valuable Twitter friends, you can then review their lists and find others to follow.

3. Listen closely: Sit back for a while and follow conversations. Learn what interests the people you are following. There are tools also that allow you to plug in a search term and see what is being said about a company or a topic. These search tools can also help you find the right people to follow.

4. Time to start talking: Once you feel comfortable, enter the conversation. Respond to topics and post your own thoughts and ideas. If you see an interesting article, post a link to it. Closely follow which posts seem to generate the most interest, and then post more of

the same. At some point, one of your followers may send you a direct message looking for further details on something you posted. Thus, the conversation builds.

5. To pitch or not to pitch: Having established Twitter relationships with key influencers, the next question is: Do you actually pitch them on Twitter? In most cases, the answer is no—unless, of course, you have established relationships through direct messaging, and you feel the target of your pitch will be comfortable receiving it. Many influencers on Twitter bristle at direct pitches, though, so it is best to be careful. That said, the information you gain on Twitter should help you with your pitches moving forward, be they via e-mail or telephone.

You can, however, post client news, although it is strongly recommended that you do not spam. Many PR/social media professionals are avid Twitter users and, when they post news from a client, they clearly label it as such. In addition, numerous companies have Twitter accounts that they use for various reasons, including developing stronger relationships with customers or distributing news.

6. Improve your writing skills: Twitter's 140-character limit per



post might seem imposing, but it eventually becomes a great way to improve your ability to tell a story concisely. Being able to communicate a message within these confines will help you to become a more succinct writer when developing pitches and other communiqués. There are even several Twitter users who have taken to writing 140-character news releases, and they are still able to effectively communicate a story.

To sum up, the Internet has put a new level of communications tools in the hands of PR professionals. If used properly, these tools can give you and your clients a major advantage. If used poorly, they could end up hurting you and your clients. Make sure you have a game plan in place before running on to the Twitter field. **PRN**

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