

Getting Started with Twitter

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Getting Started on Twitter

To Tweet or not to Tweet, that is the question—a million dollar one at that! If you're a nonprofit organization, you should at least explore Twitter, open an account, find some people to follow, and listen. Get a feel for what it's about; how it could help you, your company, and your patients; and how you might ultimately end up using it.

The rapid growth, the media hype, the general buzz, and the sheer amount of information to be gleaned from Twitter demands you at least check it out. If nothing else, you might find Twitter to be a wonderful information resource. Tweepers are very generous with information sharing; it's like having hundreds of research assistants out there finding the latest information for you.

Account Setup

Setting Up a Basic Account

- Decide on a few possible Twitter IDs, as your first choice might not be available. Make sure your choices reflect yourself personally or your company—if you plan to use it for business. It's not uncommon for the CEO to have her/his own ID (employees, too!) and the company to have one.
- Have a photo ready for your Avatar. It's best to use an actual photo of you, your logo, or something related to your brand/company. Many Tweepers prefer to see a photo vs. icons or the default Avatar.
- Watch the video "How to Setup a Twitter Account" before you start. It shows you everything related to setting up Twitter, including completing your profile.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIfipDumtCo>

Customizing Your Twitter Page

Customized Twitter pages are as varied as the individuals creating them. Here are some guides to help you, as well as some free Twitter backgrounds:

- VIDEO: How to Create a Custom Twitter Background in Minutes (basic templates, but nicer than the default Twitter background)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJzUzr6WZnM>
- PAGE: 7 Free Twitter Backgrounds to Download and Customize—includes an instructional video on how to customize these free backgrounds (TwiTip)
<http://www.twitip.com/7-free-twitter-backgrounds-to-download-and-customize/>
- A few additional resources:
 - Make a Good Impression with a Custom Twitter Background (TwiTip)
<http://www.twitip.com/custom-twitter-backgrounds/>
 - Custom Twitter Backgrounds: Tips for Better Readability ("A Total Geek's Guide" by TwiTip) <http://www.twitip.com/custom-twitter-backgrounds-tips-for-better-readability/>
 - www.freetwitterdesigner.com

A Bit of Twittiquette

- Be polite, respond when people ask you questions or mention your name
- Thank someone when they retweet (RT) you, preferably in a direct message (this may be tough if you're someone like @Mashable)
- When you retweet, indicate it's a retweet by using "RT" before the message, and credit the original author e.g. RT: @averyh [insert the message being retweeted here]
- Don't change retweets unless the original message doesn't fit within the 140 character limit
- Don't keep tweeting the same message over and over and over again

- Use a custom avatar (the little icon on your profile page) instead of Twitter's default avatar
- Respond promptly to replies and direct messages (TweetDeck makes this easy)
- Watch your mouth (i.e. don't use foul language)
- Don't pretend to be someone else

Twitter Terminology

Below are some of the words that you'll encounter in the Twitterverse (everything to do with Twitter). A long list of Twitter-related words is available at www.twittonary.com (of course).

- **@ Replies:** used to reply to another person's Tweet or to send a public message to someone (vs. a direct message)
- **Direct Message (DM):** a private message sent between two followers
- **Failwhale:** the whale logo that appears whenever the Twitter servers crash
- **Followers:** people who follow your updates
- **Hash tag (#):** denotes a topic that various Tweeters are following, for example #WIC will show you Tweets for Women in Consulting
- **Retweet (RT):** forwarding another person's Tweet to your followers, indicated by an RT just before the original Tweet
- **Tweeps/Tweeples:** used to address all of your followers at once; also a reference to a group of people on Twitter
- **Tweeter:** anyone who Tweets (uses Twitter)
- **Tweeterbox:** anyone who Tweets too much
- **Tweets:** 140-character messages that you post on Twitter
- **Twitterati:** the big Tweeters, typically with 30,000 or more followers
- **Tweeting/Twittering:** to send a Twitter message
- **Twittiquette:** the dos and don'ts of Twitter (this one wasn't on twittonary.com, amazingly)

A Few Twips

- **Don't auto follow**
- **Be authentic, be human, be interesting**
- **Use Twitter to communicate, not to sell**
- **Don't stress—it's just a tool**
- **Provide value**
- **Remember: Twitter is public;** don't publish anything you don't want everyone knowing about (those are usually the Tweets that will spread like wild fire)
- **It's okay not to follow everyone who follows you.** Follow the people you find interesting, who share similar interests, who Tweet things you find of value. Reasons not to follow someone:
 - Provides no picture, bio, and/or URL for you to learn more about them
 - Tweets too much (20, 40, or more Tweets in 24 hours)
 - Tweets too little (hasn't Tweeted in months)
 - Actual name is obviously fictitious or SPAM-like
 - Uses foul language
 - Is impolite, rude, or plain mean
 - Always tries to sell something or pushing their own product, company, blog, or service and never anything else

- **Choose an application to manage your incoming and outgoing Tweets.** This is easier said than done, given the plethora of available applications. Here are my personal favorites:
 - Desktop: TweetDeck (<http://tweetdeck.com/beta/>)
 - Desktop: Mixero (<http://www.readwriteweb.com/archives/mixero.php>) is supposed to be “pretty awesome,” from all that I’ve read, but it’s in private beta right now
 - Mobile: Tweetie for the iPhone (<http://www.atebits.com/tweetie-iphone/>)
 - Mobile: Fring for other mobile phones (<http://www.fring.com/>) (haven’t tried myself)
 - Web page: TBUZZ (<http://tbuzz.arc90.com/>) a great tool for Tweeting about a page without leaving it

Additional Reading

Many of the articles that are listed here were gleaned from my social networks on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter—a lot from Twitter. If nothing else, social networks are great for sharing information.

- Nine Twitter Tips for Business (WIC Blog) <http://blog.womeninconsulting.org/running-a-consulting-business/nine-twitter-tips-for-business/>
- “Seven Rules for Establishing a Corporate Presence on Twitter” Plus Two (WIC Blog) <http://blog.womeninconsulting.org/running-a-consulting-business/seven-rules-for-establishing-a-corporate-presence-on-twitter-plus-two/>
- Getting Onboard the Twitter Train (WIC Blog) <http://blog.womeninconsulting.org/consulting-learning-and-development/getting-on-board-the-twitter-train/>
- Twitter: Next Steps (WIC Blog) <http://blog.womeninconsulting.org/running-a-consulting-business/twitter-next-steps/>
- Twitter: Three Months in and Loving It (WIC Blog) <http://blog.womeninconsulting.org/running-a-consulting-business/twitter-three-months-in-and-loving-it/>
- 11 Ways to Shorten and Lengthen a Tweet (TwiTips) <http://dailytwitips.com/11-ways-shorten-lengthen-tweet/>
- 135 Ways to Tweet, What to Tweet, How to Tweet (Book Marketing) <http://www.bookmarket.com/50WaystoTweet.htm>
- The Ultimate Guide for Everything Twitter (Web Designer Depot) <http://www.webdesignerdepot.com/2009/03/the-ultimate-guide-for-everything-twitter/>
- Twitter Security Do’s and Don’ts (TwiTip) <http://www.twitip.com/twitter-security-dos-and-donts/>
- Team Tweeting with CoTweet (Marty Collins) <http://www.marty-collins.com/team-tweeting-with-cotweet/>