



Using Twitter to Become Part of the Conversation

How Twitter can become a Key Element of your Communications Effort

Not a day goes by without hearing the terms social media, blogging, micro-blogging, Twitter, FriendFeed, etc. The question is, how do these services apply to public relations and can they be used to help you improve program execution and results? More important, how can they be used properly without getting burned? Millions have flocked to Twitter, a messaging application that has become the rage among the technorati, attracting more than 12 million registered users so far. Top technology industry analysts, PR and marketing pros, editors and writers, the big names influencing social media, corporate executives, community managers and others can be found at all hours of the day tweeting their thoughts and ideas or providing links to sites delivering critical information.

Many public relations and communications professionals see the growing community of editors, analysts and influencers congregating on Twitter as a “goldmine” of potentially useful contacts. But that is where the potential problem begins. If it is a goldmine, it is one that has to be mined appropriately and 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 “micro-blogging” services, and what practices to avoid if you want to create meaningful relationships with key influencers who may be receptive to hearing and writing about your clients’ products and services:

1. First, get in the game.

The first thing you need to do is to sign up to participate. This is an extremely simple process. Given Twitter’s popularity, it should be your first stop. However, 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 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 people with interests similar to yours to follow, and once you start posting your own thoughts for other to see, you will start attracting your own followers. When you find a few valuable Twitter friends, you can then review their lists and find others to follow. You will quickly have a solid list.

3. Listen closely.

Sit back for awhile and follow the conversations. See what is being said about specific industries and even specific companies or products. You may even read things about your company or a client. Learn what interests the people you are following. In addition, there are tools 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, you can then enter the conversation. Respond to topics and post your own topics, thoughts or ideas. If you see an interesting article, post a link to it. Closely follow which of your posts seem to generate the most interest and post more of the same. At some point, one of your followers or someone you are following may send a direct message to you asking you a specific question or looking for further details on something you posted. Also, interesting and provocative posts usually attract more Twitter followers.

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? 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 who are on Twitter would bristle at direct pitches, so it is best to be careful. However, the information you gain on Twitter should help you with your pitches moving forward, be they via email, telephone call or other method.

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

6. Improve your writing skills.

Twitter's 140-character limit per post might seem imposing at first. However, it eventually becomes a great way to improve your ability to tell a story in a few words. Being able to make a clear point or communicate a message in 140 characters or less on Twitter should help you to become a more succinct and better writer when it comes to developing pitches and other communiqués. There are several Twitter users who have taken to writing 140-character news releases and they have been able to effectively communicate a story.

To sum up, technology and the internet have put a new level of communications tools in the hands of PR professionals. Used properly, these tools can give you and your clients a major advantage. 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.

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