

Unit 8

Using Twitter for Business

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Open a Twitter account for business purposes and personalise their profile
- ✓ Understand the basics of Twitter terminology
- ✓ Find people to follow and encourage other Twitter users to follow them

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Twitter has become one of the primary platforms businesses now turn to for their most engaging and impactful inbound marketing campaigns. The idea being that rather than going for the hard-sell, businesses use platforms like Twitter to provide their audiences with helpful, educational or often just entertaining content and gradually build relationships.

All of which results in their products and services effectively selling themselves – what’s often referred to as the art of ‘selling without selling’.

Irrespective of the audience or demographic you’re targeting, you’ll find Twitter one of the most effective and accessible social networks for your business. In the following sections, we’ll taking a close look at how and why Twitter has become such an important platform for companies of all shapes and sizes worldwide.

The Basics of Twitter

If you’re completely new to the whole thing, Twitter is essentially a communication tool that enables people to interact by way of short and concise messages. The limit of 140 characters per message (or reply) on Twitter provides little scope for going into detail, but also makes it much easier to create punchy and impactful messages.

Originally, this 140-character limit was imposed to allow Twitter to be used with old-fashioned mobile phones and feature phones with smaller screens. It’s just that the format became so popular that they decided to stick with it ever since.

In any case, it’s surprising just how much important and insightful information you can fit into a 140-character ‘Tweet’ with a little creativity.

Essential Twitter Terminology

Anyone looking to use Twitter for business purposes will need to build at least a basic knowledge of key Twitter terminology, which includes the following terms and references:

- **Follow** – The act of subscribing to another person’s update on Twitter, which will subsequently appear on your feed.
- **Follow Back** – When you start following someone who recently started following you.
- **Twitter Handle** – This refers to your username on Twitter which will be seen by other platform users.
- **Tweet** – Messages of no more than 140 characters, which can be sent directly to specific Twitter users or posted publicly.
- **Retweet** – This refers to republishing a tweet from someone else on the platform, adding it to your tweet a stream and effectively quoting/sharing their tweet.

- **Followers** – Somebody who has subscribed to your updates and is therefore following you.
- **Twitter Stream** – A chronological list of your tweets, which are automatically added to your Twitter stream and can be viewed by other people.
- **@Reply** – Using the @ symbol before the name of another Twitter at the beginning of your tweet directs your public message at the user in question.
- **Hashtag** – A way of tagging tweets in accordance with specific themes or subjects – examples of which could include #Olympics, #ManchesterUnited or #Hiking
- **Direct Message** – Also commonly referred to simply as a DM, which involves sending a private message on Twitter to another user.

These are the basics that should help you get acquainted with how Twitter works, after which you'll pick up additional useful terminology along the way.

How Can Twitter Help Your Business?



Twitter is one of the most popular marketing and promotional platforms on the web right now, used primarily for customer relationship establishment and management.

All major social platforms provide businesses with the opportunity to network on an extraordinary scale, generating leads and interacting with customers in a way that would otherwise be impossible.

Some of the main reasons businesses worldwide invest heavily in their presences on Twitter include the following:

1. Announcing the launch of new products and services
2. Providing customer support and communicating with clients
3. Monitoring their reputation and mentions of their brand
4. Announcing and marketing upcoming events

5. Encouraging customers to comment and leave feedback
6. Reaching out to new audiences and influencers
7. Generating interest in specific products and services
8. Conducting polls, surveys and other types of market research

Used strategically, Twitter can be just about anything you want it to be. From real-time customer support to major announcements and direct product/service marketing, Twitter is considered by many to be the ultimate business tool.

Setting Up Your Twitter Profile

One of the most appealing aspects of Twitter is how easy it is to use, with absolutely no specialist knowledge or experience required. All of which becomes evident upon first setting up your account, for which a simplified tutorial is provided by Twitter itself.

- To get started, simply head over to <http://Twitter.com>, click the “**Sign Up**” button and follow the instructions to get your account up and running.

You’ll have the option of choosing between a Company Account and a Personal Account – both of which can technically be used for business purposes. The difference being that while your Company Account represents your business as a whole, your Personal Account is more about you as an individual.

If looking to get the best out of Twitter, it can be useful to set up both – one account to represent your business and another you run independently as an employee/owner/manager of the company.

Choosing a Twitter Handle

It’s important to remember that the Twitter handle you choose (i.e. your username) will be seen by *everyone* who comes across you on Twitter. This also means it will play a role in the first impression others get of your business, or you personally if it’s a personal account.

A few helpful guidelines for assigning an appropriate Twitter handle:

- Choose a Twitter handle that is as close to the actual name of your business as possible
- Don’t add numbers or special characters to your Twitter handle unless absolutely necessary
- Avoid the temptation to be too clever with your Twitter handle, which can be off-putting
- Remember that your Twitter handle is an important branding opportunity to leverage
- If you can’t use your company name, choose something that describes what you do
- Make your Twitter handle as easy as possible for your audience to type and remember

It's also worth checking ahead of time that your chosen Twitter handle isn't dangerously similar to that of another Twitter user (or several other users), which may lead to confusion and costly cases of mistaken identity.

Make your Profile Personal

Once you're technically up and running, you'll need to take the time to personalise your profile to create something that's 100% unique and a true reflection of the person or business behind it.

Your profile will currently be blank, but is ultimately where you'll share information about your business, provide your contact information, link to your company website and so on.

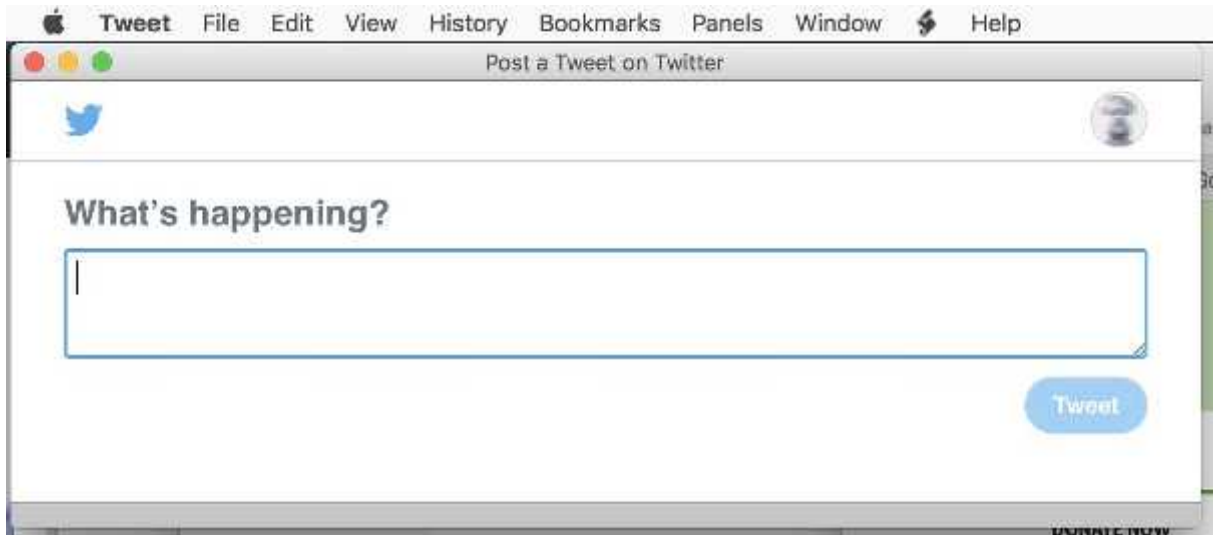
- Click the **"Edit Your Profile"** option on your profile page to get started.

Always ensure that the URL you enter when prompted points to your most important online asset, which will usually be your primary business website.

You'll also have the opportunity to script a "One Line Bio" – a virtual 'elevator pitch' that condenses who you are and what you do into a short sentence. This can be a great opportunity to generate interest in whatever it is you do, but don't make the mistake of being too cryptic.

You can then personalise your profile further by adding a profile picture, choosing from a variety of backgrounds, playing with colour themes and so on. Again, being mindful at all times to ensure that every element is an accurate and professional representation of your brand.

Time to Tweet



Setting up and activating a Twitter account is easy – knowing what to say to engage other users is the hard part. Presented with a blank canvas and the complete freedom to say anything you like, it can be difficult to know where to start.

As a general rule of thumb, it's better to say nothing at all than to say something of no value or relevance. The good news being that even if you're completely blank inspiration-wise, it's usually pretty easy to come up with something worth saying.

Examples of which may include:

1. **A simple observation** about whatever it is you are doing or thinking at the time
2. **Something you've watched** of interest with a link to the content in question
3. **An accomplishment or achievement** in relation to you or your business
4. **Questions and general information requests** to generate audience engagement
5. **Product or service information** with links to the appropriate pages
6. **Promotion of someone else's content** with a link to their post
7. **Retweeting interesting content** within your niche of business area
8. **Messages directly to other users** by adding the @ sign and their name
9. **A comment or response to a current event** or news story of interest
10. **Details on special offers** or limited time promotions where relevant

One important point to remember at this juncture – everything you publish on Twitter is public and permanent.

You can delete something you regret at a later date, but it will already have been archived, screenshotted and preserved in a variety of ways, so be careful what you say!

Following Other Twitter Users

Ultimately, Twitter is an online networking platform that's all about the people. Building a relevant and useful network on Twitter is by far the most time-consuming and challenging part of the process, which technically never ends after getting started.

Following people isn't just about subscribing to their updates – it can also be a great way of earning follow-backs and spreading the word about whatever it is you do.

A few tips and guidelines for finding people to follow when using Twitter for business purposes:

1. Use Twitter Search (<http://search.Twitter.com>) to find people publishing tweets that contain specific words and terms. If you work in sales and marketing, you could search for Twitter users tweeting about “digital marketing” or “search engine optimisation” and find new people to follow.
2. Once you start attracting followers yourself, it can be useful to start following the people your followers are following. Chances are that given the fact that they follow you, the other people they are following will have at least *some* relevance to your business.
3. Follow as many relevant businesses as you possibly can within your particular niche, as their feeds could be extremely useful sources of information and inspiration. You need to see how your competitors are performing on Twitter, if you're to subsequently take the lead and hold onto it.
4. Don't make the mistake of following as many other *generic* Twitter users as you possibly can, simply for the sake of it. Doing so will simply result in your feed becoming chaotic and congested with messages and information of little to no interest to you.
5. Keep an eye on ratios, with regard to how many people you are following and how many are following you in return. For example, if you are following 3,000 people yet only 20 of these have so far followed you back, it doesn't make you an appealing prospect in the eyes of other Twitter users.

Above all else, don't fall into the trap of attempting to rush things right off the bat. It takes time and effort to build a solid network of contacts on Twitter, so be patient and it'll eventually pay off.

Encouraging Twitter Users to Follow You

Keeping tabs on what other people are doing and saying is all well and good, but your success on Twitter will ultimately be determined by how many people tune into *your* feed. As you can't force anyone to follow you, it's a case of giving your target audience a reason to check you out and subscribe.

Here's how to present yourself as an appealing prospect and encourage other Twitter users to follow you:

1. Only ever post tweets that are relevant, interesting and have at least *some* kind of identifiable value. Quality counts for way more than quantity, so only post when you have something interesting to say.
2. Keep things in context and make sure that the posts you publish will be of interest to your intended target audience. Don't make the mistake of casting your net too widely, rather than focusing your efforts on those directly within your niche.
3. Polls, questions and competitions can be a great way of bringing new followers on board, as once they've taken part, they'll want to keep an eye on you to find out the result.
4. Make the effort to interact with the people you follow who haven't yet followed you back. Engagement holds the key to successfully building a community on Twitter, even if the conversation seems a little one-sided at first.
5. Post on a regular basis as consistently as possible, avoiding extended periods of silence at all costs. If you want people to take you seriously, you need to inform/educate/entertain them *and* continuously remind them that you exist.

Taking a look at things in reverse can help – what would encourage you to subscribe to someone else's updates? What kind of information what they need to be sharing for you to take an interest in what they have to say?

More importantly, what can *you* do to improve on what your closest competitors are already doing?

Twitter as a Marketing Platform



Twitter can be used to achieve a wide variety of marketing goals and objectives, often with very little required by way of initial capital investment. Mastering the basics of Twitter

means having the opportunity to take full control of your social media marketing, without the need to involve outside help.

Just a few popular uses for Twitter as a marketing platform include the following:

1. Driving traffic to your primary website

The URL of your main website is featured on your profile page, but you can also post as many links to your product pages, landing pages and general company information pages as you like. All of which increases the likelihood of Twitter users clicking through and visiting your main website.

2. Monitoring for mentions of your brand

Along with using the Twitter Search tool (<http://search.Twitter.com>) to keep an eye on what people are saying about your brand, your niche, your competitors and so on, you can also quickly and easily set up an RSS feed to keep tabs on related activity. Where there's someone talking about products, services or businesses like yours, why not reach out to them?

3. Display testimonials prominently

There's a 'star' at the side of the tweets that appear in your Twitter stream, which can be used to add them to your Favourites Tab. You can then share links to your favourites page, where you can showcase all the positive and encouraging things people have said about your business, your products, your services or you as a person using the URL <http://Twitter.com/USERNAME/favorites>.

4. Tease new products and services

Twitter isn't the place to resort to the hard-sell, but can nonetheless be great for generating a buzz about new products and services prior to their introduction. Teasers are useful for nurturing interest and engagement, as are special offers and promotional codes for those who take advantage early. Or better yet, promotional codes and special offers exclusive to those who follow you.

5. Establish your authority in your niche

The more useful information you provide about your business and your sector on a regular basis, the more likely you are to be recognised as a thought leader. Perhaps even an influencer, after which everything you say will carry so much more weight than it did previously. This is where an investment in quality posting practices can pay dividends.

Just a few potential uses of Twitter for marketing purposes, which barely scratch the surface of what this remarkable platform is capable of.

Public Relations Applications for Twitter Users



It's the social aspect of Twitter that makes it so useful as a public relations platform. Pretty much anything you can do offline to boost your brand image and generate positive PR is something you can do on Twitter, though on a much larger scale and for an exponentially lower price.

Here are just a few ways Twitter can be used to harness the power of positive PR:

1. Nurture relationships with influential people

'Influential people' incorporates anyone who has at least some level of influence over your target audience and the public in general. Media outlets, established bloggers, reporters, influencers and so on – all worth taking the time to build positive relationships with for mutual benefit.

2. Opportunities for editorial posts

The moment an interesting or important story breaks of any kind is the moment you should be sharing your thoughts and opinions with your target audience. Not several hours, days or weeks down the line when it is yesterday's news – getting in on the action immediately is a great way of attracting attention and establishing your authority.

3. Use direct messaging instead of an e-mail

Research has shown that reporters, journalists, bloggers and so on are all significantly more likely to read and respond to a DM on Twitter than to an e-mail. Primarily for the reason that they are connected to their Twitter accounts 24/7 and it takes seconds to read a concise Twitter post, as opposed to a long and unnecessarily detailed e-mail.

4. Conduct reputation management activities

Keeping an eye out for any and every mention of your brand is essential, which is something Twitter makes comparatively easy. Get into the habit of using the Twitter Search tool (<http://search.Twitter.com>) to keep an eye on what people are saying about your brand and never pass up the opportunity to respond or reach out where appropriate.

5. Become part of your extended community

You cannot and will not earn the trust and respect of your target audience while the business-customer barrier exists. Becoming part of the community means taking the time to interact and engage with your target audience consistently and in a meaningful way, ensuring you are part of the conversation at all times.

Technically speaking, Twitter makes it relatively simple to keep an eye on your reputation and address issues where they occur. That is, just as long as you are willing to invest the necessary time and effort in your reputation management activities.

Twitter as a Key Customer Service Tool

Once considered an optional extra in customer service stakes, Twitter is now an absolute *must* as part of a customer excellence strategy. Now more than ever, consumers worldwide expect to be able to contact the brands they do business with near-instantaneously via Twitter – your job being to ensure you respond appropriately and as quickly as possible.

Here are just a few ways your customer service strategy can be enhanced through Twitter:

1. Respond to indirect comments and queries

It's not necessary to wait for someone to contact you directly to issue a response. Each time you come across any kind of comment, complaint or query that concerns your brand on Twitter, it's essential to provide a helpful and meaningful response at the earliest possible juncture.

2. Embrace the power of negative feedback

Rather than simply ignoring negative comments and criticisms, it's far better to address them publicly and show the world how seriously you take this kind of feedback. Depending on how you handle it, negative feedback on Twitter can be turned into a bigger positive for your reputation than a comment that was positive in the first place.

3. Share information on downtime and other issues

If you are struggling to keep up with demand or your customer service department will be unavailable for a period of time, you can use Twitter to inform your customers in advance. You can also publish answers to frequently asked questions to help as many customers as possible find the answers they need, without having to contact you directly.

4. Direct message new and important customers

There's nothing like a little recognition to nurture loyalty and drive sales. When someone does business with your brand for the first time or is identified as a regular customer, why not send them a direct message to thank them personally and perhaps include an exclusive discount code?

5. Request feedback and recommendations

The key to exceeding the expectations of every customer means listening to feedback and acting on customer recommendations. Rather than taking a passive approach to the whole thing, it's far better to proactively request feedback and recommendations from new and existing customers alike – solid gold insights, 100% free of charge.

Ultimately, it's worth remembering that embracing Twitter as a customer service platform can also significantly lighten the load for your customer service representatives. It's a faster, easier and more convenient approach to customer service than traditional platforms, which for the most part is also 100% free to use.

Track your Performance, Analyse and Optimise

Contrary to popular belief, there's no such thing as a 'flawless' social media campaign of any kind. Irrespective of how successful your foray into Twitter is, there's always room for improvement.

This is why it is important to continuously keep an eye on how your campaign is performing, measured in accordance with your predetermined goals and objectives.

As you progress, you'll encounter a variety of metrics that provide a good indication as to how you are performing. Examples of which include the following:

- **Reach.** Refers to your raw distribution power, as in how many people you are able to reach (or have reached) with your tweets.
- **Response rate.** This is worked out by way of the average number of replies/responses you receive when posting a tweet.
- **Retweets.** The number of times your posts (or any specific post) has been Retweeted by other people.
- **Likes.** An indication of how many people approve of and/or agree with your post and have clicked the 'Like' button accordingly.
- **Followers.** Your current follower-count, which ideally should be growing continuously and at a consistent rate.

By keeping track of these and other metrics over time, you'll soon reach a point where you can identify fluctuations in your performance and make adjustments accordingly.