

USING TWITTER TO HELP YOUR BUSINESS

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Twitter is one of the Big Five social-media platforms, alongside Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+ and Pinterest (some might add Instagram to this list). According to Twitter, its mission is “to give everyone the power to create and share ideas and information instantly, without barriers.” A few staggering facts from Twitter:

- 241 million monthly active users.
- 500 million Tweets are sent per day.
- 76% of Twitter active users are on mobile.
- 77% of accounts are outside the U.S.
- Twitter supports 35+ languages.
- Vine (Twitter’s video platform) has more than 40 million users.

(see <https://about.twitter.com/company>, 3/7/14)

So this is some of that Big Data that everyone has been talking about!

Prior to last January, I completely discounted Twitter, considering it some mystical entity of interest only to Millennials or those people who spend all day on Facebook. I was willing to concede that it might have some application for those with a heavy B2C focus, but it certainly was not for me. It was definitely not for my business.

But then, at my company’s annual retreat, we set a strategic goal for ourselves to develop a corporate blog with the objective of establishing a thought-leadership presence for our brand. As I undertook that endeavor, it became clear that, once I launched our blog and began publishing content, I was going to need a means of distributing that content or else all my efforts would be in vain. I was already pretty comfortable with Facebook, using it every day in my personal life. And I was an inaugural LinkedIn user years ago, but I certainly was not considering it as a critical distribution platform. I was completely new to Twitter, but my technically challenged brother was using it, so I figured, “How hard could it be?”

Well, at first I was completely overwhelmed! Consuming my Twitter feed was like trying to drink from a fire hose. On the one hand, Twitter opened up a whole new world of information and discourse; working from home can sometimes feel reclusive, and now I had access to an unlimited pool of subject-matter experts on limitless subjects. My

challenge was to figure out how to select and prioritize the content I was most interested in and to find a mechanism for monitoring only that information without losing days of my life at a time.

Enter TweetDeck (or HootSuite). First, I chose four categories of topics I planned to continually monitor (which align with our business) and made public lists for each within Twitter: Marketing Strategy, Market Research, Hospital/Health System Marketing and Personal Interests (I kept this list private). Now, every time I follow someone on Twitter, I assign them to one of those four categories right then and there, right after I follow them. Using TweetDeck, which I think of as a dashboard, I display four columns, one for each list. That way, if I want to spend 15 minutes checking on what is new in Marketing Strategy that day, I can easily do so. I also have a column for my Notifications so that I can

react promptly when someone “favorites” or tweets/retweets me (in Twitter, that is called “sharing the love”). Finally, I display my Favorites column. When I come across something that I want to read later in my larger Twitter Feeds, I Favorite it, and then a couple times a month I review this column for content that I want to retweet. I try to tweet/retweet daily.

Once I got all of that set up, I could start to use Twitter to publicize my blog posts. Beyond just tweeting them out when I published them, I began to tag them with appropriate hashtags. These vary by industry. The Market Research community uses #MRX (market research) and #SMR (social-media research). Adding these hashtags to your Tweets guarantees a much larger, targeted audience. And, you can create columns in your TweetDeck to display content by hashtag. So, if you wanted to

TOOLS to TWEET

TweetDeck — customizable browser for real-time monitoring of your Twitter feed(s).

Buffer — a tool for automating message posting across several social-media platforms, allowing for automated retweeting across time zones.

HootSuite — another social-media dashboard, which allows you to schedule messages and allows monitoring of several social-media platforms at a time (not just Twitter; provides the same functionality as TweetDeck and Buffer, all in one).

Storify — a means of collecting media from many web sources, customizing the arrangement, adding your own comments and publishing the results (it has a mechanism for notifying everyone you cited: mass “love sharing,” which can generate a lot of positive activity). Check out mine from QRCA for an example of output: <http://storify.com/connect4mary/qrca-virtually>.

Paper.li — We think of it as a free online newsletter application. We have it automated to generate a paper and email it out to subscribers once a week. It gives us a place to accumulate our weekly Tweets and Retweets along with those of our favorite content creators, and it gives us a chance to both share the love and demonstrate a collection of thought leadership. Check out QRCA member Frankie Johnson’s for an example of output, @QRC. You can also find the example on Mary Aviles’ Twitter feed, @connect4mary.

have a Twitter Feed to show you everything tagged #MRX, for example, you can. This puts you in a good position to be aware of information in a very timely fashion, provided you check TweetDeck at least daily.

The other things I became aware of after I started using Twitter were Tweet Chats and following conferences that I could not attend live. Tweet Chats are live events that typically have a confer-

ence call-type format with a live Twitter component. And, by following conferences using their hashtags, I “attended” The Market Research Event, The Society for Healthcare Strategy and Market Development annual conference and the Corporate Researcher Conference, picking up a wealth of valuable information. Conversely, while attending QRCA in San Diego, several of us were live tweeting under the #QRCA2013 hash-

tag and interacting with people who were unable to attend. I made several fantastic connections with influencers and potential colleagues doing so.

While reading my Twitter feed on a regular basis, I became aware of several other great tools: Storify, Paper.li and Buffer. Storify allows me to package and publish by Twitter hashtags, so I was able to capture and add my own comments to the conference exchanges in which I participated. Paper.li allows me to collect and publish my own tweets and those from key sources that I follow on a daily or weekly basis. This becomes a free newsletter that I send out with accumulated content each week. Setup and automation are very easily managed. Buffer enables you to schedule tweets if you are of a mind to do so. If it is important to you that your content gets exposure across time zones, Buffer is a way to do that. It can also save time by allowing you to share content across other social-media platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn and Google+ simultaneously. I use this feature daily. All of these tools enable you to “share the love” among people you follow. And, in the Twittersphere, respectful reciprocity is the name of the game.

There are a couple of housekeeping items to mention:

- Take the time to choose a professional image and complete your Twitter profile. Like everything in Twitter, the verbiage is character constrained, but it is a good exercise in positioning yourself. As a general rule, I am less likely to follow you back if I cannot see or read about who you are.
- Include a link to either your website or your blog page on all of these tools. This is how you generate Google-positive traffic (traffic back to your site from external links).

And, just like that, Twitter became one of the single most valuable tools in my work life. I use it as a major component of any desk research or trend-related research that I conduct. I have made a handful of business “friends” on Twitter that I would have never met otherwise. I cannot begin to quantify the useful content that I have consumed or the impact that content has had on improving the quality of the work that I deliver to my clients. ☑

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