

A GUIDE TO

Social Media: Twitter

How to create, manage, and utilize
Twitter for your business

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Introduction to Twitter

What is Twitter all about?

Twitter was first conceived as a web-based SMS text-style social network. Founded in summer 2006 by Jack Dorsey and others at podcasting company Odeo, Twitter posed a simple question to its users: "what are you doing?"

As Twitter's popularity grew, especially from events, such as 2007's SXSWi conference, it saw increases in tweets from 400,000 tweets per quarter in 2007 to 100 million tweets per quarter in 2008 to 50 million tweets per day in 2010. Today, the social network has over 500 million active users and generates more than 340 million tweets each day.

Based on the concept of SMS texting, Twitter remains a powerful tool for communicating in real time. It's hallmarked by the casual, off-the-cuff tone most users adapt as a way to cope with its rigid 140 character limit. In late 2009 Twitter officially changed its "question" from "what are you doing?" to "what's happening?", which is generally more descriptive of users' freestyle tweets.

What is Twitter all about?

So, what benefits does Twitter hold for business users? Plenty!

1. real-time communication with customer base
2. real-time customer service communication
3. connecting with other businesses and industry leaders
4. building brand reputation as an industry expert
5. search engine optimization (SEO)

Twitter is unique as a social network, and it can sometimes be difficult for newcomers to understand interactions. As you familiarize yourself with it, here are a few things to keep in mind:

- Conversations on Twitter are casual, even for businesses! Trying to adapt a formal, traditional "business" tone will not only make it very difficult to stay within the 140 character limit - it will also make your tweets stand out as awkward.
- Sharing content is the crux of many (even most) interactions. Posting links (to your own site or other articles), photos, videos, retweeting and sharing others' content is not only encouraged, but expected.
- Courtesy on Twitter is important, and there are unspoken rules to be aware of. Basic things like saying "Thank you!" when someone retweets your content. More on this later.
- Blatant advertising or salesy-language is generally looked down upon. Rather, businesses are expected to engage in two-way conversation.
- Content is meant to be filtered, not consumed en masse. That's what hashtags and lists are for. More about these later.

Set Up

Setting up your business account

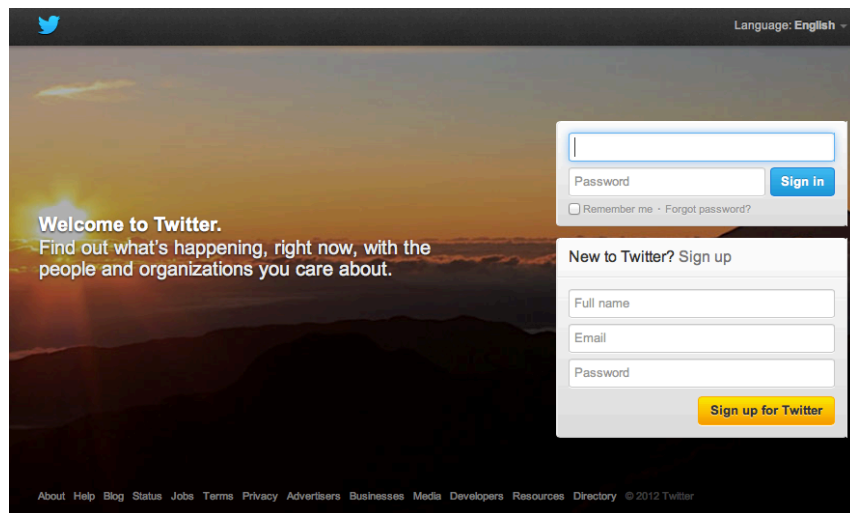
Setting up a business account

Keep in mind that social media channels often release updates that may not reflect what has been written in this guide. Please use these instructions as guidelines when setting up your accounts.

Unlike Facebook, you won't need a personal account to have a business page. Twitter doesn't differentiate between personal and professional accounts, so you'll want to edit your information as a business.

Step 1:

Go to twitter.com and fill out your business name (as your full name, e-mail, and a password you want to use, then hit the yellow "Sign up for Twitter" button.



Setting up a business account

Once you've opted to sign up for an account, you'll be brought to another page to confirm your info. Review the form to make sure everything is correct. You can change what your username will be here, or you can change it later. Your username will default to the name you put as your full name.

Join Twitter today.

Olive Engleview ✓ Name looks great.

olive.engleview@gmail.com ✓ We will email you a confirmation.

..... ✓ Password is perfect!

OliveEngleview ✓ Username is available.
You can change it later.

Suggestions: engleview · engleview · OEngleview ·

Keep me signed-in on this computer.

Tailor Twitter based on my recent website visits. [Learn more.](#)

By clicking the button, you agree to the terms below:
These Terms of Service ("Terms") govern your access to and use of the services, including our various websites, SMS, APIs, email notifications,

Printable versions:
[Terms of Service](#) · [Privacy Policy](#)

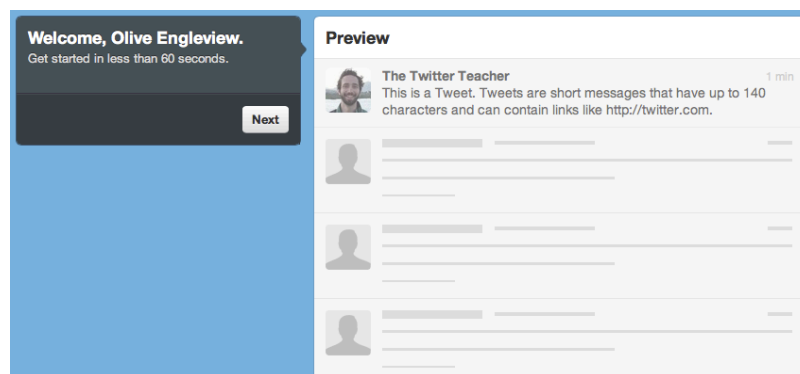
Create my account

Note: Others will be able to find you by name, username or email. Your email will not be shown publicly. You can change your privacy settings at any time.

Setting up a business account

Step 2:

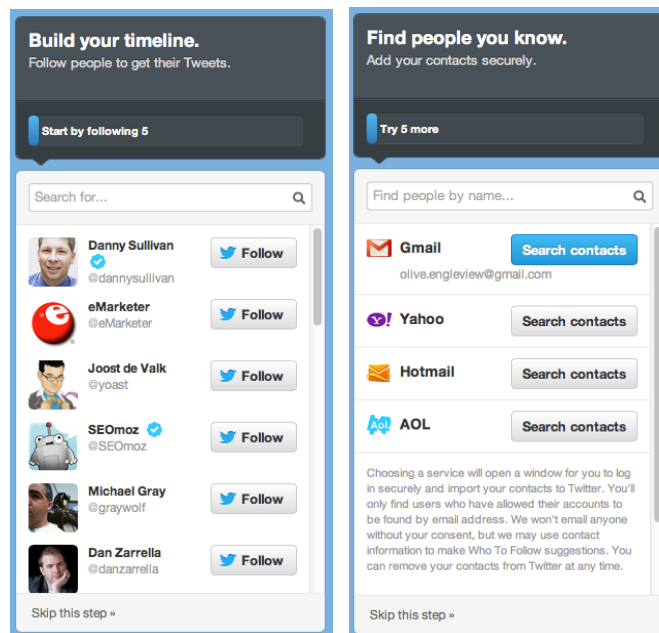
Now it's time to start connecting! After you've clicked the button to create your account, you'll be navigated to a page that will walk you through people you might want to follow.



Setting up a business account

As you're being taken through suggestions of people or businesses (and the like) that you might be interested in following, we suggest searching for companies within your industry to give you some insight into industry developments. Search for users listed in the same categories as your business. You'll have a good chance to be found by other like-minded users this way. Once you've added people and businesses to follow, you'll come to a page where you'll be able to search for contacts via your e-mail accounts (Gmail, Yahoo!, Hotmail, and AOL).

It's okay to skip these steps for now.

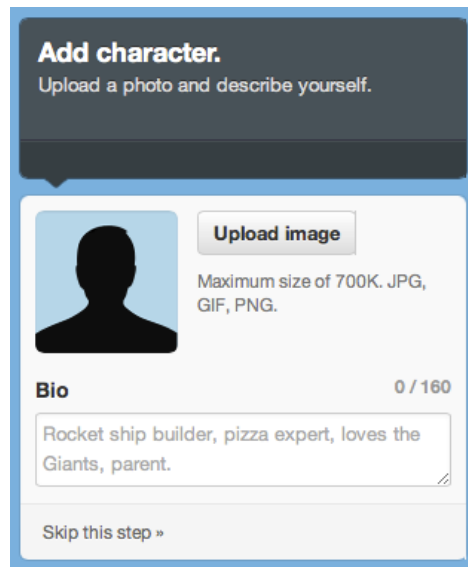


Setting up a business account

Step 3:

Now that you've built up who you're following, it's time to let everyone know a little bit about yourself.

After you've gone through the process of adding people to follow, you'll be asked to upload a profile picture and add some information about your business.



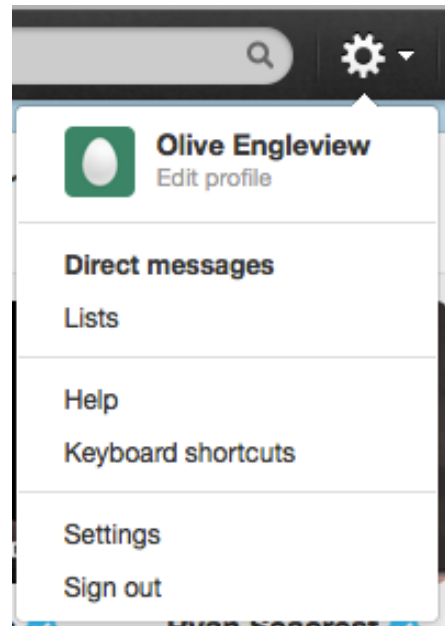
The screenshot shows a dark grey header with the text "Add character." and "Upload a photo and describe yourself." Below this is a white form area. On the left is a black silhouette placeholder for a profile picture. To its right is an "Upload image" button and text specifying "Maximum size of 700K. JPG, GIF, PNG." Below the image area is a "Bio" section with a character count of "0 / 160". A text input field contains the bio text: "Rocket ship builder, pizza expert, loves the Giants, parent." At the bottom left of the form is a "Skip this step »" link.

Setting up a business account

Step 4:

You now have a business Twitter account!

You'll be able to start tweeting about what you're up to from the home page on the side bar, or via the blue icon in the top, right-hand corner. And you'll also be able to make edits to your account settings.



Setting up a business account

Under Settings, if you go to Profile, you'll be able to edit your username and information about yourself or business. Profile is also where you can edit your bio, location, and add your website.

The screenshot shows the Twitter profile settings page for a user named 'Olive Engleview'. On the left is a navigation menu with options: Account, Password, Mobile, Email notifications, Profile (highlighted), Design, Apps, and Widgets. Below the menu is a footer with copyright information and links for About, Help, Terms, Privacy, Blog, Status, Apps, Resources, Jobs, Advertisers, Businesses, Media, and Developers. The main content area is titled 'Profile' and includes a sub-header: 'This information appears on your public profile, search results, and beyond.' The settings are organized into sections: 1. Photo: A circular profile picture of an olive with a 'Change photo' button. A note states: 'This photo is your identity on Twitter and appears with your Tweets. Need help? [Learn more.](#)' 2. Name: A text input field containing 'Olive's Gardens'. A note says: 'Enter your real name, so people you know can recognize you.' 3. Location: An empty text input field. A note asks: 'Where in the world are you?' 4. Website: A text input field containing 'http://'. A note says: 'Have a homepage or a blog? Put the address here. You can also add Twitter to your site here.' 5. Bio: A large text area for a bio. A note says: 'About yourself in fewer than 160 characters.' 6. Facebook: A button labeled 'Post your Tweets to Facebook'. A note says: 'Having trouble? [Learn more.](#)' At the bottom of the form is a blue 'Save changes' button.

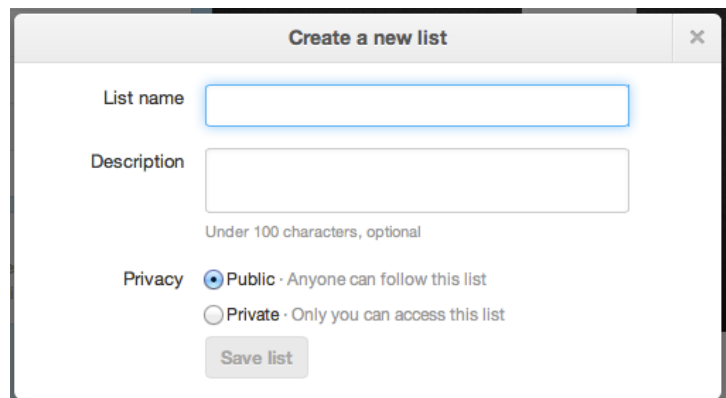
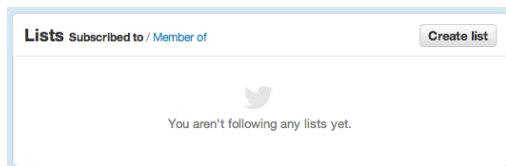
Setting up a business account

Step 5:

Now that your account has been set up, you have the option of making lists - a “curated group of Twitter users.” Lists are used for reading Tweets only.

To create a list, you’ll first go to your Lists page, which can be found under the gear icon (where you found your Settings).

Click on Create List and give your list a title and short description. You can also make your list private, or public, so anyone can subscribe.

A screenshot of the 'Create a new list' dialog box. It has a title bar with 'Create a new list' and a close button. The form contains three main sections: 'List name' with a text input field; 'Description' with a text input field and a note 'Under 100 characters, optional'; and 'Privacy' with two radio button options: 'Public · Anyone can follow this list' (which is selected) and 'Private · Only you can access this list'. At the bottom is a 'Save list' button.

Setting up a business account

To add or remove a user to your list, you do not have to be following them. Simply go to their profile, click the person icon next to Follow and select “Add or remove from lists”.



You cannot add yourself or a user who has blocked you to a list.

Congratulations!

You're all set! If you don't have a personal account and would like to set one up, you'll go through the same steps as you did for a business account to create your personal page.

Best Practices

Twitter best practices and tips

Twitter Best Practices: What can Twitter do for your business?

Before plunging into Twitter, it's important for you to understand exactly what you hope to gain from your presence there. The more intentional your interactions are on Twitter, the more successful your efforts will be. Unfocused, sporadic tweeting can look disorganized and hurt your brand.

Let's take an in-depth look at some of the benefits you can achieve through Twitter, and which ones might apply to your business.

1) Communicate with customer base in real time.

From product deals and newsletters to company or industry news, Twitter can be your outlet for real-time information. This might be particularly useful if your company's industry changes frequently, or if you're in the B2C ecommerce market and regularly have new products.

2) Instant customer service.

Companies like Comcast and Jetblue have become infamous for leveraging Twitter to provide real-time customer service. Not only does Twitter allow for instant communication between customers and brands, but it also does so in a very public setting, giving brands refreshing transparency. This is a perfect use for service companies and ecommerce.

Twitter Best Practices: What can Twitter do for your business?

3) Connect with other businesses and industry experts.

This is important for establishing your brand's industry authority, as well as for promoting brand awareness in target markets. It can also be a fantastic way to build genuine relationships with people who can advocate for your brand.

4) Build your brand's reputation as an industry authority. Many companies have turned their twitter feeds primarily into industry news feeds, gathering and syndicating relevant industry information from around the web. This, combined with dialoging with customers and experts, can make your brand the go-to source for industry information, boosting your brand's authority and awareness.

5) Search engine optimization.

As the web evolves, social links from networks like Facebook and Twitter are increasingly more important for getting high rankings in search engine results pages (SERPs). Building an authoritative network of links back to your company's website is a peripheral but notable benefit of Twitter.

Twitter Best Practices: Goal Setting

Consider the ways in which Twitter could be most beneficial to your business, then set some specific goals. A few possible goals might be:

- aiming to achieve a certain # of followers
- aiming for a certain volume of Twitter referred traffic
- finding an athlete or artist to sponsor
- boosting sales from Twitter traffic referrals
- improving customer satisfaction ratings by 15%
- author and publish guest posts on 10 industry blogs
- build relationships with at least 3 local influencers and so on.

Whatever your company's goals, be sure to set realistic, measurable expectations for your interactions on Twitter. This will help to keep your campaign consistent and successful.

Twitter Best Practices: Understanding Twitterspeak

If you're new to Twitter, the twitterstream might look like a foreign language. But not to worry! It's not nearly as difficult as it looks.

Writing in 140 characters: shortness + clarity = win. Brevity is key to communicating successfully on Twitter. This can mean abbreviating words (use only common and easily recognizable abbreviations to avoid confusion), using number symbols instead of words spelled out, and even at times resorting to text-speak (u=you, gr8=great).

Most importantly, writing on Twitter requires clarifying your message down to its core. While this can pose a challenge, it can also help you tightly hone your message, making you more attuned to your brand's key objectives. Exercise your creativity!

A note on grammar: succinctness and abbreviations are NOT synonymous with lazy grammar. Missing articles, misspellings, improper homophones; none of these go unnoticed. Tweets - especially by businesses - are expected to follow the same grammatical rules as are applied elsewhere, simply in an abbreviated setting.

Twitter Best Practices: Understanding Twitterspeak

Handle - your @username on Twitter.

Profile - your account's bio blurb, location, hyperlink and picture.

Follow/unfollow - "following" another twitter user adds that person's tweets to your twitterstream (Twitter's equivalent of a newsfeed). Likewise, when a person "follows" you, they add your tweets to their stream. Unfollowing a person removes their tweets from your stream.

Mentions - using someone's @username (i.e. handle) in a tweet indicates you're either talking to them or about them. Likewise, other users may mention you in their tweets. Mentioning others can be a way of starting up a dialogue, commenting on a topic, giving kudos, jumping in on a conversation or saying thank you. Mentions can be used individually, or in groups (as in the case of #followfriday).

Replies - a specific type of mention which responds to someone who has @username mentioned you in a tweet; reply tweets typically begin with the other person's @username.

Twitter Best Practices: Understanding Twitterspeak

Retweets - forwarding someone else's tweet to your followers. This is an excellent way to syndicate relevant content and to get in the good graces of industry experts; "retweeting" someone else's content is considered an endorsement, and original authors are often grateful you've shared their content. How many "retweets" you get can be an indicator of how engaging your tweets are.

Direct Mentions - aka "DMs", these are private messages between users who follow one another. Direct messages are private, and are only seen by the sender and recipient.

Hashtags - #hashtags (a word preceded by a # symbol) are, simply put, a way to list and organize topics. Conferences and events often have a dedicated hashtag (such as South by Southwest Interactive's #SXSWi), but hashtags can be much more esoteric as well; political memes often get turned into hashtags (e.g. Steven Colbert's #notafactualstatement, or the hashtag #muslimrage which referenced Newsweek's controversial cover photo), as do events (hurricane #sandy). Hashtags can range anywhere from mundane lists, such as #apartments or #jobs to tongue-in-cheek statements, such as #howdoyoulikemenow.

Twitter Best Practices: Getting started – profile optimization, followers lists & third party apps

Before you can really dive in to Twitter, you need to optimize your profile, seed your "following" list and organize those you follow into easily managed lists.

Optimizing your profile

Bio - Carefully craft your business' products/services and mission statement in 160 characters. Focus only on what is most important for customers to know about your organization - who, what, why, where. Twitter bios are searchable and do offer SEO benefits, so be sure to include relevant keywords.

Profile pic - Do not leave this blank. Use your company's logo, a fun facility or product shot, or some other small, easily recognized image which somehow represents your company. Use images which are easy to identify in small thumbnail form.

Location - Include the city and state of your company's location if it's relevant. For locally-based businesses, this is a must; for national product or service providers, this is less critical.

Website link - add your main website URL (or whichever landing page you want to drive traffic to) here.

Twitter Best Practices: Getting started – profile optimization, followers lists & third party apps

Finding followers

You should be able to find plenty of relevant people to follow using Twitter.com's category search and "people you should follow" features. Use these tools to create a seed list of 50-100 people, businesses and organizations that are highly relevant to your company.

As you interact on Twitter, always be on the lookout for new people to follow. Follow new people and add them to appropriate lists as you go; following new people is an important part of maintaining your account.

Organizing lists

Lists allow you to group the people you follow into categories, so you can organize your twitterstream into manageable groups. You can create as many lists as you need, and you can add people to lists as you follow them. For example, if your business was a local auto repair shop you might have lists for:

- auto news
- locals (customers w/in service area)
- businesses we <3 (local businesses)

Twitter Best Practices: Getting started – profile optimization, followers lists & third party apps

If your business was an online clothing boutique, you might have lists for:

- fashion bloggers
- crafty geniuses
- the runway (models, fashion figureheads)
- fashion news (media)
- Lifestyle

Separating media sources, consumers/customers, businesses and industry organizations into separate lists makes it much easier for you to find and aggregate valuable information and interact with your customer base.

Twitter Best Practices: Twitter etiquette and engagement guidelines

Now that you've got your profile and lists set up, you know what a "retweet" is, let's talk about how to actually communicate on Twitter.

A note about organizing information: whatever application or platform you're using, be sure to keep your eye on @ mentions and direct messages you receive. In Tweetdeck, you can keep columns dedicated to mentions and direct messages.

There are plenty of unspoken etiquette rules on Twitter, as well as best practices. Let's address them now with a few guidelines.

Shortening URLs. Both Tweetdeck and Hootsuite have built-in URL shortening, but if for some reason you're not operating on one of these applications, use the free URL shortening service at bit.ly.

Be retweetable. If you want people to be able to easily retweet your tweets, don't make them any longer than 120 characters. This leaves extra room for "RT @..." In a pinch, Tweetdeck allows you to post a "long" update, but this isn't ideal.

Twitter Best Practices: Twitter etiquette and engagement guidelines

Always reply to @ mentions. If someone mentions you, that means they're talking to you or about you. Do the polite thing: respond by mentioning them back.

Mention other people first. In order to have a conversation, you have to start one, and in order to start a conversation, you have to say something to someone. That's exactly what @ mentioning someone on Twitter is doing; it's tapping someone on the shoulder and striking up a conversation. Don't worry - it's not creepy to approach and start a conversation with a stranger on Twitter, it's just par for the course. Browse conversation threads and look for tweets which interest your company/industry or to which you can add a bit of expertise. Be friendly. Be polite. Be interesting. Be real.

Retweet relevant content. Retweeting is essential to having a well-rounded Twitter presence, especially for businesses. Retweeting others' content means you are engaged in the community and are just as interested in learning and sharing others' content as you are in promoting yourself. It also sets your profile apart as a resource for relevant and valuable industry information, and after a time authors may enlist your help to share new information. When choosing tweets to retweet, always ask whether or not the content is: 1) relevant (to your industry/customer base/followers), 2) valuable, and 3) interesting. If it fits all three criteria, retweet away.

Twitter Best Practices: Twitter etiquette and engagement guidelines

Say thank you. If someone retweets your tweet or says something nice about you in a @ mention (such as a #FollowFriday endorsement), always always say "thank you!" back.

Use hashtags. If you're trying to promote a product or service that you sell - say, you're a property management company trying to lease an #apartment - using a well placed hashtag or two can help people identify what you're offering. Likewise, if you're participating in or talking about an event, an organization or a concept that has an associated hashtag, use it. If you don't know if one exists, search for the hashtag on Twitter's search feature.

Don't overuse hashtags. Sometimes, businesses catch on that they can get more people to see their tweets about certain products or services if they use hashtags, so they begin hashtagging everything. Don't do this. It's considered spammy, and it doesn't contribute to a valuable conversation. Use hashtags when it makes sense to do so, but don't force it.

Twitter Best Practices: Twitterquette and engagement guidelines

Cite original authorship. Often on twitter, you will see the Title of A New Article via @someone, followed by a URL; the "via @someone" is indicating that @someone is the author of the article. Attributing authorship to the author's twitter handle is common courtesy, and if you post content by someone else, attribute their handle whenever possible. This is often a good way to strike up conversation with the author him or herself.

CC people who are relevant to the conversation. If you just had a meeting with a vendor, or if you just had a great lunch at a local restaurant, tweet your appreciation and @ mention the vendor or restaurant. Mentioning other businesses and vendors in an appreciative way is the perfect way to build your brand's reputation, to strike up a new conversation and to be engaging.

Know when to use private DMs. If you are discussing information that should be private, do so through direct messages. Obviously this applies to any and all exchanges of personal or confidential information, but it's also a good idea to move any in-depth customer service-related issue into the private space, so it doesn't clutter up your twitterfeed.

Twitter Best Practices: Twitter etiquette and engagement guidelines

Grow some 'tude - but not too much. Twitter is fast-paced, and its most prominent users are writers with incredible wit. The truth is that edgy, witty content rises to the top on Twitter, so try on a creative style which fits your brand's voice. There's nothing wrong with having a bland, neutral feed, it simply won't attract the kind of following and engagement that a clever, witty feed does. That is NOT, however, to say that you should be rude and offensive; let your tone be as edgy as is appropriate for your brand, but don't let the content be offensive.

Be polite. Politeness and courtesy are the biggest unspoken rules on Twitter. As a general rule, the Twitter community is warm and welcoming to newbies, and most people are eager to share, engage and introduce newcomers to their networks. Keep a friendly, polite attitude and show common Twitter etiquette in regards to mentioning, replying, retweeting, etc.

CONCLUSION

Final Thoughts

It might seem foreign or daunting at first, but Twitter is a fantastic way for your business to engage in real-time communication with your customer base, other businesses and industry leaders. Twitter gives you the opportunity to have casual conversations, while building your brand as an industry expert and boosting your SEO.

Don't shy away from the wild frontier of the Twitterverse! Familiarizing yourself and utilizing these tools that Twitter offers will help you to build relationships and gain trust from followers who could advocate for your brand.

Happy tweeting!

About Mindscape

Founded in 2001, we are a complete web-success company focused on creating user-friendly websites and Web-based applications that help companies save time and money by streamlining processes, generating leads and making sales. We provide ongoing marketing services that help companies understand buyers, and reach them via the Web at the exact moment those customers are looking to buy.

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