Building Your Twitter Community

Twitter is all about facilitating conversations, so learning how to build your community is vital to getting the most from your experience.

Tips for building your Twitter Community

What is #followfriday?

How to find people on Twitter

How do I find Twitter users in my town?

Why aren't people following me?

What to do when you've followed too many people

What's a tweetup?

tweet this chapter

Tips for building your Twitter Community by Sarah Evans

Your Twitter community is your life line. The strength of your community determines overall what you will (or won't) get out of the microblogging platform. What do you want to use Twitter for? I wanted to build a community where I could engage in dialogue, stay ahead of the social media curve, and share some laughs.

I just shared my objective with you. What's yours? Start with your community objective and then go for it. Use the 10 tips below as your guide to grow the community which benefits you (and your audience).

1. Do... Create a user-friendly Twitter ID (@yourname)

Your Twitter ID is part of your personal brand. Plain and simple. Your first choice for a Twitter ID should be your name. There is nothing stronger for creating your personal brand. If your name is taken (as mine was) find a way to keep it as close as possible. (I added "PR" in front of my name, which worked for me as it reinforced my name and my expertise.)

There are only 140 precious characters available in each Twitter post. The longer your Twitter ID, the more space it takes up, thus limiting your interactions. If at all possible, stay away from numbers or an underscore. As your community grows, you'll have many names and IDs to remember. Throwing in numbers and underscores makes it more difficult. This could ultimately minimize your interactions.

Are you reading this and thinking you should get a new username or a stronger personal brand? It's actually pretty easy .

2. Do... Search for people to follow

It's completely normal in Twitter culture to "follow" people you've never met. In fact, it's encouraged. Begin by looking for people with common interests, hobbies or professions. I also like to follow people who are experts in areas I know nothing about.

A few tools to get you started:

• Twitter search – This is the only search function actually hosted by Twitter. It's extremely easy to use

and offers comprehensive results.
• Twellow – An application similar to Twitter search except that you can search by categories (which makes results more targeted).
• TwitDir – I like TwitDir because it offers a search function and breaks Twitter users into categories like the top 100 people followed and top 100 updaters.
•A more recent addition worth checking out is the Twitter people directory, WeFollow

3. Do… Learn the lingo. You'll want to join the crowd. Trust me.

As with any new network there is a learning curve. Twitter has a quirky lingo all its own. But don't let that hold you back from interacting. If you don't understand something, ask someone. That's how I learned!

A few of the essentials:

• DM = Direct Message
• @ = Use to reply and always include proceeding a Twitter ID in a reply
• RT = Retweet
• Tweet = Sending a message on Twitter
• Tw + any other word. A fun practice on Twitter is to develop a new twist on old words. For example, Tworld = Twitter world, and Tweeples = Those who use Twitter. You get the picture.

It's an evolving list. Who knows, you might even invent the next "tword." You can also check out basic Twitter commands.

4. Do… Know who "@" replies to you

It may not seem overwhelming at first, but soon after you gain friends on Twitter, conversations tend to move quickly. How will you keep up with it? My personal favorite is TweetDeck (however it can slow down the functionality of your PC). A great alternative to TweetDeck is Seesmic Desktop. I recommend a combination of the following:

• Twitter search – If you use Twitter search, also subscribe to the RSS feed. I set up two searches, one

with the "@" in front of my Twitter ID and one without. You will get different results for each query.
• Tweetscan – I use Tweetscan as my quality check to see if I've missed any replies. You can also see a trends search cloud before you type in your search query.
• Google Alerts – Google Alerts are email updates of the latest relevant Googleresults (Web, news, blogs, etc.) based on your choice of query or topic.

5. Do… Add your Twitter ID to all of your signatures
Pimp out your Twitter name (and not just on Twitter). As social networks like Twitter continue to go mainstream, you'll want to be able to connect with new users.

A few opportunities to pimp out your Twitter ID:

• Add under your name when you comment on a blog
• If you friend someone on another social network, add a personal message which includes your ID
• Include a "follow me on Twitter" signature on all of your email accounts or for your social media email signature

6. Do… Reach out and say something

No one likes what I call a "virtual voyeur" (i.e. someone who watches social media interactions without responding). Everyone is putting him or herself out there and as far as my experience has shown, people are pretty darn accepting and helpful. Something as simple as a "good morning" often leads to a response. If that doesn't work, try something a little more aggressive like, "someone say hello!"

7. Do… Read the bio of those who follow you

Know something about those who follow you. The information you get from a bio makes it easy to engage in dialogue. If someone lists knitting as a hobby, send them a link to a knitting blog you came across. It opens the door for dialogue and that is what your community is all about.

8. Do… Promote others and share your best information

Twitter is all about karma. The more good you put out there, the more you receive. When you find others with great information, don't be shy in sharing with your community. It's a great feeling when you promote one of your followers (instead of yourself) and it results in dialogue among your community. It ultimately reflects support for you and credibility for your follower. Win-win!

9. Do… Learn the etiquette.

Most important is to learn about when you should "@" versus DM (i.e. Direct Message):

• Sending personal information like a phone number or email address. (It may seem like common sense, but I encourage you to NEVER post personal information like your social security number over ANY public forum.)

• A conversation which will consist of multiple "tweets" or a lengthy discussion with more than three posts. (Many people on Twitter will "unfollow" someone who sends multiple "tweets" in a row. Trust me.)

• Asking multiple questions to the same person or the same question asked to multiple people. (Your content becomes less valuable when people see the same thing repeated too many times...especially right in a row.)

• Correcting a mistake you've identified in someone's blog post or "tweet." (This isn't required, but it is considered a common courtesy. The person who made the mistake will thank you.)

• Thanking each of your new followers. (It's a nice concept to thank each of your new social media connections, but keep in mind how many responses you're sending out each day or within a 10 minute period.)

• Making a request to someone. (Want to ask someone to write a guest blog post or partner on a project? Don't put them on the spot in a public forum. Once you agree on a partnership, then by all means, tweet away!)

• Constructive criticism...this is your call. (If you have some pretty serious feedback to give someone, consider the most appropriate venue.)

• Getting someone's attention! (Want to make a connection with someone, send them a direct message to get things started. A lot of people on Twitter get direct messages sent to their email or mobile phone.)

10. Do... Find out who some of the big players are

Twitter is not a popularity contest and it's your choice on whether or not to follow these "top tweeps," but they do tend to share a lot of great information. Did you know Pete Cashmore and other Mashable "tweeps" are on Twitter?

What is #followfriday?

What is #followfriday? Every Friday, you'll see thousands of people on Twitter using this phrase, so we thought we'd take a moment to explain what Follow Friday is, and how you can join in with this Twitter game.

Here is a quick guide to the FollowFriday phenomenon:

1. #followfriday is a game in which people suggest who to follow on Twitter. It helps everyone find interesting Twitter users. You list the users you recommend following and add "#followfriday" anywhere in the Tweet so others can find it. The "#" is very important – don't forget it!

Example Tweet (feel free to copy this and replace the Twitter names with your friends' Twitter names and reasons to follow):

#followfriday Team Mash: @mashable @adamostrow @sharonfeder @jbruin @adamhirsch @benparr @brett @tamar

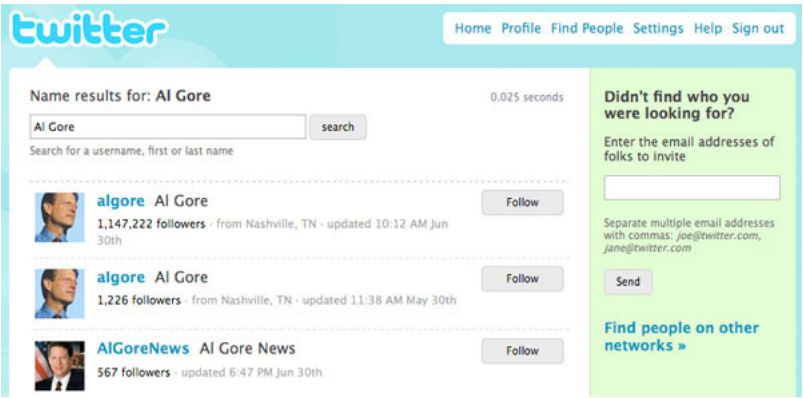
2. You can find everyone's #followfriday suggestions on Twitter search.

How to find people on Twitter by Josh Catone

Twitter is all about facilitating conversations, but until you're following some people, it's just a blank page. Once you find people to follow and talk to, however, Twitter becomes exceptionally useful. You can share thoughts, ask questions, get updates about news, music, brands, and businesses, and discover helpful links and information. Finding good people to follow, especially for new users staring at a blank page the first time they log in, can be a bit daunting, though.

Thankfully, there are a number of ways you can find people on Twitter. Here are ten sites you can use to locate "tweeps" to follow. Let us know in the comments if you know of any others.

People Search



1. Twitter People Search – Twitter's built in people search isn't the greatest way to find people on Twitter, but it's probably where you should start. Twitter searches the "real names" people enter in their bio fields, but because there isn't much accompanying bio information and because Twitter doesn't have any sort of requirement to use your actual name, that can make it a bit difficult to find people, especially those with common names. It also makes it hard to verify that the people you find are actually who you're looking for. Still, it's a good place to begin your search.

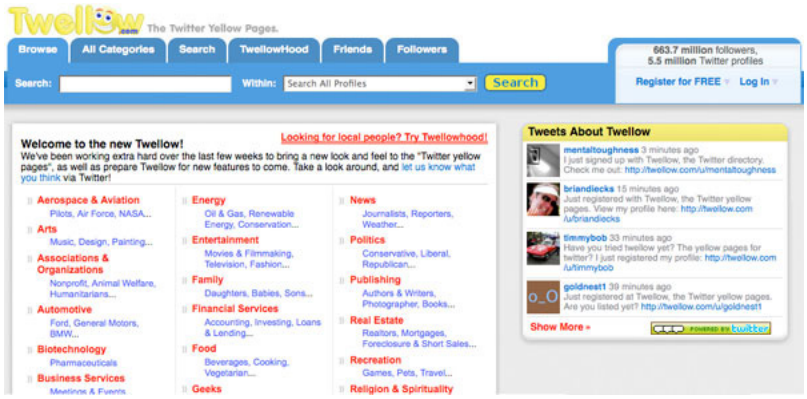
2. Tweepz – Because the biographical information Twitter collects is minimal, no Twitter people search engine can improve on Twitter's that much. Third-party site Tweepz does an admirable job, though. Tweepz lets you limit searches to specific parts of Twitter's user information (like name, bio, and location), filter results by follower/following numbers, location, and other extracted terms, and greatly improves on the layout of the search results.

3. TweepSearch – TweepSearch lets you search by Twitter name or location, or search a specific username to get a list of all friends and followers. However, if the "indexing" number listed on their main page is accurate, they're crawling about 600,000 less Twitter user profiles than Tweepz.

4. TwitDir – TwitDir is another search engine, but if the crawling stats are accurate, it's well behind the curve, searching about 3 million fewer users than Tweepz. Still, it's not a bad people search engine, and

has some helpful "top" lists if you're concerned with who the most popular or prolific people on Twitter are (then again, they're also not that up-to-date — the site doesn't seem to know who @aplusk is, for example).

Directories

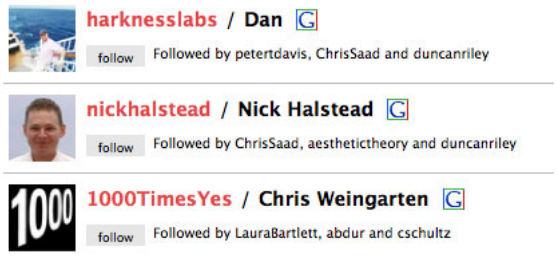


5. Twellow – Your best bet for finding like-minded Twitter users might be to use a directory, and Twellow is certainly one of the most complete. Nearly 6 million Twitter user profiles are indexed in Twellow and placed into a huge number of categories. You can search the entire lot of profiles, or confine searches to a single category. Twellow also operates a local directory called the "Twellowhood."

6. WeFollow – Created by Digg founder Kevin Rose, WeFollow is a Twitter user directory that organizes people by hashtags. WeFollow is user-generated and anyone can add themselves by tweeting @wefollow with three #hashtags that describe them.

7. Just Tweet It – Just Tweet It is another user created Twitter directory. It's not quite as well organized or easy-to-use as Twellow or WeFollow, but it is certainly large enough that you should give it a browse when trying to locate people in your interest areas to follow.

Recommendations



8. Twubble – Twubble recommends people to follow by spidering the people you're already following and recommending users that they're following. The idea is that the people you're following are interesting to you, so if more than one of them are also following another person, that person might also be interesting. Of course, that means that Twubble can't be your first stop when finding people to follow — you already need to be following some people for the service to work.

9. Twitterel – Twitterel attempts to find people you might be interested in following by doing keyword searches of tweets. The service can update you by email, direct message, or @reply when it finds new

people it thinks you might be interested in following. It's kind of like Google Alerts for Twitter follow recommendations.

10. Who Should i Follow? – Enter you Twitter username into Who Should i Follow? and the service finds users who are similar to those you're already following. The site doesn't disclose information about how it works, but in my experience it is pretty accurate at finding users whose tweets are similar in content to your followers. The results can be filtered by how popular the people are, and how close they are to a specific location.

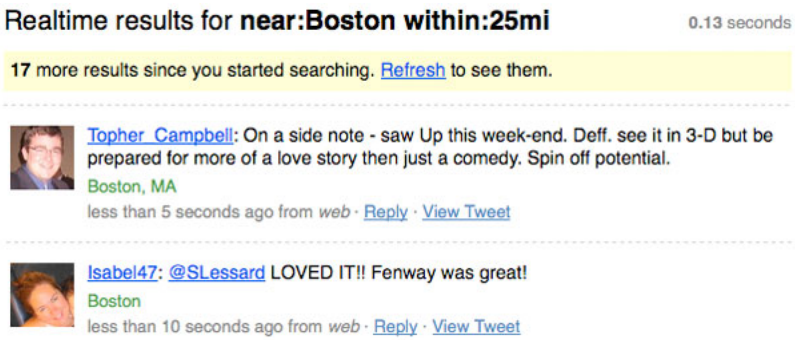
BONUS: Mr. Tweet – Mr. Tweet is a very popular Twitter app that lets you give and receive recommendations about Twitter users. The app also provides more helpful statistics about users, such as tweets per day or the percentage of tweets containing links. To get the most out of Mr. Tweet, consider installing the Firefox plugin, which gives you access to statistics and user recommendations while you're browsing Twitter.

How do I find Twitter users in my town? by Josh Catone

The number of people visiting and using Twitter has nearly quadrupled over the past few months, and as more people sign up for the hot social networking service, it becomes more useful. Twitter is enabling everything from better customer service to easier job searches, and is being employed for some extraordinary home uses. Twitter can become infinitely more beneficial, though, if you use it to connect with people in your town.

Finding local Twitter users to connect with is great for networking, but also for getting relevant, real-time, local information about things like jobs, news, politics, weather, food, and more. Someone tweeting from London can't help you find a good place to eat in New York City, and if you live in Chicago, tweets about the weather in Los Angeles won't be very enlightening. Here are nine ways to locate Twitter users in your town to help you get the most out of Twitter.

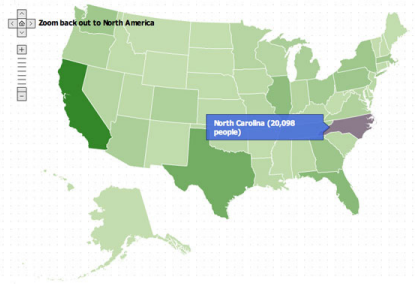
1. Twitter Search



One of the best ways to find local Twitter users is simply to search for them on Twitter Search. The advanced page of Twitter's search engine has an option to search "Near this place." You can simply enter your town and get a real-time stream of all the people tweeting from your location or near it. The results are based on the location field of people's Twitter bios, which due to geo-location for people tweeting from their phones can be very accurate.

This search, for example, reveals all the tweets coming from anyone within 25 miles of Boston.

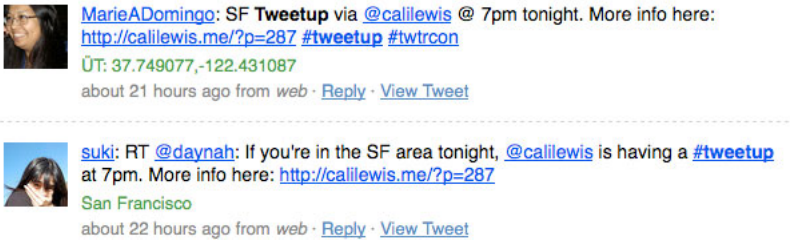
2. Twellowhood



The TwellowHood is a local directory of Twitter users from the site Twellow. Twellow is a sort of yellow pages directory for Twitter, allowing you to search for Twitter users by topic or name. The TwellowHood is a reverse location look up for the greater Twellow directory that lets you drill down into your town or city and find local Twitter users.

The site is very simple to use, just click on the map to zoom into your area and browse the list of local tweeters. The site even lets you view recent tweets and follow new users directly from their Twellow listing page.

3. Attend a Tweetup



A tweetup is an offline meeting of people who have met and organized on Twitter, and they're a great way to both find local Twitter users and also take Twitter-based networking to the next level. Here are three good ways to find tweetups in your area:

Twtvite – Twtvite is an invitation service built for Twitter. They have a large number of tweetups listed and make it easy to start organizing your own.

Twitter Search – By searching for the word "tweetup" and restricting the results to a specific geographic area, you can easily locate news about tweetups happening in your neck of the woods. This search, for example, is helpful in locating tweetups going on in San Francisco.

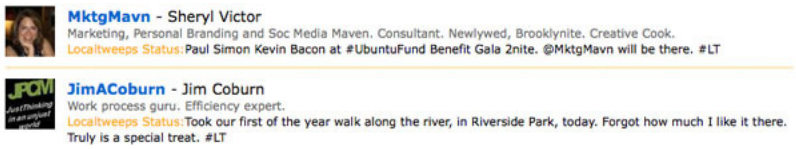
Tweetups on Meetup – Pioneering event site Meetup maintains a special page for listing and tracking tweetups. Not many are off the ground yet, but a number of cities have Twitter users who have expressed interest in forming a regular tweetup.

4. iPhone Apps

There are a ton of Twitter applications on the iPhone, and some of them have built in features for locating nearby Twitter users. Each of them basically functions the same, allowing you to search for Twit-

terers nearby to your exact location, as determined by the geo-location feature of your iPhone. Four iPhone Twitter apps that include location-based search are Twinkle (free), TwitterFon(free), Tweetie ($2.99), and Twittelator Pro ($4.99). If you know of any others, please add them in the comments.

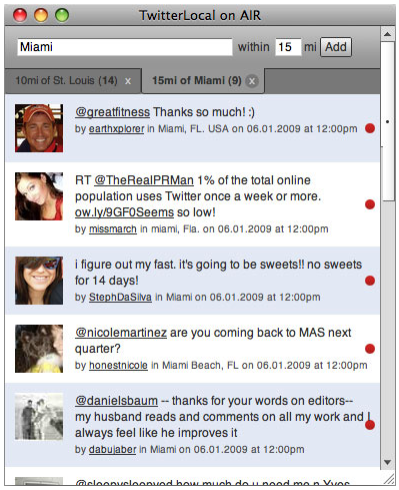
5. Localtweeps



Localtweeps is attempting to organize the local Twitterverse using a hashtag. The idea is that users add themselves on the Localtweeps site by registering their zip code, then any time they tweet about something relevant to their local audience, they append the #lt hashtag. Localtweeps them parses those tweets on their web site and publishes them in a city-restricted stream.

For now, most cities I looked at tend to have an overwhelming number of "Just listed myself" tweets that the site asks you to send out when you join, but the idea of organizing local content by hashtag has merit. However, if the idea catches on, the Localtweeps site itself might not be necessary. If people take to the idea of using a specific hashtag to designate tweets of local interest, then regular Twitter search for that tag restricted to your location will reveal a real-time stream of those tweets.

6. TwitterLocal



TwitterLocal is a dead-simple Adobe AIR application (meaning it will run on Windows, Mac, and Linux) with one purpose: finding and tracking tweets emanating from specific locations. Essentially, TwitterLocal creates an automatically updated real-time stream of the location searches possible with Twitter Search. The AIR app, which will run in the background and notify you of new tweets from your area, makes it very easy to keep a constant eye on your local Twitterverse and find interesting or like-minded local Twitter users to follow.

7. Nearby Tweets

Nearby Tweets is essentially a fresh coat of paint on the local aspect of Twitter's own search engine. The site automatically determines where you are, and loads up a list of recent tweets and Twitter users within a specific radius. You can change location, radius, and add keywords, and the results are a lot more visually appealing and easier to navigate than Twitter's search engine.

8. Happn.in

Happn.in is a new local Twitter utility that tracks trends in specific metro areas. While it's not specifically designed for finding local users, if yours is one of the 52 cities covered by the site, you can use it to locate users talking about what's hot in your area. For example, a recent trending topic in my city has been the band "Pearl Jam," due to their performance on "The Tonight Show with Conan O'Brien." I'm a huge Pearl Jam fan, so in this instance, Happn.in has helped me find some fellow 90s grunge rock aficionados to follow in my area.

9. Twitterholic

Twitterholic is the web's definitive list of the top Twitter users, but it can also show you the top users in your local metro area. Simply navigate to your own Twitterholic page (here's Mashable's, for example), then find the line about how you rank in your location and click on the link to your metro area. Twitterholic will then load up a list of the most popular Twitter users in your town or city.

This list won't be all inclusive, because Twitter users with a small number of followers will only be on the list if they have previously crawled their stats on Twitterholic. Still, it is a good way to find some of the more influential (or at least popular) Twitter users in your area, and those are people you may want to follow.

Why aren't people following me? by by Atherton Bartelby

We've all been there: You're at a party hosted by that one fabulous friend, and populated with the best of your mutual circle of friends. The atmosphere is almost carbonated with excitement; the guests' personalities flawlessly compliment each other; and the conversations that abound are infused with intelligence, caustic wit, and a wide variety of knowledge that ensures the complete absence of any pregnant, awkward pauses. Then, it happens: someone appears who just doesn't...fit.

A similar phenom happens on Twitter. You're having conversations with your established Twitter friends, you're broadcasting useful information, news, or links to your followers, and you're "engaging your Tribe," etc., when suddenly, someone begins following you who, much like that previously referenced party guest, just doesn't fit. This is the person whose follow on Twitter you simply cannot bring yourself to return. This is the follow fail.

Run any number of searches on Google or Alexa and you will arrive at a veritable host of articles offering endless lists of tips on "how to get more followers on Twitter." What you will not find are lists compiled by Twitter "power users" regarding the major reasons why they will or will not return a Twitter follower's follow when it happens, and this is my gift to you: "The Top Ten Reasons Why *I* Will Not Follow You In Return On Twitter."

1. You have no user avatar

...or your user avatar is neither a personalized photograph nor reflective of a brand.

More important than whether or not your Twitter profile background is "designed" is how you choose to present yourself in that seemingly insignificant 48×48 pixel square. If that square is empty, impersonal, or otherwise lacking any qualities that will immediately allow me to visually associate it with you, that is an immediate Follow Fail. If I am going to build a Twitter relationship with you, I want to see you, or your brand, and not, however humorous I may find it, a screen capture of a magical leoplurodon.

2. You list no location, no website, or no bio

Clearly, Twitter is all about brevity. So how difficult is it to provide a few additional characters of information that may offer potential followers more impetus to follow you in return? I've returned countless follows from users whose Twitter streams I've found "meh," but whose listed blogs, sites, or portfolios were too amazing to not follow, or whose 160-character bios were too humorous/intriguing to pass up, or who were in the same city as me and therefore potential project collaborators.

These fields take two seconds to populate; it would behoove you to take those two seconds to populate them.

3. Your "website" listed is a MySpace profile

...or, far worse, an AngelFire "page."

I'll admit it: I had a MySpace profile...until I deleted it a year ago when it became obvious that only teenagers and musicians were still using it. I also had a GeoCities/AngelFire "page"...for my very first website when I first got on the Internet in 1994. If the Twitter user in question happens to be an actual teenager, or musician whose MySpace presence truly works for them, then fine. But I tend to pass over those users whose proffered web presence is, well, clearly doing it wrong.

It doesn't take much these days to establish a web presence that seems genuine and thoughtful, and appears to intend to attract and build an online community based on the content it provides. AngelFire pages simply don't communicate that.

4. You're following over 1,000 users, have 20 followers, and no updates

...or, worse, one update that includes a shamefully ill-constructed mention of Jason Calacanis.

Who, aside from those running Twitter apps that automatically follow and unfollow followers, would add these Twitter users? While I may every so often and uncharacteristically give these users a chance, simply to see what sort of content, if any, they may eventually provide, the gratuitous mention of any higher-profile Twitterer or web-famous personality means little more to me than that you were properly able to spell "Calacanis" or "Kawasaki."

5. Your profile features any variation of "Internet expert"

...or "social media expert" and you have very few and/or insubstantial updates.

While I generally loathe any mention of the word "expert" in a Twitter bio, it is particularly egregious when paired with a Twitter stream of only five updates, or one with a plethora of updates that make me question your "expert" status. You're an "expert" who is only now tweeting about a Twitter app that everyone else was tweeting about two months ago? How awesome for you! #instantfollowfail

6. Your updates clearly indicate that your Twitter activity is always, only, about pushing your own service/product

So, you have decided to use Twitter as an online marketing tool in order to sell your amazing service and/or product, and you make this glaringly obvious. I find this fabulous, because not only must this tactic be working for you, but it also allows me to immediately decide whether or not I want to follow you in return.

Since I do not use Twitter in this manner, I rarely follow any of these users in return, unless said product or service genuinely piques my interest/desire to support it.

7. Your following and my return follow result in a poorly-constructed auto-DM reading, "Thx for the follow! How can I help you get to a 4-Hour Work Week?"

I've several Twitter friends who employ the automatic direct message tool upon any new follows, but their messages are carefully crafted and, well, thoughtful, and go far beyond the garden variety "click my junk" automatic direct message. As I am an intelligent, savvy, thinking Twitter user, I am more than capable of reading all about how you can help me get to a 4-hour work week by consulting your Twitter stream, Twitter background, or website. An impersonal automatic direct message from you along these lines does not impress me, it insults my intelligence.

8. Your most recent updates make references to any need to achieve "more Twitter followers"

...or "enough new followers to reach 10,000 followers by midnight!"

For me, Twitter is not a shallow popularity contest, it is about forging interesting connections and conversations with other people. My Twitter followers are far more to me than a simple follower count: they are friends, they are colleagues, they are collaborators, they are peers, and they are sources. To follow someone in return whose only intent is clearly to acquire more followers would be to devalue the esteem with which I hold my other followers.

9. Your Twitter stream indicates a propensity for consistent arguing

...with your followers/random Twitter users/really anyone.

I am all for intelligent debate on any topic, and I've been lucky so far in meeting Twitter followers who are still able to politely debate about a variety of passionate topics without constant and vitriolic argumentation. If your Twitter stream is filled with nothing but mean-spirited opinions and argumentation that only advance your own beliefs and allow no consideration of others' views, then my Twitter stream is definitely not for you.

10. You do not engage your Twitter followers

Probably the most important reason why I will not return your follow, though, is if it is glaringly obvious that you do not engage your Twitter followers. Here I suppose I need to make a distinction between those Twitter users who use Twitter to broadcast their content, as opposed to everyone else; these broadcasters, in my experience, are generally the ones who are followed, not those who are following.

Obviously, engaging their followers is not a priority. Twitter is a major platform in social networking and social media, and they aren't called "social" networking and "social" media for nothing. There are

other people out there, and if you are not engaging or interacting with those users who take the time to follow you for whatever reason, that is a huge follow fail in my book.

The three tenets

My list isn't perfect, and it is definitely personal and therefore biased, but it is a start toward exploring the differences between a successful Twitter follow attempt and an outright follow fail. In the end, and to return to those previously referenced lists of "how to get more followers on Twitter," I think there are really only three tenets that should be followed should you desire to build a successful and quality Twitter network:

1. Present a cohesive personal brand, or, if presenting a brand is too much for you, simply present a cohesive sense of yourself

2. Always be consistent in your use of Twitter, i.e., become known for the unique ways in which you use Twitter, and stick with what works for you

3. Engage with your network. Genuine engagement with your network of followers will ultimately ensure that your mobile number is retained, and not "lost," at the end of that fabulous party, and it will ensure that you don't (too often) commit any serious follow fails.

What to do when you've followed too many people by Elliott Kosmicki

It's an illness. It's a disease that attacks the brain, affecting the response of your fingers on the keyboard and mouse. "Stop clicking," you say to yourself as another follow button has turned into a green-checked following icon.

The first step to recovery is admitting you have a problem: you're a followholic and you can't stay away from a Twitter user's follow button. (Say it out loud: My name is _____, and I'm a followholic.)

You each have your reasons for becoming a followholic. Maybe your parents didn't pay enough attention to you, so you're reaching out to strange Tweeple on the Internet. Perhaps it's genetic... If your father was a followholic, your twice as likely to become one as an adult. The facts* are cruel, but true.

*The facts I speak of are not actual facts, but made up for this article.

I would venture to say that most followholics started with the feeling of need. The need to get more followers, then turn to a reliance on the reciprocal-follow... However, this causes the people on each end of the follow to become followholics for separate reasons: Need and sympathy.

Following because of need

Like MySpace a few years ago, people have become attached to the number of followers they have. They see someone with 12,000 followers and all of a sudden their 150 followers seems worthless. Their focus changes from networking and learning about their audience to a raw desire to gain as many followers as humanly possible.

In reality, the number of followers you have should simply reflect the quality of what you give. If you're following 1,000 people, and have somehow got 800 of those people to follow you back, it doesn't really mean that much. But if 800 people have come across you on their own and started following you, while you're only following the 80 people you care about – that says something about your value. It says that people follow you because you're valuable, not because you've started following them first.

You don't NEED to follow every profile you come across – you only need to follow the people who you find interesting and valuable to your everyday life. Follow them if you would talk to them in real life.

Following because of sympathy

“Aw, that’s so sweet… this guy I never heard of who has no description filled out, no website, and only 4 tweets started following me… I’ll follow him back, poor guy!”

Reciprocal-following is, in my opinion, one of the most dangerous time wasters. Whether you follow back manually or through auto-following – if you spend a lot of time with a Twitter app open during the day, you’re clogging your screen and brain with information from people you really don’t care to see. Not only that, but you’re preventing yourself from building a relationship with your followers. How are you supposed to engage 12,000 people adequately? There’s no room for you in conversation if you’ve diluted yourself like that.

There is no need to feel sympathetic to people on Twitter. Follow them back if you find them interesting and valuable to your everyday life. Follow them back if you would talk to them in real life.

There seems to be a pattern emerging…

Have guidelines about who you will follow

I follow people based on the idea that if I had to slide a quarter into their Twitter page in order to activate the Follow button – would I still follow them? If I’m following you, it’s because I would pay for your updates. Either you do something interesting, you seem helpful to others, I know you in some way – or would like to know you.

If you’re following 10,000 people, would you have paid $2,500 for the privilege of having to sort through that many Tweets every day? Somehow I doubt it. I mostly doubt it because it’s impossible to do. There is no way you’re paying attention to the people you care about if you’ve clicked “Follow” on every profile you’ve ever seen on Twitter.

Do you have guidelines for yourself about who you’ll follow? If not, feel free to take mine: You’ll only follow people you’d be willing to pay to follow.

Recovering from followholism:

Admit you have a problem: If you can’t pay attention to the amount of people you’re following in a manner you would want someone to pay attention to you, you’re a followholic. Admit it, realize that it’s killing your productivity and value, then take steps to overcome it.

Clean your contacts: If you’re following only people you’re interested in – you’ll never have to do this step. But if you’re like most people on Twitter – you’ve fallen down a slippery slope and need to recover. Start by getting rid of the riff-raff.

Use Twitter Karma to clean your contact list once. This is a simple tool that shows people you follow, and who follows you back. This is your chance to stop following the people you simply clicked “Follow” to try and get them to follow you back, but they never did.

Manage incoming followers: First, turn off auto-follow in whatever program you’re using to do it. There is no possible way that anyone legitimately wants to follow back everyone who follows them. This isn’t

up for discussion.

Once that's complete, try a tool like Tweepler. Tweepler allows you to see all the people you haven't sorted through yet. You'll see their bio, website, and more – all from a single screen. I'd be totally lost without this. The first time you load it up, it may take you a while to sort everyone out, but once you've done it – you can probably come back once per week and it'll be a more manageable list.

Run Twitoria every so often. This site allows you to instantly see anyone you are following who is "inactive." I run this every month or so – because it's natural to come upon someone you find interesting, but then that person just never uses Twitter again. Since that's the case, I choose to unfollow them (and get my money back) – thus keeping my list more manageable.

Remember – you're only going to follow people who you find interesting and valuable to your everyday life! Follow them if you would talk to them in real life.

Finding people to follow: One of the biggest problems people have at first is finding quality people to follow on Twitter. This leads to following everyone, and eventually to becoming a followholic. This not only makes your time on Twitter less worthwhile, but it can become a productivity nightmare to try and pay attention to all the people you're following.

My first suggestion is to start with Twitter Search. This allows you to search everything everyone has ever tweeted. By searching for topics you're interested in, you're very likely to come across people who have similar interests as you.

Next, try a service like Mr. Tweet. Simply visit Mr. Tweet's Twitter page, follow him, and he'll collect information about you in order to suggest people you might like to follow. Who knows, he might even suggest me!

The last tool I love to use to find people is Grader. Grader is meant to "score" Twitter users based on followers, Tweet rate, etc. But I love using it to find popular Tweeple in my area. First, look yourself up on Grader. Then, find the area where it says your city/state. Click on those to see the top Twitter users in your area.

Finally, followhol free!

Once you're free of the follow epidemic, you can use Twitter to network, respond to people in a timely manner, become more engaged in conversation, and better learn about the people you've chosen to follow. This, after all, is what social media is all about!

I understand that some people who read this will take it personally – it'll feel like I'm speaking to them, and that I'm saying what they're doing is wrong. I'm fine if you're using Twitter to run up a follower number, blast your marketing message to people, or announce 5 times in one day that your followers shouldn't miss your upcoming conference call. I don't take that personally. However, when I try to help people on a daily basis figure out the best way to use Twitter in their business, how to find and produce quality and personality on Twitter, don't take it personally that I won't be referring them to you.

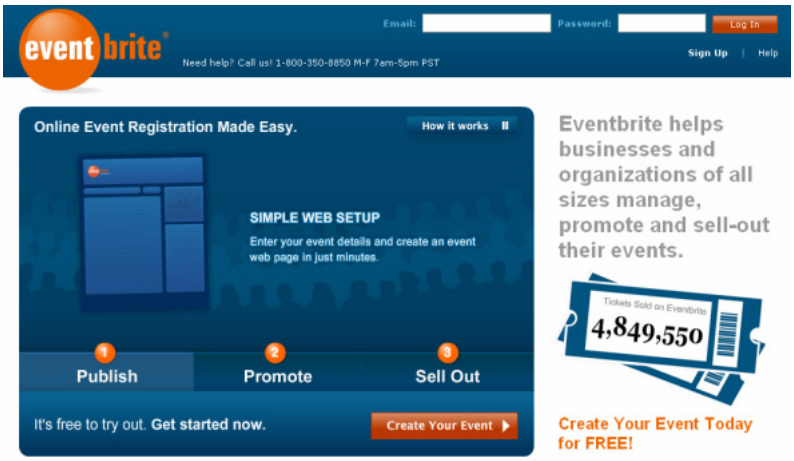
What's a tweetup? by Stuart Foster

Twitter meetups, or Tweetups as they're commonly called, are pretty much ubiquitous these days. You can't escape them. The @ nametags. The random awkward conversations that result when you have more than 140 characters to express yourself. Tweetups take an otherwise great service like Twitter and turn it into something much bigger.

Why? Because you are able to gather with online friends, meet new contacts to enhance your career, and have a few drinks. So here are a few quick tips for both the organization and managing of the actual event.

Have your own Tweetup planning dos and don'ts? Tell us about them in the comments.

Organizing the Tweetup: DO



1. Utilize your Twitter network as a way to drum up support, help and ideas. The number of PR and marketing people on Twitter now is astounding. Use their collective wisdom and networks to create buzz and support for your event.

2. Actually visit the venue. Seems incredibly simple right? But not everyone takes the time and effort to actually visit the bar, conference room, or park where the Tweetup will happen. I've never heard of anyone making a great business connection at a dark dive bar.

3. Plan for more people to show up than you think. It's Twitter. These people do know how to spread the word better than anyone. According to Sonny Gill: "Tweetups don't necessarily have to consist of avid Twitterers. However active, they are still a part of the community." Everyone should be welcome and thus you should plan to accommodate them.

4. Ensure a few core people/speakers are at the event. Trust me if @ChrisBrogan or @GregVerdino are

at an event…it will draw a lot more buzz than @stuartcfoster.

5. Use Email. Even though it supposedly has fallen out of favor, having the contact information for a variety of individuals is beneficial for all involved. You can keep this core group informed of developments.

6. Use a service like Eventbrite, Amiando or meetup.com to organize your guests, collect donations and otherwise provide shareable content. It takes all the legwork out of the administrative work that a large Tweetup entails. If you are planning on a smaller gathering…this may not be necessary and you can use Facebook or your blog to organize.

Organizing the Tweetup: DON'T

7. Secure a venue with limited or no WiFi. At a minimum the CrackBerry/iPhone users should have good service. People like technology. But they won't like YOU if they can't use their tech at your event. (This is of course size/type of Tweetup dependent, if in a large conference room/venue: WiFi and cell phone reception should be working. However, if you are in smaller venue or bar Jeff Cutler of jeffcutler.com reports: "I have an iPhone, but anyone with mobile Web knows that when 200 people in one spot are on 3G/Edge it disintegrates." This negates the need for an elaborate setup in smaller venues.

8. Have an event in an inappropriate place. If you are having 200 people and you decide to squeeze them into a 20×20 room…it may not be a good idea. If you have a DJ at a networking event…it may not be a good idea. If you have an event where it is difficult to communicate in any way…it might be a bad idea. You get the idea?

9. Have a vague premise for the Tweetup. Most people want to know what they are here for so they can dress or plan accordingly. No one wants to be the guy that shows up in jeans to the black tie event. So ensure that this does not happen, have a clearly defined cause or purpose for the Tweetup.

10. Half ass it. If you spend the time, money and energy into putting together a Tweetup don't pull it together at the last minute. So plan accordingly and do your homework.

At the Tweetup: DO

11. Get to the event early. Simple manners. You want to make sure people come to the right place and will be able to enjoy themselves. "As the organizer, it's essential you come early especially if you are bringing/receiving food or materials. In the case of the SXSW Chicago Tweetup, I want to make sure to have all the schedule sheets at the event so when people arrive they have a topic to discuss," said Len Kendall from Critical Mass.

12. Collect business cards. Event dependent; most folks will be card carrying members of the business/technology world and will be at the Tweetup to network. If you have an electronic scanner this is even better. You can send a list of attendees to your email list, providing additional value.

13. Provide food. If you schedule a Tweetup around a meal…provide food. If you DON'T plan on providing food, definitely inform your attendees. Sometimes at these events I think my stomach does more networking than my mouth.

At the Tweetup: DON'T

14. Fade into the background. If it's your event…you'd better damn well be front and center to handle and address any concerns/problems that may arise. Daniel B. Honigman the lead social media strategist at Tribune Interactive urges "organizers to be sure to introduce new folks around. If you see someone coming out for their first Tweetup, be sure to spend extra time with them introduce them around and make them feel welcome."

15. Have bad name tags and pens. If I can't see your Twitter name. I'm not going to know who you are. The same is true for all people at your event.

16. Blow people off. Trust me. Nothing is worse than being snubbed. So if you want to have a great Tweetup, you have to talk to the 16 year old kid with the same respect that you would show Seth Godin. Just good business sense and karma.

17. Go open bar. Unless you want complete shenanigans (and to be broke), you don't want @JoeBusinessGuy to be completely tanked. Also it weeds out people just after the free booze.

Tweetups are fun, productive, and great for walking away with a lot of contacts and leads. So if you are feeling adventurous and don't mind doing a bit of hustling you can host/organize your own Tweetup.

I'm looking forward to attending it .