a business guide to twitter

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corporate web services

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What is Twitter?

Heard about Twitter but not sure what all the fuss is about? Think you would like to explore it but have never got round to it? If so, then this short guide is for you. It will show you how to get started, some simple techniques and ways it can help you and your business.

Read on, jump in and join the many millions around the world who are tweeting right now.

Twitter is a message service that allows you to send and receive short messages (called tweets) within your Twitter community.
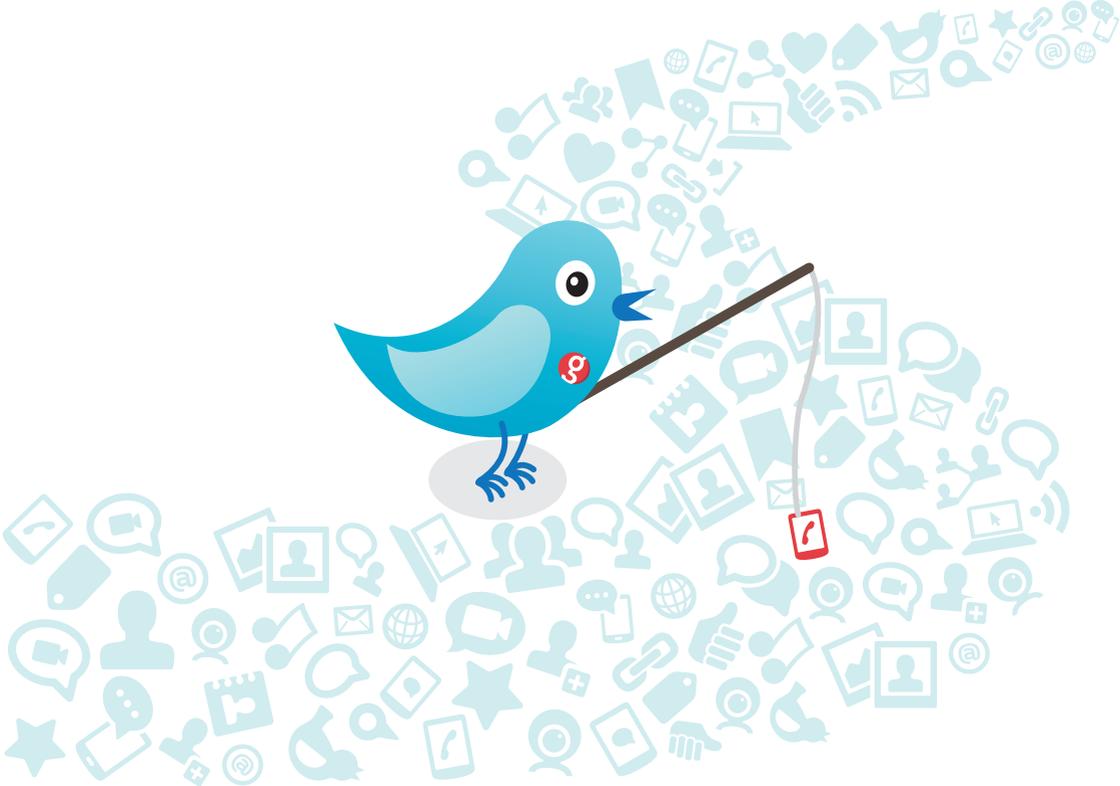
Your Twitter community consists of:

- **People you follow**
  Interesting and like-minded people. You see the Tweets created by everyone you follow. Following someone means you subscribe to their tweets.

- **People who follow you**
  Other people read your tweets and decide to follow you. Your followers see the tweets you send out.

What are tweets?

Tweets are short, only 140 characters long, so they are easy to skim.

The Twitter website says you tweet to answer the question "What are you doing?"

It's more accurate to say you tweet to answer the question "What are you thinking?"

Perhaps you think it would be boring to read what people have for lunch or about their commute in traffic. Fortunately, most tweets are not about those things. Instead, you learn the major events and the small details about the business and personal lives of the people you follow.

What it's not!

It's not like another email inbox that will fill up and cause a problem if you don't keep on top of it.

Think of it like a river of messages, you throw in your messages and you can fish for messages you like but if you are not there then the river keeps flowing and it will still be there when you come back to it.

I'm intrigued and curious about Twitter and the value it offers my business. To the casual user it looks like tweeting is the same as using the Facebook status. Why should I add Twitter as a new channel and use it actively?

Some key facts about Twitter

Twitter has gained popularity worldwide and currently has more than 200 million users, generating 47 million tweets a day and handling over 800,000 search queries per day

Twitter was founded on March 21, 2006

The Blue Twitter bird is called Ollie!

It is sometimes described as the "SMS of the Internet"

How does that help my business?

Twitter can connect businesses to customers in real-time.

Businesses use Twitter to share information with people interested in their products and services, gather real-time market intelligence and feedback and build relationships with customers, partners and influential people. You'll soon be spotting leads and new opportunities that you'd never have known about.

Twitter fact!

Twitter was founded in 2006, and despite it's huge success and growth; in it's first three years of operations, Twitter did not generate any revenue at all. Not even a penny!

From brand awareness and reputation management to Customer Relationship Management and direct sales; Twitter offers businesses a chance to reach an engaged audience.

Real-life examples of businesses using Twitter

Several computer vendors and retailers **offer exclusive discounts** to their Twitter followers and bring in substantial revenue from this additional source.

A coffee shop in Houston uses Twitter for customers to **place to-go orders** so that their order is ready and waiting for them at the drive-thru window when they arrive.

Various hotel chains send **special offers** to their Twitter followers to fill vacant rooms.

Several airlines provide **informational updates**, customer service, competitions, promotions and general dialogue with customers.

A bakery in London uses Twitter to notify followers **when baked goods are fresh** out of the oven.
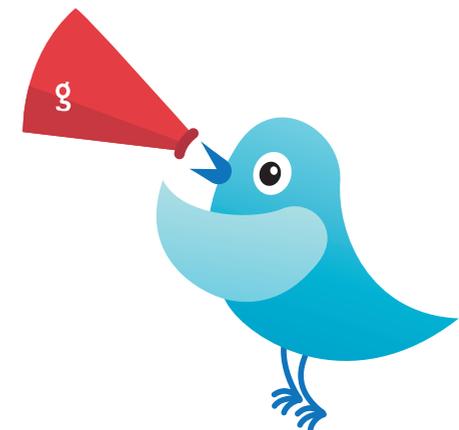
Event organizers use Twitter to **notify attendees** about logistics, updates, schedule changes and other information about an event.

A hotel chain provides concierge services via Twitter to **answer guest questions** about getting around the local area for a particular hotel.
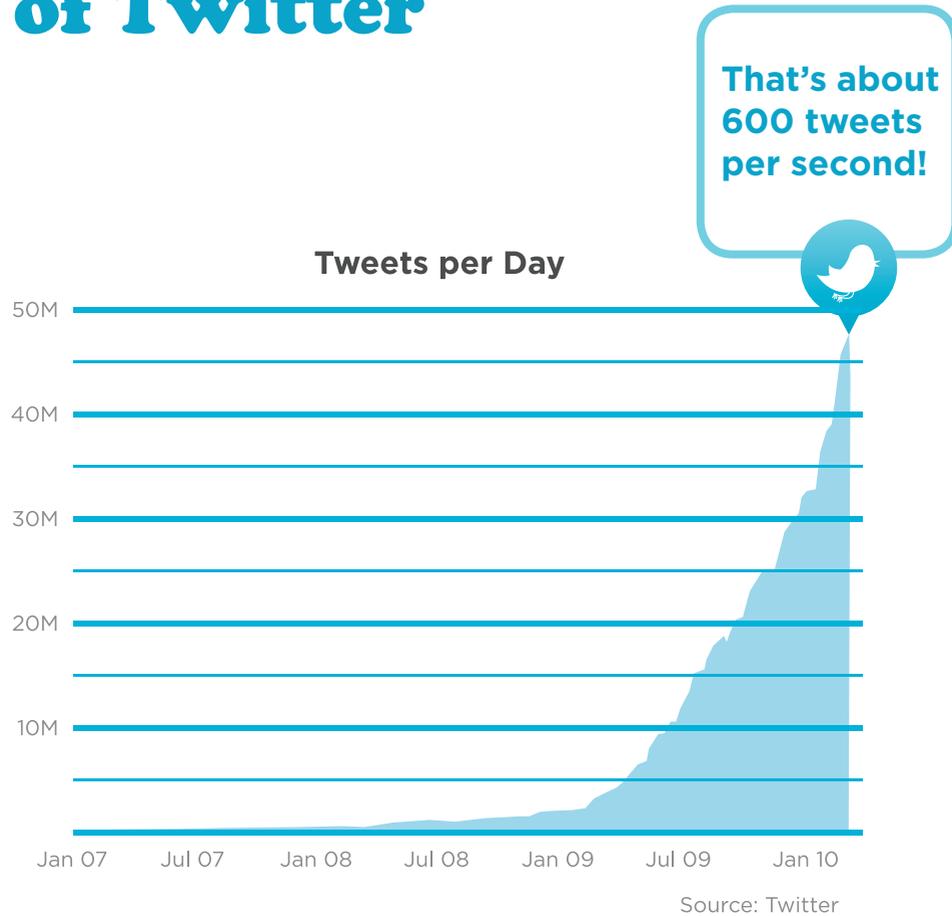
Home improvement stores **provide tips,** suggestions and how-to advice to their followers.

A Research firm **notifies their followers** when new research, articles or discussions are published.

An online retailer specialising in selling clearance products has over 1.3 million followers by **posting daily sale items** on Twitter.

The growth of Twitter

Tweets per Day

That's about 600 tweets per second!

- 50M
- 40M
- 30M
- 20M
- 10M

Jan 07   Jul 07   Jan 08   Jul 08   Jan 09   Jul 09   Jan 10

Source: Twitter

How do I get involved?

You need to create an account. But before you do that you need to think about who you will be Tweeting as.

Will you be tweeting as company/organisation or as an Individual?

The difference is important because it influences not only what you will tweet about but also your voice and tone.

Let's compare the two...
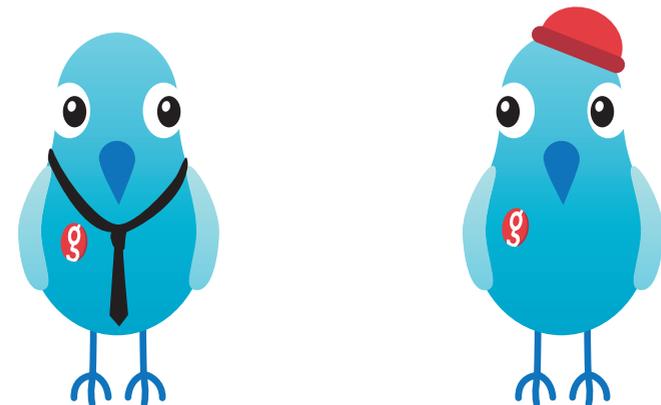
Company

Tone   The tone is the same as the company website, it's mainly anonymous and not attributable to a person.

Content
- Company announcements
- News (legislation, policy)
- Staff appointments
- New services
- Events
- Awards
- Links to your organisation in the news

Avoid
- Using the first person voice
- Anything you wouldn't be happy to see on your corporate website
- Speculation, try to keep to facts

Individual

You are speaking with your voice. It's a bit like talking to the trade press. Everything you say will be attributable to you.

- Opinions/views
- Predictions
- Commentary
- Meetings you've had
- What you are working on
- Reaction to news and announcements
- Gossip (but be careful!)

- The trivial
- Domestic news etc.

This is just a guideline, don't be afraid to express yourself and let your personality come through. You'll get more followers if you are interesting and approachable.
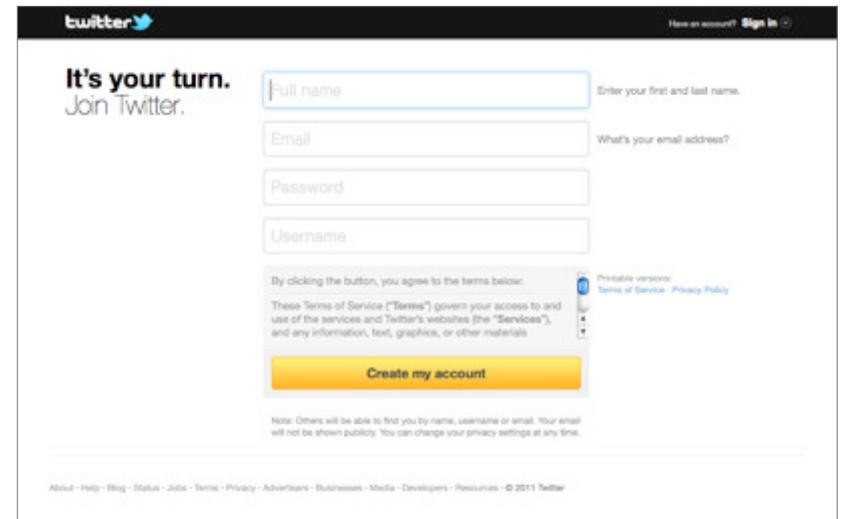
Get started

Go to www.twitter.com and click on 'Sign Up'.

You'll see this page.

Enter your name or business name and then choose your Twitter Username. You can choose anything you like here but, like email addresses, these names need to be unique so your first choice may be taken. Choose carefully because this username is shown against your tweets and mentions.

That's it, you now have a Twitter account and you are ready to start!

Completing your profile

When you have time you should add more detail to your profile such as:

- A Picture (or logo if you are a business)
- Location
- Web Address
- Short Bio

It is very important to complete this section, potential followers will check you out here. If it's blank they may be wary or feel that you are not serious.

Go to the 'Design' tab to change and customise your page. Many businesses carefully design their page to match their corporate branding and visual style.
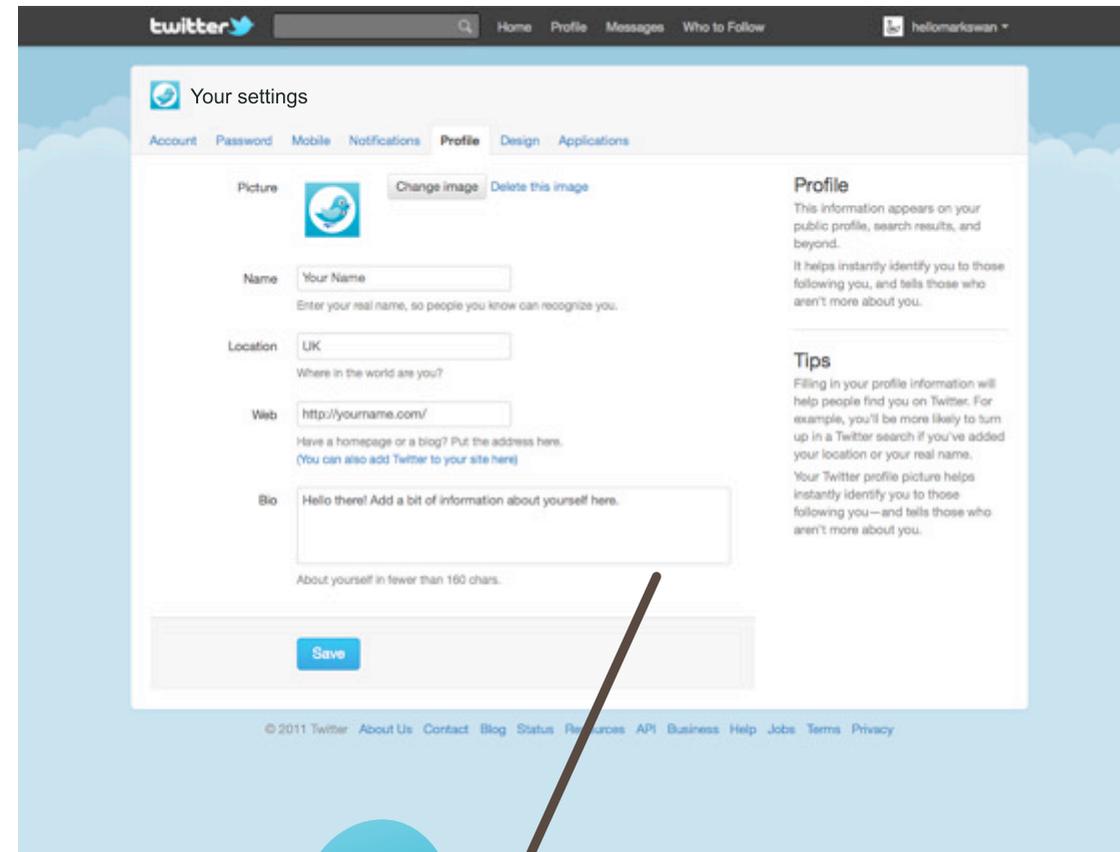
Some nice examples here:

http://www.twitter.com/#!/allstate
http://www.twitter.com/#!/Ford
http://www.twitter.com/#!/DisneyPixar

Contact us if you need help designing your page.

Having a plan

Know exactly what you are going to use Twitter for, and why.

You can run several Twitter accounts each with their own plan - but stick to them. For example, a business' Twitter accounts might look like this:

Main business account.

Follows lots of general and other industry specific news accounts, plus industry experts and opinion formers. Broadcasts on all industry related topics, plus specific company news, including company staff and social news where appropriate.

Departmental accounts.

This depends on how big and diverse your organisation is. The same rules apply within the brief of your particular department or region.
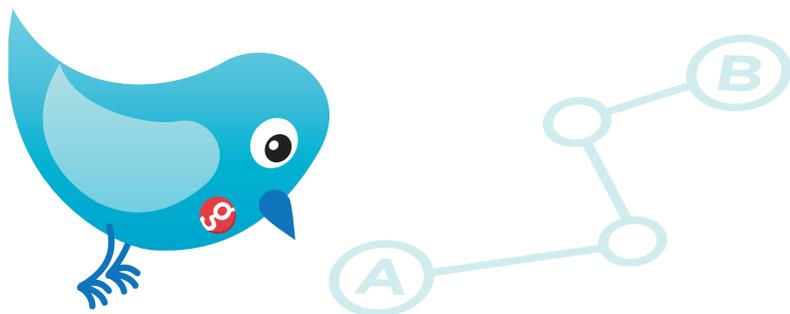
Individual accounts.

It is very useful to have some individuals, particularly those with a high profile, or those with profiles that need raising, to tweet in their capacity as CEO, CFO, head of marketing and so on.

(To see short thumbnail sketches of CEOs using Twitter click here: http://images.businessweek.com/ss/09/05/0508_ceos_who_twitter/1.htm)

Individual accounts add faces and characters to the businesses. These accounts generally need to broadcast 'on-message' of course, but they can, and should have a personal component as well. But be careful! Please avoid the inane and pointless tweet! ("Got up this morning. Had breakfast.") Individuals can follow a much more eclectic group of accounts – bring in hobbies and interests , maybe? – it's all image building and your 3Cs (contacts, correspondents, customers) will appreciate it and enjoy being your follower. But remember your position and that you are tweeting in that capacity.

Remember. Everybody can see who you follow and who follows you. You may be judged by the company you keep!

To follow and be followed

"Following" someone is a bit like adding them as a Facebook friend, except that they don't see your updates unless they choose to follow you back.

Once you start following someone, their updates, or "Tweets", will appear in your "timeline", or your Twitter feed.

There are undesirables who will follow you and you should always check out new followers. You can block any you don't like the look of.

Who to follow?

We suggest you only follow people who are relevant to your account's plan. Twitter is not about the number of your followers or the number you follow – it's quality, not quantity. If you have a plan you will quickly find out if other people are interested in your tweets.

Twitter will allow you to import e-mail lists, contacts from instant messaging services, and you can find your friends on their search engine.

Use search and check your network to see who your followers are following.

If you find someone is getting on your nerves with too many senseless Tweets, go ahead and remove them by going to their profile page on the Twitter site; you may do this by clicking on their name. Click the arrow beside "Following" just below the top of their profile page and then click "Remove".

You don't have to auto-follow, or follow people just because they follow you.

Choose who you follow carefully and watch who's following you. Again, you may be judged by the company you keep.

When people follow you should get an email announcing the fact. This is a default setting. You can turn it off ('Settings' > 'Notices') but we strongly advise you not to.

What to tweet

Here are some ideas to get you started:

• Talk to your PR department, find out what's coming, see if you can tweet a 'teaser'
• Look at your website for news
• Links to news sites
• Pictures (see Tweet Pic below)
• Re-Tweet interesting posts from your own followers, add something to it if you can.
• That idea you had on the drive into work this morning
• Questions. Don't be afraid to post a question as a post.

Use keywords and hash tags (see below) to help others find your post.

A note on style:

It is very hard to be stylish within 140 characters. However, try and spell correctly and be as grammatical as possible. Use approved abbreviations where you have to, and leave out whole words rather than text-speak.

A bit of practice, combined with re-reading and editing your tweets a few times before you post them and you will find it progressively easier to be really concise.

How much, how often?

How often should I tweet?

There's no easy answer to that but let's consider the objectives of tweeting in the first place – to enable conversations, share, network and build your personal capital or the company's reputation.

If you Tweet once a month then you'll probably not get much out of it. Your network will be slow to grow and the impression will be that you are not really interested.

Conversely if you tweet 20 times a day then your followers will probably get fed up with seeing your picture hogging their stream and think you are a bit of an attention seeker!

Rule of thumb? I'd say aim for once or twice a day and don't let a week go by without posting something.

Twitter fact!

The first unassisted off-Earth Twitter message was posted from the International Space Station by NASA astronaut T. J. Creamer on January 22, 2010

Some techniques

💬 Re-Tweeting (RT)

Re-Tweeting is simply posting something that you have received in your feed. It's fine to do. If there is space left maybe add a few words to the post to give your view on it.

🔗 Links

You only have 140 characters per post. Links can take up a lot of these so use a link shortening service like *http://bit.ly* or *http://tinyurl.com* Some tools like Tweetdeck (see below) will shorten URLs for you automatically.

📱 Messages (D)

A Message (previously called a Direct Message) is a private message sent via Twitter to one of your followers. (This is different to 'mentions' and 'replies'.) In turn, people you follow can send you a private message.

Note: you can only send a 'message' to a user who is following you.
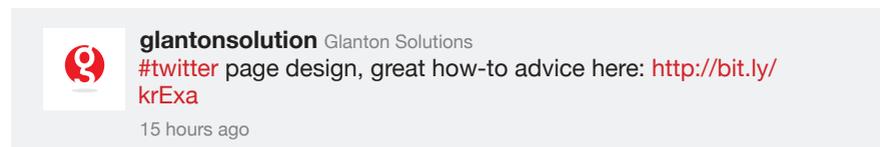
#️⃣ Hash Tags (#)

The # symbol, called a hashtag, is used to mark keywords or topics in a tweet. It was created organically by Twitter users as a way to categorize messages.

• People use the hashtag symbol # before relevant keywords in their Tweet to categorize those Tweets to show more easily in Twitter Search.
• Clicking on a hashtagged word in any message shows you all other Tweets in that category.
• Hashtags can occur anywhere in the Tweet.
• Hashtags that become very popular are often Trending Topics.

Example:

Below, @glantonsolution added the hashtag before the word "twitter" in their message. The word is now a link to search results for all Tweets containing "#twitter" in the message.

> **glantonsolution** Glanton Solutions
> #twitter page design, great how-to advice here: http://bit.ly/ krExa
> 15 hours ago

You can look up the meaning of hashtags at http://tagdef.com/

Search

There is a search facility at the Twitter website so that you can find content and subjects that might be of interest to you. If you do, you might want to follow the person who posted it.

Google, Bing and other search engines also index Twitter content.

Lists

You can group those you follow into "lists" this makes it easier for you to filter your feed into categories or subjects.

Trends

Find out what's hot on Twitter right now. Login to your Twitter account and you'll see the current trends listed next to your feed. Tools like Tweetdeck will also help you follow trends.

Mentions and Replies(@)

Mentions and Replies are tweets aimed at individuals but visible to both sets of followers in your streams. They are created by putting the '@' symbol in front of the target's Twitter name in your tweet (eg @glantonsolution), or by clicking the 'reply' button in an individual tweet from one of the people you follow.

Use carefully. Replies can be tedious and meaningless if your followers are not following any of the people you are replying to.

However, if somebody asks a question for which you can provide the answer, then yes, reply mentioning them.

This is where it becomes very useful for business to engage with their followers. People will post questions to you, using this method (@yourtwitname).

Twitter fact!

The current record for the most Tweets per second (TPS) was set 4 seconds after midnight in Japan on New Year's Day, at a rate of 6,939 Tweets per second.

Some tools

The Twitter website is great but there are some other tools you can download for free (or get on your smart phone) which might make it easier to manage your feeds and exploit them.

Tweetdeck   *http://tweetdeck.com*

Our favourite, also available on smartphones. Allows multiple feeds (if you are following a number of subjects); filtering by hashtags or mentions.

Twitpic   *http://twitpic.com*

Allows you to email or upload a picture which will create a tweet with a link to the image. It's free to use and can add a bit of variety to your Tweets.

Tweet on the go!

Tweeting from a mobile phone is very popular and it allows you to tweet that great idea or thought there and then!

There are free Twitter apps for all mobile phone types, just go to your phone's app store and search on 'Twitter'.

More links:

business.twitter.com
For more business related advice

friendorfollow.com
Shows who you follow but don't follow you

en.splitweet.com
Manage multiple accounts

twibs.com
Twitter business directory

How can I promote my feed?

Put a badge on your website or blog page
See an example at http://blog.glanton.com

Add it to your LinkedIn account
See Twitter's own feed on their Linkedin page
http://www.linkedin.com/company/96622

Add your Twitter name to all your contact details:
Website, business card, email signature, company brochures and publications.

FOLLOW ME!

Embed your feed on your website

Even better, embed your feed on your website.

You can customise the colours, it's free and supported by Twitter. Go here to find out how:
http://twitter.com/about/resources/widgets/widget_profile

This is one of several Twitter resources, more here:
http://twitter.com/about/resources

Your feed will look something like this:

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BBC tech interview with Scott Petty http://ow.ly/4NBm7 ^TM
4 hours ago · reply · retweet · favorite

How to build a Twitter app with jQuery mobile from webdesignermag.co.uk http://t.co/UktokcB
4 hours ago · reply · retweet · favorite

Plant many seeds. Nice perspective from Guy Kawasaki http://bit.ly/jFmUJV
11 hours ago · reply · retweet · favorite

Just checking first draft of our "Business Guide to Twitter". Should be available next week.
17 hours ago · reply · retweet · favorite

twitter **Join the conversation**

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'a business guide to Twitter' was written and compiled by John Royle of Glanton.

Glanton provides web solutions for the enterprise.

We specialise in corporate intranets and social networking.

We can provide tailor-made seminars to help you get started and get the most out of Twitter.

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