

Understanding the Business Use of Twitter

It's all in the tools that lay "on top" of Twitter, illuminating those millions of conversations per hour and allowing the "crowd" to take the lead in journalism.

It's no secret we're living history as we speak when it comes to the technological advances in social network marketing we're seeing today. One often heard quip is "can't it all just stop for a little while so that the rest of us can catch up!?"

Well, as we all know, it's not going to stop, and ever since the recent [Iranian Election coverage on Twitter.com](#), it's clear there is definitely **SOMETHING** going on, but what that "something" is can be a challenge to wrap one's head around.

Google knows there is something there... over the past few years, Google has become one of the top destinations online users go to when they want multiple sources of up-to-the-minute news, and they want it first! Google's method, of course, is in their superior algorithms scouring the web for top news content as it happens. But with this recent election coverage, Twitter emerged as the new front-runner in the race for quality access to information first, and both Google and Facebook have taken notice.

Why is this so important, and why should anyone care about the millions of Twitters out there that range from "I'm off to walk my dog right now" to "I just saw Jennifer Lopez eating a bagle"? The fact is that for most Twitters, it is just a sea of useless information, and when one goes to Twitter.com to see these various "status updates" changing by the minute, one wonders how this can help them... in life and in business.

The first glimpse into how this can help a business is by getting away from that Twitter.com front page experience and moving quickly into the recently launched **SEARCH** function on Twitter. Using this, one can do a quick search of key terms relevant to their business, such as "hotel Miami" to find various conversations going on out there in the "Twitter-Sphere" that are mentioning these key word search terms. And what does one find when doing this? A potpourri of various business deals, user reviews and also a bit of junk related to the world of hotels in Miami. Following along to find out **WHO** is chatting about hotels in Miami can lead



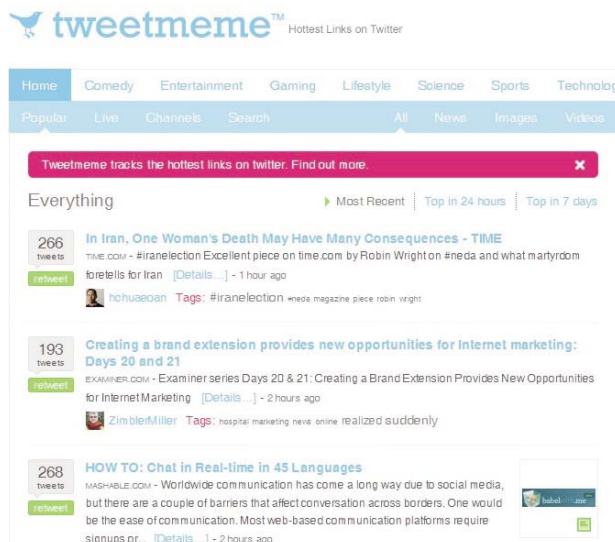
one to become connected to other businesses and key influencers out there in the Miami hotel and travel world. By clicking on the user's name or icon, one can learn more about who is chatting about this topic by reading their short Twitter bio or by clicking over to their website directly. By connecting with this individual, in the form of a **FOLLOW**, one can build a nice Twitter network of other individuals and businesses that have useful information related to the

world of hotels and travel in Miami.

This is what I call **LEVEL 1** in the world of Twitter usefulness. It's better than reading random status updates all day, but it's still a bit messy when it comes to spending quality time getting quick, quality results in a timely manner.

The next step, **LEVEL 2** of mining the Twitter world for useful information, is in using one of the newly developing 3rd party programs created specifically for this task. Twitter is different from Facebook in that Twitters have started from Day One as **OPEN SOURCE** technology. Any programmer could build an interface to work with Twitters, and build they did, developing a wide variety of unique programs for using Twitter ways the founders could not have dreamed of. Two top contenders, **TweetDeck** and **Seismic Desktop**, turn on the lights and bring even more order to the chaos of those millions of "Tweets" going on out there in real time, every minute of every hour of every day.

What these two programs do is allow the user quick updated access to the various searches one may wish to do on a daily basis related to your business. All of the most recent Tweets found using the key search terms one is using on Google today can be **kept organized and up-to-date** using these programs. In addition, for those individuals and businesses a person is currently "following" on Twitter, these contacts can be organized into **Groups**, very similar to the **Friends List** feature found on Facebook today. Using Groups, one can create a group related to business, one for travel, one for personal use, etc. These groups provide immediate screening and filtering of the Tweets one is currently following today, making the act of staying current on



Twitter just a bit easier than it once was.

These programs also allow the online user the capability of automatically creating shortened URLs (using bit.ly and tinyurl.com) for use in Twitter, as well as automatically allowing the online user the capability of uploading and linking to photos and videos. As these technologies develop, they begin to look more and more like Facebook does today, including emulating the key features of Facebook that has made this social network so powerful over the past year. In addition, they both integrate with Facebook as well, and when one places a Facebook Status Update feed side by side with their Twitter feed when using these programs, the comparisons become obvious and the reasons why Facebook re-engineered their entire system to become more like Twitter also becomes more clear.

Lastly, these programs allow the online user the capability, in one click, of seeing what some of the **top "conversations"** are among the people and businesses one is following, as well as within the key word searches being followed. Such immediate access to current "trends" and "topics" within a series of conversations is very powerful, and leads us one step closer to what I define as **LEVEL 3** of the power and utility of Twitter today.

Let's start big picture. Before the Internet, we learned about what was happening in the world via a small handful of television stations, print magazines, newspapers and radio. Just prior to the Internet, we had even more access to choices and information with the advent of Cable TV, providing us access to history, science, travel and food, just to name a few of the key topics covered early on.

Then came the Internet, and websites blossomed, providing us even more finite access to unique information and allowing people of similar interests to connect like never before. And then, just as the Internet was finally becoming easier for folks to understand, the world of blogs emerged, allowing anyone who chose to become a citizen journalist the opportunity to voice their opinions.

Blogs were unique in that they were both the next logical step in "democratizing" access to information on the Internet, allowing individuals such as Perez Hilton the opportunity to find new-found fame. What blogs did is make access to news and information even quicker, as individuals were now posting news-like items. In addition, and more importantly, blogs allowed for individuals to **INTERACT** with each other, planting the seeds for what is now known as Web 2.0.

So why is this so important? Because up to now, the online world grew comfortable in this information space. Google News gave quick access to this information, as did the various RSS news readers that allowed anyone to subscribe to and receive exactly the mix of CNN, BBC, the Huffington Post and a wide variety of other news sources and blogs, that was right for them.

Then came the Iranian election coverage and Twitter. Remember, the technology of Twitter had recently become more and more advanced, allowing for direct links and short, easy-to-read descriptions of videos, photos, website articles and blogs. The openness, usefulness and power of Twitter was ready to be capitalized on by the "masses" of users of both Twitter and Facebook, and nobody saw it coming.

As was mentioned, Twitter's power is in the 3rd party programs which interface with and make it more efficient and useful to work with. Taking that to the next logical step are programs and websites such as **TweetMeme.com** and **OpenRiot.com**. These sites take all of those mil-

lions of Twitters and try to figure out, based upon almost any search combination provided, what are the most **RELEVANT** Twitters at that moment in time. Since relevance is based upon these programs' new but developing algorithms as to what is most popular and "Tweeted" the most, these programs have harnessed the **POWER OF THE CROWDS** in bringing the most current, relevant and in more and more cases, quality information to the average user. Some of the headlines of this week emerged based upon this, asking the question - "**Is Twitter the CNN of the Next Generation?**"

Thus, the power of one's "Tweets" is not in tracking click-throughs of each individual Tweet, but rather posting something worth "ReTweeting" and virally spreading that information far and wide

As individuals, we have a knack for wanting the best information NOW. Although one can argue the higher quality of a fully fleshed out news story done by the New York Times compared to that of one hundred various blog postings about the same topic, the fact remains that a whole new means of accessing information has been released to the public. And the public is using this access and this technology in ways that were not thought possible just months before.

Now Google is racing to develop even better algorithms than TweetMeme.com, so that they remain relevant in the new world of "real-time conversational search." Facebook is redeveloping their service yet again, launching a new feature which will allow users to make their status updates available to **EVERYONE**, the same way Twitters are today. Facebook was caught by surprise in this... they had some high-quality and timely information in their service as well, but it wasn't available to the public at large. Thus, in the case of the Iranian Election, this information was useless when it came to planting the seeds for what has already become a major world event and could spiral into something even bigger.

So why is this important to any business using social network technologies in their marketing today? Because if you have something important and of quality to say, posting it in your blog or on your website and then putting the headline and link out there on Twitter can become increasingly important each passing day. More and more people use technologies mining these "Tweets" for access to information that is relevant to them. With this technology, some of the final barriers, also known as **GATE KEEPERS** of information, have been removed.

What can you do today? Besides the headline and link recommendation outlined above, you should spend some time ensuring you are connected to as many key individuals and businesses that are relevant to your business. You should also make a point of following conversations relevant to your industry based upon monitoring key word search terms in Twitter. When you come across a Tweet about an article or blog posting that is relevant to your industry, **RETWEETING** that Tweet allows you to both participate in this conversation and sets you up as a leader in your field. Being a leader means having more and more individuals and businesses follow what are you doing on Twitter and subsequently follow you more and more in the business and social networking world in general, including Facebook.

So is Twitter a fad? Absolutely not. When viewed from the big picture and interpreted as a truly social, human phenomenon, it's more than obvious that Twitter has opened up a new frontier in the emerging world of global, immediate access to information, and will be considered a stepping stone to technologies we will be using in the future. That said, leveraging your time and marketing efforts on Twitter today should allow your business to grow and stay contemporary in the world of tomorrow.