

Potential impact Twitter could be greater than Facebook

Global Influence of Twitter on Communities, Companies, Politics

[youtube:http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CivP6VN2cJc auto]

Twitter is by far the most important social networking trend for 2009, and has the potential to be larger than Facebook in terms of numbers of users multiplied by numbers of messages read or sent. Whatever you thought you knew about Twitter 12 weeks ago may already be a long time out of date.

President Obama has 336,000 followers, and Twitter was key in his election victory. With a single mouse click, his campaign manager was able to send an SMS message into hundreds of thousands of mobile phones and e-mail accounts.

During the Mumbai terror attacks, Twitter members were [broadcasting](#) second by second updates by phone, which were used by the BBC, other news media, and by security services (and also unfortunately by the [terrorists](#) themselves) to try to understand what was happening in the chaos.

Twitter already third largest social network

Twitter is now the third largest social networking site after Facebook and MySpace, with 7 million Twitter accounts opened by April 2009, increasing by around half a million a month.

Twitter is evolving very fast and is already having a huge impact on how companies and politicians are planning future campaigns. Twitter is transforming the daily lives of those who use the service and will have a huge global impact on how many tens of millions of people relate to each other.

You could say there is nothing new about Twitter: instant messaging services have been around for more than a decade, and status updates or conversations are a part of things like Facebook. But of course the same was said of YouTube back in 2004. I had video clips on this site for 6 years before YouTube started, but the simple interface, clever site layout, and features such as comments, groups, and so on, were all reasons why YouTube shot from nothing in 2 years, without any advertising budget, to a company bought by Google for \$1.6bn.

Get into Twitter as a matter of urgency

I often say this to corporations: “Take hold of your future or the future will take hold of you.” Take hold of Twitter in your work, or Twitter will start to take hold of you.

If you are a business, in marketing or media, or in government, you need to get into the Twitter world as a matter of urgency, if you have not done so already. At the very least, register an account with your brand name – costs nothing and helps protect it. Understand what is going on, join in (you need to “feel” the experience), and think about how to make Twitter work for you.

Average age of Twitter members is 35

Yet most managers don't have an account and don't really understand what all the fuss is about.

At the same time, most people who DO have a Twitter account are changing very fast in how they use it, and a significant number are using Twitter as their main way to communicate with other people.

To non-twiters the whole phenomenon can seem bizarre, weird, time-wasting and something “for the younger generation”. But the average age of Twitters is 35. This is not a trend that is being driven by youth.

A simple question started it all

Simple and fast, the site asks a single question:

“What are you doing right now?”

The answer can only be 140 characters long. Many users answer the question by posting their daily log of activities, just like status updates on Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace or Plaxo. Some people are posting hundreds of such micro-blogging entries a week.

“Just put the cake in the oven” “Just taken cake out of the oven – smells great!

Changing from micro-blog to conversations on life and issues

Many celebrities have quickly collected tens of thousands of followers, anxious to learn whether they ordered a latte or an espresso this morning, or whether their cat still needs to go to the vet, or what happened on the way to the dentist.

But the Twitter community has evolved rapidly using Reply and Direct Message to create hundreds of millions of conversations, most of which are public. Reply allows you to add a public comment to one someone has just made. Direct Message allows your message to remain private to the person you are “Twitting”. Hundreds of thousands of Twitters have moved from social diary entries to share links, relay news, ask groups of their friends for advice, or to sell products and services.

Twitter companies spring up every week

At the same time, many new websites have sprung up to help people manage their Twitter accounts. You can locate people who are Twitting on topics that interest you and join them automatically.

You can automatically send replies thanking people who have decided to follow your messages. You can even stack up loads of messages to be released automatically over the following hours or days. You can sort the people you follow into groups, and handle them differently.

Linking Twitter to the rest of personal life and business

You can also link Twitter to other social networks you have – so for example, an update in Twitter then triggers updates in your Facebook, Plaxo, MySpace and LinkedIn accounts.

Thousands of companies are now using Twitter for marketing, with spamming, phishing scams and other problems becoming increasingly common.

Twitter Rules and Social Codes

As Twitter evolves, new rules are emerging. Some are Strict Laws of the Twitter world (for example, you can only follow up to 2,000 people unless you have a similar number or greater number following you as you are following. Other rules are informal (for example, DON'T pester people with Twitter messages that are really just promotional or you will make people very angry with your brand and company).

Future of Twitter

Twitter will fuse with other technologies such as GPS on mobile phones, so that people will find themselves communicating with others not just based on topics of interest, or personal links of some kind, but based on where they are sitting or standing right now.

Twitter is very similar to Google in approach: very simple home page with few options. Expect Twitter to concentrate first on rapid growth, before trying to work out how to make money from the service. Expect Google to watch Twitter with huge interest.

Rivals to Twitter

There is a limited opportunity (if taken soon) to develop a rival platform, especially since the Twitter site is (still) so easy to ransack for contacts, replies and so on, from your own account, to import into other applications or platforms. Twitter could develop into an exclusive platform with a near-monopoly position, just as Skype has done for internet calls, and YouTube has done for video.

Twitter was originally linked very closely to SMS on mobile phones – hence the 140 character limit on length of messages. But outside the US, very few phone companies allow Twitter messages without charging. Expect this to change, with special phone deals allowing Twitter SMS to be included (perhaps with limits on numbers of messages allowed a month).

In the meantime, expect many millions of Twitters to send and read messages using web pages viewed on their mobile devices.

Expect a large number of small businesses to spring up, trying to make money out of extending the range of what Twitter does for people eg sending messages automatically to other social networks, or integrating all social network sites together into one portal for each user. As this happens, expect Twitter to come under pressure to extend what they provide themselves, to try and retain access to the users they have. Otherwise they could find that most users only go to Twitter to open an account, and use another site altogether to manage Twitter.

Expect thousands of companies to try to build up large numbers of Twitter followers, often by pretending to be an individual.

Expect a rush by companies and individuals to secure their own names before they get taken by someone else – Twitter names are really important to get right, because there is no space to add other information in 140 letter messages.

Expect many celebrities (and their fans) to discover that they are being impersonated by people

who register their names and then invent details of their hour-by-hour lives.

How to be successful on Twitter

- Register with a name that is easy to recognise for those who know
- Make sure your profile is interesting
- Put your Twitter account details on your website / blog / Facebook
- Start making some interesting posts – comments, with maybe some useful links
- Avoid a tone which seems to be just marketing / promotion
- Search for topics that interest you using the Twitter site, and start following those that are posting messages about them – a significant number may start following you back
- Don't post too often or people may decide to unfollow you
- Post regularly
- Reply to those who comment – and make direct comments to people whose posts you enjoy reading

(Here is a fuller version of [How to be Successful on Twitter](#))

Welcome to the community.

Useful Twitter links

[Patrick Dixon on Twitter](#) - read about the future and join in the conversation (if you have an account, just press FOLLOW below the photo.)

[Wikipedia entry on Twitter](#)

[Twitter applications](#) - Twitter site

[Top 21 Twitter applications](#) by actual use

Patrick Dixon's Twitter Updates

[follow me on Twitter](#)
