

In 2007, Twitter began as what many considered to be a flash-in-the-pan social media outlet, but as of 2011, Twitter had over 200 million registered users and is one of the 10 most popular sites on the Internet – anything but a passing phase. Companies that lack a strategic, lead-generating plan of attack for their Twitter accounts are losing out on access to a huge potential customer base and the opportunity to showcase themselves as social savvy, relevant businesses. Being followed on Twitter is an incredibly strong signal of online affinity for your business. These self-selected prospects are indicating an active interest in your brand and are asking to hear more from you.

Think of Twitter as the water cooler for B2B marketers: It's a vibrant community where businesses can prospect leads and congregate as thought leaders to discuss relevant industry topics. B2B marketers are always striving to provide good content in an easily digestible and timely format. On Twitter, it is easy to quickly compose Tweets and messages aimed at those interested in your company or product. (Caveat: words of caution about this to follow.)

At Marketo, we are always seeking marketing avenues that allow for continuous, real-time engagement with our customers and prospects. Twitter happens to be one of our most effective prospecting channels. We use it to get the word out to customers about specific product offerings and as a forum for potential customers to discover and learn more about us and what we offer.

Twitter Following

Becoming someone's follower on Twitter accomplishes four goals:

- You identify Twitter accounts that will be relevant and interesting to you, your organization and your industry.
- You let people know that you're on Twitter, and encourage them to follow you back.
- You associate yourself with a specific group of industry experts and thought leaders, and demonstrate your interest in the space.
- Twitter is a great platform for engagement, so once you follow someone on Twitter you can work on starting a conversation.

Quick Tip

You will also want to make sure that your Twitter handle is short, as you only have 140 characters to complete your post. Having a short Twitter handle will help your followers when they re-tweet you.

Tips for Following

- Find people to follow by importing your contact databases using tools that Twitter provides. Then, broaden this action by following those that your followers are following-- where relevant. Be sure to also follow people that your competitors are following.
- Do a search for experts in the field who are tweeting. You can find people to follow on sites like Wefollow.com or Twibes.com.
- If possible, try to make sure to follow back relevant people and companies that are following you. You don't want to upset prospects, customers or partners by not following them!
- Twitter provides easy search functionality so that you can find people that are talking about your company and your industry. Spend some time trying out different searches and hashtags that are relevant to your business. Once you find the people who are contributing most to the conversation, start following them.
- Read the tweets of those you follow and search for tweets on keywords relevant to your product or service. Twitter client applications such as TweetDeck, Hootsuite, and Seismic are useful for organizing your Twitter feeds, managing multiple microblogging accounts, and post or scheduling posts from multiple users.
- Create lists. By creating a list you can easily segment people who you are following. As an example you can create a list for hot prospects, customers, and one for competitors.

Tips to Make Your Tweets Engaging and Easy for a Follower to Retweet:

- Always use a URL shortener like Bit.ly. They are also often built into other tools such as Hootsuite and Tweetdeck. You only have 140 characters, so make it count!
- Keep tweets below 140 characters, ideally under 100 characters. It makes retweeting easier to do.
- The symbol # on Twitter is known as a hashtag. These tags are used to affiliate a tweet with a certain topic and can be useful for tracking social marketing campaigns and connecting with customers. You can develop your own hashtags to try and promote a viral following for a specific topic or campaign.
- Avoid the temptation to use tools that send automatic direct messages. These types of messages are often construed as spam and may cause people to “unfollow” you.
- You can also engage Twitter followers and influencers by including an @mention in your tweets. You can do this when you post content you think will resonate with an influencer. An easy format to follow is tweeting with a link to relevant content and then including the @mention at the end of the tweet.
- Use Twitter lists to segment users by interest or group together brand advocates and your favorite twitter users. Keep in mind that when you add a user to a public list they are notified and the list is open and searchable to all users. A private list, which may be used for competitors, is only visible to you.
- Use Twitter during events and to promote things like contests. A great way to engage your Twitter followers is to create a contest that asks followers to contribute in some way. You want your Twitter feed to be a mix of Tweets you've created, as well as replies and retweets.

Tweetchats

A Twitter chat is a public conversation on Twitter based around a unique hashtag. The hashtag allows you to follow the discussion and easily participate in it. Most Twitter chats are usually recurring and on specific topics but some are also based around special events. Hosting a Twitter chat is an amazing way to engage with your fans and followers. In addition, this is a great way to better understand and grow your community and to promote your brand and business.

Five Great Weekly Tweetchats for Marketers: (<http://under30ceo.com/25-twitter-chats-every-entrepreneur-must-know/>)

1. [#blogchat](#)
Topic: Blogging
Host: [@MackCollier](#)
When? Sundays 9PM ET
Why it's Cool? This is supposed to be the largest Twitter chat on the web and every last week of the month users pick the topic.
2. [#socialmedia](#)
Topic: Social Media
Host: [@JasonBreed](#) [@marc_meyer](#)
When? Tuesday at 12PM ET.
What's good? There is a huge archive of 130+ chats. Check out the transcripts here and check out some serious thought leadership by attendees.
3. [#b2bchat](#)
Topic: B2B Marketing Best Practices
Host: [@b2b_chat](#) [@andrewspoeth](#) [@b2bento](#) [@cuferg](#) [@kseniacoffman](#)
When? Thursdays 8PM ET
What's Cool? This group features its own LinkedIn group <http://linkd.in/qJtYFg> exclusive to b2b marketers.
4. [#mmchat](#)
Topic: Marketer Monday
Hosts: [@TheSocialCMO](#) [@JeffAshcroft](#)
When? Mondays 8PM ET
What's Smart? Most recent topic: “Would You Join Your Own Community?” Get the chance to meet social marketing experts from leading firms every week.
5. [#bizforum](#)
Topic: Trending Business Topics
Host: [@samfiorella](#)
When? Wednesdays 8PM ET
What's Awesome? Unlike other chats participants are encouraged to agree or disagree and really get to the root of the issue. Hashtag also features the question of the day.

Promoted Tweets in Timelines

A Twitter strategy we have used with great success is launching Promoted Tweets in timelines targeted to followers and users who are similar to our followers. Our Promoted Tweets contain timely and engaging content like contests for trips to industry events and links to thought-leadership pieces. Every promoted Tweet that we run goes to a gated resource page. We set up a series of three tweets per campaign and rotate them accordingly. For timelines, we run three tweets on one campaign for three days at a time

Promoted Tweets in Search

For search Tweets, we run two offers every two weeks with three different tweets focusing on fifteen keywords and five countries. We have found through trial and error that it's more about the offer than about the money spent. Fresh relevant content offers with the right messaging yields CTRs of up to 17% with a cost-per-prospect coming in at around \$14 each. This, of course, will vary based on your offer and the relevancy of your content.

We always see significant spikes in relevant Tweets during industry events. We decided to capitalize on that and use Promoted Tweets in search results during key B2B conference dates. This allowed us to be part of relevant conversations when the conversations are hot. By targeting event-specific hashtags and relevant keywords like "B2B" and "lead management," we are where we need to be at prime lead-generating moments. Being a part of real-time conversations means pouncing on real-time opportunities.

Influencer Marketing on Twitter

Twitter is a fantastic platform to learn who your influencers are. Because Twitter is designed for quick exchanges of information and shares, you can start to keep track of who is re-tweeting your content and engaging in conversations. Remember to reach out to your top sharers to create relationships. They may be interested in doing a guest blog or allowing you to do a guest blog on their site. The more you engage directly with your top influencers, the more they will continue to promote your content.

Messaging

To some, this may sound backwards or surprising, but do not use Twitter to only promote your company. Sure, calling out your company's new ebook or webcast is an important part of your tweeting. But if you never contribute to the conversations taking place, if you never offer something personal or fun or funny, you are missing the prime opportunity unique to Twitter. Twitter is about building relationships; it is about reciprocity. Engage and be engaged. Be a part of the flow of information. Don't be a broken record repeatedly rattling off the company's tagline. It's in your best interests to pay attention to what your customers' and prospective customers are tweeting about and to respond accordingly.

Remember, your content should create value and ultimately, be helpful to your network. In B2B marketing, retweeting material that will be helpful to your network is good, but writing your own informational material is even better. If your network (specifically, customers and prospective buyers) benefit from something you tweet about, they will remember you and your business.

Here is that word of caution mentioned earlier: As with anything, a little self promotion is good for business but if your entire tweet history is only about you and your company, you've got it wrong. Keep in mind the 4-1-1 rule:

The 4-1-1 rule for Twitter was popularized by Tippingpoint Labs and Joe Pulizzi, founder of Junta42 and the Content Marketing Institute. For every one self-serving tweet, you should re-tweet one relevant tweet and most importantly share four pieces of relevant content written by others.

What's great about this approach is that it lets you engage in the conversation, build awareness, and keep in touch with your followers without coming across as pushy or too "me" focused. We've been trying to follow it at Marketo for our Twitter updates as well as our Facebook updates, and so far results are positive. As you plan out the cadence of updates you'll send, try scheduling four educational or entertaining Tweets mixed with one "soft promotion" (e.g. attend an event) and one "hard promotion" (e.g. download a free trial or apply for an account).