How you can have tweet success on Twitter

MARY-JANE KINGSLAND
WOMEN IN BUSINESS

take your goods and services to customers rather than wait for them to come to you. Sounds good – but does online social media like Twitter offer businesses a new opportunity to reach new customers? Business editor **PAUL HILL** reports.

To tweet or not to tweet – that's the question.

The social networking site Twitter has grown from a standing start to a global brand with millions of users worldwide in less than four years.

Is it making money?

No.

Does that matter?

Well, it took Google four years to make money.

But is Twitter a new way for businesses to reach out to potential customers?

Or is it a technology fad which will flash and fade within a few years?

Simply, is it worth businesses taking the time and trouble to keep tweeting?

There are a host of journalists working for the EDP who are among the Twitterati – were commenting on issues through the day, others giving their views on the site on breaking news and how the news agenda changes through the day.

Advertise so for promotion with the great unwashed.

But when the prime minister's wife hosts Brown and celebrity Stephen Fry on a Twitter-inspired TV show, and Prince Charles and Barack Obama and David Cameron suggested in the blunt set terms this summer that there is a real difference between quick and measured communication.

In a sense, he was right. There is only a limited number of tweets in these 140 characters at a time.

But Mr Cameron's dismissal of Twitter missed the point.

Twitter isn't a pulpit.

Twitter is a dialogue.

This is not a virtual place where someone can broadcast anybody whatever someone else gives them.

They interact.

They argue.

They discuss and debate what has been said.

If businesses believe there are no customers on Twitter, they don't have to say customers aren't tweeting about them.

"Managing online reputation is more crucial than ever," said Kate Morford of Jungle 19 in London.

"Companies need to be one step ahead of the game. Twitter is talked about about them by bloggers and customers on review sites. Equally, companies need to ensure what they say about themselves is in tune with their ethos and brand.

"Time and time again the question comes up about who is going to be responsible for tweeting on Twitter. Who will manage the Facebook page and respond to online pain on the back of a customer complaint? Companies need to think carefully and integrate social media into their PR and marketing plans.

"The world of traditional media is constantly evolving and companies that have only just got to grips with Facebook, MySpace and Twitter then there is an online social PR strategy to consider."

Rob Wesley, from search marketing and social media agency Fortner, explained: "Twitter's rate of growth has propelled it into the limelight, and it is now the most talked about social media opportunity at a startingly fast rate.

"But is Twitter for everyone? Some people rely on it for their daily news feed and as a way of communicating and networking. But others are simply following the flock, and joining Twitter because it's the latest thing to do. Are more people sign up and realise that it isn't for them? Twitter may have inevitably reach a peak of popularity and new users will start to fall.

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Picture: BOVEE BRADLEY

ONLINE FORUM
Increasingly, news and views are being spread on social networking sites like Twitter. Used correctly, they can be a tool for businesses.

TEN TIPS

Starter for 10 – Further's Twitter tips:

- Your website is your shop window for your business. Use Twitter to direct them to your Twitter account, make sure you badge up your website with 'follow us on Twitter' and link to your Twitter account.
- Only tweet if you have something interesting or informative to say.
- Do not worry about how many you need be there is an online social PR strategy to consider."

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Twitter members have never even posted an update, and the majority – 60p – post less than once a day, indicating that for the majority of users Twitter is perceived into as a long term commitment.

"But if the current Twitter boom doesn't last, what does this mean for businesses that are using the site as a primary communication channel? It is all know of a company that has joined Twitter, has spent months trying to attract as many followers as possible, but are they really making the most of Twitter and, more importantly, are they using it well?"

Mr Wesley said that the furnishings retailer Habitat got its Twitter tactics completely wrong" when it tagged its tweets with #habitatcelebrity.

Using a non-related, populist political story to attract attention to their latest sale brought nothing but negative responses from angry Twitter users who had fed back to unsolicited spam emails," he said.

Twitter is not the same fantastic Twitter practice happening in the social media world. Dell, for example, has had for more success. By creating

- If you're tagging you? Tweet to link it to a current topic, it has to be relevant and interesting to be considered a success.
- Check Twitter for mentions of your company regularly, the only way to know you can see mentions and gives you a chance to respond.
- Offer exclusive discounts or give your Twitter followers the chance to preview products, and reward their loyalty.
- Follow other companies, bloggers and journalists in your industry to issue and varying views on industry news.

Twitter accounts for each arm of the business, including @DellOutlet, they keep an existing loyal customer base aware of clearance events.

Dell has over 1 million followers, all of whom have the potential to "re-tweet" (re-post) the messages, Dell has attributed more than $3m in sales to their Twitter campaign.

"Using Twitter to engage an existing loyal customer base is the key to success," said Dell. "Dell is currently ranking the wrath of tweeters scorned with open and unsolicited messages."

Mr Wesley said there were examples of traditional brands and familiar products that were performing social media to use.

"Our Twitter Adiamra is a great example – they're a fantastic brand name, with an existing loyal customer base – and they are now talking to their fans and fans of their fans.

"They use their Twitter account in two ways: firstly to share industry and new product news and, secondly, to respond to others on Twitter who are talking about the industry.

"One of the many benefits of Twitter is that it allows you to see what members are saying about an a company or your products. It's a great sanitising tool for responding to complaints, complaints and relevant discussions posted by other members you're engaging with – existing customers and potential customers – showing you are an approachable and informative company. This can only work to attract new business.

"Twitter may well be reaching the peak of its popularity. But of the millions of users, it will retain a high number of users who have discovered Twitter is a self-sustaining and valuable tool for businesses who know how to use it, and use it well."

CASE STUDY

Building up a following and gaining people's trust

Claire Martinsen, founder of Breckland Orchard, in Ashwell, near Thetford, started in February this year, and an called @breckland. I have 321 followers, which is just about the right number for me to manage – any more and I think I would feel removed from everyone.

I tweet about Breckland Orchard, and my work. I don't need to use it to do personal tweets. I post lots of pictures of the Norfolk countryside, of the fabulous places my drinks are sold in – Stink Bitching, Burnham Market and so on.

I also tweet how I make the product, where and when. I tweet about the places I go and the people I meet. I think Twitter is powerful as a business tool. I use it to raise the profile of the brand.

"For a small firm such as mine it's an amazing and powerful marketing tool. As it is totally free, I can't understand why everyone wouldn't want to use it."

● Who Claire follows:

"A real mixed and eclectic bunch. I would say they mostly fall into three camps – fellow mumpreneurs, food writers/chefs and Norfolk folk.

"Although there are other associated companies, I don't follow them as they may face accrued conversing. So there are a smattering of film producers, Norwegians, American food coaches and so on. I don't follow famous folk as they tend to be one way – I follow them, they talk at you, they don't need to hear what we have to say.

● Why Claire thinks it works:

"You can ask quick questions and get an immediate response – for example, where anyone knows a great hotel meeting venue?

"Also, the end of news as it is happening.

"Most twitters write blogs/articles so via the micro-blog (the tweet) you get directed to sources of information and help. I use it to direct people to my blog, for instance. You can engage with people and they want to know them over time, so drinks a year.

● How Twitter has helped Claire:

"The Chef Tim Payne recieved my drinks in Hand and Cleaver magazine. I am not a subscriber, and didn't get the magazine. Tim tweeted that he had received a tweet asking if anyone had a copy. A copy arrived in the post two days later.

"I recently exhibited at the Specialty Food Fair at Olympia. Via tweeting beforehand I got in converse with a lot of people who came to see me. So when I was able to hold a network as far afield as Devon and Scotland.

"I was contacted by a fellow twitterer who had booked a trade stand at Sterlingham for a food festival. I hadn't been able to take a stand as I had to go to Olympia. I was able to offer a stand to my drinks at the stand.

"I was contacted by 'Chilli-ish-North' who was in a bit of a sheer chilli fuel. He asked if he could review my ginger beer with chilli on its site.

"Through following marketing the Norfolk Food Show I found out that I posted a tweet asking if anyone had a copy. A copy arrived in the post two days later.

"I have recently started tweeting with customers – I have about three or four that I regularly tweet with, and so tweet back and forth. Twitter is a way of getting to know them better and keep them in touch with what I am doing.

MAKING A NAME: Claire Martinsen, founder of Breckland Orchard.

Tune in to what is said about your firm

If hundreds of people were talking about you, wouldn't you want to know what they were saying, says Jonathan Bailey, of Bailey Communications agency Tribe.

No matter what you may personally think of Twitter, Facebook or YouTube, the fact is that millions of people are using these sites to communicate with each other – and possibly about your business or product.

She suggests typing the name of your business or product into one of the free online monitoring tools such as addictomatic.com to find out what's being said about you across multiple social networking and bookmarking sites and blogs, such as Twitter, Facebook or Flickr and on news sources.

Once there, don't make the mistake of dismissing comments as the ramblings of faceless bloggers with too much time on their hands – these are real people, so listen and learn from their comments.

All it takes is one disgruntled customer with an internet connection to seriously damage your business, particularly if you fail to respond or do so in the wrong way.

Listening to what is being said is a good start, but the next step is to start the conversation yourself and make sure you are ready to answer your advice-seeking friends.

Tribe offers a free audit of your customers and talk about the positive images of your new product on to your own Flickr page so that it can forward a email the link to your customers to let them know what people are saying about it.

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Tribe also offers to forward your conversation and images the more followers you will gain.

The Futurefest is a cause for celebration. East Anglia is a hotbed of talent and entrepreneurship, but none on ladies, where were you?

The EDP's Futurefest is a splendid collection of entrepreneurs, all of whom are inspiring people. Richard and Kate Cawkin are one such.

Given that there are more women than men in the UK and Nga work be a living, the disproportionate representation is difficult to reconcile.

Or so it was as I am sure you do, that there are pockets of inspirational women working hard and very successfully in our region.

So why are they not in the listing? Our answer may be that there persists an intrinsic complacency in both the business world and the battle for equality has already been won.

Nearly three-quarters of a representative sample of women surveyed by the organisation stated that they agreed with the statement: Women today have as much chance of succeeding in the workplace as men.

Fewer, if at all, agreed.

The facts tell a different story. According to the government's Equalities Office, women remain the most underrepresented group in the UK in terms of participation in the workforce.

To find out why, I did a little survey of my own – these were some of the concerns:

- Women make lifestyle choices and set up business that work around the demands of their families.
- Women don't tend to be into manufacturing and make big sellable companies that fit the headlines.
- I find it difficult to know where to start and what support is out there.
- Women feature highly in the service industries and in the voluntary sector.
- We just aren't very good at cheer-leading.

This leads me to my next question: does it matter that we do not feature highly in the league tables? Well yes and no.

Yes, because women are underrepresented and so are not properly recognised.

We need more role models. Know go about their daily lives at work and at home and inspire the next generation and good humour; but their contribution should not be without acknowledgement.

Nominations are now being taken for the 2010 Futurefest. The absence of females in the ratings for 2009 has raised a few eyebrows – not only mine – so please if you would like to nominate a female entrepreneur, academic you admire visit www.futurefestivalcentral.co.uk. The judges are looking for entrepreneurs – they don't need to be heading up multinationals – but perhaps, like the first black US president, Barack Obama, they would say "Yes we can".

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