

# Getting your head round Twitter

## A quick users' guide by Antonia Mochan (@euonymblog)

This quick guide is to help people you have signed up for Twitter, but are not quite sure where to start. Please let me have your feedback!

### Step one: work out what it is you want to use it for.

Twitter is a multi-dimensional tool. It is almanac, publishing platform, hive mind, TV guide, newswire, magazine and many other things, all wrapped up in 140 characters. That can be quite complicated, so it's best to have a clear idea of your starting point. Here are some possible scenarios:

- I have lots of things to say and need a platform to say them.
- I'm a friendly soul and like connecting with people around issues that interest me.
- I want to know what's going on in the world
- I want to learn more about my particular area of professional activity
- I want to keep in touch with people I know near and far
- I have niche interests and want to find other people that have the same

These scenarios aren't mutually exclusive; I certainly have elements of all of them in my Twitter activity.

### Step two: build a community

Remember your first weeks at university? There you were, on your own, probably didn't know anyone, thinking about how to make friends. What did you do? You probably started talking to people on your course, in your hall of residence. Then you went to the Freshers' Fair and signed up for some societies you were interested in. The basic concept for Twitter is the same – you need to build relationships, and it takes time. How can you do that? Here are a few pointers:

- Use the search function to find people or organisations that are of interest and follow them
- Look at the suggestions from Twitter as to other similar people.
- If you like what someone has said, or find it interesting, retweet it. They get notified and that will encourage them to engage with you.
- Reply when you have something to say; even people with thousands of followers will take the time to engage with a good reply.
- Use `#hashtags` to find new people with similar interests. These `#tags` are used to link tweets about the same things and are invaluable for finding out about a subject. So if you want to find out what people are saying about the Tour de France, search under `#tdf13`

and all tweets with that hashtag will appear. You can then use that to find new people to connect with. Remember to add them to your own tweets so people can find you.

- On Fridays, you will see tweets with the #hashtag #fff . This stands for Follow Friday and is when people make suggestions about interesting people to follow. It's a good way of finding new contacts.
- Most Twitter platforms will let you see the thread of conversations. So if you reply to a tweet, you can see who else has replied and decide whether they seem interesting enough to follow.

### Step 3: Choose a Twitter client

There are loads of different services for using Twitter and it can be a bit confusing choosing a client.

First thing is to work out whether you will be mainly using it mobile or on the web. If mobile, several of the apps are free, so you can try them out and see which you like. Some like Hootsuite are particularly for managing multiple accounts. Beyond that, it's just a question of which suits you and which functions you are looking for. I find the Twitter for iOS app absolutely fine, much better than their web client. Others include Tweetdeck, Tweetbot (£), Tweetlist, Ubersocial.

### Step 4: Tweeting

So, you're logged in to your Twitter client, you follow a bunch of people and now you're ready to get going. What do you actually do?

a) Reply: if someone writes something you have a response to, reply to them. The symbol is usually a backwards arrow, which will bring up a window which already has the @username of the person that wrote the initial tweet. In some Twitter clients, any other @usernames mentioned in the original tweet will appear too, and you can decide whether or not to add them.

b) Retweet (RT): if you think the people who follow you would be interested in something you have read, retweet it. The symbol for this is usually two arrows in a box formation ↻. This completely copies this tweet and sends it out again. In some clients, when you hit this symbol, it will give the options "Retweet to Followers" and "Quote Tweet" or something similar. This gives you the option to either send it completely as is (retweet), or to add your own quick comment (quote tweet - bear in mind the 140 character limit here). One point of etiquette is that if you edit someone's tweet you should preface it with MT (for modified tweet). If you use content seen elsewhere without actually retweeting, the etiquette is to use h/t @username (hat-tip).

c) Mention: if you think something is of particular interest to someone you know is on Twitter, then you can bring your tweet to their direct attention by mentioning them using their @username. If the @username is the first thing in the tweet, only people that follow both of you will see it. But it isn't private. If you want to put their name first, but want other people to see it, then put [.@username](#). So for example [.@Username](#) is playing at the Dog & Duck tonight, hope to see lots of you there.

d) Direct message: If you want to send a private message to someone that can't be seen by anyone else (except maybe the NSA...) then put `d username` (note: NO @) and that message will go only to them.

e) Favourite: Twitter allows you to bookmark tweets to read later, by marking them as favourites. You do this by hitting the star ☆ which will turn a colour (usually yellow). You can then go back and find that tweet later. The person who sent the tweet will get a notification that you have made it a favourite.

f) Sharing: All clients will have the possibility of emailing the tweet, or copying the link so that you can use it elsewhere. The button for this changes from one client to another, so you will need to do a little exploring. Others will have additional functions such as sharing via Facebook, or translating the tweet.

g) Links: One of the best things about Twitter is its curation and intelligence function: people will be bringing to your attention fun/interesting/important stuff from around the web. If you see something on the web that you want to share, there are various ways to go about it. Most web pages now have a Twitter button, so hit that, enter your username and password and the tweet will be sent. If you don't want to do that, you can cut and paste the link from your browser into Twitter. Most mobile clients have automatic link shortening, therefore taking up the fewest possible of your 140 characters. Twitter for iOS does this, but keeps the full URL, which can throw you at first. Some web clients like Hoot Suite require you to put the URL into a box and press a button to shorten it.

h) Write your own: of course you'll have your own things to say, and every client will have a new message button for you to transmit your own views to the world. I've put this last because many new users will retweet and reply before they are comfortable doing their own tweeting.

So there are the basics. The rest is just about getting out there and being you!