



# Twitter for Beginners

by **Becky Robinson**

weaving  
influence™

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by Becky Robinson

**M**ountain State University is starting to use Twitter as a recruiting tool. As Twitter gains popularity — [some estimates from last year](#) say 10,000 new users join each day — we as a university community are exploring how we can use Twitter to reach current and potential students. As many as [41% of college admissions departments](#) are using social media to connect with students. [College career centers](#) are using Twitter as a means to support their students as well.

Many business leaders use Twitter; [Big Winner](#) compiled an impressive list. Remarkably, though, according to [UberCEO](#), only two CEOs from Fortune 100 companies have Twitter accounts.

Of course, I can certainly understand why CEOs wouldn't join Twitter: the constant stream of information can be overwhelming. Learning something new, especially social media, can be intimidating. And, Twitter's usefulness can be hard to determine at first. Michael Hyatt is one CEO who thinks using [Twitter is an important leadership tool](#).

I am a fairly new Twitter user. I, too, was skeptical at first. Yet as time has gone on, I have seen the ways that Twitter can add value to business relationships.

By getting involved with a community on Twitter, you can:

- build relationships
- build excitement
- make yourself (and your company) memorable
- delight your customers

### **Building Relationships**

For me, the most evident benefit has been relationship building. As I have followed others interested in leadership, I have gotten to know several of them beyond just sharing tweets. Direct messages, exchanged through Twitter, are a quick way to go a little





deeper in connecting with people on Twitter. Sometimes these messages lead to email exchanges or even phone calls. The important thing is that Twitter gives me a chance to get involved in a non-stop conversation and exchange of ideas. I get to see what people are reading, and what they are thinking about and talking about. I get to share my thoughts, ask questions, encourage others.

### **Building Excitement**

As I have been using Twitter more, I have seen how excitement builds around certain people's ideas or blog posts. An example: [Mary Jo Asmus](#) is a friend of mine who is a fairly new Twitter user. She had a post recently: "[Is Kindness a Leadership Competency?](#)" For days, people were "tweeting" and "retweeting" about it. It is fun to get involved in spreading excitement about someone's ideas and writing.

### **Making Your Company Memorable**

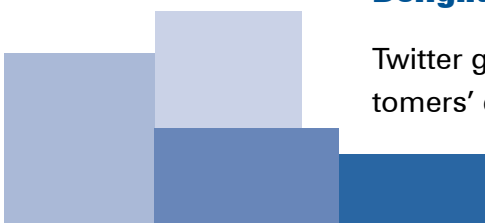
By creating a Twitter presence and developing a group of followers, you create an opportunity to influence a large group of people. Although I have about 1,000 followers on Twitter, those followers have many more. If I tweet something inspiring or compelling, people will re-tweet my words, so that I reach a much larger audience. Over time, the things I tweet and re-tweet paint a picture of who I am and what is important to me — and by extension, the organization I represent. When they see my Twitter photo and read what I am tweeting about, they are gaining an indelible impression of both me and Mountain State University.

With that in mind, I tweet carefully, and thoughtfully.

### **Delight Your Customers**

Twitter gives companies an immediate way to respond to customers' concerns or problems. As you get more familiar with

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Twitter, you can use an application like TweetDeck to do a constant search for mentions of your organization's name. If someone tweets about an issue related to service from your company, you can reply with offers of help in solving their difficulty. When Mountain State University started using Feedblitz for email subscriptions to our leadership blog, I tweeted about making the switch. Within minutes, the CEO of Feedblitz replied and offered help with any issues I might have. His responsiveness and interest solidified our decision to use his company.

**Many people choose to use a variation of their real name or a name that explains what they do in some way.**

You can also use Twitter to respond to satisfied customers to show your thanks and appreciation for their business. In doing so, you will be surprised at how easy it is to delight your customers. Once you do, it is likely that they will use Twitter to create a good buzz about your company.

### **Getting Started**

The first step to getting started is to sign up for a Twitter account. It takes only a few minutes, and it's free. To be the most effective out of the starting gate, you should take care of a few things right away:

- **Choose a Twitter name that represents you well.** Many people choose to use a variation of their real name or a name that explains what they do in some way. Simple is better so if you're not sure, just use your name. Try to keep it relatively short, though, since the characters of your name take away from 140 characters you use for a message on Twitter.
- **Add a picture.** The sure sign of a Twitter newbie: the generic default avatar. If you don't want to use your photo,





use a company logo or use some other photo.

- **Add some information to your profile about who you are, especially in the context of the business you represent on Twitter.** Use words that people may use for searches.

Now that you have a Twitter account, what should you do next?

### **Who to Follow**

Chances are, you have some friends or colleagues on Twitter already. Ask around the office or your neighborhood, or post on Facebook to let your friends know that you are tweeting. You can also search for people you know by name. If you like to read blogs, check to see if your favorite bloggers are on Twitter

**The idea behind #FollowFriday is that people tweet lists of people they follow; sometimes they even tell why they follow the person.**

Next, you can use [We Follow](#) to find interesting people to follow. If you're interested in following celebrity tweets you'll find them here, along with news sites and a list of the top Twitter users. You can also search this directory by keyword, the most useful feature. I searched "leadership" and found lots of fascinating folks to follow.

Pay attention to #FollowFriday. Chances are, you will find other compelling characters to follow this way. Apart from following people because they followed me first, this is my biggest source of for new contacts on Twitter. The idea behind #FollowFriday is that people tweet lists of people they follow; sometimes they even tell why they follow the person. I love these personal recommendations.





## **TweetDeck**

The next thing to do is download [TweetDeck](#), [HootSuite](#), or another free application for use with Twitter. If you want to explore other options, read (Google “[Twitter applications](#),” you’ll find plenty) [this article](#) from [TechCrunch](#) about the [Top 21 Twitter Applications](#).

One reason you need TweetDeck is that it allows you to keep track of what people are saying about you (mentions) and use groups or searches to hone in on the information that is most relevant to you. You can view several columns at once: all friends, mentions, direct messages, and any searches.

Using columns saves time and helps you tweet more efficiently. You can create a group of friends that you want to pay special attention to: for me it’s my top leadership blogging friends. Because I have a special group on TweetDeck just for them, I see their new tweets quickly and can retweet their new posts or see what they’re reading and talking about.

**It doesn’t make sense to me to overanalyze the content of my tweets.**

Another benefit of TweetDeck is that you can synchronize your tweets and your Facebook status updates or view several Twitter accounts at once. Whether or not you use this feature really depends upon your purpose in tweeting. Since I use Twitter for business and Facebook for personal contacts, I haven’t connected my two accounts.

The main benefit I have heard about HootSuite is the ability to schedule tweets.





## What to Do Next

### Start Following

Twitter can be overwhelming at first. So start with this: Find at least twenty people (or twenty more people) to follow. Then set up TweetDeck with columns of topics that you're interested in monitoring. Once you've done that, set aside at least 5 minutes a day for the next week to log onto Twitter and find your way around.

### Start Tweeting

But what do you say? I have read several posts that outline percentages of the types of tweets you should post.

It doesn't make sense to me, though, to overanalyze the content of my tweets. In general, if you post frequently enough, you will probably tweet a variety of things. If you are tweeting for business, being mindful of what you tweet is important.

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### What to Tweet

- **Links to Articles.** Start with links to articles you are reading that would interest your audience. I am intrigued when someone tweets that they are reading and commenting on something. If I have time, I will often click the link to read and comment, too. TweetDeck has a shrink link feature that will automatically shrink the URL to your link.
- **Links to Your Blog Posts.** Be sure to link to your own blog posts, also. Typepad has a feature that automatically tweets new posts. I prefer to tweet my new post a few times throughout the day, using different hooks each time. For example, I might ask a question as an interest builder.
- **Quotes on Topics of Interest.** Many people include quotes on topics that interest them... or original ideas on a topic.







Joan Koerber-Walker has started a whole movement on Twitter for people to “Be Original.” She uses the hashtag #beoriginal and encourages people to tweet their own thoughts and ideas instead of quoting others. Search #beoriginal for some inspiration, then tweet your own.

- **Join a conversation.** If someone asks a question or raises an issue that interests you, reply. You can reply by typing “@” followed by the persons name, or by clicking the reply feature on TweetDeck.

**When you retweet what someone says, it shows that you find them interesting.**

Earlier this week, I had an interesting conversation with a few others about a blog post we all read and commented about. And last night, I discovered that I attended the same college as another Twitter

friend. As you join the conversation, you will make some amazing connections. It seems impossible, and strange, but it’s true.

- **Start your own conversation.** Several people I follow will ask a question and use the responses they receive as ideas in blog posts. Or, as you get to know people, you can start a conversation about almost anything. When I am up early in the morning and see friends tweeting, I greet them and ask them what they have planned for the day. If someone shares something meaningful to them, I will try to remember and ask about it later. For example, one friend tweeted about a 60 mile bike ride. Later, I asked her how it went. Getting involved in conversation helps build relational connections on Twitter.
- **Repeat what others are tweeting: “Retweet.”** If you’re using TweetDeck, when you run your mouse over the person’s picture, there is a curved arrow. If you press it, it will automatically retweet (RT) for you. This saves a lot of time.





When you retweet what someone says, it shows that you find them interesting, that you support them in their efforts, that what they've said is resonating with you. I also like to add comments to my retweet. For example, if I am retweeting someone's blog post, I might add something I liked about the post, or simply say "great post."

- **Tweet information that connects you to others.** This means tweeting things about yourself that will help people know who you are, especially in the context of what you do. Tweet about what you are working on, or what you are planning to do. Even if you are using Twitter in the context of your business, people still want to know who you are. I often start to pay more attention to a person's tweets when I have an idea of who they are overall.

## Twitter is about building personal connections and relationships.

Read posts on Twitter with a mindset of connecting with others, For example, @angiechaplin is someone I follow for her leadership tweets. Recently she tweeted about getting a gift certificate from her leadership students to her favorite running store. Since I like to run, this gave me a stronger connection to Angie, and I replied to her and started a conversation about running. Discover what you have in common with people and tweet about it.

### Direct Messages

You may not understand what direct messages are for or how you can use them to enhance your Twitter experience.





First of all, a few things you need to know about direct messages:

- You can only send them to someone who is following you.
- You can only receive them from someone you are following.
- Like all other communication on Twitter, direct messages are limited to 140 characters.

### **Automatic Direct Messages?**

Some Twitter users set up auto-messages which you might receive after you follow them. This is done through a variety of Twitter applications that you can easily find with a quick google search. My advice, though, is to steer clear of auto direct messages. Most people find this more than a little bit annoying. Usually, the person includes a link to their product, service, or blog. they might say something along the lines of “Looking forward to getting to know you better” or they might tell a little about themselves. It is anything but personal, the equivalent of junk mail.

**If you make Twitter a game of numbers, it is easy to get discouraged.**

One of the reasons I dislike auto messages is that they turn Twitter into a mindless marketing tool. And, used well, it’s not about that. You may use Twitter to find people who are interested in what you have to offer or to

communicate with your existing customers. But if your focus is solely on sales, you will probably fall short in your attempts to build a Twitter following.

Why? Because Twitter is about building personal connections and relationships. If you’re using Twitter for business, you can think in terms of business contacts and colleagues. Either way, the only reason to use direct messages is to say something (privately) to someone, with the purpose of extending your bond with them. Direct messages are a quick, easy way to reach out to someone and let them know you’re thinking about them or to ask a question. You





can use a direct message to share your phone number or email address with someone you'd like to get to know better.

Think about the myriad ways you reach out to friends each day. In the same day, I might:

- call a friend from my home phone
- call or text from my cell phone
- write on a Facebook wall or send a personal message on Facebook
- send an email from work
- send an email from home
- get together in person
- talk via Skype, face to face
- leave a comment on a blog, and now
- send a direct message or @reply on Twitter

Think about adding direct messages to your list of ways to reach out, but remember to use them the same way you would any of the other means of connection...as a way to cement relationships, not sell.

**If I see a person who is following a lot of people but doesn't have many followers, I am reluctant to return the follow.**

#### **Are you a Twitter Quitter?**

[Mashable](#) reports that 60% of Twitter users quit in the first month. This may happen to you as well, but not if you

invest enough time to see value in your life or business.

I started using Twitter about a month after the LeaderTalk blog launched, in May 2009. By early July, I still had only about 200 followers. Only a month later, I have more than 1,000. Of course, if you make Twitter a game of numbers, it is easy to get discouraged. Developing a following is important, but it is more important to make meaningful connections with the followers you





have. If you are present on Twitter and relating to others, you will see your following grow. Just remember that even in its use for business, Twitter is about relationships.

Here are a few ideas about how to make your Twitter time worthwhile:

- **Try to tweet at least TEN times a day.** It is easy for tweets to get lost in the stream. To be memorable to your followers, you need to be saying something. Tweeting takes only a fraction of a minute. Retweeting takes even less time. So here's an idea to get you started. Do a search on TweetDeck for a topic that interests you. Here's a secret: it doesn't even need to be related to your business. See what people are saying. If someone says something you like, retweet them. Or reply to them. Start a conversation.
- **Find some new people to follow.** If you're new to Twitter and following a few people who aren't tweeting much, you may not find your Twitter stream all that interesting. Find some new people to follow. Generally speaking, you don't want to follow too many people at once. If I see a person who is following a lot of people but doesn't have many followers, I am reluctant to return the follow. So try to keep your numbers in balance: follow about the same number of people who are following you.
- **Add Twitter to your daily online routine.** As I have written before, you don't have to make a huge time investment. Commit five minutes a day, twice a day. But stick with it. Make visiting Twitter a regular habit. Unless you do, you will not be able to develop the meaningful relationships that will make a difference in your life and business.





*This article originally appeared as a series on LeaderTalk™, the official blog for the School of Leadership and Professional Development at Mountain State University. Visit LeaderTalk at [mountainstate.typepad.com/leadership](http://mountainstate.typepad.com/leadership). You can also follow Becky Robinson and the LeaderTalk blog on Twitter @LeaderTalk. For more information about Mountain State University, visit [mountainstate.edu](http://mountainstate.edu) or call 866.FOR.MSU1.*

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