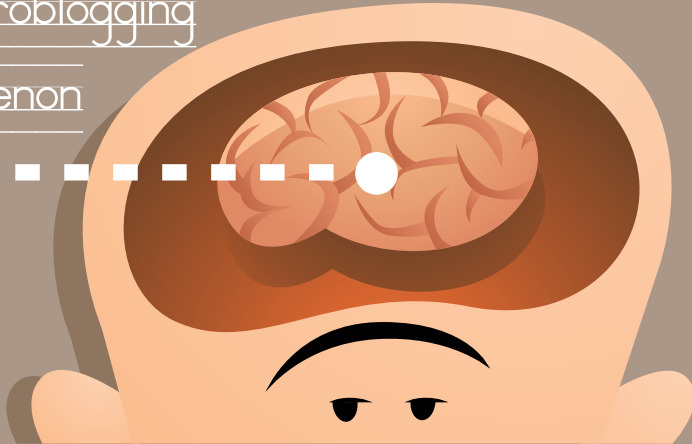
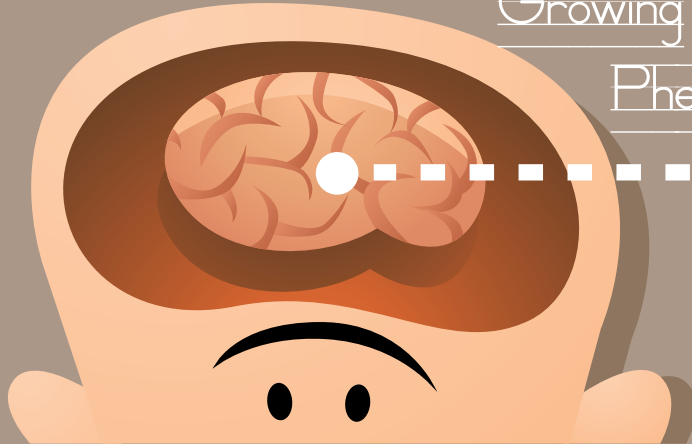


**THIS IS
YOUR BRAIN**



**ON
TWITTER**

A Business User's
Guide To The Fast-
Growing Microblogging
Phenomenon



By Brandon Uttley
Web Business Freedom, Inc.

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E-book design by Brandon Uttley.

This Is Your Brain On Twitter: **A Business User's Guide To The** **Fast-Growing Microblogging Phenomenon**

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Introduction

For those of you who are not yet familiar with Twitter, at first glance it can seem like a puzzling and pointless tool used by attention-deficient adults and prepubescent kids to flood the Web with a raging torrent of asinine announcements and useless updates.

But to those who have mastered the mysteries of this 140-characters-or-less juggernaut, the above perception is welcome news. These übergeeks secretly sneer as the unwashed masses come and go, leaving them to continue on their quest for world domination, as part of the Great Order of the Anointed Twitterati (GOATs).

That is a joke, of course—there is no secret society of Twitter acolytes (not yet anyway). However, some people who take Twitter *way* too seriously. And if you're relatively new to Twitter and looking for advice, running into one of their ilk can be annoying and frustrating, as they may act impatient and morally indignant that *you don't get it*.

Fortunately, between ignorance and idolatry of Twitter, there is a happy middle ground. Thus, this e-book is written with the goal of bridging the divide between the Twitter know-it-alls and the newbies. It will help you wrap your brain around the possibilities Twitter provides, once you get past all the noise.

Just as the Web itself started out as an arcane communications system for techies and academics and evolved into offering legitimate applications for business and personal use, Twitter has followed a similar trajectory. It's no wonder that Twitter is experiencing a torrid pace of growth, and why you finally broke down and signed up. (This book assumes you already have an account and are looking to do more with it.)

I hope you will enjoy learning more about what makes Twitter tick. I look forward to connecting in Twiterville!

Brandon Uttley

Web Business Freedom (on Twitter @BrandonUttley)

The Two Types of Twitter Users

I have a theory.

There are two basic kinds of people on Twitter: *Lurkers* and *Workers*.

Lurkers

Lurkers are people who sign up and mostly sit back and watch what is happening. Most people start out on Twitter this way, which is a good thing.

It's actually best to start out in *listening* mode, by following a manageable list of smart people and seeing what they have to say and how they are saying it. You need to understand the language and quirks of Twitter and best practices, to avoid early faux pas.

Workers

Workers, on the other hand, are people with a greater knowledge and comfort level, who are more engaged in using Twitter to share their ideas, promote their business or other favorite causes and make connections with others.

In general, lurking is *passive* and working is *active*. So if Twitter follows the typical norms of Web usage, it mirrors the 80/20 rule. That is, roughly 80% of people are mostly Spectators or Joiners, while 20% are Creators (or Critics) of content (see the excellent book [Groundswell](#) by Charlene Li and Josh Bernoff for a more in-depth analysis).

In the following section, I've provided a number of tips to help you be a better lurker on Twitter.

Top Ways to Lurk More Effectively On Twitter

As I mentioned before, lurking is fine, especially when you're new to Twitter and trying to make sense of it all. However, the real magic of Twitter comes in knowing how to *work it*.

- 1. Get breaking news from major news outlets and anyone else using Twitter.** Follow [@BreakingNewsOn](#), [@CNN](#), your local news outlets or trade publications.
- 2. Follow industry gurus and pundits.** Study the kinds of information they share, the ratio of personal vs. professional messages, etc. Follow [@MrTweet](#) to discover important people in your network and get recommendations of people to follow.
- 3. Learn Twitter lingo and best practices.** In particular, understand the difference between *followers* and *following* and the use of key symbols such as @ and #. Know when to put an "@" sign in front of usernames for *public* replies and how to send *private* messages prefaced by a "d" before the username. (See the [Resources](#) section for more information).
- 4. Follow others who follow you.** Use [Tweetlater](#) or similar tools to automatically follow others and send them a direct "welcome" message. (See [sections below](#) on how many people you should follow, and how many followers you should have.)
- 5. Monitor keywords** relevant to your brand or industry. Use [Twitter Search](#) to find any keyword or phrase that has been sent on Twitter; [Monitter](#) or [TweetGrid](#) for real-time keyword searches; [BackTweets](#) for references to a web page link; and [TweetBeep](#) or [Tweetlater](#) to get email alerts on keywords and phrases.
- 6. Spy on your competition.** Lather, rinse and repeat Step 2 using their company name, brand names, top executives' names, etc. Speaking of, find top executives at [ExecTweets](#) ([@ExecTweets](#)).
- 7. Gauge the popularity of anyone on Twitter.** This includes you, your company and others. Good sites to do this include [Twitter Grader](#) and [Twitter Counter](#). For masochists, [Qwitter](#) will email you anytime someone stops following you.
- 8. Discover trends.** There are few places better than Twitter to find out what's hot and trendy, including the most tweeted (and retweeted) URLs. Check out [ReTweetist](#), [Twit\(url\)y](#) and [Tweetmeme](#), to name a few.

Top Ways to *Work* Twitter To Your Advantage

1. **Branch out beyond the main Twitter site to send and receive messages.** Use desktop software like [Twhirl](#) or [Tweetdeck](#), or download a program to send and receive tweets from your iPhone, Blackberry or other smart phone.
2. **Send “emergency” alerts.** these could range from office delays or closings due to bad weather to anything else you deem of an urgent nature. If you really just want to do this for an internal audience or other “inner circle” of friends or colleagues, set up a private Twitter network using [GroupTweet](#).
3. **Provide general news updates from your organization.** Include links to your website or blog. See #9 below.
4. **Schedule and send hourly, daily or monthly announcements.** Set up scheduled messages using [Tweetlater](#) or [Twuffer](#).
5. **Send yourself appointment or milestone reminders.** See #4.
6. **Establish or enhance your thought leadership by linking to your blog posts.** For more in-depth ideas on how to become a thought leader, read [The New Rules of Marketing and PR](#) by David Meerman Scott.
7. **Offer real-time updates (text and photos) during professional conferences, seminars, trade shows, speeches and other events.** This practice is otherwise known as *live tweeting*. Make sure you don't offend your host by pecking away instead of actually listening to what they have to say!
8. **Share information and links pertinent to your industry.** Better yet, develop relationships with reporters and editors who use Twitter to find story ideas and sources. Use the excellent [Twittering Journalists Wiki](#), started by PR expert Harry Hoover, to find reporters.

Top Ways to *Work* Twitter To Your Advantage (continued)

9. **Track the popularity of links you send using [Tweetburner](#) or a similar site.** This requires actively using a URL shortener service like [Twurl](#)—which is not to be confused with Twhirl.
10. **Give better customer service by responding immediately to questions or complaints about your brand.** To best track your brand in real-time, refer to tip #5 under How to Lurk Better On Twitter.
11. **Post job openings or internships.** Check out [Tweet My Jobs.](#), a site that helps connect job seekers and employers via Twitter.
12. **Conduct informal surveys**—using sites like [PollDaddy](#).
13. **Share other cool information like photos ([TwitPic](#)) or charts ([TwitCharts](#)).**
14. **Arrange impromptu virtual or physical gatherings**—otherwise known as *tweetups*.
15. **Connect with others in person, whether locally or when you're on the road.** Use GPS-enabled applications or “near me” features to find people.
16. **Create buzz by sending out coupons, starting contests, hosting real-time scavenger hunts and offering other incentives.** For inspiration, check out the antics of NBA legend Shaquille O’Neal ([@THE_REAL_SHAQ](#)).
17. **Register with Twitter directories** Use sites like [Twellow](#), [TwitterLocal](#) and [Wefollow.com](#) to gain awareness and followers.
18. **Add a link to your Twitter user account on the home page (or contact section) of your website, your business card, your email signature, your profiles on Facebook and LinkedIn and other prominent places.** Anywhere you might normally sport your brand (like on a [t-shirt](#)), promote your Twitter address.
19. **Connect your Twitter account to other social sites like Facebook, LinkedIn, your own personal or company blog and many more.** Use [Ping.fm](#), to post your “tweets” to multiple sites at the same time. You can also connect [Twhirl](#) to Ping.fm.
20. **Enhance your Twitter profile.** See sites like [TwitBacks](#), [Twitter Backs](#) or [Twitter Image](#) to create a custom background for your main Twitter profile.

Caution Flags

I mentioned faux pas before.

There are many ways to mess up in 140 characters or less. In the interest of the KISS principle (Keep It Simple, Stupid), here is a list of the top two things to remember when using Twitter:

Think before you tweet.

First, make sure you know your employer's policies for sharing any company information on the web.

Second, *consider every tweet very carefully* before you hit the submit button. Twitter is a great way to get yourself in hot water if you are careless. Even though you can “delete” a tweet, there's actually no way to recall a message once it's been sent. It will appear in seconds or minutes within an archived search, and it will live on indefinitely. So don't tweet in anger or without considering other ramifications of your message. Think about how it will affect your personal or professional reputation. Cursing is seriously a bad idea, and even little typos make you look bad. More importantly, think before you send something potentially offensive or even libelous.

Don't over sell or over promote (yourself, your products and your services).

Do you like getting email spam? I didn't think so. Twitter is a lot like email—and perhaps even more *personal* for active Twitter users. Overt company plugs and constant advertisements or come-ons are frowned upon. So be very judicious in using Twitter to constantly trumpet yourself or your own products and services, unless it makes good sense (e.g., you are using Twitter under a corporate brand name to improve customer service). The same goes if you set up “auto-follow” rules—few things are as annoying as getting direct messages such as, “Thanks for the follow! Now check out my site at www.shamelessplug.com!” Assuming you have a decent Twitter profile page and a link to your site, people will know where to find you.

How Many *Followers* Should You Have?

“I always feel my followers have made me smarter. There is an evolution of a thought... if left alone, your thought may only go so far, limited by your past, experiences and imagination. Take the same thought, and launch it into the sea of Twitter friends. Now it morphs with another idea added to it, changes into something new with yet more input, grows when someone smart makes a comment from a new angle you didn't realize existed. This is how using Twitter on a regular basis can sharpen your mind and improve your thinking. Of course, it helps if you follow smart people!”

[@KrisColvin](#) via [@MrTweet](#)

<http://blog.mrtweet.net/7-habits-of-highly-effective-twitterers-kris-colvin>

Whether for business or personal use, I consider Twitter as another means to have a measure of *influence* over an audience. How big that audience can be depends in large part on what your goals are for using Twitter; how effective you are at using Twitter (e.g., are you a lurker or a worker?); how much you help others, and in turn how much they are willing to help you; and your own preference or tolerance for who follows you.

If you don't really care what the number is, then a small following may suit you just fine. However, it may limit you in what you are able to accomplish long-term using Twitter. On the other hand, you may never have 50,000 followers, and that's OK. Ultimately, I believe the more followers you have, the greater responsibility you have to give them good reasons to stay “subscribed”—so unless or until you can handle that pressure, grow your base of followers slowly.

Think back to when you first set up your Twitter account. As part of the process, Twitter suggested people you might want to follow. Now, say one person has 10,000 followers, has sent a few hundred or a few thousand tweets, and has a compelling custom Twitter profile page. Another person only has 10 followers, has sent four updates, and has no photo or link on their generic profile. Who are you more likely to follow?

In considering your followers, imagine yourself as the head of a *community*. When you're starting out on Twitter and you have a handful of close friends or colleagues following you, you might be something like the head of a household or a small book club. As you get a few dozen followers, now you are in charge of your own small neighborhood association. Hit a few hundred and you are leading an assembly or congregation (perhaps *flock* is a better analogy in Twitter terms).

The point at which things start to get really interesting is when you pass the 1,000 followers mark. Suddenly, you can reach out to and potentially influence a broader community, say an unincorporated township, up to roughly the 10,000 followers level. By the time you exceed 10,000 followers, you are mayor over an active small town of sorts—again, if you are providing consistent value. Past 20,000, and you are a real big cheese, a rock star within whatever space you occupy. Unless you really blow it, you now have a shot at being a true *thought leader*.

How Many People Should You *Follow*?

“...I did some quick math and if you follow 5,000 people and each one of those people only sends one tweet/day and it takes you 5 seconds to read each tweet, you're spending 6.9 hours per day just reading them.”

David Polinchock, Founder & Chairman of The Brand Experience Lab
<http://blog.brandexperiencelab.org>

The jury is out on whether 'tis better to follow a bunch of people (most of whom will be random strangers) or to limit those you “listen to” on Twitter to a smaller handful. The same thought process applies on whom you allow to be your “friend” on Facebook, LinkedIn and other social sites. Again, it's a personal preference.

I belong to the “more is merrier” crowd. Consider this from a blog post from tech and start-up guru **Guy Kawasaki**:

“Follow everyone who follows you. When I first started on Twitter, Robert Scoble told me to follow everyone who followed me. ‘But why, Robert, would I follow everyone like that?’ The answer is that it's courteous to do so and because when you do, some people will respond to you and everyone who follows them will see this—which is more exposure for you.

“Having said this, when you get to more than fifty or so followers, it's impossible to read what all your followers tweet. At that point, you have to focus on direct private messages (‘Ds’) and direct public messages (‘@s’).”

<http://blog.guykawasaki.com/2008/11/looking-for-m-1.html>

On the other hand, renowned thinker and author **Seth Godin** frowns on the notion of making an endless stream of connections:

“It’s worthless to have lots and lots of friends on Facebook, because they’re not really your friends. They are just people who didn’t want to offend you by pressing the ‘ignore’ button...And if you’ve got 5,000 people following you on Twitter because you tell a dirty joke every couple of hours, that’s not particularly useful for your business, either...”

“Networking is always important when it’s real, and it’s always a useless distraction when it’s fake. What the Internet has allowed is an enormous amount of fake networking to take place, and it’s so easy to be seduced by it because there’s a dashboard, there’s a scoreboard and look how popular I am! And it’s nonsense—it’s like measuring hits to your website; it doesn’t translate. What translates is, are there people out there who I would go out of my way for, and who would go out of their way for me. That’s what you need to keep track of. And the way you get there is by going out of your way for them, and by earning the privilege of one day having that connection be worthwhile.”

For me as an entrepreneur, it goes back to the question of influence. If I only have 200 followers, my network may be smaller and more manageable. But my *potential* influence—and the *perception* of influence—is lower than having 1,500, 5,000, 10,000 followers and so on.

The reality on Twitter is, the more people you follow, the more likely you are to get residual followers in return. My guess is that for every 10 people you follow, 2-3 on average will follow you back. And don’t forget that others will “un-follow” you over time.

Finally, as Polinchock and Kawasaki note, at a certain point it becomes impossible to keep up with all the people you follow. That’s why it’s imperative to set up filtering tools (#5 under How to Lurk More Effectively) to pay attention to the things that matter most to you. Otherwise, Twitter may fry your brain.

Resources

I hope this e-book has been valuable. Below are some additional resources that will help you get more out of Twitter.

Twictionary

<http://twictionary.pbwiki.com>

Use it to: Find out what strange terms and abbreviations mean on Twitter.

Twitdom

<http://twitdom.com>

Use it to: Find popular books, browser plugins, web and mobile applications and more.

Twitter Fan Wiki

<http://twitter.pbwiki.com>

Use it to: Discover thousands of third-party applications, Twitter etiquette and other useful information that will enhance your Twitter experience.

What The Hashtag?

Follow @wthashtag or http://wthashtag.com/wiki/Main_Page

Use it to: Decipher those words with a pound symbol (#) in front of them, which are known as hashtags. Hashtags are a community-driven convention for adding additional context to your tweets. They are like tags on Flickr, only added in-line to your Twitter messages. Hashtags can be created by anyone simply by prefixing a word with a hash symbol: #myhashtag.

About The Author



Brandon Uttley is president of **Web Business Freedom**, which helps individuals and companies take advantage of the power of the web to start or grow their businesses online.

Uttley is a seasoned web consultant, marketing and public relations professional with more than 20 years of experience. He is a trusted advisor to businesses on how to use both traditional PR and marketing techniques, as well as emerging social media, to create and sustain two-way conversations with their customers and prospects.

He earned the Accreditation in Public Relations (APR) designation from Public Relations Society of America. Currently, Uttley is president of the [PRSA Charlotte](#) chapter and a member of the [Entrepreneurs' Organization](#). He is also the founder of [Charlotte Communications Professionals](#).

Uttley is a 1987 graduate of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at [UNC-Chapel Hill](#).



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