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Twitter Basics

Note: This tipsheet has been adapted from the Twitter Basics lesson at Knowledgewebb (<http://knowledgewebb.net/node/141>).

Introduction: Twitter is a social networking tool that enables you to send out short messages - 140 characters or less - to everyone. You can follow people and they can follow you. Twitter can also be used as a powerful search engine, instant message service, scheduler, note-keeper, crowdsourcer and lots, lots more.

Significance of Twitter in communications and journalism: Twitter is in the limelight. Suddenly, everyone's talking about it. Lots of people are using it. There are on-again, off-again talks about Google acquiring it. Twitter has become the most talked about social networking service around. Because so many people are talking about Twitter, the service is starting to challenge the way we're used to communicating. Even if Twitter isn't around three years from now, it'll have had a big impact on the way we distribute content on the Web.

Examples of how Twitter is being used:

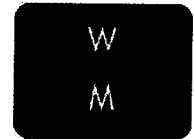
- You can see how I use Twitter by looking at my feed.
- You can also follow updates on Knowledgewebb and our services.
- Some creative people are developing other uses for Twitter. To see a real-time global map of tweets, take a look at [Twittervision](#).

In-depth Explanation:

Twitter isn't really as confusing as it may seem. It's just a social networking service that enables you to send and receive short messages. Twitter messages are 140 characters or less. (If you send SMS, or text, messages using your mobile phone, you'll note that you can send up to 160 characters at a time.)

As of the time this tipsheet was last updated, Twitter is free and open for anyone to use in the U.S. as well as many other countries. Once your account is created, you can post a message - which then gets distributed out to your network of contacts. Since the whole thing is automatic, you can use Twitter to field questions to your group, set up times to meet with your friends and to learn what's happening in your network as elsewhere.

Twitter was founded by Biz Stone, Evan Williams and Jack Dorsey. It was Williams who created Blogger, which is one of the most popular blogging platforms on the Web. In fact, it's such a great tool that Google acquired it a few years ago. Stone and Williams later founded Odeo, which is a podcasting distribution company. Not too long after that, they invented Twitter (so named, Stone says, for the sounds of chirping birds). Eventually, Stone and Williams bought Odeo and Twitter back from their investors and combined them into a new company called Obvious Corporation. In March 2006, Twitter split from Obvious to become Twitter Incorporated. That year, it made a quick debut at South By Southwest, the



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popular annual interactive/ multimedia conference in Austin, Texas. Less than three years later, my 87-year-old grandmother is asking me how to “tweet.”

Basics

Messages sent via Twitter are called “tweets.” Twitter messaging was originally intended for mobile phones, so tweets can only contain text. Now, there are still ways to send photos and even music - we’ll get to that in the Advanced Twitter Techniques lesson. You can post tweets in many different languages: French, Arabic, Chinese, Japanese and more!

Getting Started

At this point, I’d like for you to go to <http://www.twitter.com> and create an account. We’ll do this together. To start, click the green “join” button. Now, we’ll need to add our full name and pick a username and password. It’s important to pick a username that’s easy to remember and spell. Below, you’ll see that I picked amywebb_test. (Thought I was going to also tell you my password, didn’t you?)

Join the Conversation

Already use Twitter on your phone? Finish signup now.

Already on Twitter? Sign in

Full name **Your Name**

Username **amywebb_test**

Your URL: http://twitter.com/amywebb_test

Password **••••••**

Email **training@webbmedia.com**

I want the inside scoop—please send me email updates!

Note: When typing in those words, we won't make you do it again.

The next screen you’ll see is this one, below. You’ll notice that it asks you to see if your friends are on Twitter. If you already use Gmail, Yahoo, AOL, Hotmail or MSN and would like to see if the people stored in your address book are also registered at Twitter, you can click through the tabs now. If you don’t use those services, or if you’d just rather not add them, look for the “Skip this step” link in the mint-green section of the page. Since I don’t use those services, I’m going to skip it and move along to the next page.

See if your friends are on Twitter

- Gmail
- Yahoo
- AOL
- Hotmail
- MSN

We can check if your friends on other services already have a Twitter account. Choose a service from the list on the left.









Next, Twitter will suggest some people that you might want to follow. This list changes from day to day. For example, in the screenshot below, it suggests Evan Williams, Demi Moore and some others. You can choose to either add any or all of these people, or you can click on "Skip this step." You're never stuck following someone - if you'd like to add the suggested "tweeps," you can always remove them later on. I'm going to add Evan and Demi only. Click either "Finish" or "Skip" and then let's move on. At this point you might be wondering how people get on that list, especially if you're someone in PR or marketing. Selections are made at Twitter HQ.

Look who else is here. Start following them!

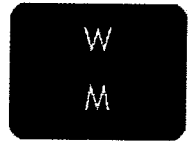
Maybe you've heard of these Twitter users? Select the people you'd like to start following.

Select All

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Evan Williams	CEO of Twitter
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Demi Moore	
<input type="checkbox"/>		Veronica Belmont	Host of Tekzilla on Revision3 and Qore on PSN. Also, a geek.
<input type="checkbox"/>		CME Group	A CME/CBOT/NYMEX Company

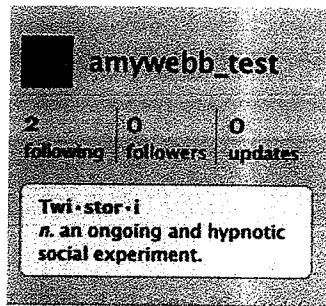
You'll be following





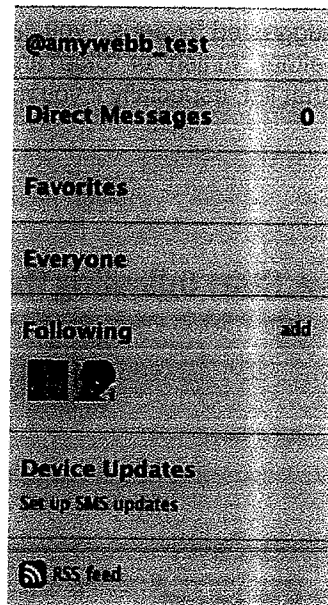


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Now at this point, you should see your own Twitter home page. You should notice that if you decided to follow some people from the last step, you'll see that number reflected at the top right of your screen under "following." Right now, we're not following anybody, so you should see a 0 there. We also haven't made any updates at this point, so you'll see a 0 there, too. Before we move on, let's talk about the navigation on the right side of your screen. It should look like this:



Home

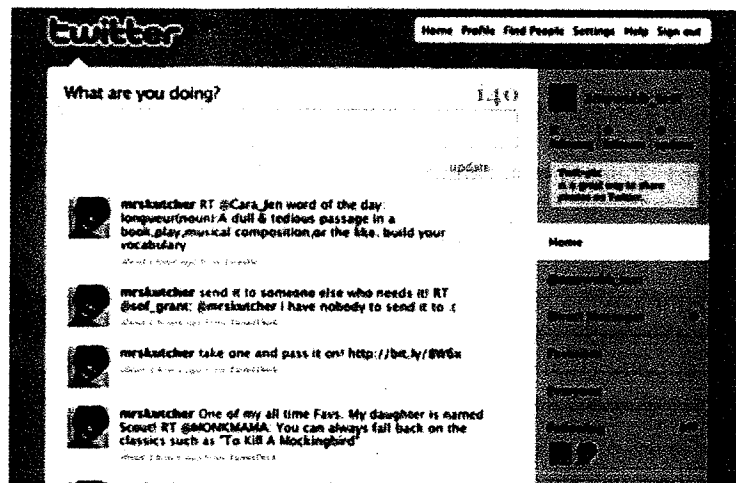


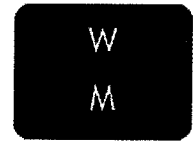


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- HOME is what you'll view to see what you're posting and what others are posting as well. This is your own, private view.
- @amywebb_test (it'll show the username you chose) will list all of the mentions of you on Twitter. We'll talk more about the "@" symbol and what it does in just a few minutes.
- Direct Messages should at this point show 0. We'll talk a bit later about sending direct messages using Twitter.
- The next tab down is for Favorites. On Twitter, it's possible to "favorite" the people you like most. If you wind up following a few hundred people, it'll be really hard to keep track of the conversations happening. By designating the people you like most as your "favorites," you'll be able to click here to easily see their messages.
- Get ready for information overload! Everyone is the tab that will allow you to literally see every post on twitter as it's happening in 5-second increments. I rarely use this part of the system unless news is breaking and I want to extend the sources I typically use.
- Just below Everyone, you'll see Following, which will display thumbnail images of everyone you follow. You'll also see a tiny blue "add" in the corner of the Following box. You can click on that to add more people.
- Device Updates will enable you to send an receive tweets using SMS on your mobile phone.
- Finally, RSS feeds is at the bottom of this navigation, and it's an incredibly useful tool, I think. This will allow you to subscribe to the RSS of your own tweets or to the tweets of whomever you wish.

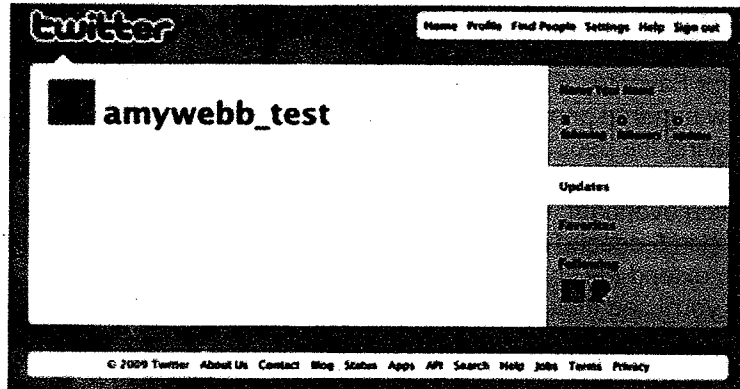
Now that we've taken a look at the right side navigation, let's go to the top of the screen where you'll see links for Home, Profile, Find People, Settings, Help and Sign Out. We already know that by clicking on "Home" you'll be taken to your own, private view of your Twitter account. Right now, here's what our amywebb_test account looks like. If you decided to follow a few people at the beginning of this lesson, you should see them now. If you didn't follow anyone, don't panic! Your screen will be blank - but we're about to change that...





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Before we get too far, I'd like to show you what everyone else will see when they view your account. To do that, click on Profile. Since we haven't posted anything yet, your screen should look very similar to this:



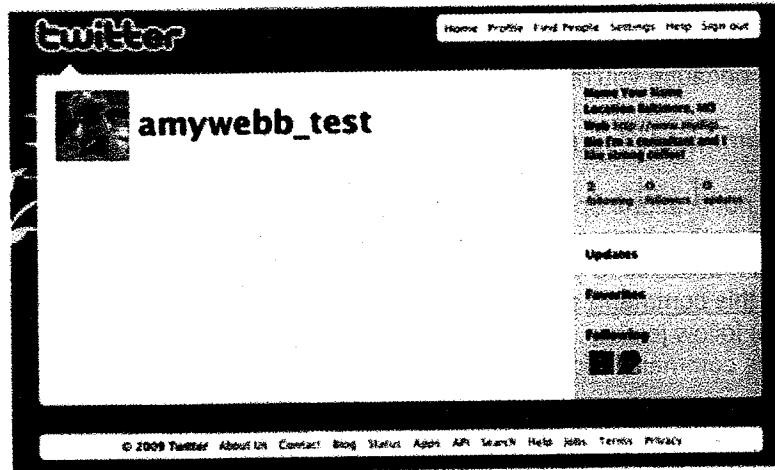
Not too snazzy, eh? Let's customize our page and try adding a photo! At the top of your screen, click on Settings.

Once you're in Settings, you'll find all kinds of useful information.

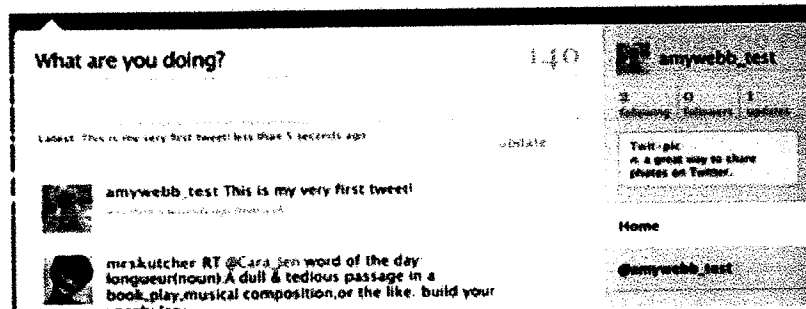
Let's start in Account. You should see your name as you entered it, your username and now a link to your very own Twitter page. Since my username is amywebb_test, my Twitter URL is http://twitter.com/amywebb_test. I'm going to put in the URL to my website, a short bio and my location next. At the bottom, you should see an option to "Protect My Updates." Selecting this option will keep your tweets private and off the public timeline. It'll also mean that you can restrict your followers to only those who you approve. I'm going to keep myself public. Whatever you decide, click Save when you finish. Also note that should you ever decide to get rid of your Twitter account, you can do that here.

At the bottom left corner of the screen, you'll see "Delete my account."

Next to Account is Password. If you'd ever like to change your password, this is the place to do it. You can also set your mobile preferences and your notices in the tabs next to Password. Now, let's upload a picture to use! You can use a headshot of yourself or just an image you have handy. Click on the Picture tab, and click Save when you're ready. Finally, click on the last tab, Design. Here, you can customize the background of your Twitter page. You can even upload and use your own image! When you're ready, click "save changes" and then click on your "Profile" link at the top of your screen. Your Twitter page should look a lot more personalized now...



It's time to tweet! Click on the Home link at the top of your screen. Once you're there, look for the "What are you doing" box at the top. This is where you'll post all your tweets. Try posting something - remember, it has to contain fewer than 140 characters - and click on the "update" button. You should see it appear in your timeline. You should now also see that under "updates" in the right-side navigation, the 0 has changed to 1.



I'm now going to explain the "@" mark and how to send a direct message. Let's say that you wanted to reply to my message above and welcome me to Twitter. You could post the following:

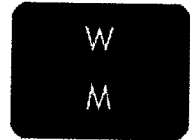
@amywebb_test welcome to Twitter!

In that case, I would see in my own timeline your message because you referenced me. I don't need to be following you to see your message. An "@" reply is also known as a "public reply."

On the other hand, you might want to send a private, direct message. You can do this one of two ways. Method #1: Type in the letter "d" in front of your friend's username, and then the message. Please notice that there is a space in between the "d" and the username.

d amywebb_test great to see you on Twitter!

Method #2 is to click on the "Direct Messages" tab on your right side navigation. After, you'll see Send ___ a direct message at the top of your screen. Eventually, after you have mutual followers, you'll be able



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to click on the drop-down menu, select your friend and send him/her a direct message. Right now, you won't see anyone there because you're not yet being followed.

Official Twitter Text Commands (courtesy of Twitter.com):

- **ON:** turns ALL phone notifications on.
- **OFF:** turns ALL phone notifications off.
- **STOP, QUIT:** stops all messages to your phone immediately
- **FOLLOW username:** this command allows you to start receiving notifications for a specific person on your phone. Example: follow jeremy
- **LEAVE username:** this command allows you to stop receiving notifications for a specific person on your phone.
- **WHOIS username** -- retrieves the profile information for any public user on Twitter.
- **GET username** -- retrieves the latest Twitter update posted by the person.
- **NUDGE username** -- reminds a friend to update by asking what they're doing on your behalf.
- **FAV username** -- marks a person's last twitter as a favorite.
- **STATS** -- this command returns your number of followers, how many people you're following, and your bio information.
- **INVITE phone number** -- will send an SMS invite to a friend's mobile phone.

If you liked this lesson, join Knowledgewebb (<http://knowledgewebb.net/node/32>) for access to more than 130 hands-on lessons. Each has an activity to help you continue learning.
