

INNOVATION ECONOMY

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Ten tips for attracting a following on Twitter

By Scott Kirsner, Globe Staff | April 18, 2010

OK, so you've been persuaded by all the Twitter hype that the terse messaging service might actually help advance your career, build your reputation, or attract new customers to your business.

But how do you actually get people to "follow" you on Twitter? There's not much incentive to compose useful or witty messages (known as "tweets" on the service) if you don't feel anyone is out there.

I've been collecting advice this month from digital media consultants in Boston who have attracted thousands of followers on Twitter, and also some executives at local businesses that have built a respectable following on their own. Here are their 10 key recommendations, relevant to those who are new to Twitter and those who have been dabbling for a while but haven't yet amassed a substantial audience.

Set up your profile. Before people decide whether to follow you, they want to know who you are, says Jim Storer, a Lynnfield social media consultant, whose Twitter "handle" is [@jimstorer](#). Click "Settings" and then "Profile" on the Twitter site, and enter your real name, a link to your website, and, in the "bio" field, a few words of description about you, your company, or what you plan to tweet about. Upload a photo or your company logo, too. "Having your own avatar on the service means a lot to people," Storer says.

Put your Twitter "handle" everywhere. Though they start with an "@" sign, Twitter handles are different from e-mail addresses or website addresses. (The handle for Globe business news, for instance, is [@GlobeBiz](#).) Knowing your Twitter handle makes it simple for people to follow you on the service, without having to hunt. Stromedix Inc., a Cambridge biotech start-up, prominently points people to its Twitter feed from the company website. It's also relatively easy to add a "widget" to your website that displays several of your most recent tweets. (Visit [twitter.com/goodies/widgets](#).)

Nick Littlefield, the marketing manager at Cambridge-based Marathon Sports Inc., a running retailer, includes his Twitter handle ([@MarathonSports](#)) in his e-mail signature file, so it shows up on his outbound messages; there are also signs in the company's stores encouraging customers to follow Marathon Sports on Facebook or Twitter, or sign up for the monthly e-mail newsletter. Others recommend adding your Twitter handle to business cards the next time you have a batch printed, or putting it on your slides when you give a presentation.

Share information; avoid self-promotion. What should you post on Twitter? "It's good to have a combination of things," says David Meerman Scott ([@DMScott](#)), a Lexington author and speaker on marketing topics, who has 39,000 Twitter followers. "You might offer advice or a tip, shoot a photo of the

place you're at, post a stand-alone quote that sounds kind of fun, or share a link to an article." At Marathon Sports, Littlefield says, "I'm always trying to connect people with other information that they'll find valuable with respect to running." Use Twitter to spread interesting information and buzz, says Storer, and only occasionally perhaps in one out of every 10 Tweets to promote what you're doing.

Re-tweet other people's messages. When someone you follow shares an interesting link, or posts an inspiring quote, consider sharing it with your followers by re-tweeting it. "It's kind of like giving somebody a virtual pat on the back," says Scott, adding that often when you re-tweet someone else's message, they'll start following you. "But too many re-tweets," he cautions, "and you're just like a parrot."

Leverage Twitter users you know. If you know people who've been on Twitter for a while, it doesn't hurt to ask them to introduce you to their followers, including your handle, and writing a few words about who you are. One way that Jerry Remy's Sports Bar & Grill built its Twitter following (now about 1,200 people, just about a month after the grand opening of its Fenway outpost) was by having Sox broadcaster Jerry Remy mention it on his own Twitter account (which has north of 40,000 followers), according to restaurant partner John O'Rourke.

Pick people or businesses to follow. Choosing to follow other users on Twitter is an important step for two reasons: Often, they will choose to follow you as well, and reading their messages will often give you good material to "re-tweet," or share with your own network of followers. "Follow people you're genuinely interested in because they're most likely to be interested in you," advises Mike Troiano, a partner at the Boston marketing agency Holland Mark. You can go to search.twitter.com and enter topics connected to your business to find other people to follow; refer to a directory like wefollow.com; or use a site like whoshouldifollow.com, which invites you to enter the handle of someone you already follow and helps you find related Twitterers.

Find people who are already talking about you. At the Charles Hotel in Cambridge, e-marketing manager Elizabeth Stefan serves as a kind of digital concierge. Using free desktop software called Hootsuite, she monitors Twitter for people who are talking about visiting the hotel, its bar, or its two restaurants, or who are attending a conference there. Stefan reaches out to welcome them (occasionally doing things like sending a complimentary dessert to someone celebrating a special occasion), or to try to satisfy someone who had a bad experience. Many of them start following the hotel's Twitter account, [@CharlesHotel](https://twitter.com/CharlesHotel), which now has more than 3,500 followers. "We use Twitter to establish a personal connection with people," Stefan says.

Be consistent. Many Twitter users start by sending a fusillade of messages and then go silent. "People like consistency," says Jeff Cutler, a Hingham-based social media trainer who hosts the Webcast NomX3.

At gatherings, be a reporter. When you're at seminars or trade shows, find out if there is a Twitter "hash tag" (these begin with the "#" sign), Cutler suggests. When you post notes or observations from the event even just a brief review of someone you saw speak include this hash tag in your message. Other Twitter users looking for info about the event will be able to easily find your tweets, and the odds are good they'll start following you for more information about your field.

Dangle incentives. Make your Twitter followers feel like insiders. Some restaurants and boutiques invite

them to special tasting events or trunk shows. Marathon Sports has occasionally done giveaways, and the Charles Hotel offers 10 percent off its best-available room rates to people who follow the Harvard Square hostelry on Twitter.

Perhaps the easiest way to attract lots of Twitter followers overnight, jokes Pearl Freier, a Cambridge biotech recruiter, is to have Conan O'Brien, the talk show host and Brookline native, decide to follow you. When O'Brien joined Twitter last February, he picked one person at random, a Michigan woman named Sarah Killen, to follow. Killen had three people following her before that; today, she has more than 28,000.

Scott Kirsner can be reached at kirsner@pobox.com. Follow him on Twitter [@ScottKirsner](https://twitter.com/ScottKirsner). ■