The Complete Guide to Twitter

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1. Introduction - What is Twitter?

Twitter has come a long way since its inception in 2006. Back at the beginning, it was just a bunch of people telling the whole world what they were doing right at that very minute. So you were subjected to banal messages such as "just had breakfast!" and "going out to work soon!"It was messages like these that really turned me off to Twitter when I first discovered it. The service was initially dismissed by some critics as "a platform for mediocrity" and at first I tended to agree with them.
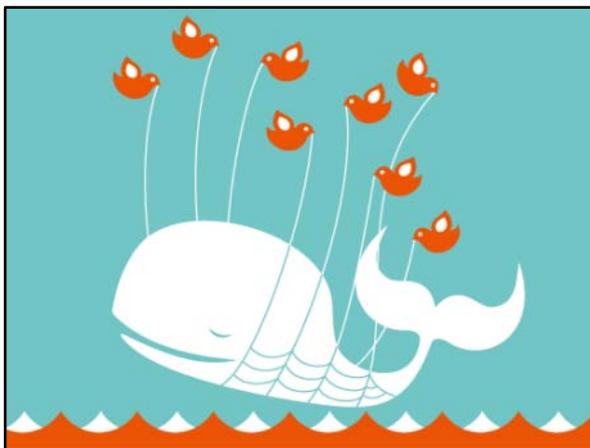
But I and many critics were ultimately proved wrong. Twitter has come a *very* long way since 2006 and now it has become so mainstream that huge world news organisations such as CNN and the BBC are using it to collect news. Lots of extremely useful web apps have been built around its API and its popularity and page views puts the site at around number 15 in Alexa's Top 500 Most Popular Websites[1].

Twitter has been used in presidential elections @BARACKOBAMA , by top military officers @TheJointStaff, by surgeons in the operating room[2] and by police sending out public warnings and announcements[3].

It's situations like these which has led to the verb "to Tweet" to become almost as well-known as "to Google" and also to the introduction of the Fail-Whale, an internet phenomenon all in itself (it even has

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[1]http://bit.ly/2FzvdZ
[2]http://bit.ly/FqcHE
[3]http://bit.ly/d9JHb

its own [fan club](4)). The Fail-Whale is shown when the site is down either due to site maintenance or when it can't cope with the volume of web traffic. But the Twitter development team have done a lot of work on Twitter's infrastructure so the Fail Whale is not seen as much as it used to.

So what *exactly* is Twitter?

[Twitter](5) is a website where you can leave messages of up to 140 characters long for other people to read. Think of it as the online equivalent of sending mobile phone SMS messages. The messages will instantly appear on your page in the form of a timeline (newest messages at the top going down to oldest at the bottom).

If people like your messages, they can choose to "follow" you by clicking a button at the top of your profile (they can *unfollow* you later by clicking the same button). By following you, your messages will appear in your followers' Twitter timelines and if you choose to follow back, their messages will appear in your timeline.

For your messages to have any kind of influence in the Twitter-sphere, having a large number of followers is a good idea (but don't go overboard as we'll discuss later). Some hard-core Twitter users have more than 75,000+ followers. However, the flip coin of that is that having too many followers creates too much "noise" on the page and you can quickly lose focus. So some users tend to be a bit picky as to who they follow, choosing people who they perhaps personally identify with, instead of just creating a huge following. So the question then becomes "*what kind of Twitterer are you?*" More on this topic later.

Once you have published a message, other Twitter users have several options. They can:

- Send you a message back responding to what you have said.

- Follow you (if they are not already doing so)

- *Retweet* the message (send the message in its entirety to their own followers). It's retweeting which has the potential to send messages around the internet like wildfire, bringing your messages to the attention of news organisations (if the messages are news-worthy) and can bring you more & more new followers every day. More on re-tweeting later.

- Continue the conversation by sending out a Twitter message of their own, about what you have said.

- A combination of the above.

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[4]http://bit.ly/36Zo
[5]http://bit.ly/3iMSl5

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Twitterer or Tweeter?

This is something which is not really that important in my opinion, and everyone will have a different opinion. However, you may see me going back and forth with *Twitterer* and *Tweeter* throughout this manual. For the record, I prefer *Tweeter* (a Twitter user) for someone who leaves *Tweets* (Twitter messages) on Twitter. But other users may prefer *Twitterer* and *Twits*. All down to personal preference.

2. What's So Good about Twitter?
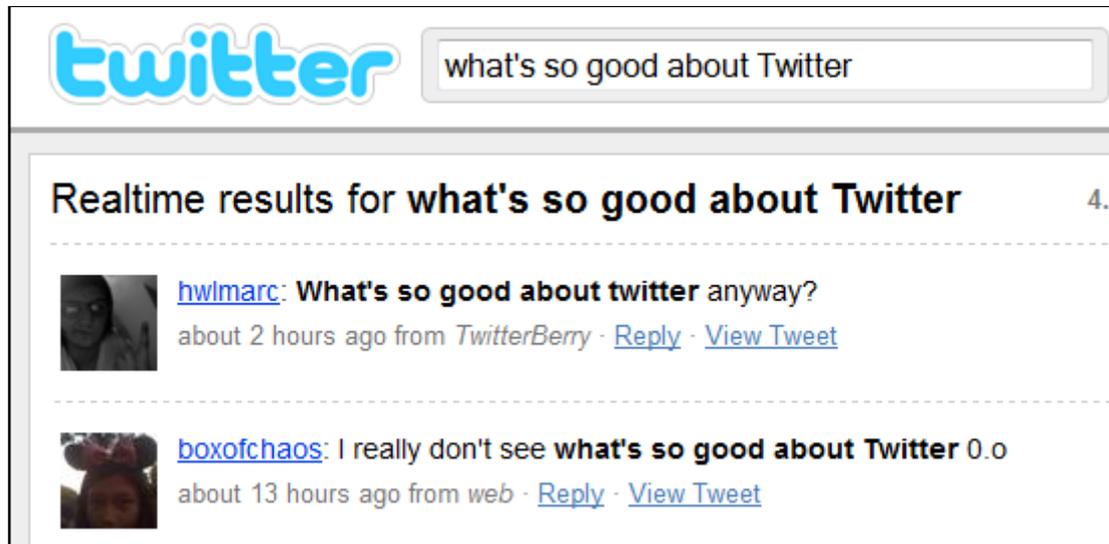
In my opinion, Twitter is an excellent site to get involved with because of its ability to provide *real time information from real people*. Here are some scenarios where Twitter has proved to be a game-changing application:

- **Being able to "live-Tweet" an event**. Twitter's "moment" when it went from banality to mainstream was at the 2007 SXSW conference when attendees were rapidly twittering conference developments as they happened. People could then stand in front of two large screens and watch the Twitter timelines rapidly and constantly updating with what was happening next. Call it instant messaging on steroids.

- **Being able to break the news live from where it happens.** The best example of this is, of course, Iran when the public went onto the streets in protest of the 2009 national elections. Iranian tweeters were able to bypass official government restrictions and tweet everything that was going on in their country. It got to the point where "official" news agencies such as CNN and the BBC were forced to get their news from Twitter because their own journalists had been expelled from the country. These messages were then presented on the television screen to the viewers. Twitter messages also give the news a "human face" because they are coming directly from the people most affected by the events in question.

- **Being used by friends & family to "follow" each other:** are your family and friends in another country from you? Do you have trouble keeping in touch with friends, either real or cyber? Then Twitter makes an excellent tool for keeping in touch and finding out what your family and friends are up to and what they are thinking at that particular moment.

- **Real Time Event Search Engine:** because of the continuous buzz, Twitter can be considered a rapidly updating search engine, powered by real people. It can be easily used to check what

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people are saying about currently unfolding events, or to check up on more personal, time-related issues (e.g. if Gmail is down for everyone or just you). We will get more into detail on this later in the manual.

- **Being able to promote your blog posts:** If you use a website called [Twitterfeed](https://bit.ly/3kslkD)[6], you can have all your blog posts automatically posted to a Twitter feed as they are published. This has proven to be a highly effective way of promoting a blog or website. Readers who live on Twitter instead of an RSS feed can be notified of your new material in their timeline (such as [all fresh MakeUseOf's articles](https://bit.ly/XpSZi)[7]). These tweets can then be retweeted to others and discussed by those who may decide to subscribe to your site later.

- **Job networking:** in this current economic climate, an unemployed person needs all the edge they can get and Twitter hasn't been left out of their job seeking armoury. The site is now being used to ask for work and to look for suitably qualified candidates. Both job seekers and job providers are leaving messages on Twitter with what they need. Private messaging takes care of the rest.

- **Being able to get the resources you need:** Twitter has also been used if a user needs something or has something to offer. Need someone to car-share on a trip from San Francisco to New York? Do you have a spare conference room which you can loan out to someone? Are you selling something or looking to buy something? Then Twitter can be used as your interactive classified ads column. No more placing ads in the newspaper.

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[6]http://bit.ly/3kslkD
[7]http://bit.ly/XpSZi

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3. Setting up your Twitter account for the first time

It is very easy to set up a Twitter account and here's how you go about it. Twitter even provides a link from the front page so just click on it and let's get your account set up:
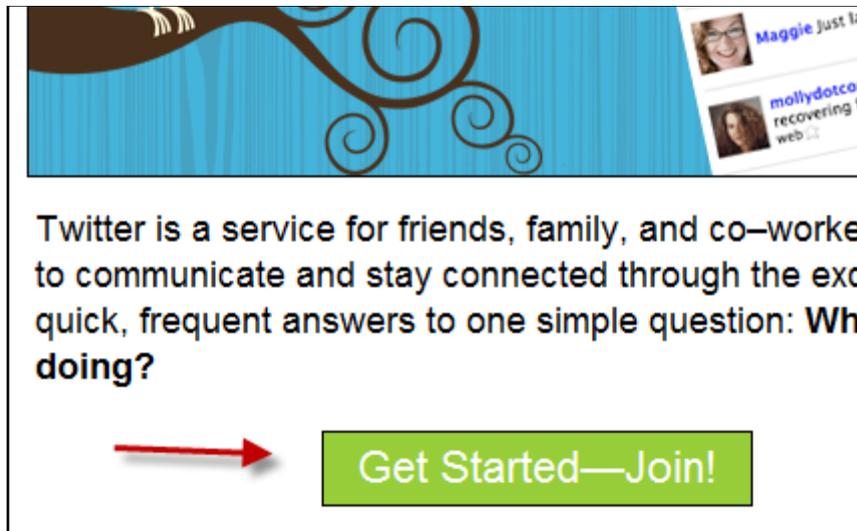

The form on the next page is very straight-forward. Just fill it out, including your desired Twitter username, and press "create my account". You'll then be asked if you want to import your contacts from places like Gmail – this is purely voluntary though and you can skip this part if you want to.

One thing to bear in mind when setting up an account; If you already have another Twitter account, you can't set up another account under the same email address (some people have even reported that you are limited to how many accounts you can set up *under one IP address*). If setting up more than one account, they must all be under separate email addresses. If you have your own website domain then the solution to this is simple – just create different email addresses on your domain. But if you don't have your own domain, you will need to set up various email addresses on email services such as Gmail, Yahoo or Hotmail (to name a few). I personally recommend Gmail because of its superior filtering abilities but the choice is obviously up to you.

Things to bear in mind when setting up your Twitter profile

The main thing to bear in mind is that in order to stand out on Twitter and make an impression (which is the fastest way to gain new followers and traction on the site), you should personalize your profile as much as possible. Make it so when people come to visit, their initial reaction is "WOW! This profile is cool!"

The first thing you can do (and is one of the easiest ones) is to upload a photograph to your profile. Nothing is worse than going to a Twitter profile and seeing a default Twitter logo where the user's photograph should be. Adding a photo adds some personality to the page and stops your profile from being just another boring URL. It also puts a human face on your Tweets and reminds people there is a real person behind the words. A picture also helps to make a "connection" between you and your followers.

Saying all that; if you are *really* uncomfortable with your photo being on the net, use a logo or comic figure, something which represents your personality. Any image is better than no image.

To add your photo, just go to *Settings→Picture*. Once that is done, there are some sidebar things you can focus on. By going to *settings* once again in the top right hand corner of the page, you can add some pertinent information about yourself.

Under *"Account"*, add your website URL (if you have one). Most people nowadays have a blog or a personal website so drop the link in there. This is good advertising for your site and you can be pretty much assured that you will get quite a few clicks from Twitter.

Also under "*Account*", add your location and a one line bio about yourself (less than 160 characters long). Here, you can perhaps say what your occupation is. Despite the short space with which you have to work with, it is really worth filling this in with something relevant or perhaps witty which will again attract the attention of visitors to your page.
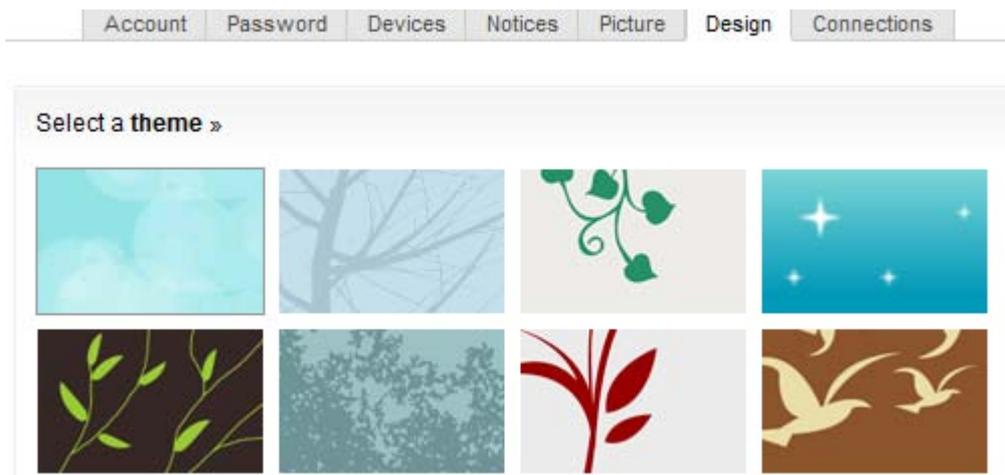
The *design* option is a really good one to remember. Twitter offers various default backgrounds to choose from, if you like them but if not, you can add your own customized personal background.

To do this, stay on the design tab and scroll down to "*change background image*"
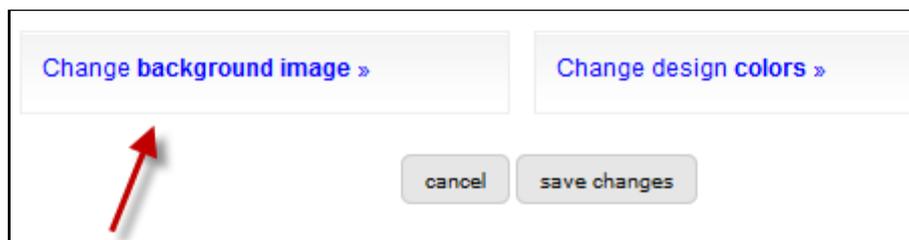
You can then choose a wallpaper from your own computer hard-drive. Pick the one you want, decide if you want it "tiled" or not (which means the image will be repeated over and over on the page) then click "*save changes*". After refreshing your Twitter profile, the new background should now be there.

If you don't like the standard backgrounds being offered, you can always try out MyTweetSpace[8].

This is one I have used and it is very easy. If you are tired or unimpressed with the page backgrounds that Twitter offers, you can use MyTweetSpace to make a better looking background.

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[8]http://bit.ly/ZrJ49

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We have also covered this same topic numerous times on MakeUseOf. Here are some other interesting links you should definitely check out –

[A Bunch of Easy Ways to Spice up Your Twitter Page](#)[9] by Jimmy Rogers

[Twitbacks: Customized Twitter Backgrounds](#)[10]

[Twitter Patterns: Cool Background Designs for Your Twitter Profile](#)[11]

[PrettyTweet: Twitter Profile Background Designer](#)[12]

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[9]http://bit.ly/3fedgn
[10]http://bit.ly/jbUiC
[11]http://bit.ly/LqoSY
[12]http://bit.ly/BEGX6

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4. How to Effectively Tweet

OK, so you now have a nice new Twitter account set up, it's time now to start leaving some messages for people and see if we can pick up a few followers.

The art of leaving good messages is the subject of many books, websites and tutorials. Leaving a compelling interesting message, while at the same time adhering to a limit of 140 characters, is actually more difficult than it looks. Instead of being wordy, you have to be succinct and to the point. You have to get your point across **very** quickly and at the same time make people want to find out more about what you are saying.
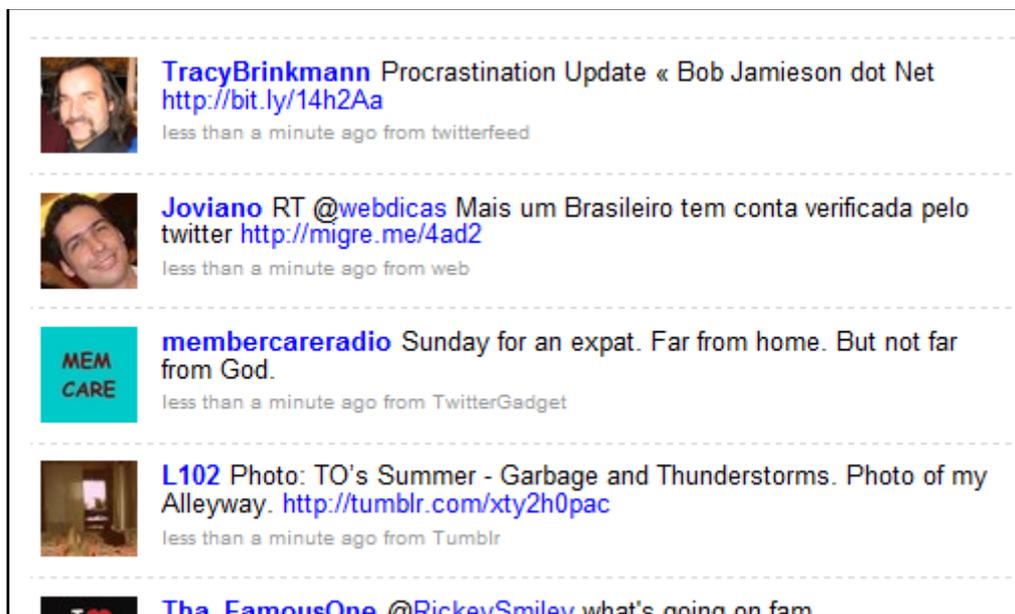
When I first started tweeting, I actually spent a few days not leaving any messages at all. I instead spent the time on the Twitter public timeline[13], reading other people's tweets, watching the reactions to each tweet and seeing what worked and what didn't. Then when I had a good idea of the kind of messages that worked well with other people, I started leaving my own.

Now, what are some of the things you can say? Well if you refer back to "*so what's so good about it?*" you will see there some of the uses you can put Twitter to. But to begin with, just leave some interesting, perhaps funny, messages to get your account going and to build up some followers. Links to interesting blog posts and webpages also go down very well if you follow it up with a bit of discussion (in other words, don't spam Twitter – leave links by all means – I do – but try and follow it up by discussing what you have posted). Or perhaps tell people what you are doing that day. Or perhaps a joke you've just heard. Make yourself interesting, compelling and someone worth following.

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[13]http://bit.ly/KYxU

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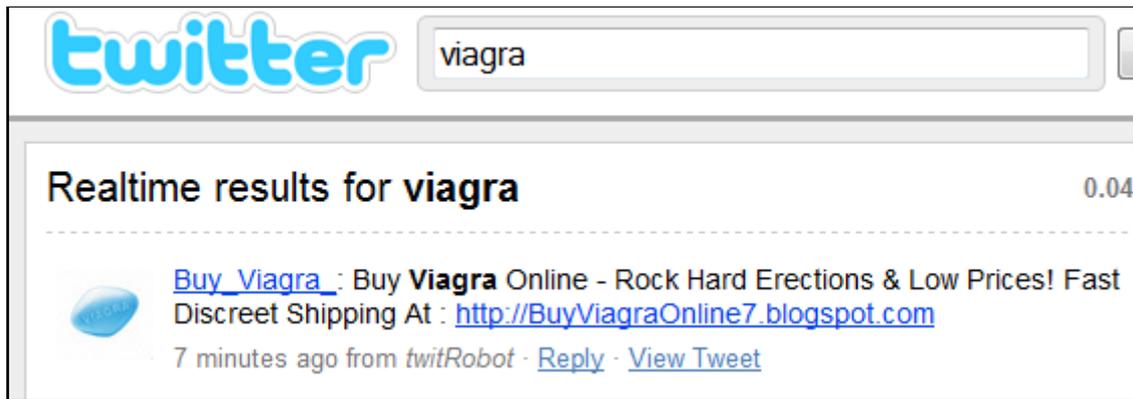
But as I said, **don't spam** Twitter and your followers. That's the fastest way to lose your followers and eventually get your account stopped by Twitter management. Any intentions to advertise your discount stock of Viagra or your $20 million in a Nigerian bank account which needs a fellow Tweeter to help with should be immediately abandoned. If not, you'll find your followers quickly abandoning you.

Finding More Followers

The fastest way to find followers is just to tweet regularly with interesting insightful comments, answer other Tweeter's messages to you, and generally be polite and courteous on the site. If you do that, people will start to follow you in no time as good quality Tweeters are hard to find sometimes, so when one raises to the top, everyone follows them.

There are many websites offering to give you lots of followers instantly without any / much work from you. **These are a scam and should be avoided.**
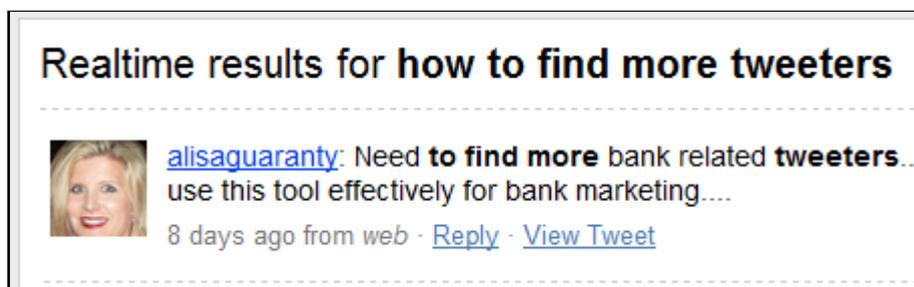
When you are starting your account for the first time, you are asked if you want to have Twitter scan through various accounts such as your Gmail account, to see if anyone there is a Twitter user. They could then potentially be added to your followers list. I don't recommend you do that because:

- It means giving a website access to your email account (something which always gives me the shakes)

- Just because someone is in your Gmail contacts list doesn't mean they should also be your Twitter follower.

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The best ways to get started are to contact your best friends and closest colleagues yourself and find out if they are on Twitter. You can then exchange usernames and manually add one another yourselves. If you have friends who are online most of the time, they may very well be on Twitter already.

After that, based on what direction you want to take your Twitter account, you can search Twitter directories for like-minded people and people in your profession.

Twellow[14] is particularly good for finding fellow Tweeters in various industries and professions:

WeFollow[15] also breaks listings up into categories but the categories are not so narrowly:

You can easily add yourself to these directories so other people can find you.

To find other directories to find like-minded people, check out some of our relevant articles on MakeUseOf ; 9 Useful Sites for Finding People to Follow on Twitter[16] by Charnita Fance, and Four Ways to Find New Twitter Friends[17] by David Pierce.

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[14]http://bit.ly/1CzBHX
[15]http://bit.ly/nIUt8
[16]http://bit.ly/fe2F0
[17]http://bit.ly/f1uJw

Publicizing Your Twitter Username

There are many ways in which you can publicise your Twitter username. I personally have "calling cards" which are simply cards with my name, mobile phone number, email address, website address and Twitter username. This can be a great way to "network" at business functions and parties and it gets your Twitter username "out there" for people to find. After handing out my own cards, I saw my Twitter follower count go up from several hundred to over one thousand.


You should also put your Twitter username on as many websites as possible. Friendfeed[18] offers you the possibility to put your Twitter feed through the site and they give embeddable widgets[19] showing your Twitter logo. People can then click on the logo and will be taken straight through to your page.

Do you have your own name domain? (*e.g.* http://www.johnsmith.com) If so, why not put your Twitter feed through your own site? Twitter offers a few alternatives[20] themselves, but you can always make your own if you have the knowledge. - Or if you have a Wordpress[21] blog, there are plenty of plug-ins offering the chance to put your Twitter feed on your blog page.

You can get Twitter name badges for your site as well. The best one, in my opinion, is TwitterCounter[22] and you can get either a small chicklet or a large button.
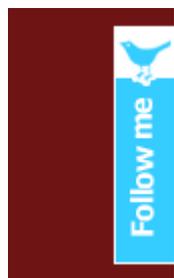
Then there is also TwitterFollowBadge[23], which I use on my own site. This is a small "*follow me*" box which moves down the page as you scroll. Clicking on it will bring you directly to your Twitter page.

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[18] http://bit.ly/xEf3
[19] http://bit.ly/rW959
[20] http://bit.ly/PJQpy
[21] http://bit.ly/1vGMCO
[22] http://bit.ly/2GrMkx
[23] http://bit.ly/qpDYQ

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Another fantastic one is Twitstamp[24] and I used this one for a LONG time on my former blog. The design is sleek and professional and you can put a lot of information on it. This is mine :

As you can see, Twitstamp can include your Twitter name (obviously the most essential detail), your picture, location, site URL, short bio, your last tweet and the number of followers and the number you are following.

You can also choose between a dark background and a light background.

If these three possibilities don't rock your boat, then many other websites offer plain vanilla Twitter "follow me" badges with the Twitter bird on them. A good place to look is Smashing Magazine[25].

With a little bit of imagination, you can easily get your Twitter username out to others so they can follow you.

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[24]http://bit.ly/DoI5P
[25]http://bit.ly/15Hhht

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Top Followed People on Twitter

According to Wikipedia, the top followed people on Twitter are the following (which is verified by the Twitter directories we have just looked at). As you can see, the top followed people are ALL celebrities and high profile people.
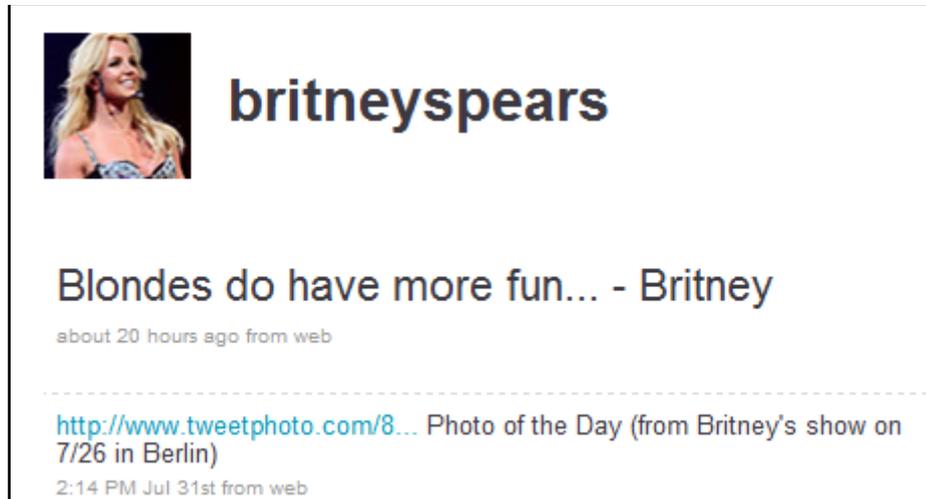
- Ashton Kutcher @aplusk - 2,839,000 followers

- Ellen DeGeneres @TheEllenShow - 2,541,000 followers

- Britney Spears @britneyspears - 2,500,000 followers

- CNN Breaking News @cnnbrk - 2,310,000 followers

- Oprah Winfrey @Oprah - 1,908,000 followers

- Ryan Seacrest @RyanSeacrest - 1,767,000 followers

- John Mayer @johncmayer - 1,759,000 followers

- Barack Obama @BarackObama - 1,755,000 followers

- Shaquille O'Neal @THE_REAL_SHAQ - 1,708,000 followers

Now, does this mean that, unless you are a celebrity, you have absolutely no chance of getting into the serious big leagues of Twitter? Absolutely not everyone has a chance. Robert Scoble @scobleizer has more than 95,000 followers (at the time of writing) and, to the best of my knowledge, he is not a Hollywood superstar, a singer or a politician. The key to becoming a Twitter mover and shaker is just to tweet often, tweet well, and engage your followers.

To use that often-used quote from Field Of Dreams, *if you build it, they will come.* If you build up a recognizable brand and provide good quality tweets, the followers will come. Keeping them interested afterwards to stop them from leaving – well that's another matter entirely.

Hashtags – what are they and why are they useful to you?

OK now it's time to take a look at some of the little things that you can do to make Twitter a *really* useful application and the first thing you should learn is how to use hashtags.

A hashtag is basically the Twitter equivalent of metadata on a message. If you want your website or blog to be easily found in the search engines, you would add metadata in the website headers which will then be picked up by the Google spiders when they visit. Well, a hashtag is basically the Twitter equivalent. If you want your message to be easily tracked by someone interested in what you are saying, you would add a hashtag next to the keyword.

Say for example you want to talk about the latest article on MakeUseOf. Well, you would obviously want other people who are also interested in talking about MakeUseOf articles to find your message and respond to it. So when writing your 140 character message, you would also enter **#makeuseof**. Whenever someone then enters the keyword makeuseof[26] into the Twitter search engine[27], your message would be included in their search results.

To avoid flooding the Twittersphere with too many similar and unneeded hashtags, it would be best to do a search on Twitter first to see if there is already a hashtag being used that you can just pick up on.
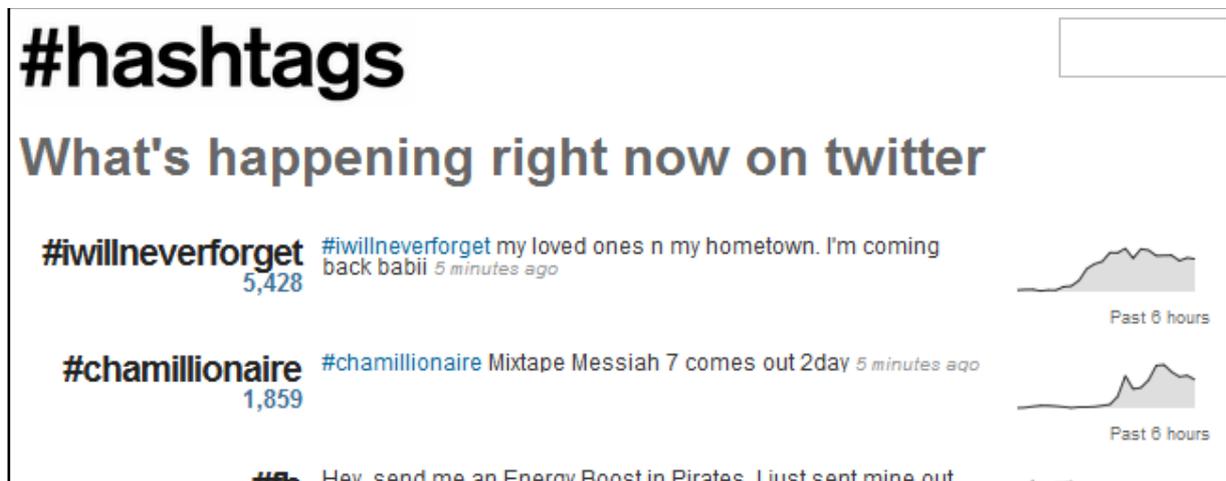

There's a website which tracks hashtags called… yep, you guessed it, Hashtags http://www.hashtags.org/ . This tracks all the top hashtags and trends of the moment and is extremely useful to use if you want to see what people are talking about right now. To have YOUR hashtags tracked on the site, you first need to follow their Twitter account - http://twitter.com/hashtags .

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[26]http://bit.ly/16LPMj
[27]http://bit.ly/1GPSAz

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ReTweeting – how to do it and why other Tweeters value them

maimislang: Oh wow I dig this! RT @NoroBiik: How To Backup Your Twitter Archive by Charnita Fance (**makeuseof.com**) http://bit.ly/QXUZ3 (expand) #cory

about 17 hours ago from *TweetDeck* · Reply · View Tweet
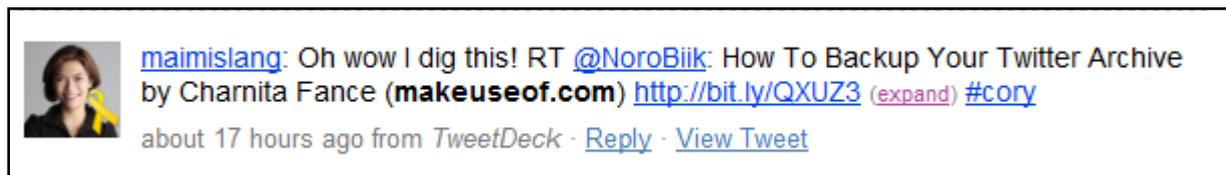
If you've spent a lot of time browsing around Twitter, you will have noticed the letters **RT** followed by another person's tweet. If you don't already know what RT means, it stands for ReTweet and Tweeters love them.

BuzzEdition: RT @The_Tech_Update: **MakeUseOf.com** - Cool Websites and Tools [August 7] http://bit.ly/cst2v (expand)

about 18 hours ago from *TweetDeck* · Reply · View Tweet
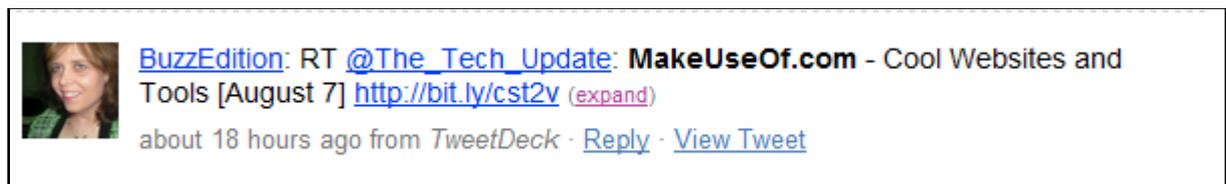
Imagine a game of Chinese Whispers where you all sit in a line. The first person says something (their tweet) to you and then you pass that same message onto your Twitter contact who then passes it onto their Twitter contacts and so on and so forth. That is essentially re-tweeting.

Obviously in Chinese Whispers, the message gets distorted the more it gets passed along so maybe it wasn't such a super analogy to use! But you get my point about what the whole practice involves. It's simply the practice of passing a Twitter message which you found and like to your Twitter followers. It is also a lot like posting a link to something you like on your blog.

Now in order to retweet something, all you have to do is start a new Tweet and begin it with the words RT. (without the full stop after it). Then repost the message in full, making sure that you don't go above the 140 character limit. If it *does* go above the 140 character limit, make sure that you have at least the name of the Tweeter of the original post in there and do some arty styling on the rest. To insert the name of the original Tweeter, just enter @ followed by their Twitter name. So our Twitter name would be **@MakeUseOf**[28].

Why Tweeters like retweets is obvious. If lots and lots of other Tweeters retweet something then a web link or an idea could go completely viral. If it's a web link, that site could see visitor stats going off the charts. People will refer back to the original Tweeter and that person will most probably get followed by lots of other Tweeters (sounds rather stalker-ish doesn't it?). So it pays for one of your Tweets to be retweeted. I'm not sure whether it's good or bad form though to request retweets from others. What do you think about that?

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[28]http://bit.ly/12EGtw

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Sending a Direct Message to another User

To send a message directly to a user, you can use two methods. The public method (which will appear on the Twitter timeline) is to use the @ symbol. So if you wanted to send me a message, you would start your Twitter message with @MarkONeill. That would ensure that the message appeared in my replies section and I would then see it.

The private method (and one that can only be used if you are following the person already) is to send a direct message. There are two methods to send a private direct message. The first one is to go to that person's Twitter page and on the right hand side is an option to "message" them.

Click on that and you'll be taken to a page to compose your message. Of course the 140 characters rule applies here too

The other method is to go to the main Twitter page and in the box, type d followed by the person's username. So to send me a direct message by this method, you would start your Twitter message with *d MarkONeill*.

Searching Twitter to Stay on Top of the Trends
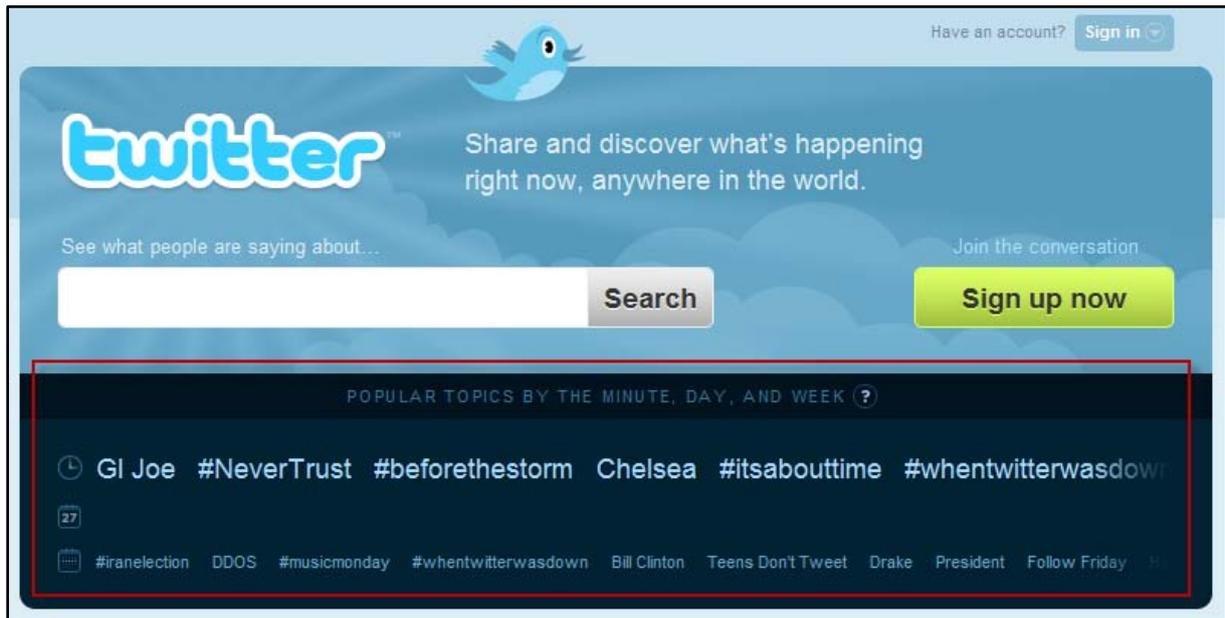
If you *really* want to be part of the mainstream Twitter conversation, it pays to follow the current trends – and the newly designed Twitter website makes that easy to do (see above).

You can see at a glance which topics are hot "by the minute, day and week" so if you instantly want to jump into a conversation, just pick a topic and go for it. Just don't forget to enter the relevant keyword or hashtag into your Tweet so it gets bundled up with the others.
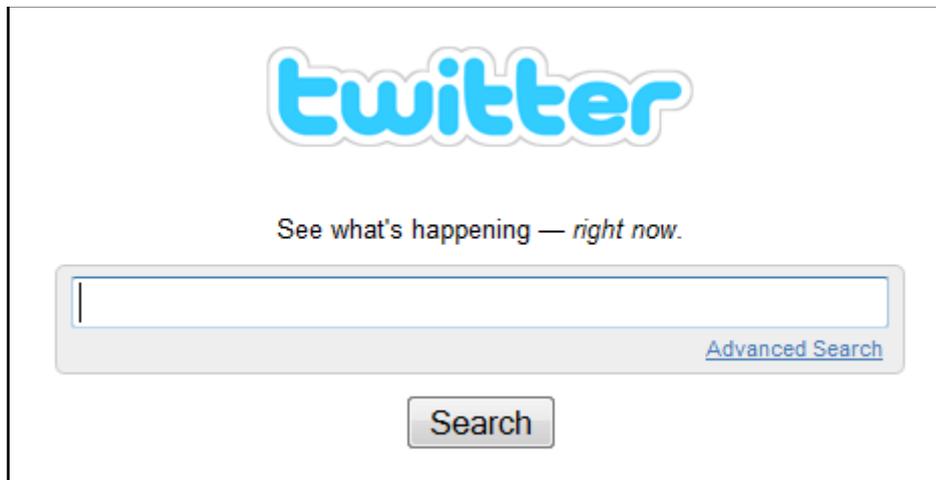
There are actually lots of benefits to using Twitter as your search engine, instead of using say Google or Yahoo. Let's see why.

Google and Yahoo are both excellent search engines but when you closely analyse them, they are just computer algorithms. They are (obviously) not human, they don't have feelings or emotions, and they just return results to you based on your keywords.

Now for part of the time, that's all you need. If you want to know the birth date of say Winston Churchill for your school history essay then a computer algorithm can easily return you the pages you need. But what if you want to know something *more personal?* What if you want to know where to get the best ice-cream in London? Or if you want to know if Gmail is down for other people besides yourself at that moment? This is where the computer algorithm hits its limits, because it can't make personal preferences and it can't respond to real-time information requests. It can only rely on spider-visited websites which may have been crawled say a month ago.

Some websites have attempted to address this deficiency such as Aardvark[29], which allows you to send queries to real people by instant messaging (I am an enthusiastic user). But why not just use Twitter?

Want to know where to get the best ice cream in London? Want to find out if Gmail is down for others apart from you? Search on Twitter and see if others are talking about it. If not, begin a tweet on the subject and wait for others to respond.

Eyal Sela has written an excellent post on advanced Twitter searches[30], which you can use to mine the site for valuable information - well worth reading. You can filter the links, remove retweets and spam from your search results and subscribe to the RSS feed for your search query, plus much more.

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[29]http://bit.ly/3lbqQN
[30]http://bit.ly/hwwLv

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Maintaining Your Reputation on Twitter

Mahendra has written a very useful post on Enhancing Your Reputation on Twitter[31]. This is a very useful thing to do if you are an active Twitter user because reputations are starting to be made and lost on the site. With Twitter accounts ranking higher in the search engines than normal websites (my Twitter account[32] is sometimes higher in Google than my Mark O'Neill domain[33]), this will be perhaps the first thing that people like potential employers will find when Googling you. So it pays to do a little work in this area.

Stop the f**king tweets!
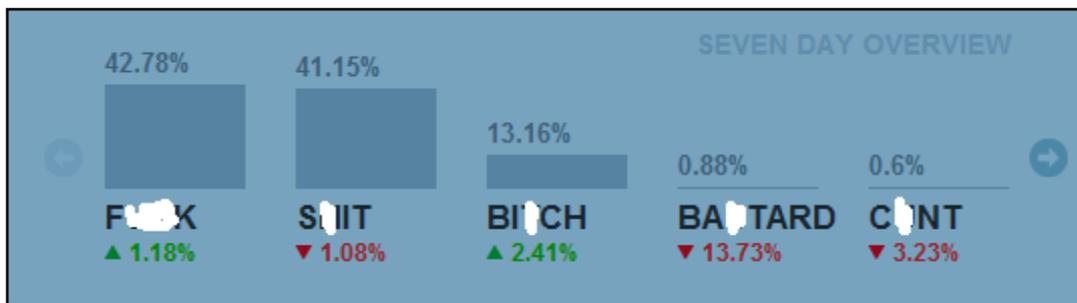
The first thing you should do is make sure your Tweets are polite and professional. Don't have any tweets with verbal abuse (which can easily be tracked[34]), pointless arguments, making fun of people (in a cruel way) and so on. You get the idea. Just like having drunken photos on Facebook isn't a good move career-wise, so is verbally abusing bullying tweets which will show the dark side of your character to people you are trying to make a good impression to.

Start talking about things that show off your knowledge

On the flip side, start talking about things which will show off your knowledge in certain areas. When someone (again, we'll use the example of a potential employer) comes across your Twitter profile, you want it to show that you are an extremely knowledgeable person, someone with all the facts at his / her fingertips. So begin discussing subjects in your area, link to relevant stories online, and answer people (using the @reply tag) when they discuss something which crosses over into your area of expertise.

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[31]http://bit.ly/2pvaGX
[32]http://bit.ly/JGNoQ
[33]http://bit.ly/7ppj4
[34]http://bit.ly/3UelTl

Cleaning up Your Twitter Account

This is something I have begun to do with my account. Up to now, I have been following everyone who follows me but I have begun to realise this is the wrong move for several reasons.

One, it doesn't look professional to be following spam accounts and it shows a certain degree of "I'm so desperate for followers that I'll follow the spam bot with the bikini picture".

Second, following everyone just creates too much noise. There are people with 15,000 – 20,000 users. How can you possibly follow, track and answer 15,000-20,000 people all at once? Simply put, you can't. Plus if you're following spam accounts too, the real Twitter users are being drowned out with offers of free marketing reports, special discounts on a wide range of crap and so on.

Third (and this is just my personal opinion), Twitter is all about connecting with people on a personal level. Why follow people who are not interesting to you and who are not saying interesting things relevant to you? Just cut all that out and follow people you are genuinely interested in what they have to say. Suddenly you will find your Twitter experience to be a much nicer one.

Obviously when you have several thousand built up like I do, it becomes more and more difficult to clean out the account without devoting several hours to it. But here's the best ways to get started.
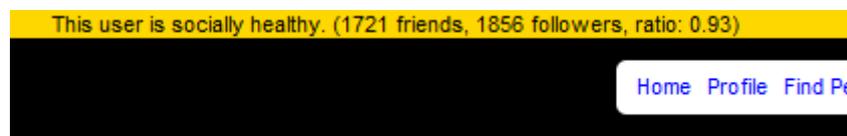
- If you are a Firefox user, use the Greasemonkey script, Twitter User Classify[35]. This shows at the top of every Twitter user page whether that person is considered to be a spammer or not. They base it on the number of followers, the number of people that person is following back, the number of Tweets and I'm sure a few other factors. This won't help you clean up your current list but it will help you in the future to avoid spam accounts.

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[35]http://bit.ly/v44U

- Use the website Friend or Follow[36] (mentioned again later in this manual) to find out who is not following you back. The site only requires your username (no password needed) and it gives you direct links to the people who are **not** following you back. I recommend unfollowing them in return (unless it's a news bot, you favourite website like Makeuseof or celebrity you really want to follow). Of course to unfollow them, you need to have the log in details for your Twitter account but that goes into the Twitter account directly, not Friend or Follow.
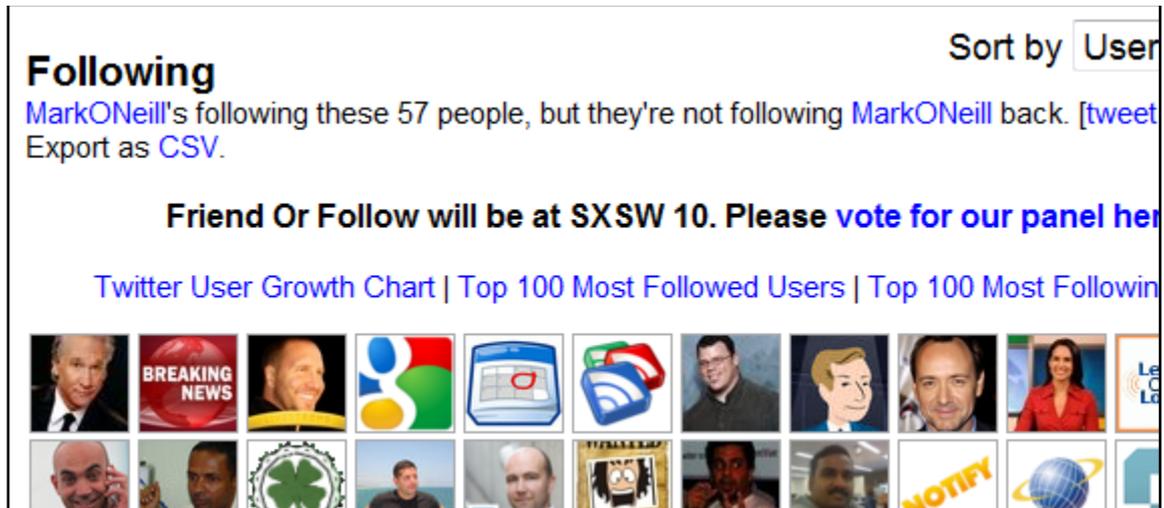
- If you have less than 700 followers, you can use MyCleenr[37] to weed out all the inactive accounts and remove them from your account. A better solution (in my opinion) is either Twitoria[38] – the only downside to Twitoria is that it will display details of all the suspended accounts that are following you, and you can't unfollow a suspended account – or UnTweeps[39] (which is slightly better still) which you can sign into using the Twitter site. You can then specify how many days a person needs to have gone before leaving their last tweet (I chose 60 days). It will then show you a complete list of dormant followers who will automatically be unfollowed for you on your behalf (if it's a lot, UnTweeps will take quite a bit of time to unfollow each one though, so be patient).

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[36]http://bit.ly/ESm3L
[37]http://bit.ly/xv95
[38]http://bit.ly/zBUV
[39]http://bit.ly/j4tyj

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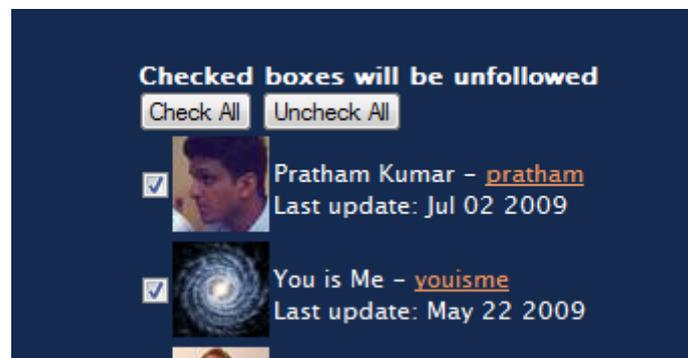
- Now to remove the spam. The best app I have found for this is [TweetBlocker](#)[40]. Just log in and then run the scan (this can take up to 10 minutes so be patient). It will then show you a complete list of all the people you are following along with a "grade".

The ones with the lowest grades are the spammers. Mousing over those accounts will show you some details of that account including how many people they are following compared to how many are following back. If they are following a vast number compared to a much smaller number following them back, they are most likely a spammer.

So now the long and tedious part - you need to open up a complete remaining list of who you are following[41] (or view them in Friend Or Follow), open each one up in Twitter and see if you want to keep following them. Using the Twitter User Classify script, open each one up and see if they are saying anything remotely interesting to you. If not, unfollow them.

Once this is done, keep on top of it by performing a spring clean every month or so. Be very picky about whom you follow and very soon you'll have a list of people you genuinely enjoy hearing from.

Some people think that the more followers they have, the better they are. But this is wrong as I've come to realise. You only get out of Twitter what you put into it and following a lot of spam accounts just looks bad, pure and simple, and makes you look desperate for followers. Don't be one of those people.

Protected Updates versus Public Updates – What's best?

Some people prefer to keep their updates private and only viewable to their followers. Why do they do this and what are the benefits?

In my mind, the only possible reason for keeping your Twitter feed private is if you are using Twitter for reasons unconnected to communicating with other people and it is imperative that you keep the details of such a feed away from other people.

One example is if you are using an app called TweetMyPC[42] which allows you to remotely shut your computer down with a Twitter account. Obviously if you are sending shutdown commands to that Twitter feed, you wouldn't want them made public so you need to keep that feed private.

As far as I'm concerned, there is no sensible reason why, if you are trying to build a follower base, you should keep your Tweets secret. After all, many people will follow you based on what you have tweeted so far and if they can't see that and instead they see a blank screen, they will simply shrug their shoulders and move on. Let's face it, would *you* follow someone who didn't trust you up-front to see what they had written?
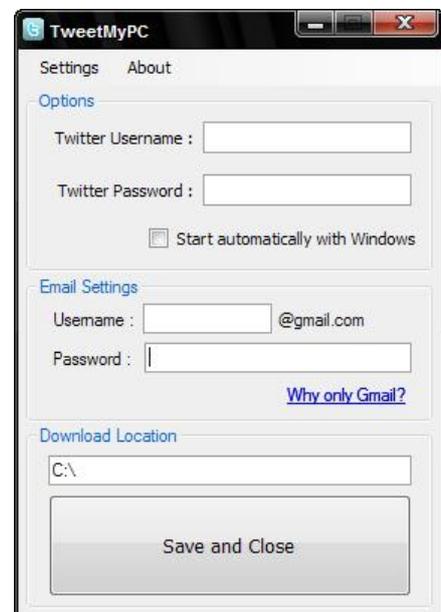
That empty page speaks volumes. So make a good impression and open those tweets up for public viewing. You may actually then start to see your follower count rising.

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[41]http://bit.ly/35alej
[42]http://bit.ly/Fct21

5. Twitter Apps & Bots You Should Know About

Desktop Apps

Thanks to the Twitter API, there are many third party apps out there. Let's take a look at some of the free desktop apps that I have used and can recommend for offline twittering.

TweetDeck http://www.tweetdeck.com
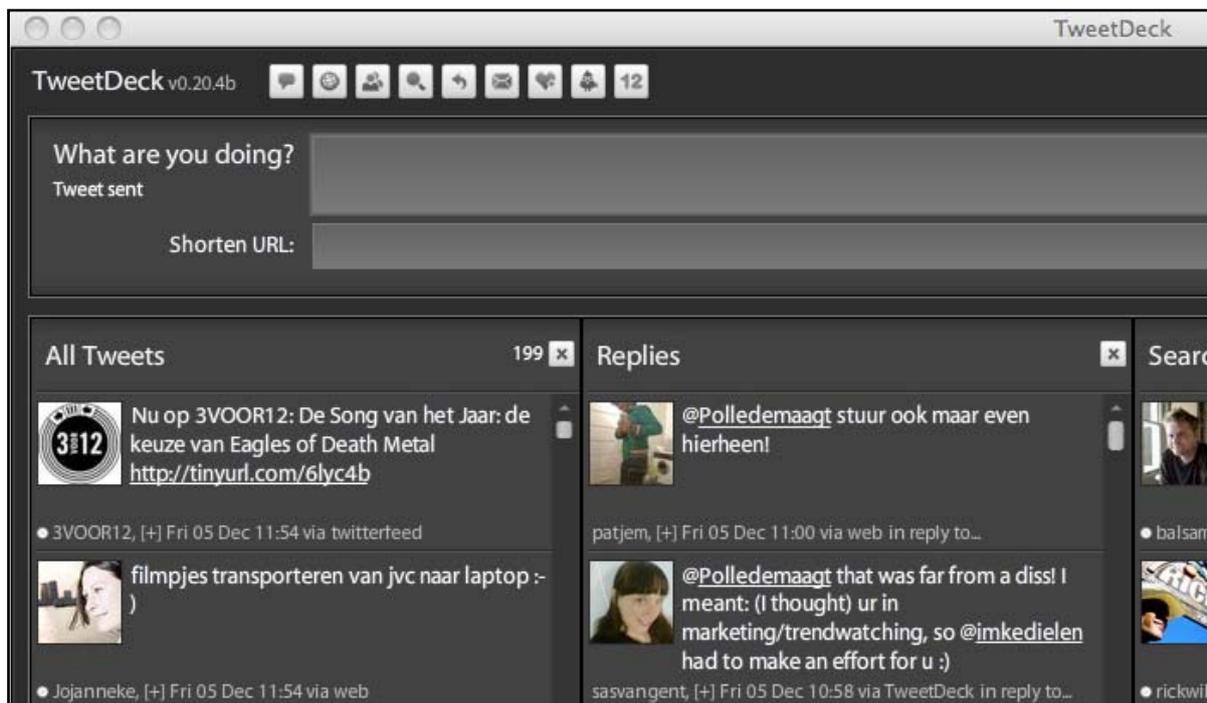
This used to be one of my favourite apps for tweeting until the *Twitter Gadget for Gmail* came along.

As you can see in the screenshot above, the text area for tweeting is at the top and you can shorten all your links using a "shorten URL" feature. Below that, the app is split up into several columns so you can see *everything* that is coming in (and these columns can be customized to suit your needs).

The first column is *All Friends* so you can see every single tweet from every single one of your followers. The one next to that is the *Replies* column, which as the name says, shows all the replies addressed to you. The one next to that is *Direct Messages* which, obviously, shows all the direct messages addressed to you (which I personally didn't need as all my direct messages are immediately emailed to me by Twitter.)

But what really makes this good is that you can also add other social networks such as 12seconds[43] and Facebook[44].

Twhirl http://www.twhirl.org

Another old favourite and one that's being constantly updated by its developer, Loic LeMeur[45]. This one, which runs on Adobe AIR, looks like your ordinary instant messaging program with the steady stream of tweets coming through. But you can also filter it down to replies, direct messages and you can also view Tweeters profiles inside Twhirl along with a preview of their tweets. So you can see if you want to follow them or not.

You can also send regular tweets, replies and direct messages through Twhirl.

The good thing about Twhirl is that you can connect a variety of other services as you can see below:


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[43]http://bit.ly/6DRF
[44]http://bit.ly/35Y50j
[45]http://bit.ly/OGh37

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If you asked me to choose between Twhirl and TweetDeck, I honestly couldn't choose as they are both really good. At one point, I had both apps running on my computer as I couldn't decide which one to get rid of. In the end, Twhirl stayed and TweetDeck bit the dust. ;-)

Digsby http://www.digsby.com
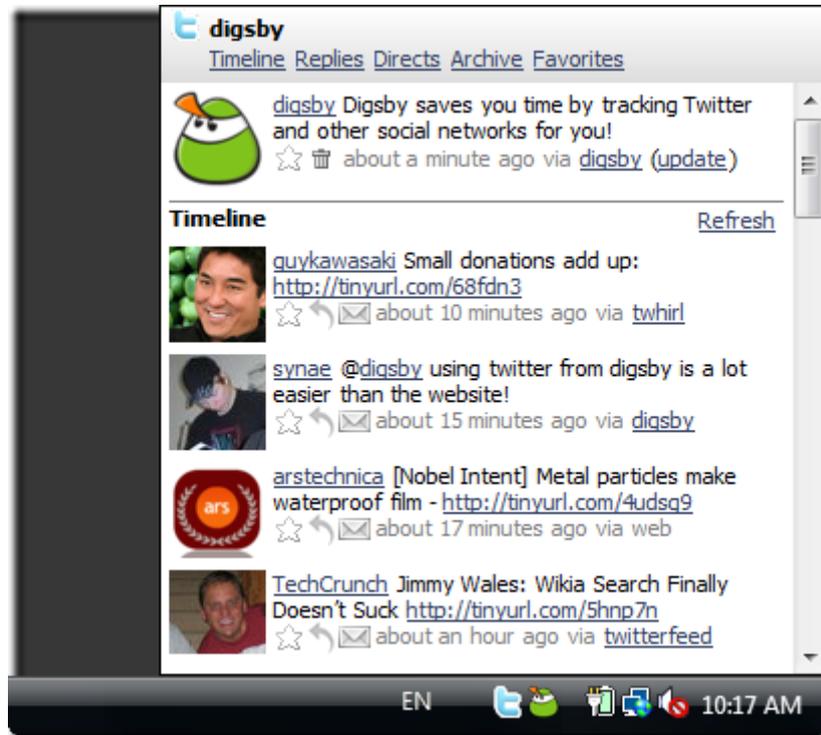
For a while, I was also trying out Digsby to tweet from but in the end, I removed it because I didn't like having my tweets and my instant messages being on the same app and having my IM program popping up all the time. That was extremely distracting. I prefer to have my tweets on a separate standalone application.

But nevertheless, many people I know are fans of the Twitter application on Digsby and it *is* a very well-made app. It just never clicked with me that's all (no pun intended). ☺

Some time ago, there were a lot of complaints about Digsby's potentially intrusive monetizing techniques. Rest assured, they have addressed this issue at present, so you won't need to worry about this anymore.

Twitter Gadget For Gmail http://twittergadget.appspot.com
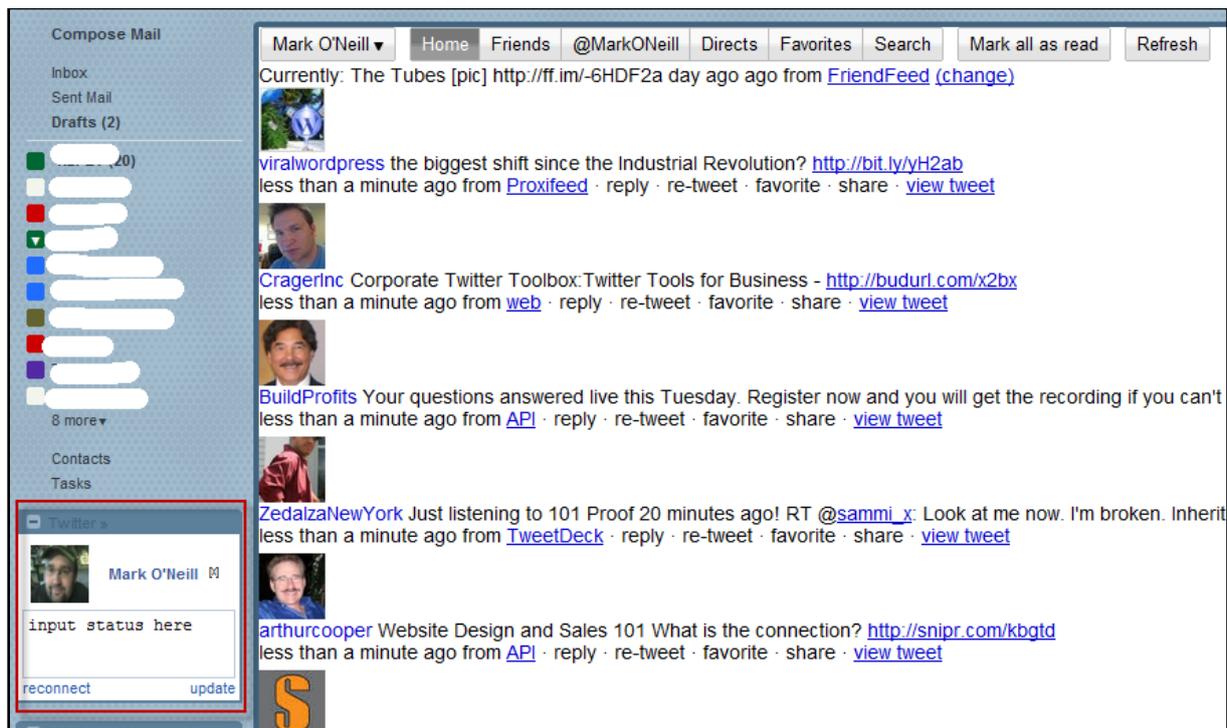
This is my current favourite. This places a Twitter box to the left of your Gmail inbox so you can send your tweets - but it does so much more than that. The new version virtually *integrates with your Gmail contacts* so you can share tweets with them (think the Twitter version of Google Reader shared items) and you can also access the main Twitter stream, your replies, your direct messages and much more inside Gmail.

To install it, you would go to the "gadgets" tab of Gmail and enter the gadget link which is found on the app website[46].

When you see the box in your Gmail sidebar, just enter your account details and when your Twitter account loads, click on your name to open up the rest of it in your Gmail main page.

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[46]http://bit.ly/LLqis

When you see the tweets in the main part of the page, you have several options open to you.
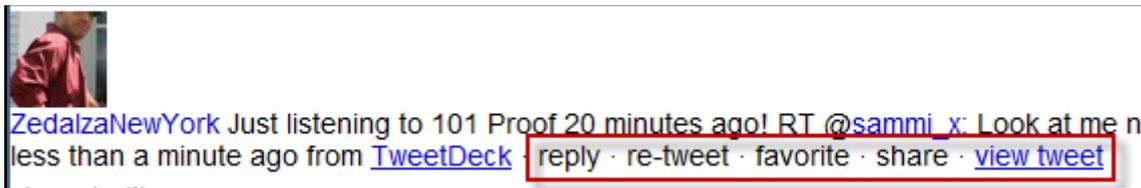
The "share" option is where you can share the tweet with one of your Gmail contacts. But the downside here is that it only works if your Gmail contact has this application also installed. If they don't, then the share option won't work.

All in all, this is a great application which has big potential for the future if the developer keeps up with it. After all, how many people live inside their email inbox? What, only me? Come on, there must be others….. ;-)

10 Twitter Bots You Might Want to Follow

MakeUseOf http://twitter.com/makeuseof

This one needs no introduction ☺ Be informed of all new MakeUseOf posts in your Twitter feed.

BreakingNews http://twitter.com/BreakingNews
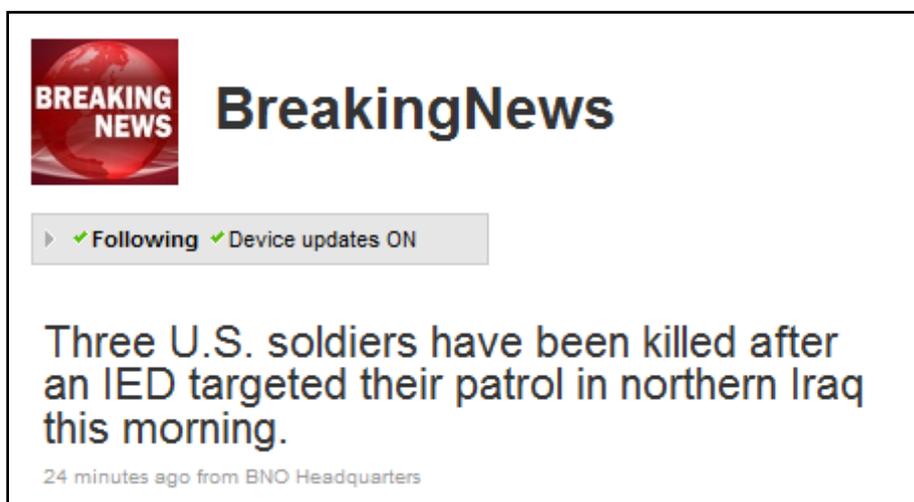
BreakingNews is a Twitter news wire service which sometimes scoops even the mainstream media.

You'll also want to read John McClain's article on additional ways to track breaking news with Twitter[47].

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[47]http://bit.ly/yk1pu

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Twanslate http://twitter.com/twanslate
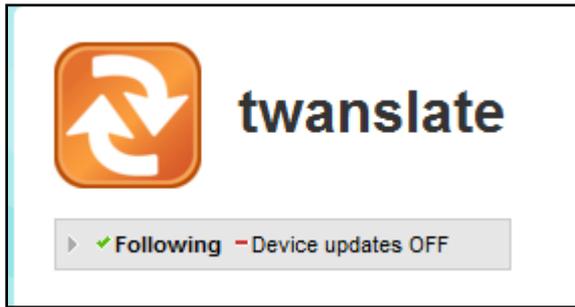
This Twitter account offers short translations. Just follow it, then send it a direct message along with the language you want it translated to and it will send you back a direct message with the translation.

So if you want something translated into French, you would write :

"d twanslate fr Where's the bathroom?"

If you want it put into another language, just direct message Twanslate for the full list of language codes (*d twanslate help*)

Internet Movie Database http://twitter.com/imdb
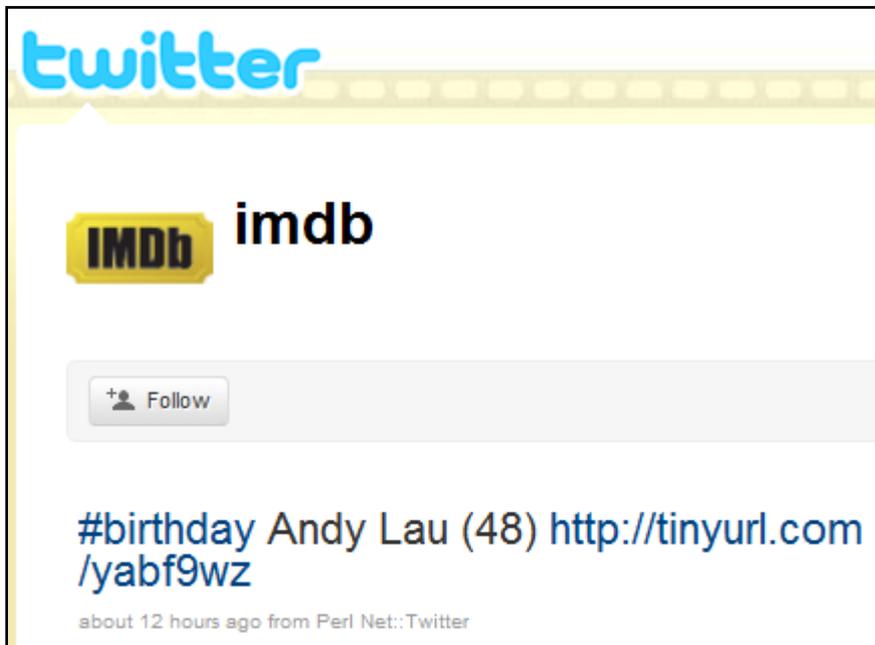
You can use this bot to make enquiries on the Intenet Movie Database, and you won't even have to visit the site.

Stock Quotes http://twitter.com/stock

Need a stock quote? Then this is the bot to use. Just type **d stock** followed by the stock exchange name of the company (enter the company name here[48] to get the stock name, amongst other details)

Timer http://twitter.com/timer
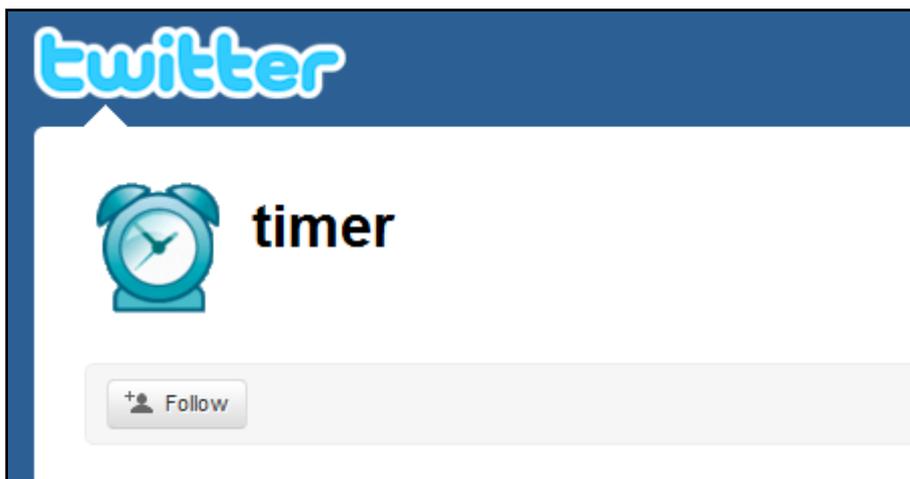
Do you need to be reminded to do something soon? Then ask this bot to send you a direct message when it's time.

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[48]http://bit.ly/g43Is

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Forecast http://twitter.com/forecast

Do you need to know the weather forecast? Now there will no need to switch on your television to find out. Just Tweet it!

TrackThis http://twitter.com/trackthis

Using this bot, you can track UPS, Fedex, USPS, DHL and several other carriers. Be notified through Twitter when your package finally starts moving so you know when to expect it.

Other Useful Twitter Websites & Applications

FriendorFollow http://www.friendorfollow.com

FriendorFollow is a site that analyzes your Twitter account and shows you which people you are following who are not following you back, and who's following you that YOU are not following back. An easy-to-use interface with direct links to the Twitter accounts so you can easily follow / unfollow them.

Twittonary http://twittonary.com

This is a dictionary of the various Twitter words and phrases being used. Such as retweet:

As you can see, you can vote each definition up and down depending on how well you think the word / phrase has been defined. You don't have to log into the site to vote – just click on the up or the down thumb and your vote is automatically registered.

Twitter Spam http://www.twitter.com/spam
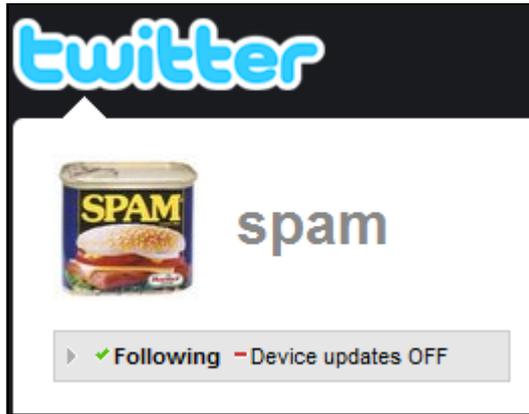
Twitter spam is, as the name suggests, the place to go to report any spammers you may come across on Twitter.

Just send them a message with the name of the spammer (just don't include yours anywhere in the message as your account may accidently get shut down too!).

SecretTweet http://www.secrettweet.com
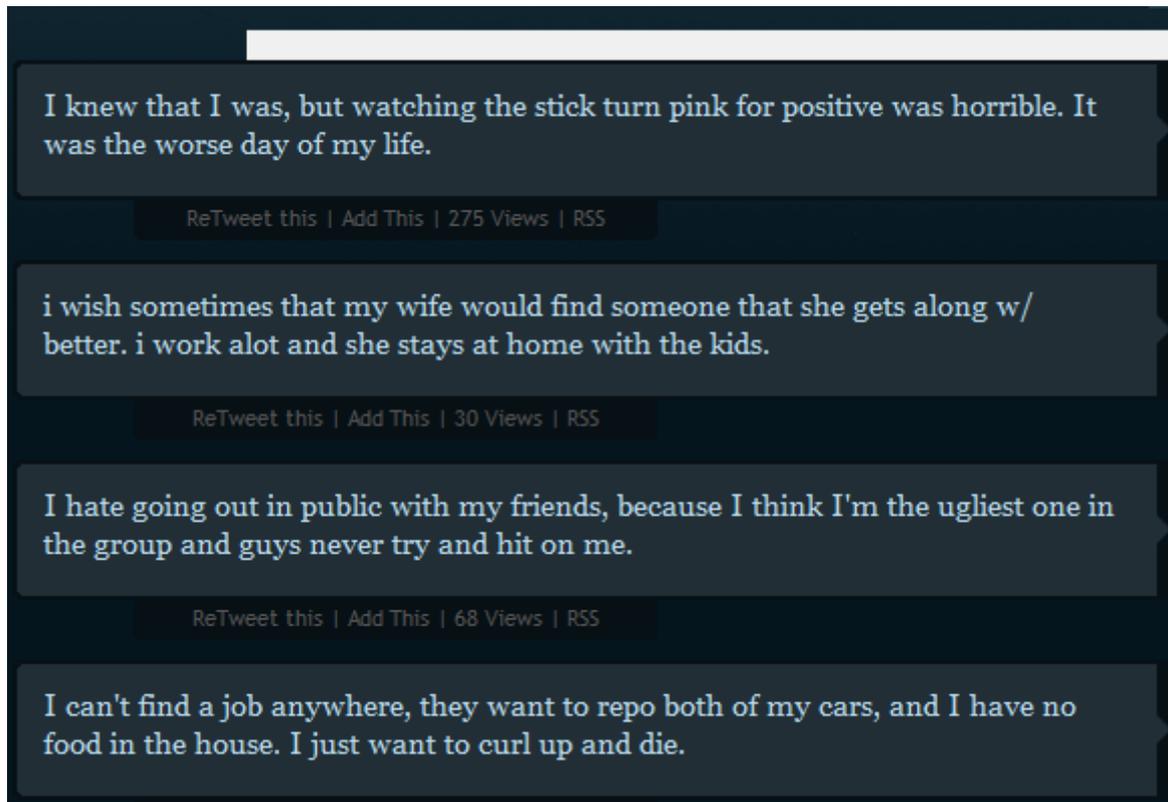
This is a very interesting social experiment where people are encouraged to leave their innermost darkest secrets by Tweet. They can be posted via your Twitter account or anonymously, although for

obvious reasons the anonymous option is used a lot here. Secrets can be retweeted and you can leave comments for each secret.

Some of the secrets are quite funny but a lot of them are pretty heart-breaking. People have confessed to wanting to kill themselves, confessed to crimes because they couldn't afford to feed themselves, and more. It seems that if you give someone an anonymous platform on which to bare their soul, they take full advantage of it. What a sad world we live in.

TwitPic http://twitpic.com/
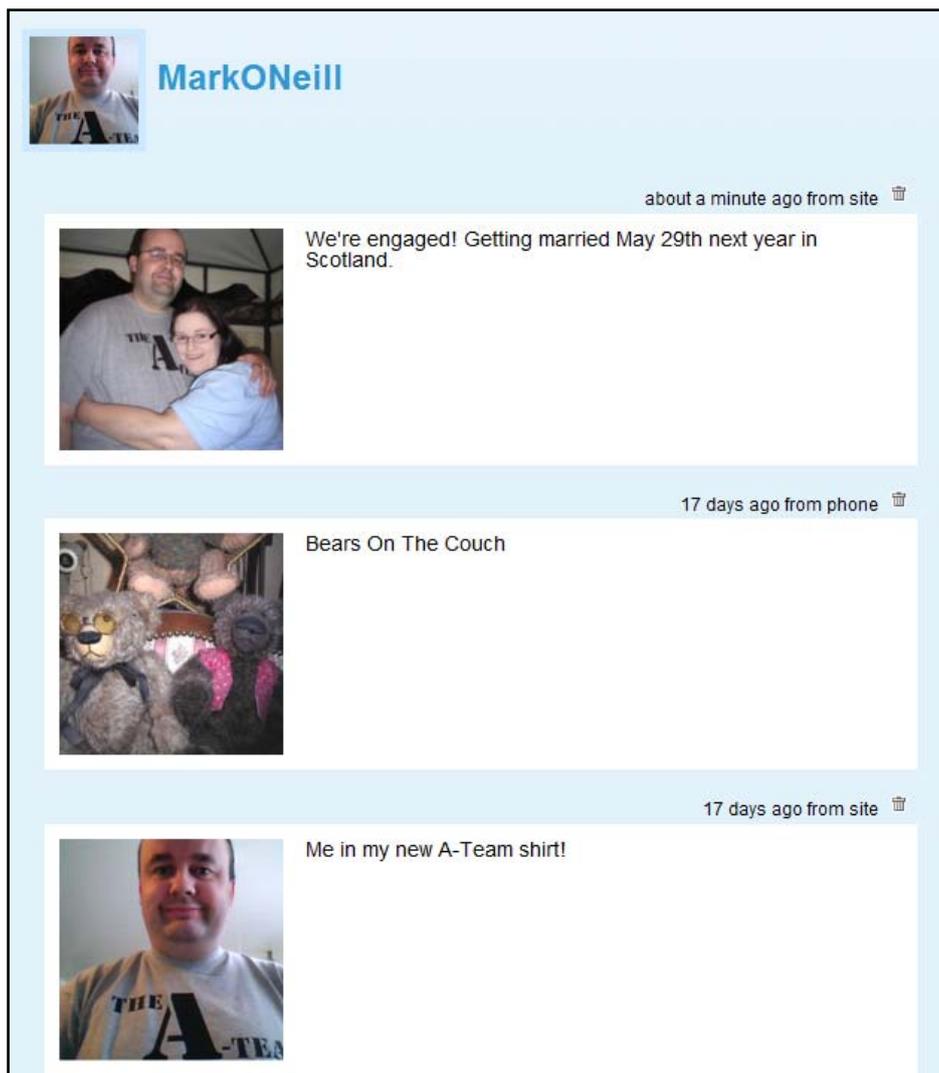
TwitPic allows you to show pictures on Twitter by tweeting the TwitPic link. You can manually upload the picture to the TwitPic site or email it in, using a unique address assigned only to you.

For more details, read my full TwitPic review on MakeUseOf[49].

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[49] http://bit.ly/4iqqjY

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Twilert http://www.twilert.com/

With Twilert, you can set up email alerts for any Twitter search term you want.   Do you want to track your username? Or a specific company or trending topic?   Then instead of constantly monitoring Twitter search, just set up the Twilert email alert and all relevant results will be emailed to you.

As the site says, they are much like Google Alerts, except it is for Twitter instead.

TwitterMail http://www.twittermail.com/
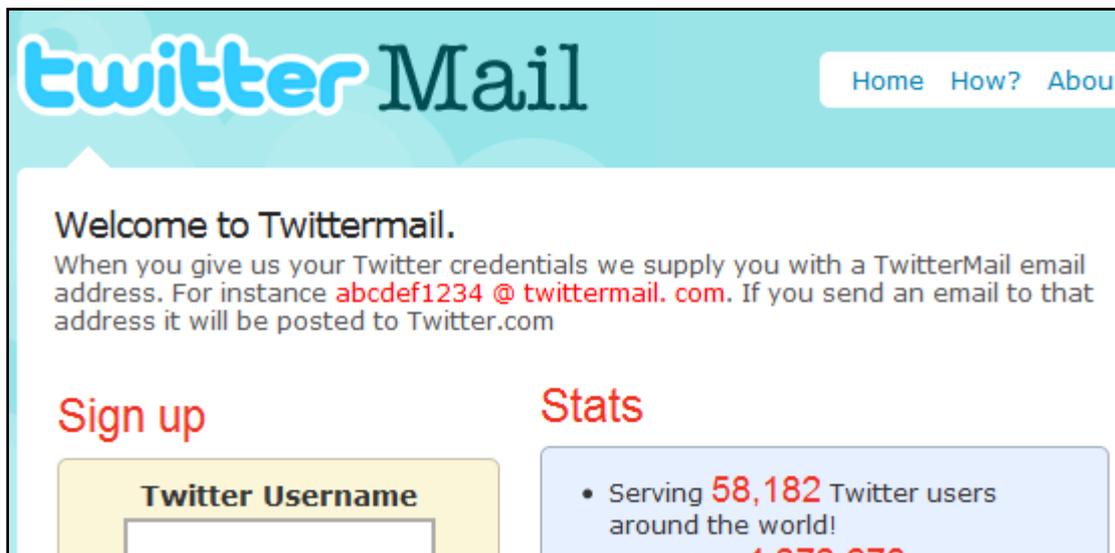
TwitterMail is a service where you receive a unique email address and any emails sent to that address will be posted to your Twitter account (you will need to give TwitterMail your Twitter log-in details). This service is very useful for people at work who can't have desktop clients open on their work computers.[50]

Read more about TwitterMail on MakeUseOf.

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[50]http://bit.ly/18fMhh

Real-URL http://real-url.org/index.php

Have you ever had this and it made you crazy?

Then Real-URL tells you what the actual URL is so you can decide if it is a safe site to visit :

Read more about Read-URL on MakeUseOf[51].

Tweetmeme http://tweetmeme.com/
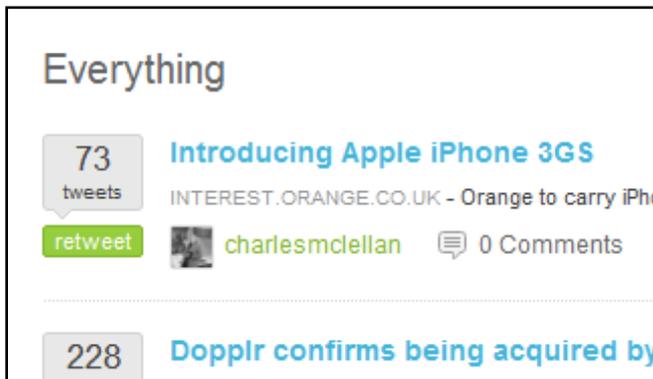
Tweetmeme allows you to see at a glance the most popular pages being discussed on Twitter. You can also get a Wordpress plugin so you can put the "Retweet" button on your blog and enable your visitors to send your blog stories to Tweetmeme at the click of a button.

Read more about Tweetmeme on MakeUseOf[52].

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[51] http://bit.ly/XCBJK
[52] http://bit.ly/2uI0ns

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Bit.ly http://bit.ly/
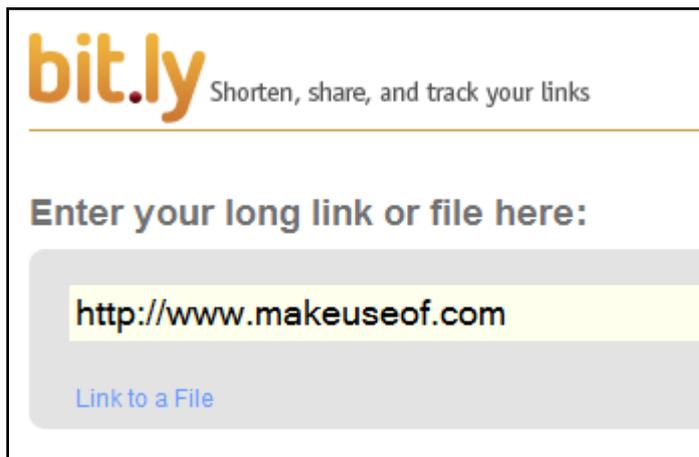
In order to get as much of that 140 character limit as possible, all URL's should be shortened. The favourite seems to be Bit.ly but we have profiled many other URL shortening services which are just as good.

You can read more about bit.ly here[53], or check out Lee Mathews' roundup of Short URL Truncators[54]. For another worthy alternative, take a look at Damien Oh's review of Su.pr[55], StumbleUpon's URL shortener.

Twisten http://twisten.fm/

Twisten searches tweets about music being listened to, brings them all together and throws in a play button so you can listen to those songs too.

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[53]http://bit.ly/UiKN
[54]http://bit.ly/gzGKH
[55]http://bit.ly/145oTo

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6. Twitter Tips & Tricks

In these past few years, Twitter has grown to record-breaking proportions. These days, there's little you can't do with Twitter. Check out the following tips & tricks to boost your Twitter experience.

Scheduling your Tweets for Later with SocialOomph

There is a great website called SocialOomph[56] (previously known as TweetLater), which can do quite a few things (see the next section for an example) but its main function is to give you the ability to send your Tweets out later. You can give this site your Tweets and specify the time you want them posted to the Twitter site. They will then take care of it for you.

When you make an account and log in, they give you quite a few options to choose from, but for the purposes of this section, we are only going to focus on *"Add a New Scheduled Tweet"*.
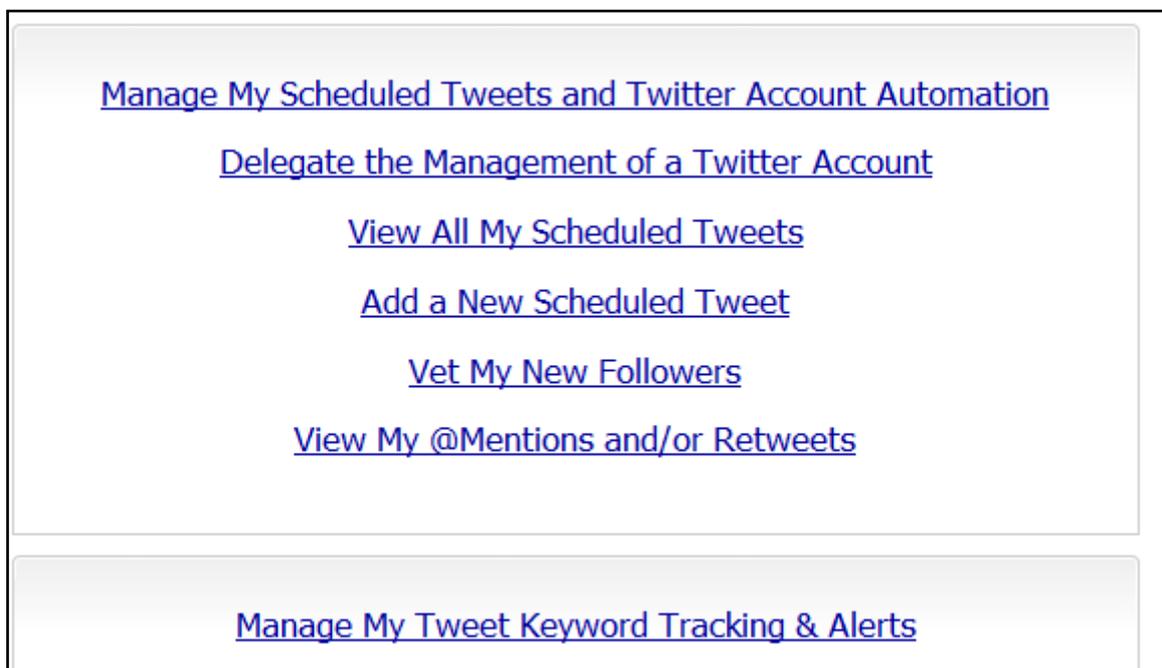
Now when you choose that option, you will be given the following screen with some fairly straight-forward options –

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[56]http://bit.ly/1UL3ac

The text in the Tweet box is mine but I left the rest alone so you can see the options available. The part I want to draw your attention to is the "*Publish When*" part where you can specify the time you would like your Tweet published.
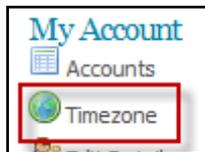
As everyone knows, not every part of the world has the same time so how does SocialOomph know what time in what time zone to obey? Well if you look to the right of the screen, you'll see the option "*Timezone*".

Clicking that, you will then be asked to specify your time zone.

Once that is entered and saved, go back to your Tweet and enter the time you want it sent out. Choose the account you would like it sent to and save it. It's as simple as that.

Another possibility for scheduling future tweets is Twuffer.[57]

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[57]http://bit.ly/OnkP

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How to Automate New Followers

I have already talked earlier about being selective on who you follow and keeping your follower list clean of spammers. But nevertheless, there are still people who follow everyone (and that is their right if that's what they want to do). If you are one of those people, SocialOomph[58] can also be used for another cool function – automatically following everyone that follows you. SocialOomph will follow the person for you and even send out a Tweet with text that you specify (I send out a direct message, thanking them for following me).

Using SocialOomph, you can automatically filter all Twitter "new follower" emails to the trash can (cutting down on your incoming email in the process and you can just forget about following new people. Whenever someone follows you, SocialOomph will follow them back (in batches, within eight hours of each other) – and send out that welcome Tweet for you. In the 12+ months that I have been using it, it has worked flawlessly.

Here's how to set it up.

After logging into SocialOomph (the log in details are NOT your Twitter log-in details – you need to set up a separate log-in), go to *Accounts* and then "*Add Account*". Later on, if you want to edit your details, you can click on *"edit automation"*.
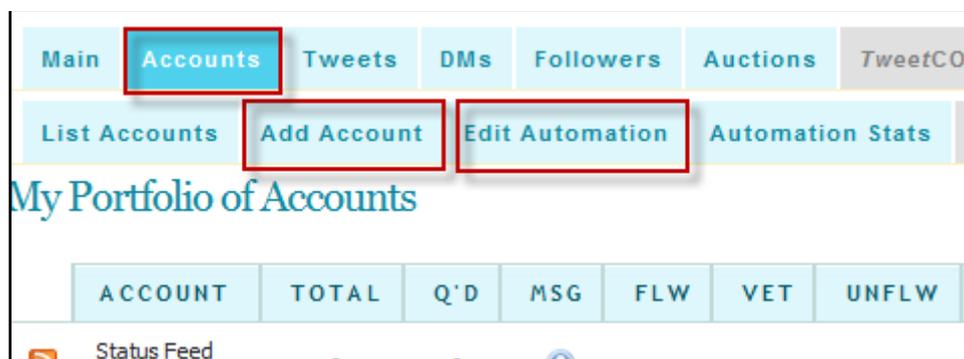
But for first time users, click on *add account* to get your account automation set up decently.

On the next page that you will be brought to, you'll be asked to select an account type, which is obviously Twitter. When you click onto the next page, you will have to enter your Twitter username and password. For those of you who are going nuts right now about entering your password, all I can say is that I have been using SocialOomph for more than 12 months without any issue whatsoever. So the site seems to be very trustworthy.

Then if you scroll down a bit, you'll have a series of options you need to consider. Do you want to auto-welcome everyone? If so, what welcome message would you like sent out? I would strongly

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[58]http://bit.ly/1UL3ac

encourage you to send out welcome messages. OK, it is automated and not *really* **directly** coming from you but it is still from you nonetheless and your new followers will appreciate that extra special attention they are getting. I get lots of very nice messages back thanking me for the personal message they have received.

So underneath that option, write your personal message in the box provided and click "auto-follow" as well.

You are also given the ability to vet your new followers but I have kept this one switched off. To me, vetting your followers kind of defeats the purpose of automating them. If you are going to take the time to vet everyone, you may as well follow them manually. By vetting everyone, you are basically missing out on the luxury of having everything automated and without you having to think about it.

The last option is "auto-unfollow" which, if enabled, will make SocialOomph unfollow anyone on your behalf who unfollows you first. *But this is not backdated* so anyone who unfollowed you yesterday or last week will not be unfollowed back. It only applies the moment you enable the feature.

Remember and save everything for it to start. If you want to edit anything, go to the "*edit automation*" tab at the top then click on the "*edit*" link on the right hand side.

All that remains to be done now is to set up a filtering instruction in your email to send all "*you have a new follower*" emails straight to the trash bin. You no longer need them as SocialOomph is now your Twitter virtual assistant dealing with your Twitter account, following and unfollowing on your behalf.

What do you think about it? Something that you would use?

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Some funny Twitter accounts to follow

Dare you use Twitter and neglect the Dark Lord of the Sith @darthvader? I think not my young apprentice @lukeskywalker. Then again, it wouldn't do at all to ignore the Jedi Master @yoda.

Hmm... Twittering I am. Followers I must have.

Or what about the Captain of the Enterprise @Captain_Picard? If he doesn't make it so for you, try out Chief O'Brien @Chief_OBrien, Doctor Crusher @BeverlyHCrusher, Mr Data @_data, Lieutenant Worf

@LtWorf, Commander Riker @Will_Riker, or Geordi LaForge @GeordiLaForge. Man, they're all twittering! When do they have time to explore the final frontier?

If foul-mouthed babies are more your thing, then follow Stewie @Stewie, from Family Guy.

Or perhaps foul-mouthed kids, like Eric Cartman @fakecartman from South Park.

You know Chuck Norris @chucknorris_. Mr Norris can tweet multiple times while making love to a beautiful woman or taking down the bad guys. Who WOULDN'T want to follow that man? ☺

ShitMyDadSays @shitmydadsays is a Twitter account which profiles everything that someone's dad comes out with. Absolutely brilliant.

Written by Mark O'Neill   *Coordinated and Edited by Simon Slangen*

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