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Twitter: How to spot users and abusers

Posted By [helen.chang](#) On July 15, 2009 @ 12:30 pm In [Business](#), [Giving'em the Business](#) | [2 Comments](#)

Twitter is a simple way to send and receive short updates via the web, smart phone, or text message. It's commonly called micro-blogging since each update, called a tweet, is limited to 140 characters.

People have to opt-in to receive updates from others. This process is known as following someone and it solves many of the problems encountered with e-mail spam since a Twitter user can always "unfollow" someone if they no longer wish to receive their updates.

Basics

To get the most out of Twitter, be sure to tweet regularly and engage people in conversations. To send a tweet to a specific user, begin it with @ followed by the user name without a space. For example, to send a tweet to SDNN:

@SDNewsNetwork Hi there.

Keep in mind that this is a public conversation so anyone can see your @ tweet.

Business use

Many businesses have discovered that Twitter can be a great way to keep in touch with their customers by updating followers with info about new products, services, company blog posts, etc. A perfect way to actively do this is to search for tweets where people comment on your product, service, or company using <http://search.twitter.com>.

Whenever people comment about your company, you should reply back to them. If it's a compliment, then thank them; if it's a complaint, then you should definitely try to help fix or clarify the issue.

Many consumers don't expect this level of interaction from companies. Customers usually respond pleasantly if you reach out to them with genuine concern. In the rare instance that your customer interaction turns sour then you should take the conversation offline. Never argue with a customer in this public venue because that is like wrestling with a pig in the mud.

Business abuse

Twitter's popularity has also brought a lot of people promoting get-rich-quick schemes and other nefarious products such as spyware.

Generally, these people will have automated systems to post their tweets over and over again. It might be the same five tweets sent once a day or it could be 50 different tweets repeated every few hours.

In addition to the automated tweeting, these users will have automated systems to follow as many Twitter users as they can hoping that some will reciprocate and follow them back. When a Twitter user doesn't follow them back within a short period of time then the abuser will automatically unfollow them.

2,001 following	1,080 followers
Updates	17

Twitter abuser following anyone to gain followers.

2 following	732 followers
Updates	256

Legitimate Twitter user with something interesting to say.

[1]

Obviously, these people aren't interested in a two-way conversation.

The abuser's goal is simple: to get as many Twitter users to follow them using any means possible. The more followers they have the better the possibility of getting some attention so people will respond to them.

Spotting an abuser

Here are a few ways to spot a Twitter abuser.

TwitterFeed: All of their tweets will come from an automated service such as TwitterFeed. TwitterFeed.com, which automatically posts tweets from an RSS feed, is fine for posting some tweets – but it's not appropriate for sending out all tweets.

Few, if any, @ tweets: If you look at the ComcastCares account on Twitter, you'll notice many tweets beginning with @. This is Comcast proactively reaching out to their customers with solutions to their problems. Comcast is engaging their customers by listening to their problems and treating them as individuals.

Following count much greater than Followers count and very few updates: A common practice for abusers is to create an account, post a few updates such as, "Check out my site to make money from home: <http://...>" and then follow about 2,000 people. Following 2,000 people is a limit set by Twitter – you can't follow more than 2,000 people until about 2,000 people follow you back.

From that point, you can't follow more than 110 percent of the people who are following you. Since very few people follow an abuser their follower-to-following ratio is lopsided with fewer followers than following.

Despite these warnings, Twitter is a safe place. About the worst that can happen is you'll end up following someone who you're not interested in. If that happens then you can simply unfollow or block that Twitter user.



[2]

Joe Moreno, a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, is the president of Adjix, which allows people to advertise on Twitter. You can follow Joe on Twitter: @JoeMoreno or @Adjix

Joe Moreno spends a lot of time on Twitter.

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[1] Image: <http://static.sdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/twitter-abuser.jpg>

[2] Image: <http://static.sdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/moreno.bmp>

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