

Leveraging Twitter

To Grow a Lesser-Known Brand

An Introduction to Social Media Marketing

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Executive Summary

- Twitter’s rules tend to stack the deck against brands that are not well known, but there

are ways to grow a lesser-known brand.

- “Twitter is a communication platform that helps businesses stay connected to their customers.”
- “Twitter facilitates social networking, but it’s not a social networking website.”
- “[F]ollowing is a one-way action that means you want to receive information ... from someone,” whom you already know.
- Naturally, if you become someone’s follower, you hope they’ll follow you, too. But that, of course, is out of your control.
- “Twitter has ... a median age of 31 compared to ... 26 for Facebook.”
- “[W]omen make up a slightly larger Twitter demographic than men.”
- “5% of users accounted for 75% of all activity.”
- At the time of this writing (September 2010) Twitter is rolling out a significant redesign of their Web site, to make it more user-friendly, with more information available in each page, and more potentially commercial, as with more space for ads.
- “Think about Twitter as a place to build relationships” (and trust), with friendly, helpful, personal tweets.
- “Understand the real-time nature of Twitter” (i.e., enjoy quick feedback but also reply to messages in a timely fashion).
- “Measure the value of Twitter” (as by monitoring feedback or by offering Twitter-only promotions).
- Hashtags (like #biz) are one of the most powerful ways for an “unknown” to leverage the size of Twitter to their own

advantage: By including a strategically chosen hashtag in your tweet—a #keyword that is commonly searched for—you can reach a potentially vast number of readers, in addition to your much more limited number of followers.

- Replies and other mentions (of other people’s @usernames in your tweets) are great ways to get a conversation started—even with someone who is not (yet) one of your followers—and to keep the conversation going!
- One of the most important things to do in Twitter or any other social medium is to get folks excited and engaged, to “spread the word”—about what you’ve said, who you are, and (in due course) what you do (sell).
- Don’t neglect people who have replied to your tweets or who have otherwise mentioned your @username in their tweets: Reply to them, letting them know you value their opinion and, if possible, building upon their remarks, to keep a conversation going.
- As with tweets, whenever you make a reply you increase your odds of becoming followed if you make a particularly insightful or otherwise valuable comment.
- Conversely, you increase your odds of becoming unfollowed, blocked, or even reported as a spammer if you try to shamelessly exploit your reply or other tweet with nothing but a self-serving promo.
- Retweeting other people’s tweets to your own followers is a *great* way to make friends, and gain followers, on Twitter.
- “[T]he culture of the [Twitter] service encourages people to spread news to friends

in their own network,” as by retweeting.

- The New Twitter emphasizes Search more, to the benefit of well-known brands but also to those whose tweets have good content, as with popular keywords.
- Searching for “interesting and influential people” in any field may lead to profitable conversations, although it is entirely up to them whether or not to reply publicly to your replies to their tweets.
- Search can be used to “monitor” tweets in your business category (or about your competitors).
- If you are associated on a List with some respected tweeters, it might gain you some followers; however, there is little you can do to influence your listing by others, beyond what you normally do, in creating timely, substantial tweets.
- You can send Messages only to people who are already following you, not to others—as to ask them to become your followers.
- If some of your tweets appear in other people’s lists of favorites, that is great “word of mouth” advertising for all to see (not just your list or their list of followers)!
- Other tweeters whose tweets have been marked as favorites are good leads to follow.
- Lesser-known tweeters tend to get “lost in the crowd” of Trending Topics.
- Find People is good for contacting people whose names you already know.
- You’re not going to be found in any of the “Browse interests,” category-based indexes if you’re not one of the “big tweeters.”
- Your tweets will show up in the Search results for a well-known tweeter if you

mention their @username; but again, you’ll get lost in the crowd.

- Getting followed by a well-known tweeter is like a celebrity endorsement, but rare.
- “Small businesses typically get more than half of their customers through word of mouth ... and Twitter is the digital manifestation of that.”
- After getting started on Twitter, “start using Twitter Search to listen for your name, your competitor’s names, words that relate to your space. (Listening always comes first.)”
- When you tweet, “answer the question, ‘What has your attention?’”
- “Ask questions. Twitter is GREAT for getting opinions.”
- “Follow interesting people ... [and] see who she follows, and follow her.”
- “Tweet about other people’s stuff.”
- “When you DO talk about your stuff, make it useful. Give advice, blog posts, pictures, etc.”
- “Share the human side of your company.”
- “Don’t toot your own horn too much.”
- “Commenting on others’ tweets, and retweeting what others have posted is a great way to build community.”
- Tweeting is “about building trust as well as relationships”; and ironically, yet substantially, “that comes from not selling.”

The Twitter Challenge: What It Is (“A Communication Platform”) and What It Isn’t (“A Social Networking Website”)

This report focuses on the “microblogging”

service Twitter, whose shortform posts (and URLs) belie its complex, sometimes byzantine rules and their often profound implications, which unfortunately tend to stack the deck against companies, individuals, and brands that are not already well known. Nevertheless, there are certain things that a lesser-known brand can do to tweet its way to increased awareness and respect within its target market.

From a business perspective, what exactly is Twitter? [According to their “Special Guide” for business](#): “Twitter is a communication platform that helps businesses stay connected to their customers. As a business, you can use it to quickly share information with people interested in your company, gather real-time market intelligence and feedback, and build relationships with customers, partners and other people who care about your company. As an individual user, you can use Twitter to tell a company (or anyone else) that you’ve had a great—or disappointing—experience with their business, offer product ideas, and learn about great offers.”

In other words, if you have an established business, which many people already know about and which many people already follow on Twitter, then you can engage in very personal, two-way communication with the public. However, if you are not already a well-known brand, Twitter offers primarily only slow, “organic” growth, via satisfied and enthusiastic followers telling others, who tell others, etc. The rules in Twitter generally frown upon ways of more directly reaching out to people who are not already your followers: Twitter tries to thwart

spammers, but in the process it also tends to inhibit the growth of lesser-known brands.

Along those same lines, Twitter warns users about “GFF” (Get Followers Fast) Sites: As summed up in [The Twitter Glossary](#), GFF sites “promise to get you more followers if you provide your username and password. After signing up, these sites send spam from your account. Don’t use them.” They will ruin your reputation and get you banned from Twitter.

In order to better clarify what it is, [the Twitter Help files](#) tell us what it isn’t: “Twitter facilitates social networking, but it’s not a social networking website. In fact, the way Twitter works is quite different from social networks: when you accept friend requests on social networks, it usually means you appear in that person’s network and they appear in yours. Following on Twitter is different, because instead of indicating a mutual relationship, following is a one-way action that means you want to receive information, in the form of tweets, from someone. Twitter allows people to opt-in to (or opt-out of) receiving a person’s updates without requiring mutual following. ...

“Remember, Twitter isn’t a race to get the most followers. If you follow users that you’re interested in, it’s more likely that legitimate users will find you and read your updates. People follow other users on Twitter to read updates that are interesting to them.”

But that still leaves the question, “How do you get noticed, among the millions, on Twitter in the first place?” Following someone does get you

listed among their followers. But if that person isn't well known, then your following won't be either; and if that person is well known, then you will get lost "in the crowd" of their followers.

Naturally, if you become someone's follower, you hope they'll follow you, too. But that, of course, is out of your control. In the worst-case scenario, "[o]nce you've followed 2000 users, there are limits to the number of additional users you can follow: this limit is different for every user and is based on your ratio of followers to following. ... [B]asically, you can't follow 10,000 people if only 100 people follow you."

Interestingly, "[\[u\]nlike other social media spaces, Twitter has an older crowd, with a median age of 31](#) compared to 27 for MySpace, 26 for Facebook and 40 for LinkedIn."

Also, [according to a 2009 study](#): "[W]omen make up a slightly larger Twitter demographic than men—53% over 47%. ... 5% of users accounted for 75% of all activity, and ... New York has the most Twitter users."

The More User-Friendly #NewTwitter Web Site: More Added (Info) Value

To get acquainted with Twitter, there is the [Twitter Help Center](#), for all users (Particularly helpful is [this rundown of where various types of tweets do and do not appear](#)), as well as "[Twitter 101 for Business](#)," where among other things, you'll find [Getting Started](#) and [Learn the Lingo](#).

As you might know, at the time of this writing (September 2010) Twitter is rolling out a significant redesign of their Web site, to make it more user-friendly, with more information available in each page, and more potentially commercial, as with more space for ads.

From "Meet the New Twitter" on [Twitter.com](#):

"You will now find @mentions, retweets, searches, and lists just above your timeline—creating a single, streamlined view on the left of the screen. On the right, you can see the features you're familiar with, including whom you recently followed and who recently followed you, favorites, and Trending Topics. ...

"Now, it's easy to see embedded photos and videos directly on Twitter, thanks to partnerships with Dailybooth, DeviantArt, Etsy, Flickr, Justin.TV, Kickstarter, Kiva, Photozou, Plixi, Twitgoo, TwitPic, Twitvid, USTREAM, Vimeo, Yfrog, and YouTube. ...

"When you click a Tweet, the details pane shows additional information related to the author or subject. Depending on the Tweet's content, you may see: @replies, other Tweets by that same user, a map of where a geotagged Tweet was sent from, and more. ...

"You can click a @username to see a mini profile without navigating from the page, which provides quick access to account information, including bio and recent Tweets."

From the [New York Times \(Sept. 14, 2010\)](#):

“If people want to learn more about the author of a post, for instance, they [in the old Web site] must go to a new page. It has been almost impossible to follow a conversation between two Twitter users. And while a quarter of the posts contain links, if people post a link to a photo, readers have not been able to see the picture without going to a new site.

“On the new Twitter Web site, people see two panes instead of a single timeline of posts. The timeline stays in the left pane. In the right pane, they can see more information about posts—like biographies of authors, photos and videos to which posts link—and conversations that spring from a particular post. This eliminates the need to click back and forth.”

From WebProNews.com (Sept. 16, 2010):

“This week, Twitter introduced a new redesign of Twitter.com with a two-pane format aimed at providing a richer user experience, and you can easily tell by looking at it that it does just that. ...

“The first pane is essentially the single pane from today’s Twitter—the timeline. In the second pane, referred to as the ‘details pane,’ users will see additional info related to the author or subject of a tweet, when clicked. This pane will also display things like @replies, other tweets from that user, maps, videos, photos, etc. Users can click the @username to see profiles from the same page. ...

“One of the striking things about #newtwitter is how clearly it’s designed to allow room for advertisements and promotions.’ ...

“Danny Sullivan has a great article about the impact the Twitter redesign could have on search. This is obviously a key element for businesses to consider. Among his points:

1. The search box becomes more prominent [at the very top of the page]
2. More filtering options
3. ‘Save this search’ becomes more prominent
4. Infinite scrolling on search results
5. People and company results more clearly separated
6. Tweets Near You feature
7. Tweets with Links feature
8. Searches for retweets by others, retweets by you, and your tweets, retweeted

“Danny provides a [detailed analysis](#) of all of these [and all the other new] items. ...

“[T]his particular redesign has some advantages. For one, many Twitter users are already using apps [from third-parties, to provide these extra functions] rather than Twitter.com anyway. Secondly, Twitter has left a lot of people wondering what the point of the service is. This has been a problem since it launched. This will help people understand its value more.”

In short, the New Twitter design enhances Twitter’s value as a communication platform, by better integrating all the (multimedia) information as well as both sides of ongoing conversations—all of which is potentially profitable, real-time intelligence for businesses using and observing the Twitter experience.

Tweets (The Timeline): Best Practices, for Building Relationships and Trust

How can you assure that [the tweets you make in your timeline](#) (in the left-hand pane of your Twitter pages) get noticed by others, amongst the millions of tweets posted every day? Well, first and foremost, your tweets must have substance (whatever the subject matter)—delivered in a friendly, conversational tone—and not just be sales pitches.

Moreover, like any other online content, keywords—in context—are king! Include words that readers will naturally search for, as in the newly prominent Twitter Search box (or in <http://search.twitter.com/>) or in Google etc.

Whenever you tweet, you of course increase your odds of becoming followed by readers if you make a particularly insightful or otherwise valuable comment. Conversely, you increase your odds of becoming unfollowed, blocked, or even reported as a spammer if you try to shamelessly exploit your timeline with tweets that are nothing but self-serving promos.

Interesting and/or informative pictures and videos included in your tweets are now more readily and prominently displayed in the New Twitter. And you can now [include a location](#) with your tweet, as for more geographically targeted replies.

“Twitter 101 for Business” discusses particulars of these [Best \(Business\) Practices](#) for tweeting:

- “Think about Twitter as a place to build

relationships” (and trust), with friendly, helpful, personal tweets.

- “Understand the real-time nature of Twitter” (i.e., enjoy quick feedback but also reply to messages in a timely fashion).
- “Measure the value of Twitter” (as by monitoring feedback or by offering Twitter-only promotions).

Hashtags: Substitutes for Groups, and Arguably the Best Way to Leverage Twitter

Taking keywords to the next level are “hashtags”: [those “#terms” that you see in so many tweets](#). By virtue of their leading “#” sign and often standardized (and abbreviated) notation, hashtags naturally aggregate in search results. Unfortunately, formal groups, as found in Facebook and other social media, are absent in Twitter.

For example, #tcot is a very common hashtag in Twitter; it designates tweets that their creators wish to identify as politically conservative, so that they can be readily found by anyone searching for such tweets (Contrarily, #p2 and #topprog are hashtags used in various politically progressive tweets).

Although hashtags can be overused—since any word can become a hashtag by simply adding the # sign to it (and search engines, like Google, frown upon, say, more than three hashtags in a single tweet)—hashtags are one of the most powerful ways for an “unknown” to leverage the size of Twitter to their own advantage: By

including a strategically chosen hashtag in your tweet, you can reach a potentially vast number of readers, in addition to your much more limited number of followers.

There are two basic ways to use hashtags: You can create your own, or you can use established ones. To create your own hashtags, first go the @hashtags Twitter profile, at <http://twitter.com/hashtags>, and click to become their follower; they will then automatically follow you: From then on, any keyword that you prefix with a # will be officially recognized as a hashtag—automatically included in and thus searchable in not only Twitter Search but also in <http://hashtags.org>, “the official site that creates, organizes and displays these [unofficial Twitter] groups.” (Like everything else so far, this service is free).

Of course, at this point in history, virtually every conventional keyword has already been turned into a hashtag (other than such passing fads as, say, #ilovemullets, or such time-sensitive matters as, say, #dougfall2010workshop). To find established hashtags to use—and to determine their relative value, in terms of the percent of all tweets including any given hashtag (giving a rough, relative measure of the number of people actually reading those tweets)—search <http://hashtags.org>.

For example, searches in hashtags.org relevant to the field of business yield the following terms with significant numbers of tweets (presented here in decreasing numbers of tweets, although even the most popular of these hashtags has just

a fraction of one percent of all the tweets made in a given hour of a given day, as indicated on the hashtags.org charts): [#success](#), [#management](#), [#biz](#), [#business](#) (Note that the longer synonymous term has the lesser usage, in 140-character tweets).

In addition, there are other Web sites that index hashtags, although their use is more for deciphering cryptic hashtags than for finding hashtags in customary use. For example, it was by searching for “business” in <http://www.hashdictionary.com/> that I found the hashtag #biz, which means “Relating to any reference to business or commercial activity. Often used to connote a message’s relevance to business success.”

Here is some other useful information about hashtags: <http://www.twitip.com/tweet-your-message-to-a-larger-audience-with-hashtags/>.

Replies and Other Mentions: Starting and Maintaining Conversations

“Replies” and “mentions” are tweets that include the @username of another tweeter: If the @username is at the beginning of a tweet, it is a reply; if the @username appears anywhere else in a tweet, it is a mention.

[As spelled out in detail in the New Twitter rules](#), a reply is shown only in the home timeline (and profile page) of the person who makes the reply and in the home timelines of those people following *both* the sender and the receiver; whereas a mention is shown only in the home

timeline (and profile page) of the person who makes the mention and in the home timelines of his or her followers (but not in the home timelines of the followers of the person who is mentioned).

Although neither replies nor mentions are, thus, ways to get directly noticed by the public at large, either replies or mentions are great ways to get a conversation started—even with someone who is not (yet) one of your followers—and to keep the conversation going! Those are some of the most important things you can do in Twitter, or any social medium: After all, you want to get folks excited and engaged, to “spread the word”—about what you’ve said, who you are, and (in due course) what you do (sell).

To make a reply to someone else’s tweet, simply hover your cursor over their tweet, and then click on the Reply icon that appears (next to Retweet and Favorite icons): Their @username will automatically appear at the beginning of your reply. Alternately, you can manually type in the @username of the person you wish to mention at the beginning of a tweet to make it a reply (However, like replies made by some, but not all, third-party apps, manual replies, like manual retweets, [might not be indexed as retweets by Twitter](#)).

To make a mention of another tweeter, simply include their @username anywhere within your tweet.

Once you make a tweet that replies to someone else’s tweet or otherwise mentions their @username, your tweet will appear in their list

of replies and mentions, not viewable by the public.

To view your own list of replies and mentions, made by others, simply click on the @Mentions tab above your timeline; you will see all the tweets made by others that mention your @username, with the @username at the beginning of any tweet that is a reply.

To find out which message of yours someone replied to, just click any space around a reply; and your details pane will open, on the right, to display the tweet they replied to, as well as other content related to the message.

Never forget that people who have replied to tweets of yours or who have otherwise mentioned your @username in tweets of their own are prime candidates to be new followers, if they aren’t already; in either case, if at all possible don’t neglect them: Reply to them, at least thanking them for their acknowledgement or, better yet, building upon their remarks, to keep a conversation going.

However you do it, let anyone who replies to one of your tweets or otherwise mentions your @username know that you value their opinion—arguably the most important thing to do in Twitter (or any other social media).

And of course, as with tweets, whenever you make a reply—to an original tweet by someone else, or to a reply by someone else to one of your own tweets, or to any tweet mentioning your @username—you increase your odds of becoming followed if you make a particularly

insightful or otherwise valuable comment. Conversely, you increase your odds of becoming unfollowed, blocked, or even reported as a spammer if you try to shamelessly exploit this opportunity with a reply that is nothing but a self-serving promo.

Retweets: The Highest Form of Flattery

[A “retweet” is a tweet that is forwarded to someone else’s list of followers.](#)

Indicated by a Retweet icon, the retweets that you make are shown only in your own home timeline (and profile page) and in the home timelines of those people following you, not in the home timelines of the followers of the person who made the original tweet, which you retweeted.

You, and only you, can see your retweet archives: After clicking the “Retweets” tab above your timeline, you will see on a dropdown menu links for any “Retweets by others” (those you’re following), “Retweets by you,” or “Your Tweets, retweeted” (retweets of tweets by you).

[Like replies or mentions](#), retweets are not ways to get directly noticed by the public at large (those not already following you); but retweets are a great way to get a conversation started—even with someone who is not (yet) one of your followers—and to keep the conversation going! Most folks are flattered if you think enough of their tweets to retweet them to your own followers. That's a *great* way to make friends, and gain followers, on Twitter.

[A Case Study in “Twitter 101 for Business”](#) tells how the growth in followers for one small, local business was “slow and organic”; but “the connections with followers were strong” ... and loyal followers tend to tweet about you, or (more likely) retweet your tweets!

Moreover, [an article from the New York Times](#) cited in “Twitter 101 for Business” states that “the culture of the service encourages people to spread news to friends in their own network.”

To retweet someone else’s tweet to all your followers, simply hover your cursor over their tweet, and then click on the Retweet icon that appears (next to Reply and Favorite icons). Alternately, when hovering your cursor over their original tweet, you can click the Reply icon, and then manually type in “RT” followed by a space before the @username of the person whose tweet you wish to retweet (Unlike the first option, this method allows you to manually edit the retweet before sending it out; however, like retweets made by some, but not all, third-party apps, manual retweets, like manual replies, [might not be indexed as retweets by Twitter](#)).

Search: Find “Interesting and Influential People” et al.

At the top of every page, Search is more prominently featured in the New Twitter. This [article in WebProNews.com \(Sept. 16, 2010\)](#) reviews some of the new features and implications of Search; namely, to encourage users to search more, and [to save searches](#), all of which is naturally of value to those who have a

high profile or who create good content.

Be aware that there is also a separate page for [Twitter Search](#), much like the Google home page (as with an option for an advanced search and lists of trending topics).

In addition to helping others find you, Search can help you find others, including those of potential networking value.

In [one of the Case Studies in “Twitter 101 for Business”](#) a winery owner “found [presumably by a Twitter search] interesting and influential people talking about the [wine] business, [so] he followed them. Then he started conversing about wine and interacting with them.”

Although that sounds like a great way to get noticed, remember that it is entirely up to the person you contact to reply publicly to you or not. ([See below](#) for more about this and other case studies).

Similarly, in [another Case Study](#) a small business gained fame by being followed by a celebrity in the field (not a common occurrence, of course).

And [yet another Case Study](#) suggests using Twitter Search to “monitor” existing references to you or your product or service in Twitter, if you have an already popular brand; but a brand newer to Twitter could use Search to “monitor” tweets about their business category in general (or about their competitors).

By the way, at this time (at least for a testing

period) Twitter is offering [“Promoted” Tweets](#): popular tweets for which their well-heeled promoters have paid a fee to appear at the top of Search results.

Lists: Being in Good Company

“Lists” are “timelines you build yourself, consisting of friends, family, co-workers, sports teams, you name it”: tweeters you *follow*. Note that lists are *not* composed of those following you and, thus, are *not* useful for messages targeted to the members of any particular list; lists are primarily for your own record-keeping purposes, as to sort through a large number of people you follow.

Clicking on the “Lists” tab, above your timeline, will show you other people’s lists that *you* are on (but remember, those are people who are already following you).

Lists may be made either visible or invisible to the general public. If you are associated on a list with some respected tweeters, it might help your reputation and even gain you some followers—and anyone can subscribe to following a list—however, I believe there is little you can do to influence your listing by others, beyond what you normally do, in creating timely, substantial tweets.

Messages: A System that Inhibits Spamming But Also Networking

One of the primary structural limitations of Twitter is that it has a “one-way” private messaging system.

You can send [Messages](#) (formerly, “Direct Messages”)—not shown on anyone’s timeline—only to people who are already following you (by clicking on the Messages link at the top of any page, then clicking on the New Message button, typing in the name or @username of the recipient, composing your message, and then clicking the Send button; or by starting any tweet with the letter “d” followed by a space and then the recipient’s @username, without the “@”; or by using a third-party app, as on your smart phone).

But you cannot use Messages to reach out to strangers—those not already following you on Twitter—as to ask them to become your followers. It’s a measure intended to discourage spammers; but it also, of course, impedes honest business networking and development.

Favorites: Showcasing You and Good Leads

You can make any tweet that you especially like a [Favorite](#) by clicking the star icon that appears (with Reply and Retweet icons) when you hover your cursor over the tweet.

Favorites are typically viewable by all the public (unless the tweets were made by people with accounts “protected” from view by some or all of the public).

If some of your own tweets appear in other people’s lists of favorites, that is great “word of mouth” advertising for all to see (not just your list or their list of followers)!

You of course increase your odds of someone’s making one of your tweets one of their favorites if you make a particularly insightful or otherwise valuable comment in your tweet.

Likewise, other tweeters whose tweets have been marked as favorites are probably good leads to follow; if you can strike up a conversation with them and get followed by them, your tweets will appear in their timeline, which has been the source of at least one favorite tweet for someone else (and perhaps others).

Trends: Getting Lost in the Crowd

[“Trending Topics”](#) are those topics of tweets that are “immediately popular, rather than topics that have been popular for a while or on a daily basis”; they “help people discover the ‘most breaking’ news stories from across the world. ... [T]rending topics ... capture the hottest emerging trends and topics of discussion on Twitter ... [and thus] are the most interesting.”

Unfortunately, the more popular a trend, the lower the chance that your particular tweet on that popular subject—identified by its including the exact word or phrase (or hashtag) used in the trending topic—will be seen (if at all) for a significant amount of time, by a significant number of people.

Or as the Twitter Help files put it: “Please understand that due to the large number of users tweeting about these specific topics, you may not always be able to find your particular tweet in search—and that is ok! Your followers will always see your tweets.”

OK, maybe, if your brand is already well known; but not so OK for those who care to grow awareness of their brands.

At this time (at least for a testing period) Twitter is offering [“Promoted” Trends](#): popular trends for which their well-heeled promoters have paid a fee to appear at the top of the Trending Topics list (in the right-hand column of your home page and also on the home page of Twitter.com).

Note, too, that the New Twitter allows you to search for Trends by country or city (click “change,” next to “Worldwide,” and choose from among the geographic areas for which Twitter has enough data to list trends).

Find People (Whose Names You Already Know)

According to [the Help files for the New Twitter](#), you can find people whose names you already know, by:

- Typing a name into the search box on your homepage.
- Typing a Twitter username directly into your browser (e.g. <http://twitter.com/oprah>).
- Importing contacts from your email address book to see who’s on Twitter.

Except for finding famous people, as in the second point above (and discussed with “The Big Tweeters,” below), these methods are good for getting started, finding or inviting people you already know to become followers; but trying to make friends (as by using Replies and Retweets) with strangers you find by these methods is about as efficient as sending out messages to everyone in the phone book (and if done for blatant commercial interests, it could get you banned as a spammer). Try instead to seek out people with common interests, as via Search.

Who to Follow: Browse Interests (“The Big Tweeters”)

In the right-hand pane under “Who to follow” (Suggestions for you) is “Browse interests”; click that, to go to a category-based index of Twitter. For example, click [“Business.”](#) At the time of this writing, the list starts with @cnbc; and if you click on the “More” button (at the bottom of the initial page), the list ends with @msnbc_business—with the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Financial Times*, the *New York Times*, and other mega-business tweeters in between.

In other words, you’re not going to be found in any of the “Browse interests,” category-based indexes if you’re not one of the “big tweeters” (my term, not Twitter’s).

Remember that hashtags ([discussed above](#)) were invented because there are no true groups—and thus no comprehensive category-based indexes—in Twitter.

So is there a way to “piggyback” on the success of “the big tweeters”—those large, well-established, readily found organizations? Well, like Teusner Winers, in a [“Twitter 101 for Business” Case Study](#), you could reply to one of the tweets in the timeline of a big tweeter and hope for them to reply, publicly, to your reply to their tweet (or to your retweet of their tweet, or to your otherwise mentioning their @username in a tweet). But for the biggest tweeters (with more replies than they can possibly answer), that’s about like hoping the president of CNBC will write you a personal note and put it on TV in response to an e-mail you send him. In fact, if you check the timeline of any of those big Business tweeters, you’ll see few if any replies to replies.

Occasionally within the timeline of a well-known organization (as above), you’ll see the retweet of a tweet by someone else (identified by their Twitter @username); however, that other person, too, is usually well known—otherwise they wouldn’t have been found in the first place!

Retweeting or otherwise mentioning the @username (such as @cnbc) of a well-known tweeter might be helpful since your tweets will then show up in Twitter Searches of that well-known @username; but of course, that’s sort of a needle-in-a-haystack approach, since so many other tweeters will undoubtedly be retweeting or otherwise mentioning the tweets of a big tweeter.

Now, you could “mine” the list of those who retweeted the tweets of a big tweeter, or otherwise mentioned the big tweeter’s @username in their own tweets—a list that can

be gleaned from a Twitter Search for the famous @username (like @cnbc)—and then reply to the individual tweets, or retweets, of those folks, who apparently share a common interest with you (in the example above, some aspect of Business); after all, there are hundreds of thousands of such retweeters to contact. But of course, that’s little better than trying to contact everyone in (a still large portion of) the phone book individually—probably not the best use of your time.

Some “Twitter 101 for Business” Case Studies etc.: Best Practices for Small Businesses

“Twitter 101 for Business” presents some interesting [Case Studies](#). Although they are mostly stories about growing established brands (like Best Buy, Pepsi, Levi’s, or even regional favorites), there is also some good advice for increasing the stature of lesser-known brands.

[Teusner Winers, a boutique Australian winery](#): “When he found [presumably in a Twitter search] interesting and influential people talking about the [wine] business, he followed them. Then he started conversing about wine and interacting with them.”

Remember, however, that it is entirely up to the person you contact to reply publicly to you or not: Any reply you make to their tweet will simply end up in their list of replies, out of public view; only their replies to you will show up in their public, home timeline.

Of course, as also mentioned above, you can try

replying to the tweets of the followers of well-known tweeters. However, because there are, by definition, a lot of followers of a famous tweeter, replying to each of them individually is sort of like sending out messages one at a time to everyone in (a still large portion of) the phone book—probably not the best use of your time.

In any case, it takes a certain amount of tact and finesse to socialize profitably with the “interesting and influential” on Twitter (like networking anywhere). As the Teusner tweeter said, “This is about building trust as well as relationships—and that comes from not selling” ... which ironically—but naturally (“organically,” in social media jargon)—led to more sales.

[**Tasti D-lite, a regionally popular dessert franchise:**](#) “He advises a three ‘m’ approach to getting started on Twitter—*monitor, then mingle, then measure.*”

Although in the case of Tasti D-lite “monitor” referred to their searching for existing references in Twitter about their already popular brand, “monitor” could also apply to initially searching Twitter for tweets about your business category in general (or about your competitors), to see which aspects are tweeted about most—to help guide your own tweeting—and to see who is doing the tweeting—tweets that you can reply to, in order to make yourself known (and hopefully then followed).

[**CoffeeGroundz, “a popular, albeit modest, Houston, TX based independent coffee shop”:**](#) “J.R. went out of his way to interact with

Houston customers [already] following him on Twitter. Growth in followers was slow and organic, but the connections with followers were strong.”

And loyal followers tend to tweet about you, or (more likely) retweet your tweets!

[**Etsy, “an online marketplace for buying & selling all things handmade”:**](#) “For a site specializing in handmade goods, there is no experience more flattering than being one of the first Twitter accounts to be followed by Martha Stewart (@MarthaStewart).”

Like having your book mentioned on TV by Oprah in her book club, “celebrity endorsements” are golden in Twitter, too. This is similar to the Teusner Winers strategy—of replying to tweets by well-known and well-respected tweeters, and hoping they will publicly reply to you.

In addition to those Case Studies, “Twitter 101 for Business” presents various [Resources](#), including this interesting article from the *New York Times* (July 22, 2009): [“Marketing Small Businesses with Twitter”](#).

“[S]mall businesses outnumber the big ones on the free microblogging service, and in many ways, Twitter is an even more useful tool for them.

“For many mom-and-pop shops with no ad budget, Twitter has become their sole means of marketing. ...

“Small businesses typically get more than half of their customers through word of mouth ... and Twitter is the digital manifestation of that. ... [T]he culture of the service encourages people to spread news to friends in their own network. ...

“[One small businessman] sets up searches on TweetDeck, a Web application that helps people manage their Twitter messages, to start conversations with people talking about his town. ...

“The extra traffic has come despite his rarely pitching his own businesses on Twitter. ‘To me, that’s a turn-off,’ he said. Instead of marketing to customers, small-business owners should use the same persona they have offline, he advised. ‘Be the small shopkeeper down the street that everyone knows by name.’”

A Dozen Great Ideas from [“50 Ideas on Using Twitter for Business”](#)

By Chris Brogan (Aug. 20, 2008)

1. “Build an account and immediate[ly] start using [Twitter Search](#) to listen for your name, your competitor’s names, words that relate to your space. (Listening always comes first.) ...
2. “Instead of answering the question, ‘What are you doing?’, answer the question, ‘What has your attention?’
3. “Have more than one twitterer at the company. People can quit. People take vacations. It’s nice to have a variety.
4. “When promoting a blog post, ask a question or explain what’s coming next, instead of

just dumping a link.

5. “Ask questions. Twitter is GREAT for getting opinions.
6. “Follow interesting people. If you find someone who tweets interesting things, see who she follows, and follow her.
7. “Tweet about other people’s stuff. ... [It] doesn’t directly impact your business, but makes us feel like you’re not ‘that [self-absorbed, exploitive] guy.’
8. “When you DO talk about your stuff, make it useful. Give advice, blog posts, pictures, etc.
9. “Share the human side of your company. If you’re bothering to tweet, it means you believe social media has value for human connections. Point us to pictures and other human things.
10. “Don’t toot your own horn too much. (Man, I can’t believe I’m saying this. I do it all the time. – Side note: I’ve gotta stop tooting my own horn).
11. “Or, if you do, try to balance it out by promoting the heck out of others, too. ...
12. “Commenting on others’ tweets, and retweeting what others have posted is a great way to build community.”

Conclusion: Twitter Adds a “Personal Touch” to Businesses Large and Small

Although the structure of the Twitter system tends to restrict the growth of lesser-known brands, there is one fundamental factor that can benefit businesses and organizations both large and small: the quality of their tweets.

In short, as the tweeter for Teusner Winers said, “This is about building trust as well as

relationships”; and ironically, yet substantially,
“that comes from not selling.”