

Twitter

What Is Twitter?

Twitter is a free social networking and micro-blogging service that is used for listening and engaging your audience through sending and receiving user updates (otherwise known as **Tweets**). Users create text-based posts of up to 140 characters and those tweets are displayed on the user's profile page and delivered to other users who have signed up to receive (or **Follow**) them. To use Twitter, a user will send a tweet (update) to their Twitter account using a mobile phone, from the Twitter web page or through a third-party application. The tweet is then dispersed to all those users who are following you.

Why Should I Use Twitter?

Twitter is the 12th most highly-trafficked website in the world,¹ with more than 500 million active registered users.² Although it shares similarities with Facebook and other blogging platforms, Twitter is unique both in its simplicity as well as its ability to provide users quick and current coverage of an issue or event. Users can search for specific **hashtags** (basically keywords attached to the end of tweets) and Twitter will display an ever-updating feed of tweets about that topic from all around the world. Twitter also allows a certain level of profile customization, and can be easily connected with other social media accounts, so it provides an opportunity to implement consistent branding across a wide variety of platforms. Twitter also provides analytics for its users, so it's easy to see the sources and levels of user engagement.

How Do I Get Started?

To begin, simply go to Twitter.com and sign up for an account (you'll need a working email address). After creating an account, you can edit your profile, profile photo, and header art. You can then start posting Tweets, following other Twitter accounts, and **favorite**-ing and **retweeting** other Tweets. Use hashtags to draw people interested in certain topics to your Twitter account. Keep your feed engaging by posting links to your content (whether on your website or other social media accounts), as well as news about your organization. You should also post links to external content (videos, photos, news stories) that might be of interest to your audience. In order to engage, you yourself need to *be* engaged.

Note: Depending on your host country, Twitter may be blocked, censored, or simply not very popular. As a result, you should make sure that Twitter is both a viable and useful option for your location *before* setting up an account. If not, consider researching alternative blogging platforms.

¹ <http://www.alexa.com/topsites>, (7/16/2013).

² <http://www.statisticbrain.com/twitter-statistics/>.