The Definitive Guide to Twitter Marketing
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With social media and digital marketers in mind, we've compiled our favorite best practices for creating a Twitter strategy and measuring impact on the platform. This guide is great if you're just getting started and want to set up a plan for your initial forays on Twitter. But even if you're a seasoned Twitter pro, it's probably time to review your ongoing Twitter strategy, and all of the tips that follow can help you with that.

We begin with the basics - how to get started, and some tips on what and how to tweet. Those tips include how to find and follow interesting accounts to grow your audience, guidelines for talking to other Twitter users and how to engage authentically on the platform, how to use Twitter search to find new communities and hashtags, with specific tips on using advanced Twitter search queries, as well as more tactical recommendations on how often to post, how and when to use hashtags in tweets, how to incorporate visual content, using favorites to your advantage and more.

We also spend a few pages discussing how to set up or adjust your social media measurement program. We encourage ongoing monitoring of metrics like tweet volume, the number of unique contributors, potential reach, engagement rates and share of voice. We also provide context and suggestions on measuring influence. Finally, we discuss set of general measurement tips like getting started early and ensuring your metrics are built on the best quality dataset.

These are just a few of the Twitter best practices we've collected over the years. After reading this, it's our hope that you'll have the information you need to get started on Twitter. After that, it's in your hands. Happy reading and good luck on Twitter! Let us know if we can help.
PART ONE: TWITTER BASICS

We'll begin with the basics - how to get started, and some tips on what and how to tweet. Here are our favorite Twitter tips for building and maintaining an impactful Twitter presence.

Follow interesting accounts

If you're just getting started or trying to grow your following on Twitter, start by following some other Twitter accounts. Seek out people who post relevant content, brands and publications that share compelling articles, or anyone who seems interesting or like they could be interested in what you're promoting. You'll want to **start building a community right away**, so that later you have an audience for all the amazing content you're going to share.

It's important that you listen as much as - if not more than - you tweet. Twitter is an incredible wealth of information on any topic you can imagine, and there are thousands of people talking about whatever you're interested in at any time. Listen to what they're saying and learn from them.

In particular, listen to what your customers (current and potential) are saying about you. Set up alerts for key terms associated with your brand and products. We'll talk more about Twitter search and monitoring later, but for now, know that **your customers are probably the most important audience you have on Twitter**, and they have lots of useful things to say. Pay attention to them.

Talk to people

Now that you're following some people, engage with them. Retweet and reply to your followers, and have conversations with people who are talking about interesting things. You don't have to follow someone to talk to them, so don't be afraid to engage with strangers.
If someone shares your content or publicly compliments you, thank or favorite them. Simply paying attention to what your customers say and letting them know you appreciate them can mean a lot, and will set you apart from your competitors. A little **courtesy and respect can go a long way.**

And beyond that, it’s okay to be human. If it makes sense for your brand, use a conversational tone in your tweets. If you accidentally tweet a typo or broken link, correct it, apologize and move on. Your followers will understand. Own up to your mistakes and act like the human being you are. Even the largest brands are run by people.

Put yourself in your customer’s shoes: when was a time a company communicated with you in a way that made you feel valued? What made you recommend them to someone else? Use that perspective to build your interaction on Twitter. Remember that **communication is a two-way process; don’t use Twitter as a megaphone** from which you shout your marketing messages. You’ll get a better response by talking, listening and responding.

Be ready to take questions from your customers. Plan answers and make sure everyone running your Twitter account knows how to respond. Depending on your business, you may want to create guidelines about response times and appropriate communication. For example, we know that **most customers expect a response on social media within an hour.** This doesn’t change much for nights and weekends either, so be prepared for that.

Finally, strive for a mix of different kind of tweets. Try to post more than just promotional content, which will fatigue your followers quickly. Interact and engage as much as you broadcast.

**Use Twitter search**

Twitter’s search functionality is a great way to discover new people and and content. In particular, it’s an easy way to find new Twitter accounts to follow. Type a phrase or hashtag relevant to your industry into Twitter search and look at the people who come up in your results. Twitter will surface a list of people who use those words or hashtags in their bios, giving you a whole new community to get to know. Follow those people, learn about them and what they tweet about.

Try searching for your brand or company name as well, to see what kinds of tweets are posted about you. Depending on what you find, you may want to:

- Favorite the positive tweets
- Reply to answer questions or address concerns
- Retweet interesting, funny or relevant tweets
- Consider which negative tweets demand a response
- Learn more about what people on Twitter think of you and your brand

Union Metrics | unionmetrics.com
It’s also a great idea to **set up ongoing monitoring for key search terms** like these so you can keep up with the pulse of the conversation as it occurs. You can find new hashtags to add to your tweets and Twitter chats to participate in. We’ll discuss this more shortly.

Beyond the basic keyword and hashtag search, Twitter supports a variety of advanced search operators that can further refine your results to only the most relevant tweets. Here are a few of our favorite Twitter search operators and how to use them.

**Find one keyword OR another**

Twitter does not require an *AND* or *+* operator to search for multiple keywords. Just type together multiple keywords into your query and Twitter will return tweets that include of those terms. For example *social media metrics* will find any tweets that include all three of those words in any order.

However, sometimes you might want to find tweets that include one keyword or another keyword. Use the *OR* operator to separate those terms, like *metrics OR analytics*. You can also chain together multiple keywords to create a more complex query. The *OR* operator will attach to the word that immediately precedes it, very much like order of operations in algebra.
@Username queries

There are several ways to learn more about the reach of tweets from or about a particular Twitter account, depending on the type of information you're looking for.

- Tweets to, from and about an account - \textit{username}
- Tweets to and about an account, including mentions - @\textit{username}
- Tweets to an account, including replies - to:\textit{username}
- Tweets from an account - from:\textit{username}

Date filters

You can filter your search results to a particular time period by adding the \textit{since:} and \textit{until:} operators to your search query. Use these date filters to narrow down your results. You can use one or both filters in a query. These dates are inclusive and correspond to the UTC time zone. Format it like \textit{social media since:2015-02-01} to narrow your results to tweets posted since February 1, 2015.

Exclusions

You can exclude certain keywords from your search by adding a minus sign (-) before the keyword. This will filter out all tweets that include that keyword. This is particularly useful if your brand or client has a common name and wants to exclude mentions of others with that name. For example, \textit{social media -facebook} will filter out tweets that mention Facebook.

Specific phrase

If you want to search for an exact phrase, put quotation marks around your search query, such as \textit{“social media analytics”}.

Tweets containing links

If you want to limit your results to tweets that include a link, like an article in the news or a blog post you've recently shared. It's also a great way to track link shares for a Twitter contest. Use \textit{filter:links} to search only for tweets containing links (e.g. \textit{CNN filter:links})

Tweets in a particular language

If you want to limit your search results to just those in a particular language, you can append a language filter to your query. Use \textit{lang:NN} to search for only tweets in a particular language (e.g. \textit{Nutella lang:en} for only English tweets about Nutella). Not all languages are supported on Twitter, so check this list to see which are and to get more information about languages on Twitter in general.

These are some of our favorite filters and operators, but here's the full list of advanced search operators if you're interested in more. A word of advice: Twitter search works best with fairly simple queries. We recommend that you only add in a few advanced operators per query and try to limit the total number of keywords in a search query to a maximum of 5-8.
Post frequently (but not too frequently)
Since Twitter moves so quickly, it's perfectly acceptable - even expected - to post several times a day. Exactly how often and how frequently you post will depend on your audience and your content availability. But it's fine to post 3-5 times per day, as long as you spread your tweets out.

Be careful not to oversaturate your followers' streams. Try to avoid posting a lot of public tweets in a row, unless you're participating in a short-term event or chat. Even then, it's appropriate to warn your followers in advance to give them a chance to temporarily mute you or a hashtag.

You'll need to post a particular message or piece of content multiple times to be sure everyone has the best opportunity to see it. Try sharing it on different days and at different times to catch people no matter what time zone they're in and when they're on Twitter.

Finally, try to post content outside typical business hours. Your customers are likely to be looking at Twitter at night and on weekends, so if you can be around to answer questions during those times, that's great. If you can't be, it's okay to schedule content in advance to go out during those times. And be sure you're clear when someone will be around to answer questions if you're directing customers to your account as a customer support resource.

Use hashtags in your tweets
Hashtags are one of the best ways to get your content in front of new audiences and share your tweets with relevant parties. They're also great for discovering new content and new communities.

You can extend the reach of a tweet by including a hashtag in it. Popular and general hashtags are a good way to add your content to a much larger conversation, but it's easy to get lost in the steady stream of new tweets around a popular hashtag. More targeted hashtags will reach a smaller but potentially more relevant audience. Try a mix of different hashtags to see what works best for your content. And in general, we don't recommend using more than three hashtags in a tweet.

Creating your own hashtag for a campaign or event is a convenient way to focus conversation around your topic. It makes the conversation easily searchable for future reference. If you do create your own hashtag, keep it short, relevant and simple - fewer than 20 characters. If you use a really long hashtag, people won't have as much room to add their thoughts.

Union Metrics | unionmetrics.com
Once you’ve come up with a branded hashtag, do a quick Twitter search to see how or if it’s being used. Ask yourself these questions:

- Is this hashtag already being used?
- How it is being used and by whom?
- Do you see a lot of spam or unrelated tweets?

For example, the general hashtag #socialmedia is fast-moving and full of information, but also routinely gets spammed. You could try it, but know that your post could get lost in the flow.

And as we mentioned earlier, searching for broader hashtags related to your industry will also help you find interesting content to learn from and share. It can also surface a whole new world of interesting Twitter accounts to follow. **Hashtags are a great way to find people who share similar interests to you**, and help you discover new tweet chats to participate in.

### Incorporate visual elements in your tweets

Twitter has evolved into a true multi-media platform, and you can no longer rely on 140 characters of text alone to get your message across; distinctive visuals are more important than ever. Not sure how to approach it? Here are a few tips to get you started.
Include images in your tweets. You don't need to attach a photo to every single tweet you post, but **tweets with photos are more likely to catch your followers' attention** and lead to higher engagement.

Twitter has recently added support for GIFs and videos, so experiment with video content as appropriate. Vine and other short video formats are ideal for a channel like Twitter, where it's easiest to consume short, snackable content.

Test the same tweet content with different images, or no images at all. **See how your different tweets perform, and keep testing.** Soon you'll know which type your audience prefers. (But remember, this could change over time.)

Be sure you only post images you have permission to use, and that you attribute them appropriately. Use photos with a creative commons license or look into purchasing images you can use. If you're sharing community content, include a link back to that person's blog or account.

**Be creative**

Try new things - experiment with new kinds of content, new formats, new ideas. Since content moves so quickly on Twitter, it's an ideal laboratory for trying new, creative tactics.

Use favorites to your advantage. **Favoriting can be a good way to say thank you to customers.** Instead of retweeting a compliment (which can be seen as self-promotional, particularly if you get a lot of compliments and retweet them all) take a moment to thank the person who complimented you, and favorite the tweet.

Don't be afraid to experiment! Don't be afraid to mix it up a little to see what works. Because no matter what we tell you here, your results will definitely vary, so it's important you try these tips out for yourself to see what works and what doesn't.
PART TWO: TWITTER METRICS

Now that you've got the Twitter basics down, you should set up your Twitter measurement strategy. Measure your efforts to learn what works and what doesn't. Tweet, measure, adjust, repeat.

The metrics that matter

There are a set of primary Twitter metrics every social marketer should be tracking. Even early measurement programs can benefit from a few simple metrics, so here are our recommendations for the Twitter metrics that matter.

Volume

The first – and easiest – social media metric to measure is volume. What is the size of the conversation about your brand or your campaign? Volume is a great initial indicator of interest. People tend to talk about things they either love or hate, but rarely about things they simply don’t care about at all. While volume can seem like a simple counting metric, there’s more to it than just counting tweets and retweets. It’s important to measure the number of:

• Tweets about your brand
• Mentions of your account
• Unique people talking about you

Track how these numbers change over time and look for spikes outside the normal range. What happened to cause the increase? Are there days or times when more people seem to be talking about your brand? Use this information to post more during these times to increase engagement.
Reach
Reach measures the spread of a social media conversation and can help you understand the context for your content. How far is your content disseminating? How big is the audience for your message? Reach is a measure of potential audience size, showing you how many people could have seen your tweets. The larger the reach, the more different people talked about a topic. A high reach indicates a diversity in contributors, some of them potentially influential.

A large audience is good, but reach alone does not tell you everything. Reach becomes very powerful when compared to other engagement metrics. Use reach as the denominator in your social media measurement equations. Pick important action or engagement numbers like clicks, retweets or replies and divide them by reach to calculate an engagement rate. Of the possible audience for your campaign, how many people participated? Reach helps contextualize other metrics so you can better understand impact.

Engagement
Speaking of engagement metrics, this is one of the most important areas to measure in social media. How are people participating in the conversation about your brand? What are they doing to spread your content and engage with the topic? On Twitter, content can be both shared and replied to. Twitter retweets are helpful to know who spreads your content, while replies and mentions show who engages with your content, and favorites show who likes it.

Think carefully about your social goals and the kinds of engagement you're interested in measuring.

- Are you focused on generating interaction like replies and mentions?
- Do you want to measure how a message spreads through retweets?
- Do you need to identify particular types of content that generate engagement?

Measuring spread or amplification is important to know how far your message reaches beyond your direct audience. Measuring interaction helps you know which content is resonating and informs future content strategy. Find metrics that reflect what's important to your particular needs.

Start paying attention to patterns in your metrics to see what tweets get the most engagement. It might surprise you what people interact with; it's not always what you expect.

Advanced metrics
Beyond the basics of volume, reach and engagement, there are myriad advanced or second-order metrics you can track. Among those many metrics, we love share of voice and influence. Both of these can be measured in numerous ways, so here are our recommendations for dealing with them.
Influence

Influence metrics are some of the mostly hotly debated social media metrics around. How do you quantify something as contextual and variable as influence? So it’s important to begin this section by asking you to **decide what influence means to you**. Is it followers, Klout score, engagement rates, amplification rates, or something else entirely? Influence may also vary from situation to situation.

We recommend using influence metrics that help you identify accounts that are more likely to spread your content to new and different audiences beyond your follower base.

Look at how many impressions each account generated. For example, someone may not receive a large number of retweets, but the ones they do get are from high-follower and influential accounts. It can be helpful to look at who someone knows, not just how engaged their followers are.

Dig into actual engagement. Who gets the highest retweet rate (average retweets per tweet)? Who is consistently mentioned? These metrics can help you understand actual influence.

Regardless of what influence metrics you choose, **decide what kind of influence you’re interested in and measure that**. Once you decide, you can use those metrics to discover influencers in a conversation or community and reach out to, engage with or follow.
Share of voice
Understanding share of voice on Twitter comes down to **knowing what percentage of a particular conversation you and your brand own**. How does your activity stack up against your competitors? Measuring your own activity is useful, but using share of voice metrics to develop industry benchmarks will help you know how exactly well you're doing.

First, decide who you want to compare your Twitter account against. Who are your main or most active competitors? Pick a few to compare. Also consider other less obvious choices, as well as any large brands that make up your category. It's possible that what your customers perceive as related might not even be on your radar, so use Twitter search to research all your options.

Also, **set up monitoring for a set of industry keywords** to see what else your audience is talking about that might not be related to a specific brand or product. Listening to the broader conversation can provide a great deal of insight into what your customers consider important.

Finally, it's important to use a few different metrics to truly understand share of voice. One brand might have a high reach, while another could receive a lot of retweets. Use several metrics to compare, to see where the patterns are and what makes most sense in your industry. Reach and unique contributors are excellent metrics for share of voice.

Other measurement tips
In addition to the specific metrics we recommend you measure, we have a few other tips to help you get the most of your social media measurement strategy.

**Plan ahead**
First, try to plan your measurement strategy in advance. There are ways to analyze historical Twitter data, but it can be costly and difficult to access. When possible, **set up your social media measurement tools as early as you can, and always before you start a big campaign**. Twitter has internal analytics available to help you understand the impact of your tweets, and there are a number of third-party tools to help you measure the earned and competitor components (like Union Metrics' TweetReach, for example!). Think through what you want to measure and set it up as soon as you can. Accessing real-time data and building your own analytics archive is better than having to rely on digging up historical data later.

**Collect enough data**
Related, be sure you're collecting enough data. No matter how you collect data for your Twitter measurement, make sure it's full-fidelity so you're getting the entire picture. And the earlier you set up your monitoring, the more data you'll have to base future decisions on. Conversations can be spiky

Union Metrics | unionmetrics.com
over short periods of time, so it's best if you have weeks or months to balance out those spikes. The longer you collect data, the more information you'll have to notice changes in trends. The more data, the better. The longer you've been collecting data, the better.

Collect the right data
More data doesn't matter if you're collecting the wrong kind of data. **Make sure your metrics aren't later impacted by a data quality issue.** Where is your Twitter data coming from? Is it full fidelity so you don't miss tweets? Are you getting everything? And is it coming to you in a form you can actually use? Dig into where your data is coming from and be sure it's what you're looking for.

And think carefully about the search queries you're using to be sure you capture all tweets about the topics important to you.

- Are you using common misspellings or nicknames?
- Are there other languages to consider?
- Should you include multiple official Twitter handles or hashtags?
- Should you add any exclusions to filter out unrelated terms or topics?

PART THREE: YOUR TURN
These are just a few of the Twitter best practices we've collected over the years. Our best tip is to get out there and give it a shot. So, go get started! Try some new things, get to know your followers and the larger Twitter community, and have fun. **Tweet like a human, and treat everyone with respect.** Keep track of what works well and what you can improve, and you'll grow your following, reach new audiences and increase your engagement before you know it. Good luck!