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Table of contents

1. All a Twitter..... 1

All a Twitter

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Abstract (Abstract): So how does it work? Users, who join the service free of charge, can post short messages of up to 140 characters via the Twitter Web site, SMS, email, IM, or other Twitter client. Messages appear as posts on the member's Twitter profile and are also sent directly to his or her followers who have signed up to receive that person's updates.

Links: Check CUA Library Catalog, Check for full text via 360 Link

Full text: Want to try microblogging, but don't know how to get started? Read on.

While sitting before a presentation at a recent library conference, I was able to broadcast my whereabouts, my mood, and my desire to connect with friends for dinner to over 150 conference attendees simultaneously, using my mobile phone. I managed this feat of hyper-connectivity through a service called Twitter, which enables social butterflies like myself to instantly publish brief messages to a network of contacts.

Although not quite as substantive as reporting the May earthquake in China before any of the major news services, as did blogger Robert Scoble and other "Twitterati," my use of the service is just one of many ways in which people are discovering the benefits of Twitter. In an especially dramatic example, a graduate journalism student at UC Berkeley was arrested in April while photographing a public demonstration in Egypt. As he was taken into custody, the student managed to twitter one word: "arrested." His network of followers contacted the U.S. embassy and the university, resulting in his release the following day.

By far the leading service within the burgeoning trend of microblogging, Twitter, launched in 2006, presents a new way to communicate online, opening up new opportunities for users to foster community, test new ideas, share resources, keep updated, and just socialize.

So how does it work? Users, who join the service free of charge, can post short messages of up to 140 characters via the Twitter Web site, SMS, email, IM, or other Twitter client. Messages appear as posts on the member's Twitter profile and are also sent directly to his or her followers who have signed up to receive that person's updates. Twitter posts, otherwise known as tweets, range from the mundane "I forgot to buy bananas" to the more broadly provocative "41 Secrets Your Doctor Would Never Share" (via diggupdates).

But mostly, these broadcasts capture the individual user's experience that would otherwise be missed by their contacts. Largely snippets of people's everyday lives, tweets oftentimes wouldn't justify a blog post or even an email message, but nevertheless manage to communicate a great deal.

Who's on Twitter?

It may be a hard sell on the face of it-devotees claim that you have to give it an honest go before you can understand Twitter's appeal. Yet microblogging has, indeed, caught on. Over one million users have subscribed to Twitter alone, according to TechCrunch, including prominent pols Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and John Edwards. Across the pond, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown is logging tweets from 10 Downing Street (twitter.com/downingstreet).

Major media outlets NBC (tinyurl.com/6qx7gp) and the BBC (twitter.com/BBC) are using Twitter to deliver news and programming information. Corporations such as H&R Block (twitter.com/HRBlock) and Dell (twitter.com/DellOutlet) use the platform to answer customer inquiries and "converse" directly with consumers. Penguin Books (twitter.com/PenguinBooks) has distributed new titles in a serialized format via Twitter, while services such as TwitterLit (www.twitterlit.com) and its cousin KidderLit (www.kidderlit.com) deliver the first line of various books twice daily. New book authors are encouraging readers to tweet short book reviews. And

educators are bringing Twitter into the classroom in an effort to create a sense of community among students and to aid teaching and learning.

According to a recent Hitwise study, Twitter has grown eightfold over the past year, and traffic to the site doubled between February and April 2008 alone, reports Compete, a Web analytics site. Having just closed on its third round of funding estimated at $15 million, Twitter is well on its way to becoming mainstream.

Those Tweeting Libraries

Libraries, too, are finding ample opportunities to interact with their patrons on Twitter. Recommendations for Web resources, news and event announcements, and virtual reference services all make ideal tweets. The service is also a handy way for librarians to connect at conferences and otherwise stay engaged with the library community at large. (Meet the 10 most followed librarians on p.32.)

The Ada Community Library, Boise, ID (twitter.com/adalib), for one, does a fantastic job of keeping patrons up-to-date, twittering on everything from Archaeology and Historic Preservation Month, book sales, and other library events to announcing new library cards. Meanwhile, the Yale Science Libraries post about upcoming Endnote workshops, its IM reference service, and access to Science Direct, all in an effort to inform patrons of the services available to them on campus (twitter.com/yalescilib).

Twitter has become so integral a tool that several institutions-Pasadena City College's Shatford Library, the Missouri River Regional Library, and the Undergraduate Library at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) (twitter.com/askundergrad)-post updates directly on the library home page.

"Twitter is just one of the Web 2.0 technologies that we are using to engage students within our traditional Web page (www.pasadena.edu/library)," says Mary Ann Laun, assistant dean of library services at Shatford. "We highlight events, interesting stats, and curious facts in an effort to call attention to some of the great things happening in the library. From announcements such as 'the system is down, ask for help at the Reference desk' to special events, we have fun conveying quick messages to students."

Twitter can also help promote a blog, whether you're an individual or an organization-like YALSA. The Young Adult Library Services Association (a division of the American Library Association) uses a service called Twitterfeed to automatically generate tweets from its blog posts (twitter.com/yalsa). The result: instant content for YALSA's Twitter profile-no extra work required-and extended marketing of the YALSA blog.

Missouri River (www.mrrl.org) is another Twitterfeed user. In addition to its blog posts, the library uses the service to import its Flickr photostream. The alternative would have been costly, according to Robin Hastings, Missouri River's information technology manager.

"We find that [Twitterfeed] has saved us from having to create the infrastructure for a dedicated alert service that will get announcements out to patrons in the format they want-text, IM, or email-or pay someone else to do the announcing for us," says Hastings. "[Twitter] is a new channel of communication to our patrons that is easy to use and free."

In Arizona, the City of Casa Grande Library (twitter.com/cglibrary) uses Twitterfeed to post the authors and titles of new books to its Twitter profile. The service utilizes the library's RSS feed for new titles to provide patrons with tweets concerning new acquisitions, which link back to the library's catalog record. Jeff Scott, library director at Casa Grande says, "Many patrons would see the feed, get notified about the new book, and come straight down to the library or place a hold on the book. We had a good run of great music and new audiobooks, and the public ate it up."

The Nebraska Library Commission (NLC) is using Twitter to put a new spin on its virtual reference (VR) service. NLC tweets all of its incoming reference questions as they are submitted through their Ask a Librarian service (twitter.com/NLC_Reference). Similarly, the Ask Us Now! online reference service for Maryland library patrons is also creating VR tweets (twitter.com/askusnow). For its part, ALSC, the Association for Library Service to Children (a division of the American Library Association), serves up tweets about news and events of interest to children's library professionals such as children's lit seminars, collection management, and special collections

(twitter.com/alscblog).
More than just another way to extend services, a library's Twitter presence can function as a larger promotional tool. "[Twitter] turned out to be a great PR piece that demonstrated that we were looking at brand new services and ideas to serve our public," says Casa Grande's Scott.
Getting Started
In a nutshell, Twitter members post short messages or tweets, which are restricted to 140 characters, similar to text messaging. Other members of the service who opt to become "followers" of another's updates can see the followed party's tweets as they are made. Members can locate friends and contacts to follow by searching their names within Twitter or another service such as TwitDir. Twitter accounts can be made public or private and can also be subscribed to via RSS feeds.
Although quite simple to use, Twitter does involve a certain etiquette. Moreover, the application's many nuances, available third-party programs, and device options may seem challenging to new members. To get off on the right foot, I recommend checking out these tutorials (listed at right).
Not sure what to post? Twitter can be used to serve a range of purposes, from pure social networking to marketing and grassroots reporting. Unlike a formal blog, Twitter doesn't require that users stick to a specific theme. So not to worry; content wise, you can shift gears from the silly to the significant without bewildering readers.
Twitter, which has been subject to hiccups of late, is not the only microblogging game in town. You might also investigate Pownce (pownce.com), co-founded by Kevin Rose, part of the team that struck 2.0 gold with the immensely popular social news Web site Digg. Pownce lets members post mixed-media items such as events, photos, music, and video files, for their friends' eyes only or for public consumption. Jaiku, another microblogging tool, enables its users to aggregate their posts from other sites such as del.icio.us, Flickr, and even Twitter into an activity stream.
At first glance, the benefit of these simple applications may not be immediately apparent. But do give a closer look. Especially when combined with add-on tools and techniques, Twitter can be a powerful tool for connecting with patrons and other library professionals, without a heavy time investment. So if you want to find out for yourself what all the fuss is about, explore just some of the resources listed here, and you'll be twittering in no time.

Sidebar

10 Most "Followed" Librarians on Twitter
Ellyssa Kroski
(with Twitter name and number of followers)
Jessamyn West (jessamyn) 1,200
Connie Crosby (conniecrosby) 1,188
Andrea Mercado (andreamercado) 698
K.G. Schneider (kgs) 606
David Lee King (davidleeking) 548
Amy Kearns (akearns) 463
Michael Stephens (mstephens7) 429
Michael Sauers (msauers) 396
Blake Carver (LISNews) 374
Beth Gallaway (infogdss29) 321

Sidebar

Five Fast Twitter Tips
Ellyssa Kroski
1. Use "d" to send a direct message to someone

[d sarahlib great to see you on Twitter!]
2. Use the @ symbol to respond to another person in a tweet
[@ellyssa how about Tuesday instead?]
3. Use the # symbol to address a group
[#CIL2008 anyone going to dinner at 7?]
4. Create TinyURLs to save characters when sending Web addresses
(tinyurl.com)
5. Grab the RSS feeds for your friends' tweets &subscribe via your news reader

Sidebar

Twitter Tools &Mashups

Ellyssa Kroski

Tools to enhance Twitter abound, thanks to an open API that allows third-party developers to create new related applications. Recently Twitter has joined the MySpace Data Availability Initiative, which will soon allow members to port their friends and information between Twitter and other online destinations such as eBay and Yahoo! But in the meantime, these popular Twitter apps should keep you busy.

Autopostr

Automatically posts Flickr photos to Twitter.

www.autopostr.com

MadTwitter

A Windows desktop client inspired by Twitterrific.

www.madtwitter.com

RSS2Twitter

Takes any RSS feed and posts the items to Twitter.

www.pivari.com/rss2twitter.html

Summize

A real-time Twitter search engine that allows for keyword searches of tweets.

summize.com

TweetScan

A real-time Twitter search engine that lets you track keywords and sign up for email alerts.

tweetscan.com

Twhirl

A desktop client built on Adobe AIR that allows sign in to multiple Twitter and Friend feed accounts.

www.twhirl.org

TwitDir

A directory of Twitter users.

twitdir.com

Twitstat

A mobile Twitter client that lets you post updates and view replies and the 10 latest' tweets from friends.

www.twitstat.com/m

TwitterFox

A Firefox plug-in that alerts you to friends' updates, formerly known as TwitterNotifier.

www.naan.net/trac/wiki/TwitterFox

Twitterholic

A list of the top 100 Twitter users based on their number of followers.

www.twitterholic.com

TwitterLocal

Will generate an RSS feed of tweets from a particular geographic area.
www.twitterlocal.net
TwitterMail
Sends your friends' tweets to your email inbox.
twittermail.com
Twitterrific
A Mac OS X desktop client for using Twitter.
iconfactory.com/software/twitterrific
TwitterSnooze
Temporarily unsubscribes you to a Twitter member who may be at a conference or event.
twittersnooze.com
Twitt(url)y
Aggregates all of the URLs that Twitterers are talking about and displays how many tweets each one received.
twitturly.com
Who should I follow?
Makes recommendations of people to follow based on your existing subscriptions.
whoshouldifollow.com
Find oodles more by checking out these links:
Firefox Add-ons
tinyurl.com/2c3en6
Twitter Mashups from the Programmable Web
tinyurl.com/62wpj4
All Twitter tools and mashups in one place
tinyurl.com/2789fo
Twitter Fan Wiki
twitter.pbwiki.com
Twitter Toolbox: 60+ Twitter Tools
mashable.com/2007/09/29/twitter-toolbox
Twittermania: 140+ More Twitter Tools!
mashable.com/2008/05/24/14-more-twitter-tools

Sidebar

Tweetorials
Ellyssa Kroski
The 12-Minute Definitive Guide to Twitter
tinyurl.com/28lpm6
Mobile Instant Messaging Meets Social Networking: Twitter-A Beginner's Guide, Part 2
tinyurl.com/6fofbh
Newbie's guide to Twitter
tinyurl.com/2gchre
David Lee King: Twitter Explained for Librarians, or 10 ways to use Twitter
tinyurl.com/2ljtmr
The Twitter Disconnect
tinyurl.com/6nsf8x
Twitter in Plain English (video)
www.commoncraft.com/Twitter
David Free: Welcome To The Twitterverse (screencast)

showcase.litablog.org/index.php/David_Free
David Lee King: Twitter, part 2: the "fluff" (screencast)
showcase.litablog.org/index.php/David_Lee_King

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