

## Twitter in business: What are you doing? >

### Executive Summary:

*Twitter often appears to be frivolous, but it can become a valuable business tool when used correctly. (This is the third in a series of columns by experts on social media.)*

### By Janeson Keeley

Twitter, the micro-blogging site founded in 2006, asks its users to answer the simple question, "What are you doing." Apparently, a lot of people are answering it. According to the social media site mashable.com, Twitter posted a 1,382 percent year-over-year growth rate in February, 2009, with more than seven million unique visitors that month alone.

Although not originally intended as a business tool, Twitter's real-time search and 140-character status updates have been adopted by businesses such as Zappos, Amazon and Comcast to help them monitor their online reputations, create relationships with their customers and business partners, provide customer service, and disseminate information.

**Monitor your online reputation.** You don't have to have a Twitter account to benefit from Twitter. Visit <http://twitter.com> to access its powerful real-time search engine. Search your company name and your competitors' to see what people are saying. Set up an account with TweetBeep (<http://tweetbeep.com>) and have updates emailed to you on an hourly or daily basis. You can view another company's tweets by going to <http://twitter.com/username>, where "username" is that company's Twitter ID.

**Create relationships.** Once you've taken the plunge and set up a Twitter account, you'll want to connect with clients, prospective clients and business partners. Find them using the real-time or "Find People" search tools and follow them. Many people will follow you back. Engage the people you're following with @replies (@username) by asking questions or commenting on their



Janeson Keeley

Dan Smith

tweets. Do not use heavy-handed sales tactics here. This is not about generating an instant sale; it's about starting a conversation.

**Provide customer service.** If, in monitoring your online reputation, you run across someone making negative comments about your business, connect with them. Offer to be of help and take the conversation offline. By providing timely, direct service, you'll make a proponent for, rather than a detractor of, your company and establish your company as responsive and responsible. If someone is saying good things about your business, it's a perfect opportunity for you to express your appreciation.

**Disseminate information.** Tweet about the great special that your company has going on. Post links to your blog entries. Post pictures of new products or conduct surveys. Don't forget to request and respond to feedback. Unlike traditional media, Twitter is a social medium. No one likes a person who only talks and never listens ... in real life or on Twitter.

Although it can be intimidating at first, for an investment in time alone your business can potentially achieve very real benefits in business intelligence, brand awareness and management, customer relations, and yes, sales. 