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What is Twitter and Why Should We Even Care?

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Twi-what??

Twitter is a mini-blog. If you are asking yourself what a blog is, maybe you are reading the wrong column. Blogs and social networking have taken the online world much by surprise, becoming the #1 internet growth sector and experiencing a year-on-year growth of 5.4%¹ and more than doubling the other sectors (Search, Portals, Software Manufacturers and eMail). Many have said that Social Networking is the next killer app of the internet (after many years of reign of almighty email).

The same study mentions that over two-thirds of the online population will visit a social network ir blogging site and the sector now accounts for almost 10% of total internet time, overtaking email in global reach. Another study, to start getting into demographics, states that the share of adult internet users who have a profile on an online social network site has more than quadrupled in the past four years, from 8% in 2005 to 35% at the end of 2008. All of a sudden, people start having a lot to say to each other, everywhere in the world.

So what is Twitter, Again?

Twitter is a mini-blog, a micro-blog, a quick update (dubbed officially as a “tweet”) containing a limited number of characters - 140 characters in this case. In Facebook, one of the most populated SNSs⁳, it is included as a “status update” feature, but is far from the central feature of that service. In Twitter, the quick updates are the very essence of the service.

*Twitter is a blog on steroids.* Keeping a blog is excellent, but it’s very hard work – both writing an entry, however serious you get about it, and also making sure it gets around to the right people. It can also take up serious time which, more than ever, is lacking nowadays. Twitter recognizes that and is limited strictly (if you write more you cannot tweet it) to 140 characters as the maximum extension of our thoughts. Since I have been tweeting, I am constantly surprised at how much can be said in such few characters.

Okay, got it. So What Can I Tweet About?

The beauty is that the platform itself is multi-function. Mainly, it’s good for⁴:
1. **Social Messaging** - Twitter is a very fast, precise and immediate way of keeping in touch with a group of people. It’s quicker than a blog, yet slower than an instant messenger, but requires constant attention. It’s like an offline conversation, which can eventually be online if other members of our followers/ees are online also. It can also be done from mobile devices, and that makes it rather attractive to the young mobile professionals.

2. **News Reporting** – The fast nature of the service has been embraced by new media and online sources of information as another *distribution channel*. It is far more immediate and requires no extra effort from the twitter. Once the decision to *follow* is made, each tweet will potentially capture the attention of the twitter. It is an evolved RSS Feed, less complex than a blog and less intrusive than an email update.

3. **Social Media Marketing** – Whenever communication is involved, marketing has a say. Clearly Twitter becomes a target channel for companies to *catch* consumers or potential consumers and lure them into their value proposition. Also, brands have no *higher status* than regular Joes; everyone’s an equal on Twitter. Politicians and Companies have found a way to exploit – with varying degrees of success – this new information outlet.

Twitter is lots of things in one. Above all, it resembles very much the way Google started out in 1998: simplicity in design and near-instant ease of usability. Many have reported to set-up a Twitter account, abandon it for a couple of months until the concept “matured” in them, and then getting terribly hooked.

With Twitter, you can market your products and yourself, you can meet and keep up with people and you can get your fix of news, all in a form of a large ongoing conversation. These conversations can be one-sided (when you follow a person or that person follows you, but not both together) or two-sided (mutual following). However, they are public and open, and that entails some risk-taking and some opportunity-management.

Do you want to know more?

Good, and welcome to Twitterland.

Sign up at [http://www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com) and contact me @patoguru.

Join the conversation.
Nielsen Online, Global Index, December 2007-December 2008. This % measures the reach of the overall world’s online population.

iii Pew Internet, Adults and Social Network Websites, January 2009.

iv Social Networking Sites.


vi Note that in certain countries this free service is not readily available. In Argentina, it isn’t, for instance, and so many more people find workarounds or tweet online.

vii As in Facebook, where you can become fan of a brand but not befriend it.