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## Tracking the Twitter trend

by Donna Talarico  
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Social networking is, and has been, taking the connected culture to a whole new level of interaction. The latest craze? Twitter. People are "tweeting" like crazy.

What is Twitter? Regular Facebook or MySpace users are familiar with "status updates." At its core, that's what Twitter is: sharing status messages — or tweets — with followers, and really, the whole Twittersphere

"Twitter is a different animal because it's a micro-blogging tool, and because it forces you to post 140 characters at a time; it's nothing like any of the other sites," said frequent "tweeter" Eric Manassy (e\_man), 35, of Hawley.

Twitter is a lot simpler than its social networking brothers and sisters. LinkedIn is geared toward career-minded folks looking to network professionally, while Facebook and MySpace are more personal, allowing users to create extensive profiles, photo albums and more.

"I think of Facebook as people I personally know, and Twitter as people I have never met but are getting to know," Manassy said. "I have pockets of people I interact with depending on the topic. If I talk Jets, the same 10 or so converse with me. Once I go tech, another pocket talk, and if I talk about local events, again, a pocket of local peeps interact. It is really cool!"

### How it works

You register (for free), create a profile, find people to follow and hope to be followed. Then, 140 characters at a time, you make tweets. To reply to someone or include them in a tweet, you use the @ sign, for example, @e\_man. This will ping that particular user.



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From your Twitter dashboard, you view recent updates from followers and from sidebar links, who you are following, who is following you, @replies, direct messages and favorite tweets. The more frequently you use Twitter, the more you may want — or need — to look into advanced third-party Twitter tools and applications to keep up with all your followers and your own account. (See sidebar.)

Marywood student Mandy Boyle (mlb27), 21, of Scranton, uses Twitter to promote her personal blog and tweets about school, work and freelance writing.

"I'd have to say that Twitter is a breath of fresh air," she said. "It's fun, it's engaging, and it keeps my writing concise and reminds me to convey my message in as few words as possible. It's great practice if you're a writer."

Tweeter isn't complicated, however, there are some words you should know. (See sidebar.) It didn't take Boyle long to become twiterlate.

"From tweets to retweets, DMs and Follow Fridays, there's a lot to learn about Twitter," said Boyle. "However, once you get started, you catch on quickly, and soon you'll get caught up in the stream of communication. That's what it's really all about — instant connection in a constant flow."

Karla Porter (karla\_porter), 46, of Ashley, is a human captial and new media specialist. In short, she's a recruiter and was in fact named one of the Top 50 Tweepers in her industry. She tweets about everyday life, industry stuff and even uses Twitter to find job candidates.

"I do advanced searches on Twitter for keywords like job, work and customer service, within a 10 mile radius of my work zip code and monitor for comments like: I hate my job, I need a job, I need a new job, etc.," she said. "I then contact those poor souls to see if I can help them."

When not at her desk, Porter uses the TwitterBerry application for her Blackberry to stay on top of Tweets.

### What do people tweet?

While a good chunk of Tweeples, especially newbies, tweet about where they are and what they are doing, Twitter-ers post links to interesting articles, pictures, motivational quotes and even breaking news. Manassy likes to post about the Jets, and since he works in IT for a health company, he uses Twitter to ask questions about software he's evaluating.

And, one great tweet can change your life. Janis Krums of Sarasota, Fla., became a Twitter celebrity in January. He was on a Hudson River commuter ferry when it was diverted to rescue passengers of U.S. Airways Flight 1549 after it made an emergency landing in the river. Krums took a picture and uploaded it to Twitter using TwitPic. It spread like mad.

"It was an incredible sight. I definitely thought I should take a picture, and I happened to be on Twitter when I saw it, so that was quickest place to post," Krums told the eBiz Insider in January.



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Krums' photo became the first to circulate as part of the international news frenzy branded "Miracle on the Hudson." That week, the citizen journalist was interviewed on all the major news outlets, and his Twitter following grew from 180 to more than 3,500. Krums is getting ready to launch his new e-commerce site, ElementzNutrition.com, and plans to use social media to grow his brand.

"I was going to use [social media marketing] tactics anyway," he said. "This reinforces the point, especially now that my network is so big — the reach now is incredible. No questions asked, I'll definitely use it now."

### **Twitter for your business**

On- and off-line businesses are posting tweets related to sales, promotions, products, customer service and more. Retailer Twitter Aggregator ([www.noturnonred.com/twitter](http://www.noturnonred.com/twitter)) displays recent tweets from big retailers. Communication is light, oftentimes promoting a sale, offering instant customer service and random banter between followers. Some recent entries?

TheHomeDepot replied to a customer post: "@marqueart saw your tweet about your backyard project. That's awesome — doing all the work yourself? Share a tweetpic when ur done?"

7\_Eleven to followers: "Good Morning Tweep! With snow through most of the nation, it's a good day for a hot chocolate!"

GemAffair.com ([gemaffair.com](http://gemaffair.com)) posts multiple tweets per day, CEO Michael Jansma said.

"We wanted to use Twitter to get to know our customers and to give them an opportunity for them to know us. GEMaffair.com is more than just an e-commerce retail store; it's like a neighborhood jewelry store. We love to interact with people, and since we're on the Internet, Twitter affords us that opportunity," said Jansma.

Jansma said GemAffair.com posts about news stories, deals of the day, trivia, links to sales, replies to customer questions and even holds Twitter-exclusive contests.

"We ask that entrants retweet (RT) ... our message ... and send it out through their network," he said. "Every entry gets written down, and at the contest's end, we randomly select a winner. Winners have received everything from diamond pendants to ruby heart necklace and earring sets."

Jansma and his crew like the community feel of Twitter. Boyle, Manassy and Porter would agree.

"We follow their blips, and after enough, we get to know that person," Jansma said of Twitter-ers. "I think that's why Twitter has exploded. It's a platform that can be used in a huge variety of ways — for news, for retail, for friends, for students, for mothers, for teens, for everyone. And with each little 140-character message that passes through our home page, we learn more about who is in our community."

### **Twitter Commands & Lingo**

## BASIC COMMANDS

### @reply

Used to direct a tweet toward another user or just include them in a tweet. For example, "I am having dinner with @mlb27." Basically, the @ symbol makes usernames linkable.

### #topic

This hashtag is used in front of a topic to make it more searchable. For example, "Did you read that story about #rihanna?"

### RT- Retweet

The formula to retweet is RT @username and then the copied tweet. This gives credit to original poster.

### DM- Direct Message

For example, "Hey, @GemAffair DM me your phone number so we can do that interview."

### TinyURL.com

This site will become your best friend if you want to share links — with only 140 characters, actual links do not fit. Use TinyURL to make links smaller.

### Follow Friday

Each Friday, update your status with @usernames to suggest interesting people to follow.

## FUN LINGO

Dweet: A drunk tweet

Mistweet: A tweet one later regrets

Tweeple or Tweepers: People who Twitter

Tweeter or Twitterer: A user of Twitter

Tweetheart: A Tweeter crush?

Tweeting: The act of making a tweet

TweetUp: Tweepers meeting up in real life

TwinkedIn: To invite someone on Twitter to connect with you in LinkedIn

Twitterlooting: To tweet from a bathroom

## Twitter Applications & Tools

Twitter apps for iPhone: Twitterrific, Twinkle, Twittelator, TwitterFon

Twitter apps for Blackberry: TinyTwitter, TwitterBerry

TwitPic: Allows you to post pictures to Twitter

ReTweetist: Site filled with data that shows the most popular Retweets, Retweeters and more

TweetDeck: A desktop application that organizes Twitter feeds and give up to the second updates

TwitterEyes: A FireFox plug-in that shortens tweets so they fit

TwitThat: Allows you to "tweet" the Web page you are reading

TweetBeep: Works like a Google Alert, only on Twitter

TopTweet: Showcases tweets from the top Tweeters

TwittEarth: A 3-D globe, showing real-time tweets from around the world

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