

Jen Anderson's Guide to Twitter for Small Businesses

So you know you should be updating your company's Twitter page, but you don't really get the whole Twitter thing. And you're way too busy to learn how it works and how you should be using it because you have a company to run.

As a freelance writer/social media manager, business owners are always asking me about Twitter. I always answer their question with a question:

Do you want to hire me to do it for you, or are you asking me to teach you how to do it yourself?

You're busy and social media management is something you can easily outsource. If it's easier for you to find money in your budget than 30 minutes a day to do it yourself, then seriously consider delegating that task. (If you're thinking, "Oh yes, please. Don't make me tweet. You just do it," then you can reach me at jen@janandersonwriter.com)

Most people want me to teach them how to use Twitter for themselves. Which I don't mind doing at all. I love giving people advice that they're actually going to follow.

But rather than have a long phone call with everyone you want to know more about Twitter, I decided to write it all down. That way, you can keep referring back to this document so you don't have to absorb all this information at once.

What's the point of social media anyway?

Brand recognition. You want customers to know that you exist. They can't even consider buying your products if they don't know who you are. You can use social media to drive sales by sharing coupons, recipes, and product photos. But a lot of the time, people will buy when they're ready to. And you want to already be in their brain when they get to that point. Social media is great for that.

OK, so Twitter.

Think of Twitter as a river. You wade in and let the river flow past you. The individual Tweets are like fish. You can ignore some of them, and look more closely at the ones that catch your interest. No one tries to see all the fish in the river.

When you log into Twitter, you can easily see tweets from the past 15 minutes or so. (Twitter will also show you some notable tweets from farther in the past.) No one who uses Twitter scrolls down through the past several hours trying to read everything their friends tweeted in the past day or so. It's too much.

What this means for you is that if you post a tweet, only a few of your followers will see it. So you should tweet several times a day so that you can reach more followers.

But you don't have to actually visit twitter several times a day, thanks to....

Automation

There are several third-party applications that let you use Twitter in different ways. I like **HootSuite**, but you can use something else if you prefer. I'll just discuss HootSuite here.

HootSuite has a great feature called Autoschedule. Instead of sending a tweet right away, autoschedule will pick a time in the future to send it. (You can also manually schedule a tweet if you have strong feelings about when you want it sent. You can also edit an autoscheduled tweet to adjust when it's going out.)

HootSuite's default Autoschedule settings may not be ideal for your customer base. It'll pick a time between, say 8am and 6pm when you autoschedule. You don't want to tweet at 3am, but maybe you want your tweets to go out between 11am and 8pm. You can change that in the Settings.

The settings also let you specify how many tweets per hour you want to send, and HootSuite will keep that in mind when autoscheduling. Stick to one tweet an hour at this point. If you're running a crowdfunding campaign, then go as high as 4 tweets an hour.

Now that you're all set up with automation, you're all ready to start talking to yourself because you don't have any...

Followers

Now you need to go out into Twitter and make some friends. Twitter will suggest some accounts for you to follow. Ignore this. Twitter tends to suggest big accounts with lots of followers who will never follow you back. You may find their tweets interesting, but they're not going to pay any attention to you.

Encourage your Facebook followers to also follow you on Twitter. Include a link to your Twitter page on your website. Tell people at trade events to follow you on Twitter. But you're also going to have to find your tribe within Twitter itself.

Follow accounts that might be interested in your product. Is your product gluten-free? Then search for "gluten free" on Twitter. Follow any account that has "gluten free" or "celiac" in their bio. Follow people who tweet about gluten free recipes and products.

Some of these people will follow you back. Some won't. That's OK. It's nothing personal. But Twitter won't let you follow more than 2,000 people without having a decent amount of followers. So you're going to need to unfollow people who didn't follow you back after a few days.

ManageFlitter is a website that will help you do that. You log in with your Twitter account, and they show you a list of accounts that aren't following you back. You can then unfollow them one at a time with a click of a button. Give people 3 days to follow you back before you unfollow.

Keep looking for new people to follow. Influencers in a certain field are especially useful, because if they like your product, they might tell their thousands of followers. **Klout.com** will help you find the popular bloggers in your category.

But what are you going to tweet to these people?

Content

Content is anything you share with your followers. It should be something they're interested in. And it shouldn't just be about your company and products.

Some authors only tweet about their book. Every 5 minutes, another tweet with a picture of their book cover and a link to a sales page. They probably sell a few books that way, but most people get annoyed and stop following them.

Don't be that guy. Think about what your customers are interested in and tweet about that. Then your product tweets will be welcome when they come.

Retweets

Create a Twitter list of influencers you might want to retweet. Then add that list to your HootSuite dashboard so you can easily see tweets from the people on that list. You can retweet instantly in HootSuite, or click Quote (as if you're going to add your own comment) and then click Autoschedule to send the retweet out later.

A note on quote tweets – only add a comment if you can add something to the conversation. "Ha-ha" or "This is interesting" is just unnecessary chatter.

Articles

Create Google Alerts for subjects your followers care about. If you make chips, go with "snacks." Once a day, you'll get a email with the latest news about snacks – like a recent article about how Baby Boomers snack more than Millennials.

To share the article, I view the article online and click the Twitter share button. A Twitter pop-up appears with some text prepopulated. Copy & paste that text into HootSuite. Change the text if you'd like. Then click Autoschedule.

Your Own Content

Blog posts and recipes are great to share on Twitter. You can go back and tweet about old blog posts once a month or so. When you post a new recipe or blog post, you can autoschedule tweets about it over the next few months.

Pictures and graphics do well on Twitter. You can create them using **Canva.com**. Upload your own pictures, slap some text on them and you're good to go. If you want to ask people to sign up for your mailing list, or tell them about your latest offer, you'll get more attention with a photo.

If you post something on Facebook or Instagram, you can automatically cross-post it to Twitter, but the picture won't be displayed on Twitter. It's better to create a separate tweet with the same content.

Behind the scenes photos are popular, so take a few snaps when you're making and packaging the product. Pretty photos of your products (or dishes made with them) are good. Pictures from events are popular. Stumped? Put your favorite teenager in charge. Hand them the product and tell them to take pictures of it wherever they want to. Bring them along to help you set up at an event, then set them loose with a camera phone.

Sensitivity

You don't want to be the brand tweeting about their latest product while everyone else on Twitter is frantically searching for news about a natural disaster. Or when they're distracted by a celebrity death or political scandal. Or when everyone's live tweeting an awards show.

Don't schedule tweets when people will be focused on something else. And reschedule your autoscheduled tweets when a big news story breaks.

For holidays, keep in mind that not every celebrates the same ones. Thanksgiving and Halloween are fair game, but you want people buying your products as Hannukah gifts as well as Christmas gifts. Wish your followers a Happy Spring as well as (or instead of) Happy Easter.

As a native New Yorker, I strongly believe that brands need to shut on up 9/11. You don't want your brand associated in people's minds with grief and horror. Express your appreciation for heroic firefighters on your personal accounts.

You may be focused on a big earthquake, but it's very difficult for a brand to comment on something like that without sounding crass and self-promoting. So just stay silent. If you're donating profits to disaster relief, that's fine.

When you're logged in to your brand's social media account, you're not a person. You're a brand. People are uncomfortable with a jam liking a photo of their kid.

So That's Twitter

I know it's a lot to take in, but once you get set up and into a routine, Twitter will take you only a few minutes a day.

You can handle this.

Questions? Hit me up at jen@jenandersonwriter.com

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