



## Twitter Chat

A Twitter chat is an interactive conversation between you and your community on social media. It works when a number of people use a prescribed Hashtag at a certain time to hold a public discussion on a topic of choice. The following is an overview on how to join in on the phenomenon.

### Organizing Your Chat

**Choose a Hashtag.** The Hashtag creates the link which enables the Twitter chat. It is the key to the whole operation. Everyone using the Hashtag will become involved in the chat. Therefore:

- *It should be unique.* Check to make sure it isn't already in use as part of a Twitter chat. Search it on both Twitter and Google to ensure it will be exclusive to your effort.
- *It should be as short as possible.* Hashtags count towards the 140 character maximum on tweets. The longer the Hashtag, the less space the participant will have to add their thoughts.
- *It should be relatively simple.* The easier it is to type, the less likely the participant will be to misspell it. Remember, a Hashtag works the way any other link would: If it is not exact, it will not work. Typos = tweets that will not show up in the chat.

**Choose a day and time.** The most effective chats are the ones that recur regularly. Therefore, establishing a day and time to conduct the chat when **you** will be consistently available is essential.

- *Avoid times in which people are generally busy* (i.e. business hours, dinner time, etc.). It is probably safe to assume that Monday morning at 10am most of your community is already preoccupied. Perhaps a better time would that evening at 7 or 8pm.
- *Make sure there will be no conflicting Twitter chat.* Avoid times in which you've seen another Twitter chat advertised (at least one within your niche). Keep track of other Twitter chats as you've seen them advertised by your followers or elsewhere. <http://tweetreports.com/twitter-chat-schedule/> is a website which posts Twitter chat schedules.

**Choose your tools.** Using twitter alone for a large chat can be difficult. As tweets come in rapidly, they may become overwhelming to filter through and keep up with. Fortunately, there exist tools for assisting in chats.

- <http://tweetchat.com/> - With TweetChat, you can create a chatroom for your Twitter event which your participants can connect to directly. Once on TweetChat, they can type into the chatroom and the site will automatically add your Hashtag to their every tweet. This removes clutter and, as the site advertises, "helps you put your blinders on to the Twitter-sphere while you monitor and chat about one topic."
- <https://hootsuite.com/> - Hootsuite allows you to track twitter search results on a separate tab. It will also archive the search results for your future reference.
- <http://tweetdeck.com/> - TweetDeck is a site run by Twitter. It gives you the ability to add a new column on Twitter so you can view the Hashtag results separately. You can also enable desktop notifications to go off every time someone uses the Hashtag.

**Announce your chat.** Make sure you use all media available (Facebook, Blogs, etc.) to get the word out there. The chat will be only as successful as you are in your promotion.

- *Give specifics.* Your announcement should include the time and dates your chat(s) will be held. It should also give the official Hashtag and the name of any site you might be using to help facilitate the operation.
- *Ask your followers to spread the word.* It can also be beneficial to add a moderator. Ask someone with a big social media presence to assist you in hosting the event. He/she can drum up chat participants, and during the event can help you ask questions and focus conversation. (Make sure you are in good communication with any moderators you may add. Giving them a specific set of guidelines for what you'd like to discuss can help keep the chat on track).

## Running Your Chat

**Give a proper introduction.** You want to create a conversational setting to ensure discussion will flow easily.

- *Welcome participants.* Introduce yourself. Be brief, and give others a chance to introduce themselves as well.
- *Set the focus.* Announce the chat topic and give your thoughts on it. Allow participants the chance to give their initial opinions as well.

**Facilitate conversation.** You have control over the conversation, and it is your job to make sure it remains on track.

- *Ask questions.* This is an excellent way to focus the discussion. It can be helpful if you label your questions (i.e.: Q1, What do we need to do to improve racial equity? #whatkidsneed). This way, participants can succinctly identify which question they are answering.
- *Highlight the most important points.* You can do this through retweeting points you find valuable and paraphrasing valid arguments.

**Give a proper conclusion.** Summarize the major ideas discussed and be sure to announce the next time you will be chatting. And of course, thank everyone for participating.

## Documenting Your Chat

If there was a high volume of tweets during your chat, you may find manually creating a transcript to be cumbersome. Here are some websites to assist you:

- <http://searchhash.com/> - SearchHash allows you to download your twitter results onto an Excel spreadsheet.
- <https://storify.com/> - With Storify, you pick the tweets you'd like to include on your transcript, and can add other media to provide helpful context (i.e. YouTube videos, embedded links, etc.). Storify also allows others to subscribe to your content.
- <http://www.twilert.com/> - Twilert will send you an email of every tweet that utilized your Hashtag. This provides a searchable archive of your chat within your email account.

Mack Collier wrote a helpful piece for people new to Twitter chats: <http://www.mackcollier.com/10-steps-to-creating-a-successful-twitter-chat/>