



ebook ISBN: 978-9625977-3-2
228 pages
Release Date: 2009
Retail Price \$39.00

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Avoid the Twitter Trap!

by Keith F. Luscher
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Don't get this headline wrong. I think Twitter is great, and use it myself (hence the icon link above). Often described as a "mini-blog," Twitter is a social networking tool that uses the SMS text protocol (short messaging service) designed for mobile phones (which explains the 140-character limit). Twitter was originally conceived to allow a user to broadcast these messages to a group of subscribers, or in this case, "followers." It has grown to become one of the most popular web applications in the world.

Twitter is free and only takes minutes to set up an account. The first objective of most Twitter users (called "peeps," among other expressions, but that's my favorite) is to get followers. At the same time, you will likely seek out other peeps to follow, ideally based upon a common interest, industry, profession, location, other connections, etc. These factors are typically indicated in your profile. You will also be sending out "tweets" (message posts) that relate to what you do and those like interests of your prospective followers and clients. Such messages should also have keywords included so that potential followers will find you in their searches.

In attracting followers, don't fall into the "Twitter Trap!" Many peeps will set up their account and then start following as many people as possible indiscriminately in hopes that those people will in turn follow them back. This is a common mistake—and you can spot the people who do this by their follow-to-follower ratios. If John Smith has 5,145 followers, but also follows 4,989, then John may have a largely artificial following. Do 5,100 people really care what John has to say? Does John really spend his hours and days tracking the tweets of 5,000 fellow peeps? I doubt it. As a result, his following is artificial. John is just one of 5,000 people stuck in the Twitter Trap...a big room where most "peeps" are talking to everyone, and listening to no one.

Avoid this trap, and take the time to build a natural following. In other words, exercise discretion with who you follow. Follow someone on Twitter because you care about what they have to say, or are interested in pursuing a relationship with them of some kind.

In turn, if you indeed wish to use Twitter to prospect for your business, then those who follow you must have a genuine interest in what you have to say. For example, if you are in commercial real estate in Pittsburgh, PA, you can likely have prospects all over the country—people who may be involved in looking at Pittsburgh and its commercial locations for opening up an office for their company, or relocating altogether. Keep that in mind. Post messages and links to content that are of importance to them.

In this case, you can post content, thoughts and links that tie to your prospects' individual industries, or related to the location and community you represent! Obviously, you may also post content that is related directly to your own expertise and profession.

Also, be mindful of the posts from people you follow. If someone tweets a question describing a problem or need, and you may have the solution; therein lies your opportunity to help someone else out. It's just like people posting questions on a bulletin board. The more questions you answer, the more people you serve and the stronger your reputation will become (and your following will grow).

So how do people find you? Content is king. Post several times per day (two, three, maybe four times...?). Spread out those posts. Don't blast out a dozen tweets within a short time—it can be like being the loudest and most obnoxious person in the room. Focus on a handful of topics. In the morning, post about the latest good news impacting your local community; afternoon, focus on your industry or an aspect of your profession; evening tweets can be more laid back—with content that might be entertaining or contemplative (such as quotes of wisdom, etc.). Plan out your strategy—but keep it simple.

Suppose you want to plan out your posts, but can't always send them out at the time you would like? There are third-party clients you can use. I recently discovered HootSuite, which allows you to post and schedule tweets in advance.

More importantly, tweet consistently; most importantly, deliver value at every opportunity. Be a generous peep!