

Introduction to Twitter

About six weeks ago I decided to take the plunge and join the [Twitter](#) world. Twitter is the [fastest growing](#) social network. I was totally clueless at first and as I've become a Twitter fan I've realized that most people have no idea what Twitter is. Over the next few posts I hope to give you a brief introduction and enough of the basics so you can navigate the Twitter world.



What Is Twitter?

Twitter is a way to share brief thoughts and updates on what you're doing. Each entry must be 140 characters or less. If you're familiar with [Facebook](#) then they're very similar to Status Updates. Here is a screen shot from my Twitter feed and some recent updates I made:



Why should I use it?

If you like social networking like Facebook or [MySpace](#) then you will like Twitter. Twitter is a way to keep up with those people that you have interest in (family, friends, those in your field of study or work, celebrities, etc.). **I would say that Twitter is a great networking tool, not just social networking!** Not only do you get updates on what people are doing, but people use Twitter to share the following:

- Links to websites/blogs/people that interest them
- Brand or market your business, organization, website, services, etc.
- Answers to questions you may have (for example, the other day I asked a programming question to my followers and received several replies in a matter of minutes)
- News on events in your follower's lives and around the world (in the recent plane crash in the Hudson River, some of the very first communication and updates came through Twitter - way before the regular media was on board)
- Good deals (several times have had people link to sales like a book or CD on Amazon)

- Updates on organizations that interest you ([Life Church](#) has started using Twitter to provide real time updates on events and what's going on in our community)

Twitter also has the ability for you to send messages back and forth to a particular individual. These can either be public so others can read them or private so no one else can see them (we'll talk more about these tomorrow.)

How Do I Sign Up?

It's quick and easy. Go to www.twitter.com and select a username and password. Next you will want to click on the "**Settings**" menu along the top of your webpage and edit your personal information. I highly recommend you upload a picture of yourself as well.

Next you will click on the "**Find People**" menu along the top and it gives you several ways to find others on Twitter. For example you could type my twitter username @scotthimes in and start following me. The best way to find most of your friends and family is to select "**Find on other networks**" and enter your email username and password in. Twitter will then search your email account for email addresses of people also on Twitter, show them to you and give you the option to start following them.

Once you start following people you will quickly get people following you called Followers. (you can see a few of the people I am following on the right side of the above screen shot) You can also see who the people you Follow are following and add them to your Twitter network. Very quickly you can be following a large group of people.

Message Types

There are three types of messages you can send in Twitter:

- **Regular Message** - this is just a general, public update that goes out to everyone that is following you. Just type something in the twitter box and press send.
- **Reply Message** - this is a message that replies to someone specific on your Twitter feed. The reply is also public so everyone can see your reply. For example, someone asks a question that you know the answer to so you decide to reply to them. You designate a reply message by starting it with the person's Twitter screen name (ex. @scotthimes is my name) Here's an example of how someone would reply to me:
"@scotthimes I know the answer to your question! It is...."
- **Direct Message** - this is a private message that goes to a specific person. You designate a direct message by putting a 'D' at the beginning of your message, followed by a space and the person's screen name. Here's an example of a direct message:
"D scotthimes I didn't want anyone else to know this but the answer is..."

Twitter Language

There are a bunch of new terms and words that have popped up around Twitter. Here are some and a brief explanation so you're not clueless like I was the first week:

- **Tweets** - these are the individual messages people send out. Ex. "Thanks for all the tweets today you sent to encourage me."

- **Tweeps** - some people use this term to refer to those that follow them Ex. "Hello to all my tweeps out there."
- **Re-Tweet** - Refers to forwarding on or sending out the tweet of someone else while giving them credit. Designated by "RT" Ex. "RT @scotthimes McDonalds has BOGO today for their drinks."
- **@** - anytime you see a word started with the "@" sign you know they are referring to a Twitter username Ex. "Check out the new pics at the website of @scotthimes"
- **#** - A word preceded by the "#" symbol is called a hashtag. A lot of times people will tweet about an event or topic that others have interest in. To make it easy to search for and find all the tweets about that event people will put single or multiple hashtags in their tweet Ex. "Having a great time at the U2 concert #U2 #indianapolis"

Twitter Etiquette

Here are some tips on how to best use Twitter while being courteous to those that you interact with:

- **What to Talk About** - How you use Twitter is completely up to you. From personal experience, people that put frequent updates about every little thing they are doing (giving a play by play of their day) are not as interesting to follow as those that give occasional updates and share thoughts/questions/ideas they're thinking about.
- **Referring to someone** - when you're mentioning someone else that uses Twitter it's good etiquette to use their screen name Ex. "Thanks @scotthimes for the website recommendation." This helps others that may want to follow the person you're talking about.
- **Re-tweeting** - don't just copy someone else's tweet and send it out as your own, that is plagiarism. Give them credit by re-tweeting. Ex "RT @scotthimes Check out this newspaper article on the fire in Indianapolis today."
- **Website Links In Your Tweets** - Since you are limited to 140 characters in a tweet you need to use short URL names. Long ones are also difficult to read and follow. Websites such as [TinyURL](#) will take the URL of a website and shorten it down. Use something like this instead of including the full URL.

Other Resources for Twitter

A few resources that help make Twitter even more useful and easy to use.

Twitter Search - How do you find people that are talking about topics that interest you? Twitter Search is the place to do this and more. The Advanced Search option is really powerful and lets you find people in your area, search by dates, specific people, etc. <http://search.twitter.com/>

Twitter Widgets - Do you want to show your Twitter feed on another web site? Twitter has created some widgets that can be put on MySpace, Facebook, Blogger, Typepad or any other site where you can embed HTML. <http://twitter.com/widgets>

Facebook Updates - this is a MUST do for any Twitter user that also uses Facebook. Download the Twitter app in Facebook to allow Twitter to automatically update your Facebook status. Once you make a post to Twitter it will also update your Facebook status... if you don't do this

you must update both independently which would be a huge hassle! In Facebook search for the Twitter app. It's quick and easy to setup.

iPhone Application - If you have a smart phone then getting an application to Tweet with is a must. I only have an iPhone so I can't speak to other phone platforms. There are several applications available for the iPhone but I wanted one that was FREE and easy to use.

[Twitterrific](#) seems to meet both those requirements and is what I use.

<http://iconfactory.com/software/twitterrific>

Desktop Application - Using the Twitter webpage isn't very user friendly and gets frustrating after awhile as you can't customize it. [TweetDeck](#) is a quick, simple answer to this problem. It's a standalone application that runs on your desktop. It's very easy to use, can work with services other than Twitter (Facebook is being included in their next release), and includes useful tools to help sort tweets, replies and direct messages. The two features I use most are the ability to shorten a url in TweetDeck and the feature to shorten a tweet you're making if it's too long.

<http://www.tweetdeck.com/beta/>