A-LINE'S GUIDE TO TWITTER

Using Twitter to increase your brand's visibility and customer interaction

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A-LINE's Guide to Twitter

Twitter: You probably love it, hate it, or have never used it. It's the social network that has defined constant information, immediate news and the eschewed FOMO (fear of missing out). Posts on Twitter (tweets) have ruined careers, started revolutions, wrecked marketing plans and empowered the powerless. So with so much to potentially gain or lose, why should your business get involved?

In Short: Twitter is essential for almost all businesses today. It's a thriving hub of engagement, information-sharing and brand identity—not to mention profit.

A study by Datalogix found that promoted tweets can boost online sales by up to 29%. In a recent survey, 72% of Twitter users report that are more likely to buy from small or local businesses that they follow on Twitter, and at least 60% have made purchases recently from small- or medium-sized businesses after engaging on Twitter. And engagement on Twitter is impressive as well—90% (yes 90!) of users say that they've engaged with or talked about small- or medium-sized businesses on Twitter.

In general, Twitter can help build and manage relationships, as well as serve customers. Participation on Twitter can drive traffic to your website, help convert leads into buyers, and help convert buyers into loyal fans.

Ready to Get in the Game?
So you're convinced it's time to join the crowd on Twitter? Use the following information in A-LINE's handy Guide to Twitter to get started.

> In 2015, Twitter has more than 270 million active users.
>
> The average Twitter user follows five or more businesses.
>
> Over a third (37%) of Twitter users will buy from a brand they follow.

Learn the Twitter Lingo

Like most social media networks, Twitter has a language all its own. Before you get started, familiarize yourself with the terms used by the network and its followers.

Twitter: A real-time information-sharing network, available as a website or mobile app, where people can gather news instantly and connect with anyone (usually without needing approval). Get started on www.twitter.com.

Tweet: A message posted on Twitter. A Tweet must be fewer than 140 characters (that includes spaces and punctuation).

Handle: Your name on Twitter. This is the part you'll put after @ when telling others how to find you on Twitter. A-LINE's handle is @WinWithALINE.

@Mention: By using @ before a user's handle, your tweet is seen by his/her followers as well, and that user receives a notification.

A little birdie told us that @WinWithALINE is a must-follow Upstate handle.

Hashtag (#): Use this symbol before words or phrases (with no spaces) to organize ideas or themes and group your tweets with others on the same topic. The most popular hashtags of the day will appear as Trending at the top right of users' screens.

Retweet: When you retweet another person's tweet, you are copying his/her tweet and sending it out to your followers. Some programs add "RT" before your tweet to show it is a retweet, or you can choose to write RT in yourself. (Tip: Use "MT" or "modified tweet" to show that you're copying another's tweet but have amended it slightly).

Follower: A person who opts in to follow another person's or company's tweets. Unless you protect your Twitter feed (not recommended), anyone can become your follower. You can also follow any users or companies without needing permission.

Promoted Tweet: Twitter lets companies pay to have their tweets broadcast in networks beyond just their followers. Promoted tweets are always labeled as promoted, but otherwise function the same as regular tweets. Visit Twitter for details. >

Promoted Trends: Trends are hashtag terms listed on the right side of a user's screen to show what's popular (or "trending"). A promoted trend has been purchased by a company to appear at the top of the right screen for an entire day. The goal is to increase exposure and engagement. Learn more straight from the source. >

Getting Started: Setting Up a Twitter Account for Your Brand

1. Choose Your Handle

Put some thought into your company's handle. It's easiest to just use your company's name, though this won't be possible if the name is too long or has already been used. Always try for the shorter, easier-to-remember version of your business name. Avoid numbers in your handle (which can make you look like spam) or overly abbreviated versions of your name. If your handle will serve a specific purpose, like customer service, try to indicate that in the name (e.g. Delta Airlines has the handles @Delta, @DeltaAssist and @DeltaNewsHub that clearly indicate different uses for different accounts).

2. Set Up Your Profile

Your profile, or description of your company, should not just provide information, but should also support your goal. You want users to know who you are, what you do, and how to find more information. Specifically, ensure that every item is filled out as completely as possible:

Logo or Photo: This image will appear next to every tweet you post, so make certain that it encapsulates your brand. Often it can be your company's logo, but be sure it is legible even when tiny. Recommended size for photos is 400x400 pixels.

Bio: You have 160 characters to describe your business while also encouraging people to follow you. Be helpful and pithy, but avoid clichés or quotations.

Twitter avatars are only 48px square. Make sure your image is clear and bold in this window.

City and State: List where your headquarters are located, or the location of the specific account associated with the handle.

URL: Always list your website to encourage customers to engage further.

Header Image: This image will show up like a banner across the top of your Twitter page when visitors find you. Choose a photo or designed logo that fits the space without distorting. Recommended size is 1500x1500 pixels.

Pinned Tweet: Select a tweet that will always appear at the top of your page so that customers can see a recent important news event, a showcased product, a current promotion, or any other item you want to highlight for a good first impression.

Once your profile is complete, check that all your other online pieces, including websites, blogs, Facebook and more, link to and promote your Twitter handle. Twitter feeds can be integrated into your website—often in the footer or in a news section—to allow for real-time updates and immediate customer response.

Getting Started (continued)

3. Find Your Customers

As with all social media, your account is only as valuable as the people you interact with. You can't just push out information without finding and engaging with your customers and fans. Here are some tips to find your customers on Twitter:

Follow clients, employees, vendors, former customers, community members, industry influencers and media involved in your industry.

Follow your competition, both local and national (or even international).

Import your email contact list. In the "Find Friends" prompt on Twitter.com, you can search for contacts from your email provider. If you then click "Manage Contacts," you can upload your entire address book.

Use search.twitter.com (or just the upper right-hand search window on Twitter) to find the keywords and hashtags related to your business. Follow people using these keywords and trends.

Write Great Tweets

Now that you're set up and following people, it's time to start pushing out content and engaging with followers. Even though you're limited by 140 characters, there are some best practices to help your tweets gain interest and stand out.

Be timely. Twitter updates constantly. To truly engage with customers, you need to check your account often and respond quickly when needed. Download Twitter to your mobile device to ensure that you can always check your account.

Add images to tweets. Tweets with photos or images (think infographics, graphs or cartoons) appear more prominently on followers' feeds and on your company's profile page, and they tend to be retweeted more often.

Shorten your links. It's a great practice to include links to find more information, but writing out an entire URL address can take up precious space or end up looking cluttered. Use a service such as bitly or ow.ly to keep links short.

> Tweets with images get twice the engagement than those without. And those with links are 86% more likely to be retweeted.

Retweet often. Once you've found the influencers in your industry, retweet their content regularly.

Be helpful. Provide how-to tips, guides, links to videos and other resources that help clients better understand your products, your company or your industry. Become valuable and watch as you're retweeted and followed.

Brag a little. Customers choose to follow you, so give them what they want. Use Twitter to announce new products, kick-off promotions or brag about new hires and big awards.

Be personal. Users on Twitter understand that behind your handle is a real person. Though you should always use appropriate language and avoid sensitive topics, it's okay to occasionally wander from business speak and say something more personal or fun. Many clients prefer companies that show their personal sides.

Whatever you post, keep it short and sweet. Tweets with fewer than 100 characters get 17% more engagement.

Spread the love. Take time to help shine light on other companies. Showcase a client's work, praise a competitor, highlight a volunteer organization. Just like "be personal," this tip will ensure that your Twitter account is seen not just as a business, but as a part of the community.

Change it up. Try not to write the same type of tweets all the time. Try asking questions and responding to the answers. Mix up original content with retweets. Then note the type of tweets that get the most engagement and be sure to use that type regularly.

With such a long to-do list, it can seem overwhelming to regularly write and circulate fresh content. To start, try tweeting one time each day. As you have time, try tweeting more or less often to see what works best. The right amount of time to tweet for one company may not be right for your business, so don't feel too tied to a certain recommended number.

And as you develop a longer list of followers and people you follow, consider using a Twitter organization application, such as Hootsuite or Tweetdeck, which can schedule tweets in advance and manage your Twitter streams (which is especially useful if you have more than one account). Additionally, programs like Buffer can manage your Facebook posts as well, showing you the impact of your social media messages and helping you plan and schedule tweets and posts several days in advance.

Jump In

Twitter can easily become a rabbit hole that you fall into, losing track of time and direction as you anxiously await a celebrity's tweet about her workout routine. But, used wisely, Twitter can also be your company's most effective tool for customer engagement.

A well-planned Twitter strategy can ensure you're getting the most out of the network with the least chances of being glued to your phone all day. So take the time to set up a good profile, think through a content calendar, send some engaging tweets, and interact with fans and community—and soon you'll be part of one of the world's (or at least the Upstate's) leading social media sites.

Do More with A-LINE.

With this go-to-guidem you've got the first steps of becoming a Twitter favorite.

If you're ready to dig deeper, contact A-LINE and we'll be happy to evaluate your brand and develop a custom social media plan to increase brand awareness, attract fans and track your efforts in growing your online followers.

About A-LINE Interactive

A-LINE Interactive is dedicated to elevating the brands of businesses and organizations across the South Carolina Upstate—the region we call home.

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