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Version: Accepted Version

Book Section:

Potter, Ned (2015) Getting the most out of Twitter. In: Start a Revolution: Stop Acting Like a Library. ALA Editions, Chicago. ISBN: 978-0-8389-1267-6.

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Potter, Ned (2015). **Getting the most out of twitter.**

This is an excerpt from:

Start a Revolution: Stop Acting Like a Library,

by Ben Bizzle with Maria Flora, published by ALA Editions.

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Twitter.com is, at the time of writing, the second most popular social network in the world. It's behind Facebook, of course, but in my view there is a stronger overlap with the kinds of people who use libraries and the kinds of people who tweet, than with any other social media.

Why should you be on there? Twitter users are receptive to interacting with Libraries on the platform. They want to hear from us, and they want us to listen to them. For me, it's the first place to start when building your library's social media portfolio; get Twitter right, and the rest becomes so much easier. You can boost your reputation, you can reach new audiences, you can engage existing customers and you can really show some personality. Twitter is the chance to be open and approachable and informal, without losing credibility or authority.

So how do you get the most out of it? Here are 10 bite-sized tips, divided into two sections. The first is Getting Started - what are the foundations of establishing a great Twitter account? Then we move onto Going Further. A lot of library Twitter accounts start off full of optimism and freshness, but then reach a plateau a half-year or so in, where the followers, the level of engagement, and the return on your time investment stops going up. There are ways to get over this hump, some of which I've detailed below. Once you get past the plateau your momentum will become self-sustaining and your network will grow and grow.

If you're not yet familiar with Twitter, there's a whole set of terms and phrases which are associated with the platform which may catch you out. I've included a brief glossary of the key terms at the end of this case study, so skip to that if you need a primer before reading the advice below.

Getting Started

1. Don't tell people you're there till you've done some groundwork.

Once you've set up your account, don't start following people and tweeting right away, or you may miss out on some important opportunities. Whenever you follow someone on Twitter, they get a notification telling them so – chances are, when they see this, they'll click on your profile and make a 3-second decision on whether to follow you back. This will be based on your profile and your last few tweets. If they don't follow you back it's not the end of the world, but it greatly reduced the chances of meaningful conversation later down the road, so it pays to get the foundations right before you launch. With this in mind: put in a proper picture. Twitter uses the default 'egg' avatar, they'll assume you're a spam account if you keep it. Find a picture (of your logo or your library) that works in the very small size at which it will appear in peoples' timelines. Put in a proper bio. And that doesn't mean something like 'The official Twitter account of Library X!' – anyone reading your bio

should already know from your name who you are. Use the bio to give them a *reason* to follow you. 'Tweeting about culture, technology, books, and upcoming events at the Library.' Once your avatar and bio are sorted, and you've put in a link to your library's website, write a few tweets. It feels silly tweeting before you have an audience, but people need to see some kind of representation of your style. Write four or five tweets. THEN, and only then, start following people and otherwise telling your users and potential users you're there.

2. **Go for an informal tone.**

Libraries often struggle with this at first, but if you can, try and be colloquial, approachable and informal, without being self-consciously whacky or otherwise losing credibility. Don't be afraid to use 'I' rather than 'the Library' even though you're tweeting as the organisation – Twitter is a conversation, so people expect to be conversing with a person behind the account.

3. **Remember Twitter is a conversation, not a broadcast.**

I really can't emphasize this enough – social media is participatory and interactive, so be prepared for a two-way conversation on Twitter. You can tweet announcements, sure, but also tweet questions – and *listen* to the answers; listening is so important. In fact, in an ideal world, a rule of thumb to aim for is one in four tweets are broadcasts, the other three being replies, ReTweets, or links to third-party content which is potentially useful to your followers but not necessarily directly related to your Library.

Going Further

4. **Ask questions.**

As a general rule, the more interactive a library Twitter account is, the more popular it will become. Responding to questions your users ask you on Twitter as soon as possible is really important - but so is starting conversations yourself. Ask your followers for book recommendations, or their favourite apps, or their top tips for using the library – then ReTweet the best answers for everyone to see.

5. **Tweet multimedia**

Entirely text-based tweets are fine, but why stop there? Twitter embeds most multimedia in your Tweet, meaning that it can be viewed / watched on Twitter itself without your followers having to leave the site. Links to YouTube videos, Prezi and Slideshare presentations, plus pictures via Twitpic, will magically make the objects appear in your tweet. If you're tweeting about something happening in your library, take a pic on your phone and tweet that too. It'll get much more traction that way. Pictures of displays, of workshops and classes, new decoration – even print screens of websites you're linking to.

6. **If something is important, tweet it four times**

As you might expect, only a relatively small percentage of your followers are online at any one time – so you need to tweet important information and links across a period of two days and covering different times of day (and schedule a midnight tweet too if you have international followers in different time-zones). If it's a link to a blogpost, rather than just tweeting the title each time, tweet a key piece of information or quote from the post – this stops your timeline being filled with duplicate tweets, and hooks people in over time.

7. **Get ReTweeted and your network will grow**

When someone ReTweets (RTs) your tweet, it appears in their profile, viewable by all their followers. So nothing gets you new followers like tweeting something great and having loads of people ReTweet it – it exposes your tweet and your Twitter presence to several new networks at once, some of whom may well be inspired to check you out and follow you. The best way to get RTs is to be *useful*, to tweet really punchy tips or advice or links. You're also more likely to be ReTweeted if you show some personality. What else can you do to make it more likely?

Firstly, simply asking people to RT. If you say 'Please RT!' you will get 10 times the number of RTs you would otherwise. If you spell it out – 'Please ReTweet!' you will get 23 times as many! But you can only use this very sparingly – when something is REALLY important or REALLY useful. If you abuse people's kindness they'll soon switch off and stop RT'ing. Another thing to keep in mind is, if possible, leave a RT space. By which I mean, if you can express yourself in, say, 100 characters rather than the full 140, that allows someone wanting to manually ReTweet you some space to add their own comment or endorsement.

8. Analyse your tweets

There are a million and one packages that promise you some statistical insight into your Twitter account – the trick is finding the ones whose information you can *act* on. Stick your Library's Twitter handle into <http://www.tweetstats.com/> and check out how many of your tweets are replies and ReTweets (RTs) – if the combined total is below 25% you need to make an active effort to change this; once you do, your network will grow. Tweetstats will also tell you when you tweet, which allows you to know (rather than guess) whether your followers are getting a consistent level of service across the week. If all your tweets happen at 9am (when 'the person who tweets' gets into work and thinks, hmm, better do my tweeting for the day) then you need to change that. Combine information about when you tweet with the information <http://www.tweriod.com/> gives you about when your followers online, and you can start to really use Twitter in a focused, targeted and successful way.

9. Use Twitter for social monitoring.

People will be talking about your library on Twitter, and it's always useful to know what they're saying. Those who know you're on the network may speak directly to you using your @ name, but you can also pick up on conversations which aren't addressed to you. Run a search for your Library's name, plus any shortenings commonly used. You can then save those searches and run them each day to pick up relevant tweets. You can also set up a location search on the word 'library' – to pick up any tweets within, say, 1 mile of your location, to catch people who say things like 'I'm in the Library, can't find the journals!' and reply with help and guidance. Investigate Twitter's Advanced Search functionality for more options.

10. Put your Twitter handle EVERYWHERE

Although using Twitter is in itself marketing, you still need to market the marketing... People need to know you're on the platform at all, so tell them – put your username on slidedecks and leaflets and handouts, put it on people's business cards, embed your tweet-stream on your Library homepage, have a live tweet-stream on your digital display screens for a day. You're putting the effort in to be there, so shout loudly about your activity!

Enjoy your Twitter activity, have fun with it. Don't get too caught up in the numbers – it's not about how many followers you have (although more is better, generally), it's about having some kind of

impact using social media. A Library Twitter account with 5,000 followers who are completely passive is worth much less than one with 1,000 followers whose *behaviour has been changed* by the Twitter account – people who use the Library more often, more effectively, or who praise it to their networks and RT your tweets. Above all Twitter is about engagement.

Good luck!

A brief glossary:

Username: This is what you are called on Twitter, and all usernames are prefixed by @ - it's best to keep yours relatively short.

Profile: Your Twitter profile is what other people see when they click on your username – it consists of your username, your actual name, a profile picture, a background picture a short bio (160 characters) and a link to a website of your choosing; it's important to make the most of all these.

Tweet: The tweet is the public message itself, displayed online. It is also the verb (I'm going to tweet about this; I tweeted about that). A tweet is viewable by anyone who clicks on your profile, although in practice it will only be seen by those who follow you. You will also hear the term 'Tweeter' to refer to people who tweet.

Timeline: Your timeline is what you see when you log into Twitter – by default you'll be on the Home screen, which consists of your own tweets, tweets from people you follow, and ReTweets. The @Connect screen shows you tweets directed specifically at you, the tweets of yours which are ReTweeted or Favourited, plus information about when new people follow you. The #Discover screen is an attempt to expose you to other Twitter activity based on your interests – in practice this will be the screen you use the least, if at all.

Reply / @ / Mentions: Users can Tweet directly at another user to converse and ensure their replies appear in the other users' timeline. As long as a Tweet has someone's @username in, they should see it.

RT (or ReTweet): To ReTweet someone is essentially to quote them – clicking the ReTweet button will cause their Tweet to appear in your timeline, so you'll be sharing it with all your followers. You can also 'manually' ReTweet by typing 'RT', then the original Tweeter's name, then their Tweet. This allows you to add your own comment in at the start, prior to the ReTweeted text.

Follow / Unfollow: This is the basis of the Twitter network. If you Follow someone you see their Tweets (and those they ReTweet, see below) in your timeline; if they follow you, they see your Tweets. It's a good idea to Follow plenty of relevant people so you have a steady

stream of information and content, but it's also okay to 'prune' and unfollow people or organisations over time if they cease to be relevant – following too many people can make Twitter less useful to you.

MT (or Modified Tweet): As above, but you're editing the Tweet so it is no longer a verbatim quote. This is generally done to shorten the Tweet to allow you more room for your own comment – if you edit the Tweet at all from the original source, you should use MT rather than RT.

DM (or Direct Message): A Direct Message is a private message sent between users; it does not appear on the network. It's important to note that only people you follow can DM you (and you can only DM people who follow you). Therefore tweets like 'New internship available at the Library – DM us for details' are bad idea, because not everyone reading the Tweet will actually be able to message you.

Favourite: Any Tweet can be Favoured by clicking the little star below it – this means it is in effect filed for later use, via your Favourites screen. This is useful for keeping track of useful tweets or links, flagging something to respond to later when you have more time, or collating responses to a particular Tweet. It is also useful to see which of your own Tweets are favoured, as the fact that a fellow Twitter user has taken an action based on your output is indicative of some kind of impact.

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