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How to be a Tweet Talker and Build Your Brand Online

By Linda Welter Cohen

Twitter is a social media network and micro-blogging site that has attracted 14 million users who visited its site 99 million times last month to read a stream of “tweets” or messages about what other like-minded users are doing at any given time of the day.

So how are businesses using social media tools like Twitter to build their brands online? They are listening to what customers are saying about their company and its products and services, sharing useful information and adapting their brands to better meet customer needs.

One company successfully using Twitter to develop its brand online is shoe retailer Zappos.com. Boasting more than 460,000 followers, Zappos.com CEO Tony Hsieh “tweets” about everything from product development to his attendance at the 2009 Presidential Inauguration and the breakfast burrito that disagreed with him this morning.

Companies also use social media to communicate and build relationships with their customers, business associates and industry leaders on a more personal level. Twitter is a successful business tool because it offers a means of sharing ideas, events and valuable content in a manner that is friendly and fun. To summarize, Twitter is a great opportunity for companies to be more approachable and reveal their true human side.

Another example of a business using Twitter is computer developer Dell. According to VentureBeat DigitalMedia, Dell made \$1 million in additional revenue in 2008 because of its Twitter account, which keeps followers posted on upcoming product discounts.

Before jumping in and using Twitter, companies should monitor customer “tweets” for awhile and learn how they communicate. Conversations about your company or brand will happen on Twitter, with or without your participation. You can watch these conversations unfold, or you can become actively involved. If your company chooses the later, there are some important things to remember:

- Select a spokesperson who can provide the right voice for your company or brand online without compromising the human connection that social media demands;
- Listen before you “tweet”;
- Keep your communication short, clear and to the point;
- Avoid sarcasm and conversations about religion and politics (unless you work for a religious or politically-based organization);
- Maintain regular involvement, as conversations online happen in real time.

One easy way to way to monitor what is being said online is to use the Twitter search engine: <http://search.twitter.com>. Here you can type in your company name and the name of your brand, hit Enter, then read what people are saying.

If using Twitter still seems daunting, companies can sit on the sidelines and postpone the inevitable while their competitors jump into the game. Or they can realize the power of social media, quickly enter the conversation, and give a human voice to their brand.

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