



THE *VERY NECESSARY* TWITTER GUIDE FOR CANADIAN MARKETERS

By Kristin Laird

If Twitter were a real-life party, the average Canadian marketer would be the one standing alone in the corner. He's often the first one to arrive to stake out his position in the crowd. But he's not quite sure what to do while he's there. Should he wait for someone to talk to him? Or should he strike up a conversation with other partygoers? Should he carefully listen to what people are saying and interject when the timing's right?

Some of the other guests wonder why he bothers showing up if he isn't there to socialize. But it always seems like a good idea at the time, because he'd rather be there doing nothing, than on the outside looking in.

When it comes to the adoption of a new platform or technology, Canadian marketers are often there—like with Twitter. But five years after the site first hit the scene, marketers are still standing in the corner. Some companies don't know what to do with it, how often to use it, how to respond to mentions,

how often to respond to mentions, or who should even *run* the corporate Twitter account.

When it comes down to it, Canadian businesses are not utilizing social media resources to engage their customers to the extent that they could, or should. A new survey by SAS Canada and Leger Marketing conducted in January 2011 found that less than one-fifth (17%) of Canadian companies regularly monitor and post to social media sites.

"You have to have a strategy in place and you have to understand [how to navigate this space]," says Donna Marie Antoniadis, co-founder and CEO of ShesConnected Multimedia Corp, a Toronto-based agency that provides online community management services for brands and agencies looking to target the female consumer.

Canadian companies are still trying to get comfortable with Twitter and understand that it can do everything from build a brand to provide customer service—all in 140 characters or less. Within the framework of brand guidelines, Twitter offers a great opportunity to have both a "consistent and fluid brand experience, tailored to the consumers' questions, thoughts or opinions," says Maggie Fox, founder of Social Media Group.

So why aren't Canadian companies better at Twitter? What has them running scared?

Mitch Joel, president of Twist Image, says brands are still learning

how to deal with consumers one-on-one in a very public way. Twitter is a volatile barometer of public sentiment and many companies don't necessarily want to discuss every issue in that environment. In the past, dissatisfied customers would call a customer service line and deal with the company directly, and privately.

If a company was dealing with a crisis management issue, the media relations team or legal department were put on damage control. The issue was addressed by way of a press release or an official statement. Either way, the company had more control over what print or broadcast media outlets were saying.

"Companies have never interacted with consumers this way and so what you're seeing is companies reacting almost as if their people are media entities," he says.

Joel suggests looking at it from the perspective of a consumer packaged goods company that until recently dealt only with retailers. Interacting with consumers forces a company to act and behave differently.

"Suddenly in this channel a lot of brands that have never had this interaction have to deal with their consumers... It creates a new culture and DNA within an organization."

Because of the immediacy of Twitter, it does tend to see a lot of knee-jerk reactions and content from consumers, says Ed Lee, social media director at Tribal DDB. "Organizations have to make a decision how they want to deal with these reactions or if they want to lead the conversation around their brand."

It's important to have a Twitter plan in place. Know your objectives and strategy and, more importantly, how they fit in with the business objectives and culture, says Lee. If it's appropriate, "give your employees permission to engage on Twitter without constraining them too heavily," he says.

Twitter offers the opportunity to be both proactive and reactive—"sharing the human side of who you are and what you do with outbound messaging and news, as well as responding to inquiries in a way that consistently embodies your brand," says Fox.

But give your brand a voice. "If it's appropriate, give your employees permission to engage on Twitter without constraining them too heavily," says Lee. "They are your people, they epitomize your brand and can be your greatest salespeople."

And one more tip: keep reading.



WHAT DOES THIS MAN KNOW THAT YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA DEPARTMENT DOESN'T?

He has close to 1.2 million followers on Twitter. That's more than Canadian subsidiaries of McDonald's, Dove, Pepsi and Kraft combined. How Jason Sweeney became the cool kid on the Twitter block and turned 140 characters into a career in advertising

FOUR YEARS AGO JASON SWEENEY JOINED TWITTER BECAUSE HIS FATHER, a Flash developer, said it would be the next big thing. So he did.

But Sweeney wasn't sure what to do with the micro-blogging tool, which at the time was still in its infancy.

"When I first joined it I thought 'Am I going to use this to talk about what I ate for lunch? Nobody wants to know what I had for lunch,'" says Sweeney, who barely used Twitter for the better part of a year.

He revisited it after hearing about a community of people using it to share jokes.

"I discovered I don't just have to talk about what I had for lunch. I can use this to try and make people laugh and also read other people and have them make me laugh," says Sweeney, who has a university degree in theatre.

The community took off and showed up on numerous sites that aggregated lists of funny feeds to follow.

Then in 2009, after discovering that a certain percentage of new users were signing up and then not following anyone, Twitter introduced its "Suggested Users" program to generate a list of potentially interesting individuals.

From there, the Twitter team weighed each recommendation against a specific set of criteria. For example, is the account a good introduction to tweeting for a new user? Does the person or organization running the account have a fairly wide or mainstream appeal? Sweeney made the list thanks to his tweets that put a humorous spin on the mundane.

"From that point on [my number of followers] shot up incredibly," says Sweeney, who has also appeared on *Maxim* magazine's list of "100 Accounts Every Guy Should Follow."

Last year, Sweeney's wife Mary-Beth Hefferton encouraged him to submit a collection of tweets to CBC's Canada Writes competition.

Sweeney, who at the time was working as an IT coordinator and web developer in



1. A REAL VOICE

The best thing a brand can do on Twitter is create a distinct voice. People want to connect with real people, not a mouthpiece. Always imagine what you are writing is actually being spoken by a person to another person. If it doesn't seem like something a real person would say, why would a real person listen to it?

THREE TIPS FROM A TWITTER WIZARD. OR RATHER, 'TWIZZARD'

2. LISTEN

If you have a Twitter presence for your brand, it's not enough to tell people what you want them to hear. You have to listen to what people are saying about you and—more importantly—to you. Respond quickly and helpfully. Whether you want it to be or not, your Twitter account is now your customer support. Your best PR is listening to what people have to say and doing something about it. And nothing turns a customer—or potential customer—into an ex-customer faster than being brushed off or—even worse—ignored.

3. PUT IT ALL IN THE TWEET

People go to Twitter to read their Twitter stream. Seems obvious, but what does this mean? They don't want to click links. Links take them away from their Twitter stream. You might really want them to click a link, but it's easier for them to just keep scrolling. So, if you can put your entire message into your tweet, do it. But, if you really want them to click on a link—to go to your site or read an offer or watch a video—you'd better give them a really good reason to do it. Explain to them why this is something they want. Make them laugh. Make them curious. Make them want to know more.

Halifax, was selected as a semi-finalist and flown to Toronto to compete in the next leg of the competition.

Sweeney and the other contestants were expected to complete various writing tasks for a panel of judges, one of whom was Arlene Dickinson, resident business guru on CBC's *Dragons' Den* and CEO of Calgary-based Venture Communications.

Dickinson was asked for her opinion on a commercial script Sweeney wrote for a fictional smoked meat company that was trying to redeem itself after it had been caught serving human meat.

"[Sweeney] was quick and witty and I loved the way he attacked the challenge and came up with something that was compelling. He was just really good," says Dickinson. "Throughout the entire contest he continued to show not just a quick wit—because that's only part of it as a copywriter—but the ability to tell a compelling story in an engaging manner."

After the show, Dickinson sought out Sweeney and handed him her card and later got him in touch with Venture Communications' chief creative officer, Paul Hains. Because Sweeney was based in Nova Scotia at the time, the conversations didn't go far. But when Hains reconnected with Sweeney months later, he was working as a web developer for a Toronto-based company.

The two met some more and in March Sweeney joined Venture Communications as a writer. In addition to writing headlines and copy, he's helping develop social media strategies for the agency and its clients. He isn't however, tweeting on behalf of Venture, says Dickinson.

"In the end Twitter and my wife got me a job as a paid writer," says Sweeney, which isn't a career path he had necessarily considered.

"It's neat how these things happen and in the end what I realized about acting and drawing and all those things is it's bringing things to life and now I get to do that with words."

Sweeney continues to tweet but not as frequently as he once did. He won't "tweet for tweeting's sake." Of this Twitter philosophy he says, "I try to make certain the things I say are in my voice and sound like they've come from me... It can be hard when you're reading so many people's jokes and tweets to have an urge to do something in their rhythm or pattern but you have to find your own and express how you speak."

Twitter Do's and Don'ts



BE CONSISTENT

It's easy for a brand to get lost in the Twitter noise. Try to post a few times a day and respond to comments directed at the brand, says Amber MacArthur, co-founder of MGI-media.ca and author of *Power Friending*. "Keep engaging to keep your community looking for more."

PLAN AHEAD

Keep a content calendar with interesting tidbits of information that pertain specifically to the company or industry as a whole, says Luis Vieira, president at Lola, a social media monitoring firm. This type of content is far more interesting to followers than sifting through tweets that deal with customer service issues, he says.

CREATE TWITTER-SPECIFIC CONTENT

A common mistake marketers make is repeating the same content across multiple channels. If a brand posts the same information on Facebook that it does on Twitter, the incentive to follow that brand across several platforms is lost, says Sidenyve Matrix, assistant professor in the Department of Media and Film at Queen's University.

UNDERSTAND THE VALUE EXCHANGE

To build a strong Twitter base, it's important to follow individuals who talk about things related to what the company offers, and engage with them credibly, says Maggie Fox, founder of Social Media Group. Twitter offers the opportunity to share the "human side of who you are and what you do with outbound messaging and news, as well as responding to inquiries in a way that consistently embodies the brand," she says.



Hire a Professional Tweeter, Already!



ASSUME CONSUMERS CARE

It's the classic "build it and they will come" mentality, says Fox. Marketers need to do their homework first to make sure they understand what consumers want and what it will take to earn their attention. "With a million places to spend my attention you'd better have something pretty compelling if you're going to pull me away from watching cat videos on YouTube," she says.

PUKE YOUR MARKETING INTO TWITTER

Think about what the Twitter platform can do to enhance the brand narrative rather than using it to only spew sales and promotions, says Mitch Joel, president of Twist Image. "Embrace the fact that it's a real interaction with real human beings," he says.

PUT THE INTERN IN CHARGE

Just because a twenty-something knows how to use Twitter doesn't mean they know how to communicate with followers in a voice that stays true to the brand or with relevant content. "We've seen entry-level people who are given Twitter because they probably have earrings and tattoos and look cool," says Joel. "Because they aren't really indoctrinated in the brand, a couple of slips of the tongue create more problems than opportunity."

BE SELFISH

Companies need to understand that Twitter followers are interested in content and news that extends beyond their brand, says Ed Lee, director, social media at Tribal DDB. Have a good enough understanding of the audience and where their interests lie in order to know what this content is.

An argument by Jason Sweeney

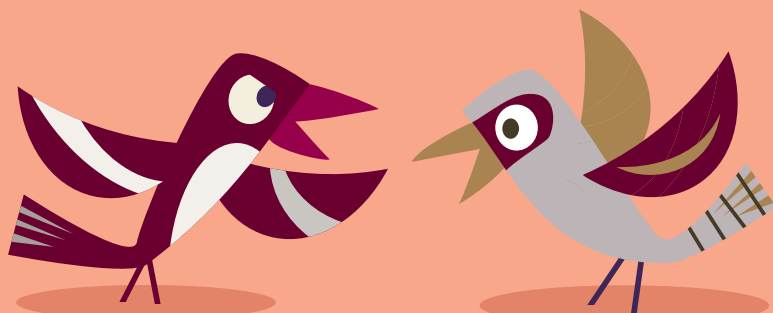
Picture a magazine ad. Big image, flashy design, small amount of text. But the text *is* very important. That's your message. It has to convey the most important information, the biggest emotional wallop, all in a very small package.

Where did you get that ad? You hired an agency to do it. Because they know how to design ads that stand out from the crowd. And that agency has writers. They're the ones who hone everything you want to say into a single arresting message.

Each of your tweets is—effectively—an ad. Or a press release. It's how the world sees your brand. Without the photography. Without the design. Just words on a screen. So those words have got to be *just right*.

Now... who do you want to write those?

WHO OWNS TWITTER?



Battle lines are drawn as internal departments and outside social media and PR agencies vie for sole ownership of a company's Twitter feed.

"I've seen clashes internally within organizations. They duke it out to see who owns social media," says Luis Vieira, president of Lola, a new social media monitoring firm in Toronto. "Customer service is rallying around it, corporate affairs might be trying to own it and marketing's pushing to have the right to own it."

Unfortunately, deciding where the responsibility of social media should lie isn't always cut and dry. But clarity about the Twitter objective can make the decision easier.

"If you're using Twitter because you're doing some brand narrative extensions beyond what you're doing in traditional mass, it's clear it should reside more in marketing," says Mitch Joel, president of Twist Image. "If you're using Twitter as a place to push the conversation forward in terms of news releases and media engagement then it's clear it should be more on the public relations side."

Amber MacArthur, co-founder of MGI-media.ca says her agency works with clients to educate them on how to use Twitter well, and then hands over the reins. For instance, MacArthur's agency worked with Canadian outerwear manufacturer Canada Goose to develop a social media plan and ensure the company's Twitter participation was headed in the right direction. Today @CanadaGooseInc is tweeting a few times a day, answering questions about where to get product, linking followers to new blog posts, and occasionally chiming in

on non-winter coat issues like #TUFF or retweeting comments about even greater issues like the 9/11 anniversary.

"For many companies, it makes sense for their marketing to manage their own social media efforts since they intimately know what makes their customers tick," says MacArthur.

In February Toronto-based PR agency NKPR expanded its services to include a social media department called NKProductions. Seven months later, agency president and founder Natasha Koifman says it's the best decision she's ever made and that social and digital media will likely represent 65% of her business in 2012.

"Social media is just an extension of what we do for our clients from a media relations perspective because we own communications," says Koifman, who strongly believes that social media responsibilities should lie within PR.

"We're the ones who are tweeting from the events, we're the ones who are hands on and preparing the editorial calendars from a social media standpoint," she says.

Maggie Fox, founder of Social Media Group, says those who know the brand best should be the ones to embody it on the social web.

"They're credible, knowledgeable and if the proper internal framework is in place, they should be able to act and react in real time, which is what consumers expect," says Fox. "Outsourcing your community management to an agency is an excellent option, but you do need to be careful that you don't 'outsource your brains.' Have a plan for building those resources internally."

WHERE THE PARTY @

Twitter is not only a way of staying connected with friends and family but also a way to be part of a bigger conversation. Here are three ways Twitter users are connecting online...

Twestival (or Twitter Festival)

is a one-day offline fundraising event in support of global or local causes. All events are organized by volunteers and since 2009 have helped raise more than \$1.75 million for 275 non-profits. More than 200 international cities including Toronto, Buenos Aires, Seattle and Hong Kong have participated in Twestival.

Tweet-Ups

take the party offline and allow users to meet face-to-face to help build a sense of community, share ideas and cement relationships. A Tweet-Up can revolve around a geographic location, a charity, or even a hobby.

Twitter Parties

offer companies the chance to ignite conversations around their brands and connect one-on-one with followers or a desired target audience. These parties typically last for one or two hours during the evening and have been known to generate thousands of tweets.

