

Twitter 101



A step-by-step guide to getting started on Twitter

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BEST PRACTICES GUIDE | SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING



So you're ready to take the jump into the wild world of Twitter. Daunting as it may seem, there's nothing to be afraid of! Once you get yourself familiar with the territory, you'll be on your way to making a big splash on Twitter.

As you're getting started, you're most likely interested in getting a basic understanding of Twitter so you can effectively use it to help you achieve your business and marketing goals.

In order for that to happen, it really all boils down to these three things:

1. Building a targeted audience
2. Creating an engaging channel
3. Developing a thriving network over time to leverage when needed

But first, you have to understand how the platform works.

That's why we created this guide!

In this guide, we will help you get comfortable with some important Twitter basics. We'll also introduce you to some best practices that you'll need to grow your business on this exciting social platform.

Here's what we'll cover:

- Understanding Twitter
- Learning the Lingo
- Setting Up Your Twitter Profile
- Letting People Know You're On Twitter
- Getting Organized
- What to Tweet: Coming Up with Great Twitter Content
- 25 Things that Make You Look Dumb on Twitter
- Additional Resources

You can read this guide from front to back or find a section that best suits your needs. However you choose to use this guide, we hope we can remove the intimidation factor involved with getting started.

Understanding Twitter

Twitter is the 140-character messaging service that was originally developed for cell phones. That's the main reason there is a 140-character limit. Today, Twitter has morphed into more of an online service that puts you in a virtual room with a large potential audience. But, what you're probably wondering is how does this thing work?

Imagine a giant cocktail party

Picture yourself walking around the party listening in on everyone's conversations. At first it might seem pretty noisy until you zeroed in on a conversation you found interesting. Then, you'd introduce yourself and join in. Once that conversation fizzles, you'd move on to the next.

That's what it's like on Twitter. There are people chatting away, sharing ideas, opinions, and links to websites and blogs. You seek out the people talking about topics you're interested in. Then you follow those people.

"Following" is Twitter's fancy word for what you do when you want to see a person's updates regularly. When people are interested in your updates, they become your followers.

With each new connection you make, you extend the potential of your network. These Twitter connections can lead to deeper conversations on other mediums, such as connecting through email, blogs, phone calls or face-to-face meetings. As with any relationship, there's always the possibility of adding a new customer, client, audience member or some other unforeseen benefit.

What will Twitter do for you exactly?

This depends on your specific goals. But in general terms, it gives you ACCESS, both on a personal and professional level. Twitter allows you to connect with people quickly and easily, people that you would never have been able to reach before. Most importantly Twitter allows you to LISTEN. You'll find out exactly how to cater to the needs of your audience.

Aren't people just wasting time on Twitter?

No, it's not just people blabbering about what they had for dinner and their cats. Or what their cats had for dinner. It's people sharing links, news, photos, ideas, and directly and indirectly selling their stuff. Yes, those blabbering dinner and crazy cat people are there too, but you don't need to worry about them.

Focus only on the people you want to know more about, that bring value to your network, and the people you want to connect with down the line. These are the people whose messages, or updates—or tweets as there known on Twitter—you are interested in. This also includes people who would be a potential audience for your stuff, whatever that may be.





“This sounds like a giant time suck!”

The amount of time you spend on Twitter is entirely up to you. Realistically, after some preparation, you can spend as little as 15 minutes a day on Twitter and start to see the benefit. But as with any endeavor, the more time you put in, the more benefits you reap.

“Is there a wrong way to use Twitter?”

Some people think it’s a place to talk about what you’ve had for lunch. Others think it’s a touchy-feely “we’re going to change the world” type of atmosphere. And yes, there are those who even want to show you how to make millions of dollars from single tweet. Who’s right?

They all are. That’s the beauty of Twitter.

Just like in the offline world, you seek out like-minded people. If you don’t like what someone else is doing, that’s okay. One click is all it takes to keep someone from bothering you.

If there’s no wrong way to use Twitter, is there a right way?

Remember, the platform is still relatively new. Everyone is figuring it out as they go along and everyone is learning from each other. Failing, succeeding, and having a good time. But just like anything that’s new, it’s nice to get a little perspective. So the key thing to remember is that you’re looking to develop relationships with people. With that approach, you’ll be headed down the right path.

Before we get started, let’s make sure you’re familiar with some key terms and language being used on Twitter.

Learning the Lingo

Twitter has a language of its own. If you think you're fluent already, skip ahead to the next section. If not, here are the terms you need to know!

DM/Direct Message: A private note between two users on Twitter. The person receiving the message must follow the person sending it and the message is bound by the 140-character limit.

Follow: The act of connecting with someone on Twitter. People who have elected to follow you will see your tweets in their timeline. You are not obligated to follow people back and you have the ability to block followers (usually used only for spammers) from seeing your posts.

Following: Electing to see someone's tweets in your own timeline. Follow people and companies that you're interested in hearing from.

Handle: Your Twitter username is referred to as your handle, and is identified with the @ symbol. For example, Constant Contact's handle is @constantcontact. The @ is used to refer to a specific person or company and link to that account on Twitter within a tweet.

Hashtag: Words preceded by a # sign (i.e., #ctctsocial) can be used to tie various tweets together and relate them to a topic, be it a conference, TV show, sporting event, or any happening or trend of your choosing. Twitter automatically links all hashtags so users can search for other tweets using the same tag.

Lists: A way to combine select people you follow on Twitter into a smaller feed. A list can be made up of friends, competitors, people in the same state: anything you want. Lists let you view a slice of your followers at a time and are a great way to focus on specific folks when you're following a large number of people. They can also be marked as public or private.

RT/Retweet: This is the Twitter equivalent of forward-to-a-friend. When someone posts something you find interesting, you can retweet it, share it, with all the people who follow you.

Search: Since the majority of tweets are public, you can use Twitter's search feature to look for tweets containing a keyword or phrase. The search results will update in real time with any new tweets that contain the word or phrase you searched for.

Timeline: The chronological listing of all tweets in a given feed.

Trending Topics: Along the left side of the main web interface, Twitter lists 10 topics that are "hot" on Twitter based on certain algorithms. You can see trending topics for all of Twitter or for certain geographic areas.

Tweet: What posts are called on Twitter.

Tweetup: A term for in-person events (i.e., meetups) that spring from Twitter connections. Tweetups are typically informal gatherings that let Twitter followers meet in real life. Coordinators often use a hashtag to unite tweets related to the event.

Unfollow: By unfollowing someone, you no longer receive their updates in your own timeline.

Now you know how to talk the talk on Twitter. Let's make sure you know everything you need to know about setting up your Twitter Profile.

Setting Up Your Twitter Profile

The anxiety of not knowing how to get set up on Twitter plays a big part in why many businesses decide to put off getting started.

What's most important when setting up your Twitter profile is that you want to make it easy for people to recognize your business and connect with you right away. You can do that with your Twitter handle, your profile picture, and the information you decide to offer.

Here are a few things to keep in mind when getting set up.

1. Choose the right Twitter handle

The first step in getting started on Twitter is creating your account. When creating your account, it's important to remember that your username—or as it's called on Twitter: your “handle,” is outward facing and will be what the public uses to identify your business.

Hopefully, your business name will be available (Constant Contact's handle for example is @ConstantContact,) but if not, you'll want to come up with something that will still make sense to your followers (for example: “In a Pickle Restaurant” in Waltham had to use @InAPickleRest).

You want your handle to be around 10 – 15 characters so your customers can “mention” your business without using too many of the 140 characters they have to use.

2. Create a bio that captures your business

Twitter is widely recognized as one of the most open social networks, because most of the communication on the site takes place in front of people in the timeline (rather than on individual pages or groups). Keep in mind when creating your bio, more people will find you on Twitter that have no previous knowledge of who you are or what you do.

If you had just a few seconds (or in this case 160 characters) to explain your business to a complete stranger, what would you say? That will be your bio.

3. Upload a photo or image that makes you stand out

Don't underestimate the importance of picking the right picture or image for your profile (and please, please, please don't send a tweet until you have one uploaded.) For businesses, the perfect profile image will be one that your customers already know and associate with your business. For many, this will be your company logo. For individuals, you'll want to use a close-up head shot and make sure you are the only person in the photo. (You do have the option to change your profile picture in the future, but we don't recommend it, at least until you've established yourself.)



4. Introduce yourself by sending your first tweet

Now is the perfect time to send your first tweet! It's not going to be anything earth shattering, and you won't have any followers (yet) to see it, but it will let people know you are a real person or business and not a robot or spammer. Make the tweet something simple; your introduction to the Twitter world.



5. Find the right people to follow

Who you follow on Twitter will dictate the type of content you have access to and the quality of the relationships you're able to establish. For this reason, you'll want to set up some criteria based on your experience, your industry, and what you're trying to accomplish. People you may want to follow could include: friends, professionals in your industry, other local businesses, colleagues, and even current or potential customers.

When you're starting out, the key is to follow businesses similar to yours that are doing it well. Don't mimic everything they tweet, but pay attention to how they are engaging and the type of content they share.

Keep your eye on Twitter's "Who to Follow" feature (in the left column) for recommendations of people and businesses that fit your interests.

Once you have your profile set up, you'll be ready to get started. Remember, success on Twitter starts with building a targeted audience for your business or organization.

In the next section, we'll walk you through what that means when you're starting out.

Letting People Know You're on Twitter

There's a good chance that Twitter isn't your first experience with online marketing. Depending on where you're at in the online marketing process, you likely already have a network of online connections either through social media or via a list of email contacts.

When jumping head first into Twitter, you'll want to start with your current network of supporters both online and off, to help build your following.

Let's take a look at how you can leverage your network, to jumpstart your Twitter audience.

1. Announce your new social endeavor on other social networks

If Twitter is a cocktail party, doesn't it make sense that you invite the people you already know and have a relationship with?

Start by reaching out to the people who have already connected with you on other social networks. If they're on Twitter too, there's a good chance they'll want to follow you there as well.

2. Send a targeted email to your list of email contacts

Whenever you're getting started on a new social network, take the time to tell your email contacts about your new social endeavor. There's a reason sites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Pinterest ask for your email address when you sign up and send emails to your inbox. Email is the most effective way to drive action behind the stuff you do on social media. Dedicate at least one email to letting people know you're on Twitter.

3. Link your regularly scheduled newsletter to Twitter

After you've notified your audience that you're on Twitter, you can keep driving traffic to your profile by including a button or badge in your emails that links to it. With Constant Contact, you can quickly add social media buttons to any email to give readers the chance to easily connect with you.



4. Make sure your website links to Twitter

Just like you want to link your regularly scheduled emails to your Twitter profile, you'll also want to make it easy for people who visit your website to find your activity on Twitter as well.

Twitter makes it easy to embed your Twitter feed right onto your website or you can simply add links to Twitter on your website homepage. If you have a blog for your business, you'll also want to connect that to your Twitter profile as well.

5. Ask customers, clients, and members to find you on Twitter

Don't limit yourself to just your online interactions. Make sure you're providing a clear call-to-action for every customer, client, member, or volunteer who interacts with your business or organization. If you have a brick and mortar store, you can put up signs at your register encouraging employees to ask customers to find you on Twitter. You can even use a QR code to give customers the chance to connect with you on Twitter with a quick scan of their mobile device.

Which ever way you decide to promote your activity on Twitter to your current network of fans, readers, and customers—just make sure you're covering your touch points and providing a clear call-to-action to encourage them to take the next step.

Get Organized

As you build your following and begin to invest more time into Twitter, you may find it's not always easy to keep things in order.

With so much happening on Twitter, even the most experienced users can start to feel overwhelmed.

The good news is that Twitter comes with plenty of tools that can help you stay organized and get more from the social platform.

Here are a few things you may want to consider:

1. Use Twitter Lists to your advantage

Twitter Lists are a cool feature that lets users organize the people they follow into specific groups based on their industry, relationship, expertise, etc.

Consider this simple approach to organizing your first three lists:

Peers – This list would contain people within your industry that are at about the same level as you. These could be people you already have strategic partnerships with or people you'd like to partner with. These relationships can prove extremely valuable as you move up the ranks with your business.

Pros – This list is for experts or thought leaders in your industry, or the people with businesses at a level you'd like to reach. Use this list to monitor how they're using social media and what they're talking about. What can you apply to your business?

Patrons – This list contains people who are already customers or clients, or are people you've deemed likely to buy, donate, or volunteer. Watch this list to identify their interests and keep an eye out for any questions being asked that you could answer. Monitor for customer feedback (positive or negative) that you can respond to and expand on your answers with your own content to drive potential customers to your website.

Once you have these lists in place, you can start identifying the people you should add to them. To start this is as simple as adding the people you've identified as fitting into one of these categories. As you monitor Twitter and follow the discussions, you'll organically find new people to add to these lists.

2. Save some searches

Similar to Lists, Saved Searches let users organize their content, but do it based on a specific topic rather than on specific

users. Saved searches work exactly like they sound. You find a topic of interest or relevance to your business, search for it in Twitter's "Discover" tab, and then save it for future reference. After saving it, you can easily go back and see results as they appear in real time.

Some ideas for searches to save include:

- Your business name
- Your personal name
- Your city/town
- Relevant industry topics
- Popular hashtags

Searches can help you keep track of what people are saying about your business and also give you a chance to access relevant content your followers will love.

3. Schedule tweets with HootSuite

If you're worried about Twitter getting in the way of your busy schedule, a free platform like Hootsuite can be a big help.

In addition to helping you manage and monitor your social media activity, Hootsuite gives you the ability to schedule tweets ahead of time.

Scheduled tweets are great for sending reminders about upcoming events, limited time offers, or anything else you might have going on at your business. For nonprofits, scheduling tweets during a fundraiser can help generate donations without getting in the way with your busy schedule.

4. Get updates sent straight to your inbox

When you set up your Twitter account, you'll be able to opt-in to receive email updates about all your Twitter activity. (Or you can update your preferences in your account settings.)

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This is a great tool for keeping tabs on mentions, retweets, and new followers.

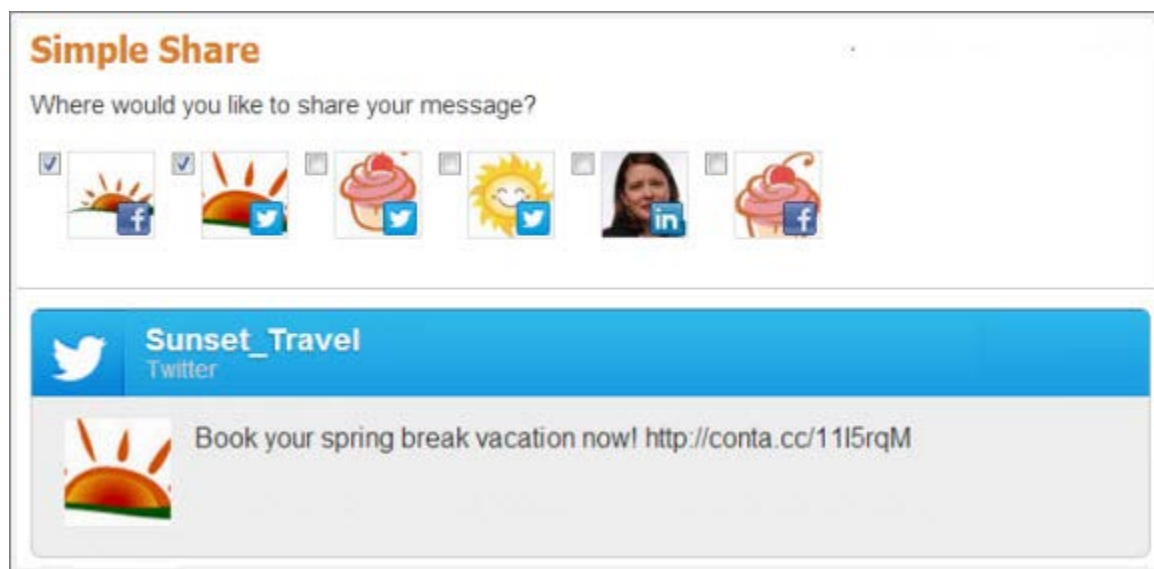
You may also want to check out a free tool like Nutshell Mail. With Nutshell Mail you can get a digest of all your social media activity on sites like Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn sent directly to your inbox.

Both of these tools are great for keeping up with your Twitter activity without having to check into your account continuously throughout the day.

5. Share your emails automatically with Simple Share

Your email newsletter is a great source of Twitter content. People follow you on Twitter because they trust you'll offer them something of value. They subscribe to your emails for the same reason.

That's why we created Simple Share, a free tool that lets you share your emails automatically right when they go out. With Simple Share, all you'll need to do is choose your Twitter profile, come up with a tweet to accompany a link to your email, and hit schedule. ([Learn more about Simple Share!](#))



In addition to your email newsletter, there are plenty of great sources of content all around you. In the next section, we'll take a closer look at the places you can turn to when you're struggling to come up with something to tweet.

What to Tweet: Coming Up with Great Twitter Content

At this point, you're more than ready to join the conversation on Twitter.

But what are you going to tweet about?

With over 400 million tweets being sent each day, you may feel like you're the only one having trouble coming up with great Twitter content—you're not.

The type of content you share on Twitter will have a lot to do with the type of audience you're able to attract and thus, the results you're able to achieve.

That's why it's so important to start by thinking about who those people are. What type of content would your ideal customer, client, members, or supporter be most interested in seeing?

Some of that content may come directly from you — like a blog post, email newsletter, or a link to your website. But there are plenty of other sources of great content all around you just waiting to be shared.

Here are 4 places to find inspiration for content when you don't know where to look:

1. Look to others in your industry

One of the best ways to find inspiration is to look at what other people in your industry are talking about. Can you offer a different viewpoint or piece of advice on a topic?

There are two main ways that Twitter can be used to quickly and easily share other users' content:

1. Share someone else's post with a retweet
2. Share a link to someone else's content and mention them directly

You may also want to interview other experts in your industry. Let's say you're a social media consultant and you're attending a conference. Ask the speakers for a quote for your blog or website after the presentation. Most likely they'll love to be featured and you'll look good by association.

Try it. Soon others may start asking YOU to be featured in their content!

2. Interview one of your customers

Ask one of your own customers if they want to be featured in one of your posts. This could be a loyal customer or even a new customer. Write about their business challenges and how they've overcome them. Customer stories are an engaging way to create more visibility for both your business and theirs. Ask them to share the story with their own network as well.

3. Ask your employees for topic ideas

Create a simple system to gather topic ideas from those who know your business best ... your own employees. If you have a store, place a fishbowl somewhere with some blank forms and have your employees submit ideas. If you are online



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business, create a private link somewhere online or through an email for employees to submit ideas. You could even make this fun and create a contest for others to vote on a few of the ideas. Engage your employees while creating great content ideas.

4. RSS Feeds

There's a good chance you already have some favorite blogs, news sites, or other sources of content you like to follow online.

You can use a tool like an RSS feed to easily keep tabs on your favorite news sources.

Once you've figured out what you want to say, make sure you're sharing it in a way that's going to help get you noticed and not overwhelm your audience.

To do that, you'll want to make sure you're paying attention to how people are engaging with your content. Your audience will tell you what's working, what's not, and where you may need to make improvements. All you need to do is listen!

Here are a few content essentials you'll want to keep in mind.

- Talk *with* your audience, not *at* your audience
- Keep your content related to your field and your audience
- Use the general rule for content: 80% information, 20% promotion
- It's not about sending a message, it's about getting responses
- Be yourself!

As valuable as it is to know how to do things right, if you're just getting started, you probably want some insight into things that could be labeled as "wrong." So, last but not least, we'll be taking a look at 25 things that you'll want to avoid when getting started on Twitter.

25 Things that Make You Look Dumb on Twitter

It's normal to feel at least a little anxious when getting started on Twitter.

Don't worry. A majority of Twitter users are learning something new about the platform every single day.

Rather than having to go through the heartache of learning from your mistakes, we decided we'd give you a helping hand.

Here are 25 common Twitter mistakes you'll want to avoid when getting started on Twitter:

1. Not leaving enough space to retweet

The first lesson every Twitter newbie should learn: just because you have 140 characters, doesn't mean you need to use them all. It's usually a good idea to keep posts to about 120 characters to allow people who retweet with the RT format the ability to do so without having to edit your tweet for length.

2. Not shortening links in your tweets

This is one of the most common mistakes and it doesn't need to be. Check out link shorteners like bit.ly or ow.ly. You'll also be able to track the number of clicks the links you share get with these tools.

3. Looooong Twitter handles

Are you noticing a pattern? If your handle is longer than the first half of your tweet, you're losing valuable space. Keep handles as short as possible so you have enough room to actually write something.

4. Too much self promotion

A little self promotion is good for any business but, if your timeline is riddled with "I's or We's" and your only retweets are about you, then you're doing too much. Follow the 80/20 rule. Post 80% helpful or entertaining content and save 20% for the self-promotional stuff.

5. #HashtagAbuse

Hashtags are without a doubt the most interesting part of Twitter. But, in addition to sometimes being hilarious, they are extremely helpful for organization purposes. Don't abuse the hashtag, save it for when you need it.

6. Too much negativity

No one wants to follow a depressing tweeter. Keep your tweets positive and your followers will act accordingly.

7. Not responding to Tweets

If you're not being social, why are you on social media? You might not be able to respond to everything, but do your best to answer questions and address any negative feedback. And don't forget to say thanks when it's positive.

8. Automatic direct messages

Too many people send automatic direct messages to new followers. Don't do this. You don't want the first impression that you make with your customers to be from a robot.

9. QR code avatar

Nowadays you see QR codes in some crazy places. Don't let your Twitter account be one of them. Make your avatar something that reflects you or your brand.

10. Too much abbreviation

Sometimes you're going to have to abbreviate but try not to abandon grammar to the point of being unreadable.

11. Spelling errors

Spelling errors are going to happen, but try to keep them to a minimum. People will notice them and it can make your business look sloppy. Review before you hit send. Watch for some common misspellings, like There/Their/They're/Your/You're.

12. Tweeting without a strategy

Never tweet just for the sake of tweeting. Take some time to decide why you're on Twitter and what you want to get from it.

13. Too much dialogue, not enough content

Twitter is all about sharing content. You want to engage with followers but you also want to give them content that makes them engage with you.

14. Too much content, not enough dialogue

Confused yet? It's all about finding a balance. Unless you're a news outlet, then people are looking for more than just news. Use your content to drive engagement from your followers and start a discussion.

15. Only tweeting 9-5

No one expects your Twitter to be a 24/7 operation but, your followers don't log off when you go home for the day. Hootsuite is a great option for managing and scheduling tweets.

16. Tweeting without the facts

This is the number one way to hurt your credibility and tick your followers off. Be a helpful source of information in your industry, not a rumor mill.

17. Tweeting too often

There's no set formula for how much you should be tweeting. But, unless you're the most interesting person in the world, chances are if you're clogging up their timeline they'll get turned off in a hurry.

18. Bad talking competition

If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all. Building connections is a great way to build your following and many of your competitors' followers would likely be happy to follow you too.

19. USING TOO MANY CAPS AND EXCLAMATION POINTS!!!!

You wouldn't yell at your customers in person, don't do it on Twitter. Use sparingly for maximum impact.

20. Outdated Twitter profile

Your profile says a lot about who you are. Tell people what

you're all about and give them a reason to follow. And make sure it's up-to-date.

21. Not connecting your business website to your Twitter account

80.5% of small businesses DO NOT link their sites to their social networks. Don't let your business be part of that group. They're missing potential followers and most importantly customers.

22. Responding with the same answer from multiple admins

It's good to respond to people's tweets, but if multiple people are tweeting from your handle, get on the same page and agree on the right voice for your brand.

23. Facebook/Twitter overflow

Connecting your Facebook and Twitter feeds might seem like a good idea but if your Twitter is solely just a feed for your Facebook, then it defeats the purpose of being on Twitter in the first place.

24. Asking too many questions

A question can be a great way to get feedback or start a conversation but if you're constantly asking, "How's everyone doing?!" and no one is answering then it's not adding to the conversation.

25. Not sharing the love

If people are promoting you on Twitter, show them some love back. A retweet can go a long way on Twitter and so can mentioning someone when you share their article or post.

Didn't realize so much could go wrong in just 140 characters? Don't worry.

Everyone, and I mean everyone, is going to make some mistakes when they're starting off. The best you can do is to keep this list in mind and try not to let a couple missteps ruin the party.

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Additional Resources

Congrats, you've graduated from Twitter 101!

With this guide, you should have everything you need to get started. We hope you'll find us on Twitter and share any questions you might have.

You can also check out some of the additional resources we put together to help you succeed:

Check out the Social Media Quickstarter

The Quickstarter is jam-packed with great advice, research, and how-to's that you can reference as you start to build your presence on Twitter.

Watch a free webinar

Watch as members of our social media team talk about getting started on Twitter. Learn more about how Twitter works for small businesses and find out what other organizations have done to succeed.

Visit the Constant Contact Blog

Get daily updates to help improve your online marketing strategy. There, you'll find advice to help improve your social media and email marketing efforts.

Get advice sent right to your inbox

Each month, we compile some of our best online marketing content and deliver it right to your inbox through our Hints & Tips newsletter. Get great advice plus be the first to hear about new eBooks, webinars, and other opportunities to grow your business.

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audience fast.



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and shares into real,
measurable results.



EventSpot

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from one place.

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