

# communiqué

tech talk by mark ively

## Communication these days is all a-Twitter

10 techniques for developing a Twitter community, one follower at a time

Check the directories and explore Twitter's search function to see what others in your field are tweeting about.

Twitter is a great tool for companies seeking to connect with key audiences, build their brands and much more. But if you're like many users, after you signed up you probably were not sure how to attract followers and build a community. It's not rocket science, but it's also not as easy as you might think.

Twitter communities are generally loosely organized at best. That's the beauty of it, but it's also the challenge. Connecting with so many different people is like herding cats.

My approach is to focus on the individuals behind the tweets. Rather than thinking about hundreds (or in some cases, thousands) of followers, I'll choose two or three representative followers to focus on at a time—that's my "audience." When I'm answering a question or corresponding with someone on Twitter, they have my full attention.

Angelo Fernando will return next issue.

I'm trying to build a community one contact at a time—slow, yes, but steady and, I hope, enduring. I'm really focused on

the quality of community versus pure quantity, so Guy Kawasaki (with 100,000-plus followers) has nothing to worry about with me (730 followers).

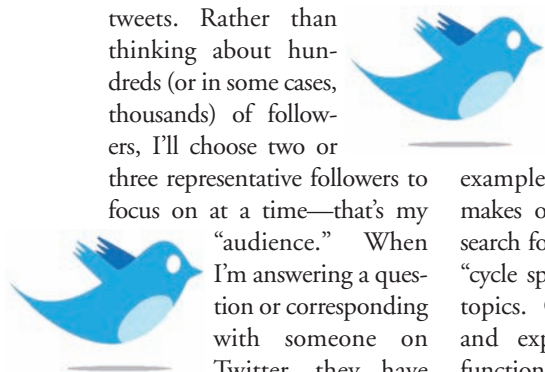
Below are 10 techniques and tips to help get you started.

**1. Determine who your audience is.** Don't try to appeal to everyone. Specialize. If you're a communication manager at a computer maker like Dell, it might be consumers interested in buying a computer, tech media and others trying to keep up with PC trends and developments.

**2. Become a subject expert.** Specialize in one or two areas. I focus on social media and marketing. Set up multiple topics searches. For example, if your company makes off-road bikes, you can search for "bicycles," "off-road," "cycle sports" and other related topics. Check the directories and explore Twitter's search function to see what others in your field are tweeting about. Use the advanced features to refine your search by keyword, location and even feeling (happy or angry tweet).

**3. Find good models to mimic.** Seek out top bloggers and topic experts you want to attract, and go outside your area—you might find the best examples in other fields. See what they're tweeting about and how they're covering it. You'll need to develop your own personality and angle. Check out directories like Twellow, WeFollow or Tweetop to find the big guns. While you're at it, take a peek at who they are following.

(You should also be using a program like Tweetdeck to organize the people you're following into manageable groups.) **4. Be generous.** Pick out strong posts and retweet them. Really give them credit and share your followers' tweets with the rest of your network. And answer other people's tweets—every time you reply to someone and they reply back, your @name shows up before their entire network, exposing you to thousands of people. Chris Brogan (@ChrisBrogan), a social media consultant and president of New Marketing Labs, says, "My No. 1 tip is be helpful. Provide





useful information, and only promote your own stuff 1 out of 15 tweets.”

**5. Add value.** Twitter is competitive, a Darwinian system where people compete for mindshare based on the perceived value of their contributions. Simply put, you're going to attract more followers with strong content. One tip: Always be linking to interesting online material (and it's OK to post it more than once).

**6. Be engaging.** Chat with people about issues that matter, what keeps them up at night, etc. Make it easy to engage with you. Think of your audience first.

**7. Get creative.** Make a list of all the ways you can use Twitter, and think out of the box. You can easily cover industry conferences. At Cisco's Partner Velocity 09 conference, I tweeted for two days about the events, partners and reactions to our Web 2.0 material and so on. But Twitter has also been used for fundraising, finding donated human organs, locating missing children and much more.

**8. Tie into a hot subject and start tweeting.** Your tweet will go into the public time line and can be seen by others searching for a topic. In March, for example, people were blogging constantly about SXSW, the South by Southwest music and film festi-

val and conference in Austin, Texas. Add a hash tag (#) in front of your phrase to make

it easier to find. You can use a tool like Twitscoop to stay on top of the Twitter buzz.

**9. Tweet regularly—but not too much.** You need to tweet consistently to feed your network, but don't go overboard. Some people tweet dozens of times, and multiple times at once. This can actually annoy your followers, so find a balance.

**10. Mind your manners.**

- Follow those who follow you (except spammers). This is a commonly accepted practice. At least follow those with a common interest.
- Send a note of welcome to new followers (a direct message, not a public @ message).
- Avoid turning Twitter into a two-way, prolonged conversation. You're tying up the lines after a couple of tweets, so take it private.
- Don't gloat, and don't talk about yourself too much.

None of these rules is written in stone, but once you develop a following, make sure you continue nurturing it. Companies take different approaches to keeping followers happy while managing to weave in some of their products or services. Some cut their employees loose to connect with audiences on an individual level.

Ford's chief Twitterer Scott

Monty (@ScottMonty), with 17,900 followers, has a nice personal touch even as he's tweeting about Ford's latest product breakthroughs and automotive issues. Eastman Kodak's "chief blogger" Jenny Cisney (@KodakCB) entertains her 5,580 followers with her photo tweets. She posts dozens of times a week on cool photos and photo sites, while weaving in personal stories and mentions about Kodak cameras. Cisco's chief technology officer, Padmasree Warrior (@Padmasree), mixes personal observations with anecdotes about Cisco's latest technology, like TelePresence. Although she has more than 246,000 followers, she speaks to them as one. After her speech at VoiceCon in Orlando, Florida, she tweeted, "Just finished the VoiceCon keynote. Thx to all the tweeks for collaborating with me on this. Cisco believes in boundaryless orgs."

Twitter is still evolving, so there's room to improvise. For instance, there's nothing wrong with asking people outright to follow you. (You can follow me at [twitter.com/markivey](http://twitter.com/markivey).)

Above all, strive to be interesting and authentic. Engage as you would with a new contact at a networking event or dinner party. Use some humor and show your opinions. Better to take a calculated risk and make some mistakes than talk in corporatespeak and drive your followers away. •

find out more

**How to Attract and**

**Influence People on Twitter**

<http://prevential.com/twitter-tips/>

**4 Ways Companies Use Twitter for Business**

<http://tinyurl.com/d5hxzh>

**Getting Started on Twitter:**

**A 5-Step Guide for Professional Communicators**

<http://ioncorporation.com>

</blog/?p=884>

**50 Ideas for Using Twitter for Business**

[www.chrisbrogan.com/50-ideas](http://www.chrisbrogan.com/50-ideas)

<-on-using-twitter-for-business/>

**47 Twitter Power Users' Secrets to Getting Many Followers**

<http://jobmob.co.il/blog>

</get-many-twitter-followers>

<-power-user-secrets/>

**21 Tips to Earn Links and Tweets to Your Blog Post**

[www.seomoz.org/blog](http://www.seomoz.org/blog)

</21-tips-to-earn-links-and>

<-tweets-to-your-blog-post>

**Looking for Mr. GoodTweet:**

**How to Pick Up Followers**

**on Twitter**

<http://blog.guykawasaki.com>

</2008/11/looking-for-m-1.html>

about the author

Mark Ivey is co-founder and president of the ION Group, a marketing communications firm based in San Jose, California.