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“DigitalSteph_BE” on Twitter

Twitter should be integrated into a business’s marketing mix

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Abstract

Want to position your company on Twitter, but not sure how or where to begin? The following article “Twitter should be integrated into a business’s marketing mix” is a must-read for any digital marketer who is interesting in taking this social media plunge. Content includes a simple explanation of Twitter and its functionality, a breakdown of Twitter’s user demographics, best practice for use, and overall best practices that will directly apply to your marketing plan’s strategies and tactics prior to implementation.

Intro to Social Media

As psychologist Abraham Maslow detailed in his concept of hierarchy of needs in 1943, there are five levels of needs: physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization. These needs must be met in order from physiological, which entails basic needs such as food, water and sleep, to self-actualization, which is the highest level of individual growth to achieve his or her full potential. Among the five levels of needs, social needs include the need for belonging, love and affection. “Relationships such as friendships, romantic attachments and families help fulfill this need for companionship and acceptance, as does involvement in social, community or religious groups” (Van Wagner, n.d., par. 6).

The Internet is one destination that many people are flocking to for personal, professional and social development. In its most elementary (Web 1.0) form, social media initially included instant messaging, virtual communities, and personal Web pages. Nowadays, most Americans have access to the Internet and are able to go online to find a date, make reservations, and connect to friends and family and network across many different applications and sites. Of these, social networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook and Twitter are among one of the many channels, where Maslow’s social needs can be fulfilled. Social networking sites are essentially a virtual one-stop community for creating a sense of belonging and acceptance among peers. As a result of this, the massive appeal and the rapidly growing social networks, which according to Pew Internet & American Life Project, “74% of U.S. adults are online; 35% use social networking sites (which has more than quadrupled in the past four years)” (Briefing, 2009, par. 1).

Like individuals’ need for socialization in Maslow’s hierarchy, businesses also seek out social belonging and acceptance among its consumers, its stakeholders and marketplace. This

need can pertain to a host of social needs including the need for general acceptance and acknowledgement of its brand, its involvement in the communities that it serves, and creating and maintaining relationships among peers and its stakeholders. As with individuals, businesses can only commit to this need after its physiological and safety needs are met and satisfied.

“Social media is redefining how we relate to each other as humans and how we as humans relate to the organizations that serve us” (Heuer, 2007, par. 3). While social media continues to be redefined through technological innovation, social media, in its broadest terms, is a fundamental community in which we can belong, share, converse, think and be free to grow toward self-actualization. “Think of social media as interactive, bi-directional, conversational word-of-mouth – taking place online and passed around at greater depth and speed,” said Kevin Chen, new media consultant specializing in restaurant marketing (Briefing, 2009, par. 2).

There is no better time than now to begin the conversation with consumers. Social media sites are among the most cost effective vehicles for understand consume behavior and listening to their needs. In the downturn (economy), I think the only way to keep a brand in front of customers and the message relevant is to use social media. Marketing dollars work at dramatically higher multiples when consumers help create your message and pass it along, said Reggie Bradford, CEO of Vitruve, Inc., a social-media marketing firm.

(Briefing, 2009)

Intro to Twitter

“What blogging was in 2004, Twitter is in 2009,” said Kevin Chen, new media consultant specializing in restaurant marketing (Briefing, 2009, par. 5). Twitter is one of the most up-and-coming social networking and micro-blogging services on the market today. The

infrastructure for Twitter was built in two weeks in 2006 by Obvious, a creative environment in San Francisco, and then later released in August 2006. Less than a year later in May 2007, Twitter expanded outside the realm of Obvious and Twitter Incorporated was founded (Twitter, 2009). The premise of the social networking tool is “What are you doing?” Twitter allows its users to send and read other user’s “tweets,” text-based updates and posts that are up to 140 characters long to the Twitter portal (Twitter, 2009). Twitter “connects people to each other through a rich and active exchange of ideas, thoughts, observations, and vision in one, highly conducive ecosystem (known as the Twittersverse)” (Solis, 2008, par. 1). To sign up for a Twitter account, visit www.Twitter.com (this is a free service to both individuals and businesses). After establishing a user name and password, there are several ways to post updates on Twitter, including:

- **Tweet.** These updates will populate to the entire Twitter community unless a user chooses to “protect their updates” in his or her settings. This privacy setting is important to note and consider as you tweet. As with any other social media site, do not post anything that you may not want others to see. Weigh the pros and cons and make sound, rational judgments with anything that you do online.
 - **Direct a tweet to a specific Twitter user(s)** by inserting the “@” symbol before his or her Twitter user name. While these types of tweets are still sent out publicly, the targeted user will quickly catch the specified user’s attention as these are messages tailored for them.
 - **Retweet (RT)** something that someone else has tweeted about on his or her profile. By “retweeting,” a user is giving credit to the person who originally posted the content or link. To retweet, a user will begin their

tweet with: “RT @(user name that you are giving credit to, then the message).

- **Send a direct message (DM)**, which is a private message to a user(s) and are similar to Facebook’s Inbox or an email.

Within any tweet or direct message, a user may choose to insert an active link. To offset the problem of lengthy Web site URL strings, users are able to shorten their URL by services such as Tiny URL or IS.GD. Users can insert with their photos either by mobile devices using applications like Twitterific or Twittelator or by using a third-party API application such as TweetDeck, Twitterific, Twhirl, among others. These third-party API applications each easily integrate a feature called TwitPic, allowing a user to search its device for photos to insert in a tweet or direct message (Shaw, 2009).

Stay connected to Twitter and to your followers by accepting updates via SMS, Web, instant message, or from third-party API applications such as TweetDeck, Twitterific and Twhirl. Users are also able to update their Facebook status from Twitter by installing an application on Facebook that automatically imports any tweet aside from those that begin with the symbol “@”. If a user chooses to use this Facebook application to update his or her status, it is worthy to note that any retweet should be structured as “@(user’s name), RT (message here)” in order to avoid showing in his or her Facebook feed (unless the user would like to share the targeted with all friends on Facebook). Twitter updates can also be fed to blogs using RSS and to phones such as the iPhone using widgets. With so many widgets and applications for Twitter, it is hard not to stay connected to the Twitter community.

Another reason to be on Twitter is the ability to “follow” and to be followed by other Twitter users, which now includes a number of businesses such as Starbucks (user name

“Starbucks), Burger King (user name “theBKLounge”), Southwest Airlines (user name “SouthwestAir”) and Zappos (user name “Zappos”). By following a user, one is able to stay in close contact with that person and at the very least passively read about what the user has been up to. “Updates from those you follow appear on your page. The more followers, the more influence and networking opportunities there are for both individuals and businesses” (Briefing, 2009, par. 6). Using tools such as search.twitter.com, whoshouldifollow.com, and twellow.com, a user can find people to follow and help monitor what’s being said about you and what competitors are doing via active networking (Briefing, 2009). “Simply put, Twitter is what you make of it--receive a lot of information about your friends, or just a tiny bit. It's up to them” (Twitter, 2009, par. 3). A user is not expected to respond to any updates unless they want to. This flexibility allows the user to participate only when they want to. There is never any pressure to respond, it is up to the user to decide how active he or should would like to be within the Twitter community. As Twitter.com describes on its site, users are also in control of whose updates they receive, and on what device. For example, Twitter provides settings for scheduling Twitter to automatically turn off at dinnertime. In addition, users can switch off Twitter updates at any point (Twitter, 2009). Overall, “Twitter gives you a fragmented experience of opinions, events, news, ideas and feedback largely because its structured to accommodate non-contextual usability: You can easily follow thousands of users and listen in and enter into conversations conducted among multiple users at any point” (DoshDosh, 2008, par. 4).

For businesses, “Smart brands use Twitter in meaningful ways, and most of them use their brand name as a way to make sure customers can find and recognize them” (Van Grove, 2009, par. 3). In addition, Twitter can be used as a form of permission-based marketing that helps create two-way audience engagement to connect current and potential customers with your

product or brand (Brooks, 2008). “Like Facebook, Twitter users are open to being marketed to, as long as communications are relevant, authentic, transparent, and personal. The more personal businesses are in social networks, the more likely they are to really connect with people who’d be interested in them” (Briefing, 2009, par. 8). Not only this, but Twitter allows deep infiltration into the lifestyles of interested participants, which helps to build brand recency/loyalty. Twitter can be also seen as a traffic generation tool in which links within profiles and tweets can direct users to specific areas of their Web site, microsites, blogs, or wherever else you want to point their attention (DoshDosh, 2008).

Twitter Demographics – who is on Twitter?

Like a mantra in marketing 101, one of the key marketing principles to carry with any marketer throughout is to know and understand your audience. With this knowledge a marketer can cater a program that is relevant and applicable to their target audience. According to Compete.com, approximately 2.5 million people visit Twitter.com each month, growing at about 250,000 - 500,000 (an increase of 10-20%) users per month and up over 440% since this time last year. To compare these statistics to another social media site, Facebook receives about 41 million unique visitors per month (Solis, 2008). In the United States alone, as of February 2009, Twitter grew at a rate of 33% over January 2009 (O’Neill, 2009). In the article, “Twitter traffic explosion: Who’s behind it all?” Max Friert details key physical and behavioral attributes related to Twitter users as:

- **“Twitter users are 10% more likely to be male** than the average Internet user” (Friert, 2008, par. 3). As of 2008, male users represented 48.65% of total users online (IT Facts, 2008).

- “Twitter **skews heavily towards the college/twenty-something crowd**. Twitter attracts 18-24 year-olds at nearly twice the rate of an average U.S Web site” (Friert, 2008, par. 3). The 18-24 year-old age category represents 7.82% composition of total US Internet users (IT Facts, 2008).
- “Splitting age demographics based on usage intensity shows that **heavy users tend to skew older** than visitors who only hit the site once a month” (Friert, 2008, par. 3). It is important to note that this trend is true to U.S. Internet usage with the 25-49 year-old age category accounts for 78 Internet sessions per month (totaling more than 92 hours per month) and the 55 year-old age category accounts for 80 Internet sessions per month (totaling more than 85 hours per month). However, the 18-24 year-old age category only accounts for 23 Internet sessions per month (totaling more than 25 hours per month) (IT Facts, 2008). “This could indicate that while the younger segments are more exploratory, the **25-44 year old segments have found more value in Twitter and started to ramp up usage**” (Friert, 2008, par. 3).
- **Twitter is a weekday event** – On a typical weekday, Twitter is receives more than twice the hits as a weekend day (Friert, 2008, par. 3).

According to the article “Twitter demographics,” other key Twitter demographic information and usage statistics include:

- 11% of online adults use Twitter or a service like Twitter to update their status online.
- 35% of Twitter users live in urban areas while 9% live in rural areas.
- Americans who live in lower income housing are more likely to use Twitter.
- 17% of Internet users in households earning less than \$30,000 tweet.
- 10% of Internet users in households earning more than \$75,000 tweet.

- 76% of Twitter users use the Internet wirelessly.

According to a PEW study, the percentages below are in relation to those users that have ever used Twitter or something like it (Morgan, 2009):

- 19% of online adults age 18-24
- 20% of online adults age 25-34
- 10% of online adults age 35-44
- 5% of online adults age 45-54
- 4% of online adults age 55-64
- 2% of online adults 65+

Other interesting stats from the PEW study that detail the median age of Twitter and other social media sites users (Morgan, 2009):

- Median age of a Twitter user is 31
- Median age of a MySpace user is 27
- Media age of a Facebook user is 26
- Media age of a LinkedIn user is 40

To summarize Twitter demographics, if you are a business trying to target males that are either in the college/twenty-something crowd or skews older (25-34 years old who tend to skew toward higher usage) who frequents social media sites on the weekdays and lives in the suburbs, then Twitter may be right for you. This is not to say that Twitter is not right for businesses who are trying to target other audiences. Other significant classifications of users can be found on Twitter as well; everything from mommy bloggers to foodies, tech junkies and celebrity

gossipers. No matter the audience that you are trying to tap into on Twitter, the gem of this social media site is its ability to send messages to a well-defined and highly targeted audience. For example, when a company sends a tweet, the user has an idea of who its audience is (i.e. their followers, who have already agreed to follow you). “@replies are the best illustration for this sense of audience: Even though Twitter is not a point-to-point message delivery system, @replies are sent with the understanding that they will be read by the intended people because they are known to be in the audience” (Hochmuth, 2008, par. 6).

8 best ways to use Twitter for business and organizations

As Twitter continues to grow and mature, the number of widgets and applications and uses for Twitter on a business level continue to grow. Creativity and active engagement are crucial in order to grab users’ attention, gather more followers, build brand and loyalty, and continue to stay viable in any business’ ever-challenging marketplace (Rice, 2008). Below is a composite, at-a-glance recap of how Twitter is (and can be) used by businesses today:

1. **Crisis management.** Corporate communications, consumer relations and public relations can monitor what others are saying about their business and then respond appropriately to accusations or claims that are defamatory. These key point people can also act appropriately if there are negative ratings, reviews or comments, or can inform others during unforeseen circumstances such as an electricity company during a bad storm.
2. **Pitch a story to media.** With so many media outlets (national, regional, state and local) on Twitter, this gives businesses a great chance to pitch stories directly online

- via tweets with links to the press release and any images. This function is especially helpful during breaking news and crisis situations.
3. **Consumer relations.** Be sure to monitor your presence on Twitter, listen and then respond to everyone you can. Note the feedback that is received and record as many comments as possible. “Use replies rather than direct messages. Be transparent about what you’re saying to others on Twitter” (Cook, 2009, par. 4). However, a company may choose to do both by replying to a user’s comments and tell that person that they are looking into the issue, then if the issue is an isolated incident, DM a solution to the user. “Don’t be afraid to talk back and get involved in the conversation” (IT Management, 2008, par. 2). Set up a feed or subscribe to a monitoring service such as Google Alerts to see what others are saying about your brand or company name (Rice, 2008).
 4. **Event management.** Corporate communications, public relations and marketing can promote and extend the reach of corporate or company-sponsored events by announcing all upcoming events on Twitter.
 5. **Staffing/Employment.** While in a down economy, take this opportunity to promote your job openings and direct these users to your application form online. Employment related tweets are a hot commodity and can easily draw more frequent and additional traffic to your page when relevant and regularly updated.
 6. **Philanthropy.** Talk about the good things you do in the community that you serve and ask your followers to help get involved in the cause. Even if your business is smaller and does not have the extra capital for major contributions to charities, talk about your volunteer efforts or any related item that relates to the greater good of the

communities that you serve. This will not only earn the respect of the community and its leaders, but elevate your reputation in the marketplace.

7. **Promote marketing programs and promotions.** Hype up or allude to your newest product or promotion via Twitter. Be sure to make these tweets purely conversational rather than promotional. “This is not a place to push our product, but a place for us to join a community in which we can share ideas on topics of common interest” (Cool, 2009, par. 15). If you are trying to use bounce back offers or special discounts online, get these in the hands of your target audience by people with a significant following. For example, if you are promoting a free kids meal, follow several well-followed mommy bloggers (a.k.a. tech-savvy mothers who advocate for and represent the mother/parenting community), who may RT the offer to their extensive following, which may allow the promotion to go viral.
8. **Drum up sales or leads.** According to Rodney Rumford, a social media guru, “About 56% of Twitter users say they use the online social communication site for business purposes” (based on a sample of 700 Twitter users) (Flandez, 2009, par. 4).

According to the article “17 ways you can use Twitter: A guide for beginners, marketers and business owners,” other ways businesses can use Twitter include: personal branding; get even more feedback and recommendations from loyal users; direct traffic to where you want your users’ attention to go; network with like-minded people, especially those in your industry; business management (i.e. acts as an Intranet that enables employees to connect to one another); notifying your customers by setting up a Twitter feed specifically for a targeted purpose; find potential customer or client; provide real-time coverage; and time management and analysis (DoshDosh, 2008).

14 things a business or organization should consider when creating its communication/marketing strategy for Twitter

When setting up a corporate Twitter account, there are several things to consider before venturing out in Twittersphere. Follow these 14 easy-to-follow steps for a successful Twitter experience both in terms of the user and the business:

1. **Bring your brand to life.** Add a personal touch to your business Twitter page by adding more personalization and less formality. Companies can choose to have one person represent the company on its Twitter account or have multiple personalities from varying aspects of its business participate in addition to its overarching corporate account as seen with companies like Bob Evans (user name “BobEvansFarms”) or Zappos. Either way, avoid sticking to company slogans and phrases, allow these business ambassadors to portray themselves and the things that they do in a realistic way (Carr, 2008). Tweeting is not advertising; it is a conversation. “People don’t have conversations with companies; they have conversations with people at companies” (Carr, 2008, par. 2).
2. **Be transparent, honest and relevant** (Lewis, 2009). “No one likes a fake and especially not a fake hiding behind a corporate insignia” (IT Management, 2008, par. 2). The article “Idiotproof social media marketing optimization strategies for businesses,” suggests:

Even with full disclosure from your marketing team or partners, dishonest messaging can cause more damage than good, as most information can be quickly validated via online fact-checking. All communications should be relevant and add value to the conversation or community and no campaign can truly succeed

unless significant time and resources are committed over a period of time. (Lewis, 2009)

Social media when used by businesses should still rely on fundamental marketing principles such as understanding your target audience, preparing a community/marketing plan to understand goals and objectives, and so on (Cool, 2009).

3. **Define your purpose.** Define your target audience and your company's goals and objectives before launching your account. Start small and build your social media presence. Try new things, learn from them and make adjustments as needed. Monitor analytics and report frequently (Defren, 2008).
4. **Follow others.** "The more people who follow you on Twitter, the more influence and networking opportunities you have. Thus, it makes sense to try and build a following" (Brooks, 2008, par. 12). However, do not feel compelled to follow everyone that is following you. "Having an anonymous entity follow you is a bit like receiving spam - you don't know who it is or why you're getting it" (Cook, 2009, par. 2). Try to follow those who are active in the community, may be interested in your company and help your company achieve its goals and objectives.
5. **Keep your competitors close.** Follow them on your personal Twitter account. Take note of what they are doing well and always try to stay ahead of the game.
6. **Establish your credibility.** Post questions and answer your followers' questions in order to become an active and involved Twitter member. Think out loud and do not be afraid to ask for help or ask questions from your followers.
7. **Have a crisis management plan in place *before* you launch your business Twitter account.** As Rumford said at the 2009 Gravity Summit on Social Media in Los Angeles,

"People are going to be saying bad stuff about your brand, and that's okay" (Sass, 2009, par. 6) because it gives the company an opportunity to really shine with their customer relations. "I love it when someone says something bad, because then it's a chance to show your true colors" (Sass, 2009, par. 6).

8. **Tweet regularly.** Try to tweet at least two to four times a day (may depend on the day part that your goals and objectives relate to). The more regular your company posts, the more likely your followers will keep your brand top of mind and continue to follow you. Avoid tweeting based on a Monday-Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. basis. Prove your accessibility and willingness to listen beyond company hours.
9. **Be interesting.** "It's simple. To be successful on Twitter, be interesting," advises Kevin Chen, new media consultant specializing in restaurant marketing (Briefing, 2009, par. 8).
10. **Add value.** Provide useful content for those that choose to follow you (Rice, 2008). As mentioned before, be relevant and try to add updates that are not only interesting but allow your users to see inside your business in a way that no other media or outlet can.
11. **Get quick Answers.** If you are a small restaurant, offer your followers a few options for tomorrow's dinner special and see what they want. Loyal customers are usually more than willing to express their opinion, especially when given the opportunity by the business (Brogan, 2007).
12. **Fully integrate into your marketing mix.** Promote your company's Twitter account by providing links to your account on your Web site, microsites, email marketing, blogs, employment merchandise, Intranet, company Wikipedia page, etc. "Integrating all of these efforts into your marketing mix will generate targeted, measurable traffic, leads or

sales” (Lewis, 2009, par. 20). Again, be sure not to overdo it to avoid sounding too commercial.

13. **Build a custom page on your Web site, microsite, or blog.** This page should include a quick introduction, your purpose for being on Twitter, why should someone follow you, and highlight any corporate Twitter personalities (such as your CEO, president, digital marketing manager, or HR department) with links to each of their Twitter pages. Do not forget to plug your email marketing program on this page as well (Rice, 2008). This is the perfect opportunity since it will primarily be visited by those who are truly interested and loyal to your company and your brand(s) and want to learn more.
14. **Build momentum.** Treat every tweet as a tease to the next tweet or to a new interactive feature, blog post, news article, press release, promotion, etc. Take advantage of the extended reach that each follower can give you. After time, your followers will pick up on past tweets and will feel as though they are better connected to your company and brand (Rowe, 2007).

How to monitor ROI for social media

Two of the ways that Pete Blackshaw suggests monitoring the ROI for social media in general is by driving innovation and by driving margins, saving money. To drive innovation, Blackshaw reminds us that social media is a massive feedback loop that is unmistakably efficient if you consider the life cycle of vetting a good idea or absorbing the ideas of others. If you really peel the onion on what’s happening across blogs, Twitter and other online communities, brands are setting up de facto listening labs that rewrite the rules of gathering and managing feedback. We’re getting more ideas faster. The funnel is

broadening. The filters are sharper, more immediate and grounded in deeper levels of intimacy with the product or proposition. (2009)

In the article “When calculating Twitter’s ROI, don’t forget its change on organizations,” Blackshaw said that listening is about reinvention. Also, focus on inspiration when driving innovation. “Inspiration is empowering and enabling, not constraining or judgement” (2009, par. 16). Coincidentally, this rationale ties in well with Kotter’s eight steps to change. As Kotter outlines in his book “Leading change,” in order for a business to succeed, a company must be willing to empower broad-based action in order to motivate and enable its employees to move toward a common goal, a change for the greater good of the business or organization (1996). In regard to Blackshaw’s second point of driving margins and saving money, social media and other digital initiatives are relatively inexpensive to fund while the impact and reach remain substantially high (2009).

“The problem with trying to determine ROI for social media is you are trying to put numeric quantities around human interactions and conversations, which are not quantifiable,” said Jason Falls (Defren, 2008, par. 7). As outlined in the article “ROI for social media marketing: It’s complicated,” Peter Kim, a former Forrester analyst, outlined a four ways to measure social media by monitoring:

- **“Attention.** The amount of traffic to your content for a given period of time, similar to the standard Web metrics of site visits and page/video views” (Defren, 2008, par. 10).
- **“Participation.** The extent to which users engage with your content in a channel” (Defren, 2008, par. 10).
- **“Authority.** The inbound links to your content like trackbacks and inbound links to your Web site, microsites and other digital content” (Defren, 2008, par. 10).

- **“Influence.** The number of followers on your Twitter account(s) or Friendfeed” (Defren, 2008, par. 10).

Again, while Twitter cannot return quantifiable results, marketing is great for: “brand building, relationship management, product development, reputation management, customer interaction, customer feedback, customer support, community building, and defensive SEO” (Li, 2009, par. 7).

What is next for Twitter

As stated on Twitter.com, the company hopes to continue down the path of keeping things simple while paying close attention to user behavior and paying attention to feature requests (Twitter, 2009). As technology rapidly integrates into our daily lives and into the businesses and organizations that we work, we must consider one thing: “Because, at its heart, Twitter is just a communication tool. Like the Web, and the phone and the telegram before it, it’s just a tool to let one person connect with another” (Brooks, 2008, par. 4). Twitter evokes that sense of socialization and community that Maslow wrote about more than sixty-five years ago. At the end of the day, rest assure that your business or organization’s marketing efforts have not gone to waste by using Twitter as long as there is a defined communication/marketing plan in place and the messaging is relevant, authentic, transparent, and personal to your users. So what are you waiting for? Start a conversation with your customers and be amazed at how much you can learn, innovate and evolve from Twitter.

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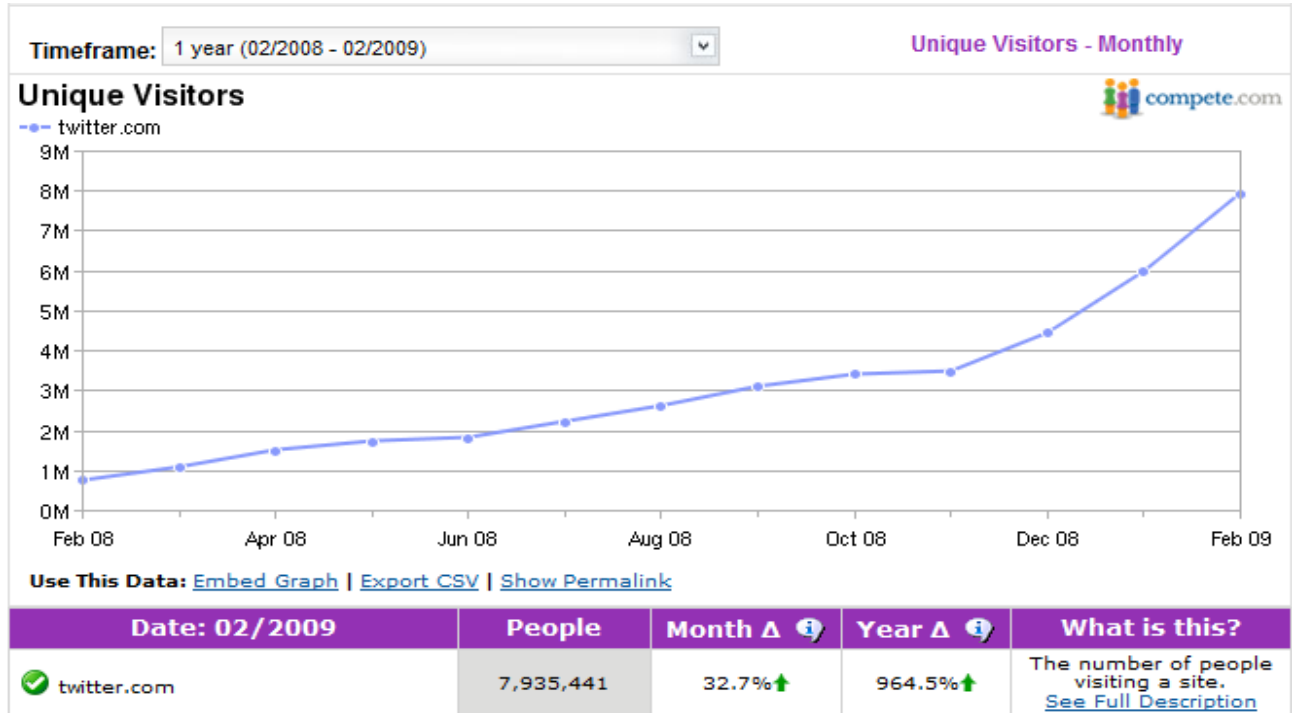
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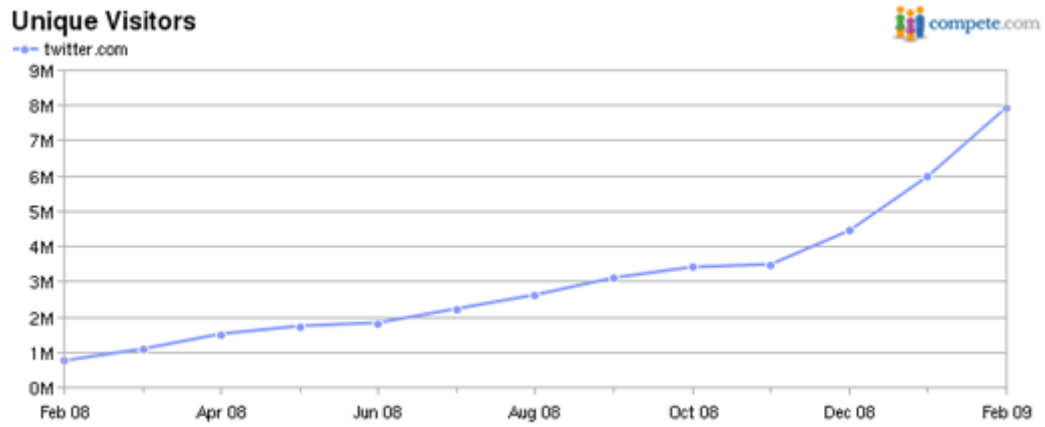
Appendix A

Twitter Traffic Trends



Source: <http://siteanalytics.compete.com/twitter.com/?metric=uv>

Appendix B



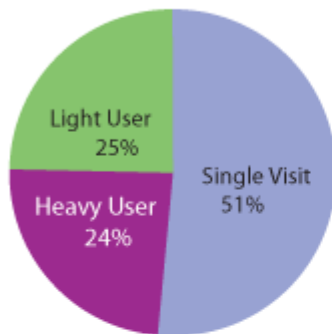
Source: <http://www.socialtimes.com/2009/03/twitter-us-growth>

Appendix C

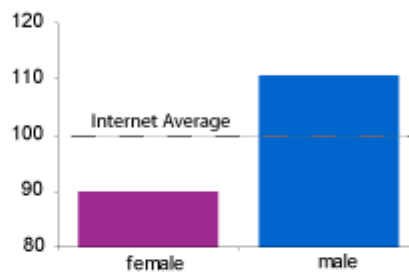
Twitter Usage Segmentation - April 2008 By Usage intensity, Gender, Age



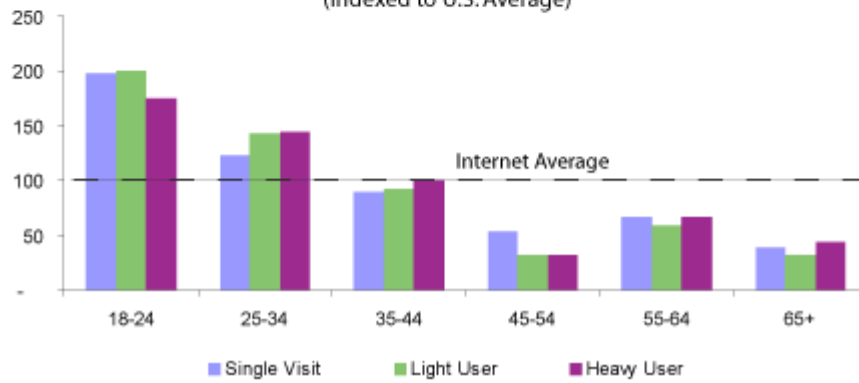
Twitter (Web) Usage Intensity



Twitter Gender Breakdown
(indexed to U.S. Average)



Twitter Age Breakdown vs. Usage Intensity
(Indexed to U.S. Average)



Source: <http://blog.compete.com/2008/05/15/twitter-traffic-growth-usage-demographics>