

Getting started

The easiest way to make sense of microblogging is give it a go! It's not for everyone, but the majority of people who use it as part of their working practice report that they find it beneficial. Different people adopt different practices. Additionally they tend to adapt their practice at different times, locations and as their network grows.



Ten things to try

1. Search Twitter (<http://search.twitter.com/>) for keywords that are meaningful to your research, job or teaching.
2. Sign up for an account (hint: try to choose a short username!), add a few details about yourself and follow a 5-10 people. Track what they're 'tweeting' each day for a week.
3. Ready to make some noise? If so, write a few posts about what you're doing, reading or writing. Also send a reply to someone. (Hint: replies are referred to as "at replies" because you write '@username' to reply to someone.)
4. Follow somebody famous, e.g. @stephenfry, @lancearmstrong or @BarackObama
5. Take a picture and post it on Twitter! (TwitPic and yfrog are popular services)
6. Encourage students to follow a professional working in a field related to their studies, e.g. a photojournalist, an author, a GP or a web designer.
7. Want some feedback or opinions from your network? Then ask them a question and 'crowdsource' some responses. You'll be surprised how willing they are to help!
8. If there's a conference you can't attend, find out the conference's hashtag (used to link related tweets) and track what's being talked about. Perhaps engage & ask a question?
9. Been using Twitter via the web for a while? Finding there's too much to keep track of? Then try using a Twitter client to help make sense of the noise. Tweetdeck, Seismic and Twhirl are all very popular right now!
10. Check out other microblogging tools such as identi.ca, Tumblr, Jaiku and Yammer.

Microblogging

Expand your network and make sense of the noise!

Web2practice: Guides to emergent technologies & innovative practice

Suddenly everyone's talking about Twitter! But what exactly is microblogging and why is it useful?

Microblogging is a very social method of communication that appeals to our inherently inquisitive human nature. We're social beings who like to know what other people are doing, reading, writing, watching, listening to etc.! It's open, informal and spontaneous, all of which encourages interaction.

These 'posts' or 'tweets' if using Twitter, can be about any topic and are available to be read by anyone. People freely reply to tweets, entering the conversation; responses are made, ideas are swapped and suggestions are offered. However, posts are most likely to be seen by the author's 'followers' - people who have indicated that they're interested and want to receive updates from them.

The short 'micro' nature of tweets means that they're quick to write and instantly consumable by readers. It might sound noisy, but we're attuned to cope with conversational 'noise'! Try microblogging and join in the conversation...

"There are loads of people on Twitter who I find it useful and interesting to follow!"



In Practice

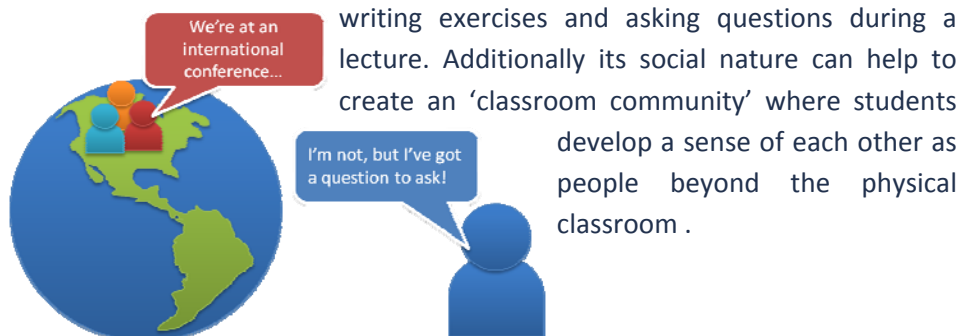
“Originally I tried Twitter and failed to 'get it' even though many of my colleagues were using it. But sometimes you have to be patient - it's invaluable for me now!”

The openness, simplicity and flexibility of microblogging is one of the reasons why it's taken off and different individuals and groups are using it for very different purposes. The way people obtain and exchange information is changing and Twitter, the leading microblogging tool, is proving to be an ideal platform for rapid, innovative and consumable communication.

Researchers are using Twitter to widen and keep in touch with their research network, asking questions, engaging in debate and linking to blog posts or journal articles they're reading. Microblogging is also making an impact at conferences and events, helping to 'amplify' what's going on to others who can't attend in person. Additionally social science researchers are studying the social interaction which is taking place in online networks!

Administrators are using Twitter to broaden their network of colleagues both within and beyond their institution. Also microblogging is being used to keep staff and students up-to-date with important information, including travel problems, lecture cancellations or venue changes.

Teachers are using Twitter within and outside the classroom for a wide variety of purposes. It's being used to facilitate collaborative group work, for creative



Who's using it?



The JISC-funded M3 project has investigated the use of Twitter as a communication platform to encourage in-course participation from learners.

Find out more: <http://www.elanguages.ac.uk/secondlife>

Many Universities and organisations also have institutional Twitter accounts, for example: @JISC, @UniofBath, @wellcometrust and @SOASNews

Other institutions are trialling Yammer, a microblogging tool that can be installed for internal use and staff are encouraged to answer the question "what are you working on?"

What are the risks?

The rapid popularity of Twitter means that it can be prone to down-time (called the 'fail-whale') and therefore it shouldn't be relied upon for vital communications. Twitter is an open communication tool and users should be aware of the risk of voicing conflicting interests between personal and institutional opinions. For each web2tool you use, find out who retains ownership of the content you generate and never overly rely upon a specific service. Be sure to read and understand the terms of use for any web2tool you begin to use and rely upon in your practice. For further guidance, visit the web2rights project website:

<http://www.web2rights.org.uk/>



Find out more...

<http://web2practice.jiscinvolve.org/>