



Trends

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What a Manager Needs to Know About Using for Business

. . . . According to Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, **Twitter** is a free [social networking](#) and [micro blogging](#) service that enables its users to send and read other users' updates known as *tweets*. Tweets are text-based posts of up to 140 characters in length which are displayed on the user's profile page and delivered to other users who have subscribed to them (known as *followers*). Senders can restrict delivery to those in their circle of friends or, by default, allow anybody to access them. Users can send and receive tweets via the [Twitter website](#).

Although Twitter was originally intended for communication among individuals, a number of organizations have begun to actively participate on the platform. However, not all companies are using Twitter in the same way. Some are tweeting, some are just listening, and some really savvy companies are doing both.

Before any company employees start tweeting, it would be a good idea to remind them that the same rules that apply to other web participation (like blogging, for example) also apply to Twitter. "As Twitter is a public forum, employees should understand the limits of what is acceptable and desirable," says Jeffrey Mann, research vice president at Gartner Inc, a leading information technology research and advisory company. "If organizations have not defined a public Web participation policy, they should do so as quickly as possible."

Based on a recently [released report](#), Gartner has narrowed down the four different ways that companies are using Twitter to do business today: direct, indirect, internal, and signaling.

Direct

Some companies are using Twitter as a marketing or public relations channel, much like an extension to their corporate blogs. They will post about corporate accomplishments and distribute links that take people back to corporate web pages, press releases, and other promotional sites.

This method seems to be the easiest way to get started, but companies need to be aware that using Twitter like this could actually hinder their image in the Twitter community. A whole bunch of self-serving, self-promotional tweets can actually damage their reputation - Twitter folks like a personal touch.

Gartner also warns that responding to comments can be risky when going this route, but, while that's true to a point, when done right responding on Twitter can be of great benefit to the company. To see some examples of brands that "get" how to tweet and respond, check out what Ford does, or Starbucks, or Dell.

- [16 Examples of Huge Brands Using Twitter for Business](#)
- [40 of the Best Twitter Brands and the People Behind Them](#)

Indirect

The second method some companies use on Twitter is to let their employees tweet instead. As employees use Twitter to enhance their own personal reputations, the company's reputation is also enhanced by proxy. If this one is hard for you to understand, then perhaps a good example to demonstrate the power of the indirect method is in reverse: imagine what negative tweets about the company would look like. Take the case of the [Yahoo employee who twittered throughout company layoffs](#), for example. How do you think that made Yahoo look at the time?

Now that you understand how employee tweets can affect the company negatively, understand that the reverse is also true. Employees twittering away with excitement about their work, developments in their industry, new products, or other interesting tidbits, even if unrelated to the company itself, can promote positive feelings for whichever business they (indirectly) represent.

Another good reason for having employees tweet, instead of the company itself, is if the company wants to be seen as employing influential leaders. [This list of Forrester analysts on Twitter](#) offers a great example.

Internal

Some companies use Twitter internally to share ideas or communicate about what projects they're working on. If this information is confidential in nature, employees either need to protect their updates or even better, not use Twitter at all. Gartner doesn't recommend using Twitter or any other *consumer* micro-blogging service in this way because there's no guarantee of security.

If, however, your company wants to use micro blogging at the office, there are tools designed for businesses that let you do just this. [Yammer](#) and [present.ly](#) are two of the top options for a Twitter-like platform for the workplace.

Inbound Signaling

Some companies aren't as much Twitter participants as they are Twitter "listeners." Using search tools like [search.twitter.com](#) or desktop applications like [TweetDeck](#) are easy ways to keep track of what's being said about the company, its product names, or even the industry as a whole. Smart companies are tuning in to these micro-conversations to get early warnings of problems and to collect feedback on product issues or ideas.

Conclusion

If your company is thinking about jumping into the Twitter foray (and who isn't these days?), it's best not to do so blindly. Gartner's breakdown of the four ways companies use Twitter is a good starting point, but, in reality, developing a strategy is much more complex than the examples listed above. You can follow up on the ideas in this article by reading Chris Brogan's "[50 Ideas on Using Twitter for Business](#)," then subscribing to his blog for more insights. You can also contact Gartner directly for access to the [full report](#).

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http://www.readwriteweb.com/archives/4_ways_companies_use_twitter_for_business.php