

The River Cities DAILY TRIBUNE

'Living In a Tech World' Column

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Are You All A'Twitter?

If you have been exploring your Tech World at all lately you have certainly come across the hottest tech trend around, Twitter (<http://twitter.com>). I'm sure I could get a majority to agree that Twitter is either 'a totally narcissistic waste of time' or 'one of the most powerful business communications tools available today'. That's a big gap and I'm going to explore it with you today but first.....

The Twitter Buzz

The quite buzz I heard in late 2007 became a roar over the past few months with all of the cable news networks beginning to use Twitter with their audiences and culminating this week with Twitter getting the cover of Time Magazine.

Twitter is a communications technology that is a cross between email, instant messaging and phone text messaging delivered in real time to your computer or smart phone. When you sign up for membership you get your own Twitter page that posts all of your 'tweets'. Each tweet is limited to 140 characters so it has spawned a necessary new wave of abbreviation. The concept is that you Twitter your thoughts or random information and your friends "follow" you and vice versa. It is instant communications between friends or other affinity groups.

My first exploration was through a website called TwitterVision (<http://beta.twittervision.com/>) a lurker's view of Twitter. The site is a world map and as you watch, Twitters from all over the world pop up. In the beginning they were in the form of 'I'm going to walk the dog' but since then new uses have developed. The most dramatic of the new uses was seeing passengers on the flight that went down in the Hudson river tweeting reports of their safety and eye witness accounts. They even provided the first photos through sites that add photos to tweets. Cable news channels now use Twitter for viewer comments to the news and you can follow your favorite celebrity or sports figure many of whom have hired people to tweet for them. The quest is on to find uses for succinct pieces of information accompanied at times by website links to communicate and among those experimenting with this are businesses.

I think Twitter as well as other social media is worth exploring at a business level. If I owned a clothing resale shop or any retail business with inventory that turns over quickly I would immediately begin letting my regular customers know that they could follow me on Twitter and I would begin tweeting new arrivals mixed with the same personal small talk that I would engage regular customers with when they come into the store. If you want to consider using it for business purposes here are some simple guidelines.

Don't try it in place of traditional advertising. It is a support tool not a primary promotional resource. Don't be random, if you start sending tweets do so regularly but also don't go too far afield of what you have in common with the customers or potential customers that may follow you. Remember it is a two-way medium. Watch for responses and answer them directly and privately or acknowledge the feedback with a tweet. Don't think you will get it right the first time. Test, verify, adapt, evolve. Repeat. Eventually you will come up with the right approach. And don't repeat the same message, the boredom will build quickly and your followers will soon be gone.

If you don't have a business there are other good uses. I can see families, particularly those that are geographically spread out, using Twitter to give occasional updates in the category of 'just thinking about you'. There are those thoughts or messages that you would like to share but just aren't enough to justify a phone call or even an email. They may be conversation starters, health update, results of a little league game or links to the pictures from the prom. Give it a try. I was one of the 70% of people who have tried it and quit but in the last few weeks I've found several friends that are using Twitter so I am following. I may even Tweet a few times myself (rmelchior). If you are using Twitter send me an email. If you want to try Twitter you might visit our website where I will post additional websites and applications to aid in tweeting.

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