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Blue Papers

Twitter for Business

ALL-A-TWITTER:
Mastering micro-blogging for business

Twitter® has gone from a virtually unknown Web quirk to the buzz of the Internet in a short period of time. Since its 2006 debut, Twitter has attracted millions of users, amassing hundreds of thousands of user updates—called "tweets"—every hour. As Twitter continues to gain momentum, more businesses are recognising its value as a legitimate business tool—especially as communications shift from one-way lectures to community conversations, and brand humanisation and transparency are increasingly demanded by consumers.

Twit... huh?

You may be surprised to learn that Twitter has rather humble beginnings as a collaborative side project, created in the spring of 2006 by Silicon Valley's Evan Williams, Biz Stone and Jack Dorsey. Twitter—originally dubbed TWTTR—was a relatively simple short message system (SMS) platform developed to answer the question "What are you doing?" in 140 characters or less. [1]

Within weeks of its public launch, users quickly realised that the true value of Twitter wasn't in the sharing of life's details, but in sharing information that leads to larger conversations and relationships. Twitter as a micro-blogging application was born.

It wasn't long before Twitter went beyond the 'individual' to 'business', for two important reasons:

1. Businesses discovered that they were being talked about on Twitter and they could either join the conversation or leave their brand's reputation completely in the hands of others; and

2. It dawned on businesses that, in participating in these conversations, they could actually grow their business.

Case in point: Dell Computers®

One of Twitter's first business success stories comes from Dell. Shortly after hearing about Twitter during the technology portion of the 2007 SXSW (South by Southwest) conference in America, Dell marketer Ricardo Guerrero made the connection that Twitter could serve as a low-cost medium to promote one of Dell's online storefronts, Dell Outlet. He quietly logged onto Twitter under the username @DellOutlet, unsure of what the results would be.

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1 *"PE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD XHTML 1.0 Strict//EN" "http://www.w3.org/TR/xhtml1/DTD/xhtml1-strict.dtd" //1){setTimeout(function(){onCondition(D,C,A-1,B)},B)}}}; //]]." Twitter. Web. 23 Sept. 2009. <http://twitter.com/about#about>.*

The vast majority of his initial tweets were links to promotions with discount codes specifically for audiences on Twitter so that he could monitor their success. Add the personal touch and interaction of Dell Outlet store manager, Stefanie Nelson, and Dell had a winning model. Dell cast its net wider after sensing success with @ DellOutlet and proceeded to create Twitter accounts for other areas and customer service functions.

In 2009, Dell issued a press release announcing that it had sold $2 million worth of refurbished computers through its Dell Outlet presence on Twitter. Adding to that impressive sales figure, Dell also mentioned that those who began their shopping experience at Dell Outlet then went on to purchase more than $1 million in new computers. [2]

Why Twitter + business works

The beauty of Twitter is that its value as a business tool isn't limited to big-name brands like Dell, or even just B2C (business to customer) communications. There is potential for all organisations to benefit from engaging a range of audiences on Twitter, with a variety of goals in mind. Adapted from the book "Twitter Revolution" by Deborah Micek and Warren Whitlock, here are the advantages businesses witness from tweeting. [3]

1: Communication
This is perhaps the most obvious use and benefit of Twitter. Tweets can inform audiences about your business's latest news and successes, events, promotions and discounts. If your business has added a new blog post or information to its Web site, Twitter can be used to drive audiences there. It can also be used to comment on industry news or developments. These communications should aim to inform and engage followers, building trust, rapport and lasting relationships. It's crucial to remember that Twitter is best for talking WITH people vs. AT them.

2: Brand visibility and recognition
All brands aim to achieve front-of-mind recall with their audiences. Twitter allows businesses to build a presence where people virtually congregate on a daily basis. This incites audiences to think of your business when they need a product or service. Additionally, because Twitter is about two-way communication, it feels personal. It is a fantastic medium for personifying a brand, making contact more attainable in the eyes of stakeholders.

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2 Israel, Shel. "Twitterville: How Businesses Can Thrive in the New Global Neighborhoods" New York: Penguin Group, 2009. Print.
3 Micek, Deborah, and Warren Whitlock. Twitter Revolution. Las Vegas: Xeno, 2008. Print.

3: Reputation management and improved customer service satisfaction

What was once limited to a select few in-the-know techies, Twitter is growing as a popular social networking site across many demographics. This means that if you're a business, chances are, someone on Twitter is talking about you. Don't you want to be part of that conversation? Twitter allows you to reach out to audiences who are sharing experiences with your brand. It helps you monitor conversations and take action when needed. The key is establishing your business persona on Twitter first. If you join Twitter solely in response to a negative tweet about your business, you won't have any credibility. It will probably come across as disingenuous and it will be difficult for you to remedy the situation.

Along these lines, having a presence on Twitter and monitoring your brand's reputation creates the opportunity for your business to go 'above and beyond' in assisting customers. Whether responding to their comments or seeking out others who have issues that your product or service can solve, Twitter can be the solution. Using it to manage the customer service experience can build transparency, rapport and trust among audiences.

Case in point: Comcast® Cares

Comcast is one of Twitter's best examples of a company using Twitter to manage the customer service experience.

For years, Comcast a global media, entertainment and communications company based in the U.S., had a reputation for less-than-perfect customer service. Increased Internet use by its users enabled them to voice their dissatisfaction to the world. Fortunately, one day in 2008, Comcast customer support employee Frank Eliason opened the Twitter account @ Comcastcares and began addressing customer service issues directly.

One Twitterer at a time, he approached their issues with a forthright attitude—simply asking what the problem was and seeking to fix it. In 2009, results of the American Customer Satisfaction Index revealed that Comcast's rating rose more than 9 percent—the single largest gain among competitors—and the survey directly attributed the improvement to the customer engagement taking place on Twitter. [4]

4: Grow your networks

It's becoming common for people to find each other on Twitter and develop lasting business relationships. This happens simply because Twitter is a wonderful way to reach out to new people, make connections, and build relationships with others by engaging them in conversations and sharing information.

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4 Israel, Shel. "Twitterville: How Businesses Can Thrive in the New Global Neighborhoods" New York: Penguin Group, 2009. Print.

5: Attract customers

When used appropriately and efficiently, many businesses find that Twitter has become a proponent of "permission marketing"—meaning, that businesses can actively, yet appropriately and persuasively, attract customers instead of chasing them. In Tweeting information that is useful, relevant and engaging, your business invites those interested to become invested in your brand. They decide if they want to follow your updates and can change that relationship at any time.

6: Identify and engage influencers

Once your business establishes a presence on Twitter, it won't take long to discover who the influencers are—which consumers are heard by the masses, which professionals offer the most valuable information and which Tweeters hold the most industry clout. These influencers have the potential to offer your business a great amount of insight and useful knowledge. Connecting with them on Twitter is akin to introducing yourself to them at a conference or informational meeting. In the face-to-face setting, it's not always what you know, but who you know. In the Twitter world—or "Twitterverse"—it's not always who you follow, but who follows you.

7: Search engine optimisation

Many search engines, specifically Google, index tweets, which means that Twitter pages and even individual tweets are appearing more frequently in search results. The buzz in many search engine optimisation (SEO) blogs and Web sites speculates that the future of search engines is in real-time search results. It hasn't quite happened yet, but if it does, Twitter may be worth its weight in SEO gold.

For now, if you want your business to be found online, Twitter may be your key to success. It is an easily implemented medium that can drive traffic to your Web site or blog. That is, if you choose your Twitter handle (username, preceded by an "@" sign) wisely, and tweet topics that are relevant to your business and industry. [5]

8: Monitor trends

In using Twitter to pay attention to the conversations about your industry, business and brand, you'll stay abreast of information and trends that are important to your audiences in a way that news sites and blogs cannot compare to. Why? Because the conversations taking place on Twitter are taking place in real time and are coming directly from the mouths of consumers, clients, influencers and thought leaders. Using this information to guide business, services and product innovations can prove to be a valuable advantage over competitors.

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5 "The Top 10 Twitter SEO Tips." Social Media News and Web Tips – Mashable – The Social Media Guide. Web. 24 Sept. 2009. <http://mashable.com/2009/06/25/twitter-seo-tips/>.

9: Access to real-time research

Traditional research methods, including focus groups, can be costly and time-consuming, especially if quick feedback is all you're seeking. But through Twitter, businesses can ask simple questions or use various Twitter applications to conduct polls and "twocus groups" free of facilitation or consultancy fees that are usually associated with traditional focus groups or related research methods.

10: Enhance event experiences

One of the rather unexpected uses of Twitter is its usefulness in an event setting. Attendees can share information and speaker quotes, and track conversations taking place at an event or conference using Twitter's search function. The use of hashtags (#) paired with a unique moniker placed at the end of a Tweet ("This is awesome! #Summer2009") will lump tweets together in a Twitter search result. This creates a real-time account of what is taking place, being said or discussed. This can be useful in creating buzz while an event is taking place, engaging attendees and tracking what interests them.

While these Twitter business uses provide an overview of ways Twitter can be used, the use of Twitter by businesses requires more than just a Twitter account and the eagerness to engage. It requires thoughtful planning and preparation, as well.

Determine if Twitter is for you

When you have a hammer, everything starts to look like a nail. Many businesses have made the mistake of getting on board with social media tools like Twitter simply because they are there. The truth is, Twitter is not appropriate for all businesses. Before your business begins tweeting, you need to approach Twitter like any other business tool and assess the goals in comparison with a cost/benefit analysis of pursuing a presence within the Twitter community.

First, make a general assessment of whether or not your business can support a brand presence on Twitter. This has to do in part with your business's internal culture, and in part with the overall nature of your business. Tweeting can be time intensive. Blogger and social media expert, Beth Kanter, tells her readers that in order to be successful, they need to expect to spend anywhere between 10 and 35 hours a week using social media tools like Twitter. She explains that Twitter is more than just updates—the use of time on Twitter can be broken down into three categories [6]:

1.   Listening—an estimated five hours per week. This involves monitoring what your followers are talking about on Twitter. It also involves

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[6] Kanter, Beth. "How much time does it take to do Social Media?" Web log post. Beth's Blog. 1 Oct. 2008. Web. 20 Sept. 2009. <http://beth.typepad.com/beths_blog/2008/10/how-much-time-d.html>.

conducting routine Twitter searches and monitoring other social media outlets via RSS feeds, Google alerts and Technorati in order to respond to findings via Twitter when appropriate.

2. Participating—an estimated 10 to 15 hours per week, this often goes hand-in-hand with listening. This involves participating and engaging in conversations of interest to both your brand and your audiences.

3. Generating Buzz—also an estimated 10 to 15 hours per week, often includes both listening and participating. Refers primarily to releasing links, content and general information via Twitter specifically on your business's products, services or special events and promotions.

Also in reviewing your culture's adoption of social media, you need to consider that many businesses have asked their IT departments to block employee access to social media sites for fear of viruses or inappropriate use by employees. As reported in the Financial Times [7], around a fifth of companies globally block their employees from using social media sites like Twitter and Facebook. And this figure rises to a third of companies in the UK alone. If you cannot access a Twitter account while at work, a presence on Twitter will be challenging. Along the same lines, some industries are highly proprietary and in some businesses confidentiality and discretion are top priority. In these cases, it should be a rule of thumb that if you need to consult your board of directors prior to each Tweet, Twitter is not going to be a good fit for your business.

Next, decide if your audiences are using Twitter. As of March 2009, 53% of Twitter users were female, 82% were Caucasian, 46% had a college degree and the median age of a user was 31 years old. [8] While these demographics are changing and expanding each day, they still may not encompass those your business is trying to reach. Use Twitter's search function to see if any conversations are already taking place involving your business, your executive team, or products and services. Then, use the search function to find your competitors on Twitter and be sure to search industry keywords and general interests that your intended audiences may be talking about on Twitter. The search results yielded from this exercise will give you a better grasp of whether or not a message on Twitter would reach your audience.

Finally, consider the objective of adopting Twitter. What do you hope it will achieve? Will it be used for brand awareness or to generate sales? Ensure that the objectives you set complements and integrates with your other marketing activity.

7   http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/4edb8512-d7de-11e0-a5d9-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1Z9Lzqo8Y
8   Morgan, Jacob. "Twitter Demographics." Web log post. Social Media Today. 5 Mar. 2009. Web. 26 Sept. 2009.
    <http://www.socialmediatoday.com/SMC/78505>.

Develop a strategy

After assessing your business's infrastructure and defining Twitter's purpose, you need to develop a sound implementation strategy with measurements and benchmarks. This strategy should also outline specific tactics and be a moveable component of your business's overall communications or marketing plan.

Like all other business strategies, this strategy should serve to align with and reinforce your business's overall goals, vision and mission while addressing these questions:

- What outcome do we want?
- Why are we doing this? What is the point—awareness, sales, loyalty, all of the above?
- How are we going to do it?
- What's our pitch? (Keep in mind you must be able to make your pitch in 140 characters or less)
- What's our 'thing'? If you had to sum up your business in one word, what would it be?
- How can we make our use of Twitter relatable and human?
- What tone and voice do we intend to adopt?
- Who will be involved—internally and/or externally?
- Who will have access to the Twitter account? Who will be responsible or held accountable?
- How will the use of Twitter integrate with other areas of communications and marketing?
- How will we measure success?

In answering the questions above, understand that some businesses tweet as a brand while other businesses support individual Twitter use on behalf of the brand, whether through the marketing or communications staff, executive staff, or others. What's more, some businesses tweet from individual accounts, but in the form of ghost writing. Each approach is different, and each has its own pros and cons, which should help when defining your business's strategy.

- **Tweeting as a brand**—Often referred to as "logo tweeting," this usually means your Twitter handle is the name of your brand and your picture, or 'avatar', is probably your business's logo. The overall voice of tweets has little personality beyond the brand: no personal anecdotes, no first-person references, etc. While this works in some cases—for instance, if your business's goal is to primarily use Twitter to share news releases and promote products or services—it can become an obstacle in other cases. For example, if your business's goal is to engage and interact on a more personal level, it would be more appropriate to give audiences a face and a human personality to link to your brand. As author Shel Israel explains

in his book, Twitterville, "Brands do not listen. People listen. And not only do they listen, they respond." [9] A few instances of businesses that have found success with this tactic are: The Home Depot® (@TheHomeDepot); H & R Block (@HRBlock); and JetBlue Airways® (@JetBlue). These brands have found a harmonious balance of maintaining focus on the brand, but still adding a human quality to the content provided. Proponents of this tactic also argue a brand has more authority than an individual—meaning someone may be very familiar with your brand, but not so with one of your employees. Proponents also point out that this approach sets boundaries of what is and is not appropriate for employees to Tweet about on behalf of the brand.

- **Tweeting as an individual, on behalf of the brand**—Your Twitter handle is unique to you, your personal photo is probably used as your avatar, but it is also disclosed where you work and your position, along with links to your business's Web site, blog or other Social Media efforts. The overall voice of the tweets is your own, but there is a balance of personal, non-business related tweets and those that aim to promote your business. Many businesses will argue that this is the way to go—when done well, it promotes your brand while making it more attainable and relatable to audiences. Twitter itself is a business that follows this model, with all of their employees engaging on a daily basis through Twitterwith each other and with external audiences. Evan Williams (a co-founder of Twitter) positions himself openly and honestly in his account (@Ev) and tweets aspects of his personal life, interacts with personal friends, relays information about Twitter and Twitter issues or hiccups, essentially serving as a hub of information for the brand. All of this combined sets a prime example of connecting the humanity to the brand.

- **Ghost tweets**—These are most common among higher level executives, political figures, and celebrities or brands … the Twitter handle appears to be linked to a person tweeting as an individual on behalf of the brand or simply the brand tweeting as the brand. However, in actuality, a staff member or multiple staff members are managing the account and adding content collectively. This is the most controversial option: when associated with an individual, many people feel that it defeats the purpose of social media and appears disingenuous while reinforcing the message that this high-level person is too busy to care for or be bothered by direct interaction with audiences. Some people, like AllTop.com founder Guy Kawasaki, have mitigated this concern by disclosing which

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9 Israel, Shel. "Twitterville: How Businesses Can Thrive in the New Global Neighborhoods" New York: Penguin Group, 2009. Print.

tweets are ghost written and which are not. If Kawasaki wants to share something personally via his own Twitter, he does so. But he has also given access to his personal account to staff members. When a staff member finds information that would be of interest to Kawasaki's audience, they will tweet it, followed by a carrot mark and their initials. Many public relations and advertising agencies or other businesses that use Twitter primarily to share information and articles, find this route to be quite useful and when done successfully and openly, it can be well received by audiences.

- **A combination of the above**—Your business has both a brand account and individual employees who tweet on behalf of the brand or your business has multiple accounts, each serving a different purpose. As mentioned, Dell Computers is a great example of a collective presence approach on Twitter. Another example of success in this way is the U.S. online clothing store Zappos.com. Zappos CEO Tony Sieh is on Twitter (@Zappos) and tweets a balanced combination of personal anecdotes, insights into the company, their strategy behind social media and Twitter and promoting the brand. Zappos also has another brand-focused presence on Twitter with @inside_zappos, which is devoted to sharing insight, blog posts and videos relating directly to the internal culture and employee activities. More still, Zappos has over 450 employees who tweet either on behalf of the brand or as individuals, and they are all listed on the Zappos Web site.

Getting started

After your business has made considerations and planned a strategy, you will have the information and direction necessary for implementation.

First things first—create an account, upload an image for your avatar, choose your Twitter handle and create a biography (bio). Whether you use your business's or an individual's name will depend on which tactic your business has decided to explore. While both the Twitter handle and your bio can be changed at any time, careful consideration should still take place before choosing your words. Your handle and bio should clearly represent your brand and provide some insight into who you are and what benefit your tweets will provide. Be sure to include links to your Web site and blog, and, conversely, promote your Twitter account on your Web site, blogs other online media. Especially in the case of Twitter handles, remember that communication in tweets and bios is limited to 140 characters. So, your bio must be to the point and your handle needs to be short. Any time a follower wishes to mention you, reply to you, retweet (RT) or Direct Message you, your Twitter handle is included and deducted from that user's 140 character allotcation.

From here, your business will want to watch things for a while before jumping into the

actual tweeting. Remember those initial searches you conducted prior to deciding that Twitter was right for your business? Conduct them again and "listen" to what is being said, but this time as a way to get a feel for the flow of the community conversations. Then, begin tweeting and participating in these conversations.

As you do this, begin to follow those who you think can provide useful insight to your brand through their tweets and remember to retweet their comments—not just those you think will be interested in yours. The biggest mistake many businesses make is turning Twitter into a numbers game—attempting to build their followers to impressive numbers in a short period of time, without focusing on relationships and providing valuable content. The goal is quality over quantity: Followers will come to you when you have interesting or useful content to offer them and if you are engaging others in this content.

There is, however, an instance when numbers do matter – when your following ratio is off balance. For example, if you are following 5,000 people but only three are following you, this is usually associated with Twitter accounts that have been set up as spam accounts. The last thing you want is to give the impression that you are on Twitter to sell to and harass people. Be patient. Grow your following as the community that follows you grows.

While you grow your followers and your interactions, be sure to always revisit the strategy your business developed prior to tweeting— keep the content you are providing focused and consistent. Ensure that your business is reaching out to followers and beginning conversations as often as your business is responding to inquiries or participating in conversations initiated by others.

Regardless of how your business has decided to use Twitter, avoid repetitive tweets or over-tweeting. Conversations on Twitter aren't meant to be linear and at any given time one individual on Twitter may be involved in multiple conversations. It's important to make sure that the content your business is providing is relevant and that each Tweet is new. Followers will get bored if you're offering the same content repeatedly. Similarly, if your business is Tweeting every five seconds (thus dominating your followers' Twitter feeds) you may be swiftly un-followed.

Measuring results

As soon as your business begins using Twitter, you will also need to begin measuring and benchmarking results. Evan Gerber, contributor to MarketingProfs.com, explains that the first step in measuring Twitter is to understand what the "key performance indicators" are for your strategy's goals and objectives. After those are defined, you can select from several tools and methods to gain perception on everything from how your

business's presence on Twitter is growing to how messages are being shared throughout Twitter and what followers are responding to. [10]

Essentially, let your strategy guide the focus of your measurement. If your business is hoping to use Twitter as a sales tool, you will obviously be examining actual sales in relation to Twitter activity. If your primary goal is to communicate information about your business, then measurement will focus heavily on the reach of your tweets. There are many tools available to assist in measurement on Twitter:

- Bit.ly (http://bit.ly): Used to shorten hyperlinks (so you can fit them in 140 characters), this tool also enables you to find out who is clicking your links and when.
- twInfluence (www.TwInfluence.com): A tool for measuring the combined influence of your business and your followers. This allows for you to better understand the reach of your messages on Twitter.
- Twitalyzer (www.Twitalyzer.com): This tool "evaluates the activity of any Twitter user and reports on relative influence, signal-to-noise ratio, generosity, velocity, and clout."
- Trendistic (http://trendistic.com): A visual interface for tracking trends on Twitter. By entering a keyword, you can see how the keyword is being referenced over time. Depending on the term and the amount of data available, it is possible to see up to 180 days' worth of information.

Beyond Twitter: Applications, tools and resources for maximising engagement

In addition to the tools listed above; there are other tools available that can streamline your business's efforts on Twitter and are definitely worth investigating:

- Use desktop applications like Twhirl (www.twhirl.org) and TweetDeck (www.tweetdeck.com/beta) to easily monitor what your followers are tweeting and be alerted instantly when someone mentions your business or sends you a DM. Many desktop applications have additional features that make tweeting faster and easier, such as automatic link shortening and the option to update other social accounts simultaneously.
- Use applications like TwitVid (www.TwitVid.com) and TwitPic (www.twitpic.com) to upload pictures and video to your Twitter feed.
- Use TwtPoll (www.twtpoll.com) to conduct surveys on Twitter.
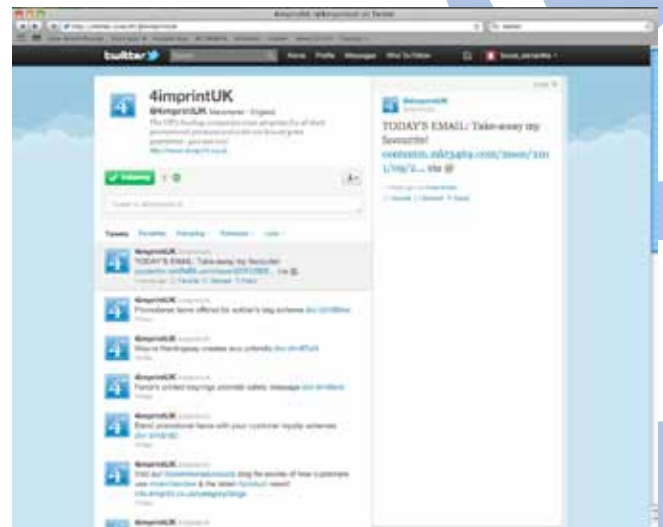- Use TwtVite (www.twtvite.com) to invite followers to join events like in-

10 "MarketingProfs. Marketing Newsletters and Articles." MarketingProfs: Marketing Resources for Marketing Professionals. Web. 29 Sept. 2009. <http://www.marketingprofs.com/9/making-twitter-success-measurable-gerber.asp>.

person get-togethers called "Tweetups" or online events such as Webinars.

Using these tools in conjunction with a solid strategy, clear goals, and willingness to learn and engage will position your business for success in the Twitterverse. While Twitter began as a fun way to pass the time, it has grown into an effective way to share information, promote and engage with audiences. It is truly a legitimate tool in navigating the changing ways that consumers and businesses communicate.

It all boils down to this: Once you've embraced Twitter in a business sense, approach its use like you would a conversation in the real world. As author Shel Israel pointed out in a interview with blog "Bulldog Reporter," Twitter is "like networking at a real-life event. If you're talking to a few people about a topic, and some guy walks into your circle and starts bragging, he's not going to be well received," said Israel. "But if he comes into the room, makes eye contact, listens and then offers a useful piece of information to the conversation—that may or may not be about his company—that's an effective way to join the conversation." [11]

Globally 4imprint has a couple of Twitter accounts, you can follow 4imprintUK on Twitter - @4imprintUK. We tweet about new promotional products, special offers and industry developments - and post daily marketing newsfeeds pertaining to the public sector, education, small businesses and charities. Consider giving us a follow! We look forward to your tweets.

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11 Zeccola, Frank. "Now is the Time for PR to Thrive in "Twitterville": Author Advises Leading the Conversation About Brands to Capitalize on Social Media's Global Neighborhoods." Web log post. Bulldog Reporter - Daily Dog. 23 Sept. 2009. Web. 21 Sept. 2009. <http://www.bulldogreporter.com/ME2/Audiences/>