

# **30 Things I Wish I Knew When I Started On**

twitter



**By Nick Bowditch**  
**@nickbowditch**

Since 2006, hundreds of thousands of people have gotten on the Twitter bandwagon. Users of the social media micro-blogging platform have grown recently at a rate of 1382% per month!

While I have a following of around 1,300 people now, when I started using Twitter a few months ago, I had no idea what I was doing with it. Like a lot of new Twitterers, after a few days of tweeting to nobody and getting nothing in return (obviously), I thought the same thing I have heard a million times from people, “what a waste of time”.

So if you are new to Twitter and having the same doubts, don't despair.

I am going to share with you the 30 things I wish I knew when I started on Twitter.

## **1. Complete your bio.**

Why would anyone follow you and what you have to say if they don't know who you are and what you are going to tweet about? Would you follow someone like that?

Include at least your real name (for personal accounts) or your business name (for business accounts) and a webpage (or even better a customised Twitter landing page) and a short but succinct summary of you.

## **2. Personal Accounts vs Corporate Accounts.**

Have a personal account and username if you are that person and a business account if you just want to project the corporate image or your business without any real personalisation.

## **3. Personalise your Personal Account.**

If your Twitter account is a personal one, use a photo of **you** as the display photo and make the photo relevant to your personality or the subject of your tweets.

For instance, I have used the same photo of me while on holidays looking silly for my photo and since I tweet about family travel and the lighter side of travel, the photo is both appropriate and has become what my Twitter profile is sort of known for.

Also, think about including a personalised background for your Twitter homepage as well. I reckon nothing looks worse or gives off more of an impression that you are not really committed to tweeting than having one of their default backgrounds or worse still the default avatar instead of a photo.

#### 4. Promote your Twitter account offline.

Include your Twitter username and URL on your business cards and other offline marketing as well. Putting my Twitter URL on my business card early on has definitely helped me get a lot more traffic to both my Twitter account and my webpage.



## **5. Make your tweet 're-tweetable'.**

If you want your Twitter community to spread your word around (and let's face it who wouldn't) then you have to make it as simple as you can for them to do it.

When someone 're-tweets' any of your tweets there are some characters at the start (eg RT @nickbowditch – 16 characters) that will be included in their re-tweet.

Therefore, try to keep your tweets (or at least the ones you hope people will re-tweet) to a maximum of about 120 characters instead of the standard 140.

## **6. Make a Twitter landing page.**

There are two very good reasons to do this: you look far more professional for a start, you can monitor how much traffic you are getting to your website directly from Twitter. You can also offer a free download, ebook or other product to followers this way also.

## **7. Follow people to get followed.**

Don't get caught up in the "how many followers do you have" mentality. You could have 10,000 followers but if 9,999 of them aren't who you want to read your tweets or who you are trying to reach in your Twitter community then what's the point?

However, when you start and you are trying to actually reach the people you want to, if you follow people a lot of them will follow you back. This is a good way to get the ball rolling and add some credibility to your account.

### **8. Watch for people replying to you who aren't on your list.**

A reply or tweet to you from someone who you are not following is often an invitation to engage with them and either follow them or begin a dialogue with them. Some of these can turn into some of your strongest followers and most useful Twitter community members.

### **9. Reply to people you are following, especially if they're not following you.**

I don't mean the kind of sad way a lot of people reply to the Twitter celebrities in the vain hope they might actually engage them, but certainly with thought leaders or interesting people in your field, this is a great way to get off the mark with them and further establish your Twit-cred.

### **10. Give your tweets good headlines.**

Consider starting tweets that you want to grab attention and hopefully get re-tweeted with headlines such as: Breaking News, Free E-Book or New Blog Post. Remember there is a lot of boring stuff about what people are having for lunch to stand out from!

**11. “Listening always comes first.” @chrisbrogan**

So true. Don't try and jump in and be an opinion leader or Twittermaster overnight. Sit back, follow some interesting people and learn... you will be much better for it in the future.

**12. Retweet others without ulterior motives.**

There is nothing that says you are a good Twitter citizen like retweeting or promoting other people's work when it has nothing to do with your area of interest or expertise.

I don't mean just retweet all the rubbish about people heating up their lasagne leftovers, but if I see something that is responsible, legitimately helpful stuff, but has nothing to do with travel, I still might retweet it.

This makes it a lot more easy for people to retweet my stuff too.

**13. Don't just push your own agenda.**

Similar to the above point, it sounds obvious but a lot of people on Twitter don't really get it. Be generous and understand other people's motives – it's not all about you.

#### **14. Don't do the hard sell.**

Also might seem obvious but a sure-fire way to turn people off is be one long infomercial. There is no reason you can't use Twitter for commercial reasons but be tactful about it.

#### **15. "Building community is a marathon and not a sprint." @chrisabraham**

Basically be a good citizen, don't piss anyone off and you will see your community grow as I and lots of other Twitterers have. Also don't be disheartened if it seems to take forever for people to get your stuff, remember its quality and not quantity.

#### **16. Thank retweeters.**

Some people will argue against this as it clogs up the timeline and is superfluous, but I totally disagree. If someone does something nice for you in the real world you would thank them. I reckon it is no different on Twitter. Be courteous.

#### **17. Include your original link.**

If you like me think that people who retweet your stuff should be thanked, I think the original link should always be included in your thankyou tweet.

For instance, if I tweeted something about my new blog post and the URL was <http://tinyurl.com/abcde>, and @myfriend retweeted it, I would reply to her with “Thanks for the RT about my new blog post @myfriend <http://tinyurl.com/abcde>.”

In this way, my thankyou doesn’t just seem like random rubbish but instead a sincere thankyou but this also gives a second chance to promote your blog post to your (and maybe her) followers.

### **18. Use Direct Messages (DM’s) for more personal or ongoing conversations.**

There is nothing worse to me than this:

@boringperson1 hey, how are you doing?

@boringperson2 yeh great. How are you?

@boringperson1 yeh not bad. Just heating up my lasagne.

@boringperson2 oh ok. Did you make it yourself?

@boringperson1 no no its leftovers. Was takeaway last night.

Right... who cares? I mean its fine if you want to use twitter like MSN but don’t subject all your followers to it or they might not be your followers for very long.

If you are engaged in a long conversation or something of a more personal nature, use the direct messages!

### **19. Start local networking groups and “tweet-ups”.**

This has been something that has worked really well for me. Convert the online interaction into offline interaction, particularly as a lot of Twitterers are also small business owners or employers of larger corporations, these tweet-ups might actually be good business networking as well.

### **20. Incorporate Twitter into your other online presences.**

Add your Twitter feed to your blog or other social media, especially Facebook as it has quite a large crossover following of Twitter users.

There are many badges and widgets available and services that automatically change your Facebook status to read your most recent tweet.

### **21. Tweet your photos.**

Use applications like **Twittergram** and **Twitpic** to share your photos with your Twitter following. This can add real value to your tweets especially if you are tweeting about breaking news or something where you can share a relevant on-the-spot photo.

## **22. Promote your Twitter handle on your site or blog to prove you are the real person.**

OK this is more if you are celebrity of some sort I guess but talking about your Twitter profile on your blog ensures that everything you tweet is actually your own work and thoughts and not someone who might just be pretending to be you. This is important for those with business accounts too.

## **23. Tweet your blog posts in 3 different ways.**

If you tweet to your followers to alert them to a new blog post (as I do) don't just do the same wording over and over and don't just tweet the title of your blog post.

Ask a question about what you've written, or take a standout (or controversial) line from the blog and tweet that instead.

If you tweet about a new blog post say 3 times in one day, make sure it is worded in 3 different ways.

## **24. Tweet when comments are made on your blog/site.**

This is another way you can get extra exposure and traffic to a blog post or item on your website that you may have already tweeted about.

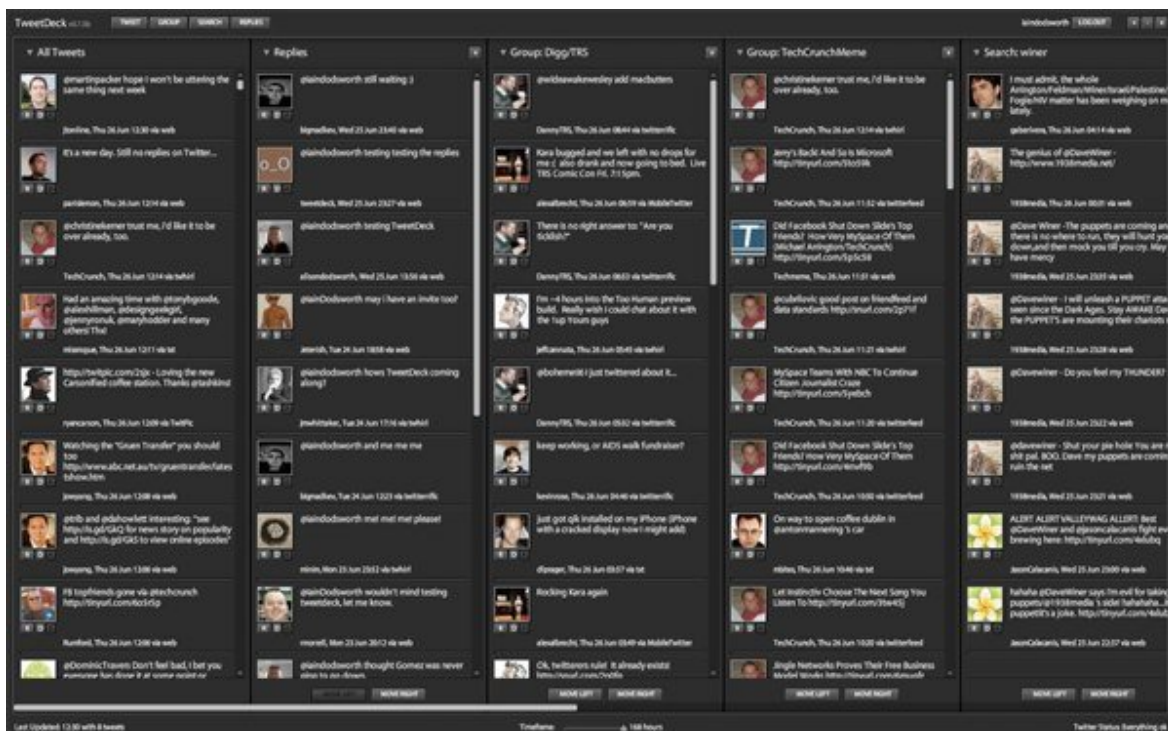
When someone leaves a comment (good or bad) you can thank them for it (if they are on Twitter) or just tell your followers to check out what they said on your website.

This has the added bonus of maybe encouraging others to comment on the post as well.

## 25. Use a third party client so you don't miss anything.

There are many third party clients, such as **Tweetdeck**, **Twhirl** and **Destroy Twitter** that are absolutely essential if you plan on doing a lot on Twitter.

They let you keep up with not only the public timeline but also when people either respond to you or talk to you as well as when they send you direct messages. You can also use them to search keywords or other users and they are mostly all free.



## **26. Use a line in your blog posts to encourage users to “tweet this”.**

Again, this is about making it easy as possible for users to retweet your stuff. If you have a blog and someone near the beginning of a post you include this line:

Click [HERE](#) to tweet this on Twitter:

you will have a much greater chance of people retweeting your work. It adds value to your posts but also shows you are very Twitter savvy which could be important in your area of interest.

## **27. Shorten your URL's.**

There are a lot of sites now which will shorten your link in a tweet from a big long messy string of characters down to a handful. One of the most famous of these was <http://tinyurl.com>.

A lot of the third party clients like **Tweetdeck** also include a URL shortening function.

It basically frees up a lot more characters for you to use your own text on.

## **28. The most under-used function on Twitter: Search.**

You can use the Search function within Twitter to track not only your own points of interests and your own name or service provided but also competitor's names and businesses.

For instance, if you were the boss of Coca-Cola you could search for people who are saying (either good or bad) things about Pepsi and communicate with them on Twitter also.

Search can also be important after you have just posted a blog about a certain person, company or topic. If people are also talking about the same thing and you can find what they are saying through Search, you can add value to them by directing them to your new blog post about the same subject.

But be careful – you don't want to come off as an eavesdropper or commercial vulture – very poor form.

## **29. Use #hashtags.**

People use hashtags on Twitter for all sorts of things, and you can basically make one up yourself and use it as long as it isn't already being used for something, or by someone, else.

I use the hashtag of #familytravel a lot and it makes it easier for my followers and also others interested in family travel to keep up with my tweets.

They are also useful if there is a topic of current affairs such as protests in Iran, Michael Jackson's death or Victorian bushfires.

### **30. Use Twitter as your business' help desk or customer service portal.**

This is perhaps one of the best uses of Twitter and can save a lot of manhours and time spent on the phone also. Companies like **Dell** have been doing this for a long time.

Could you help your customers by getting them to tweet you for a direct and immediate response rather than sending a email or calling?

So there you go. Obviously there are loads of other uses for Twitter and everyone you will speak to will have some tip or advice about it.

The most important thing I believe is be a good Twitter citizen, be courteous and respectful, don't use profanity or say sexist, racist or other unsavoury things in your tweets and you will get great use from this social media platform.

Oh, and don't forget to add me!

**@nickbowditch**

**<http://www.twitter.com/nickbowditch>**