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## Is Twitter The Next Big Thing?

By: Adaline Lau, Hong Kong

*Published: Feb 13, 2009* [Delicious](#)  [Reddit](#)

Hong Kong - Micro-blogging social networking service Twitter continues to gain traction with users from more than 180 cities including Hong Kong last night gathering to celebrate Twestival and raise funds for charity.

According to Hubspot, there are currently 4 to 5 million Twitter users worldwide.

In Hong Kong, statistics from Hitwise showed visitors to the Twitter website increased year-on-year at 38.16% from January 2008 to January 2009.

Simon Tayler, managing consultant for Text 100, one of the sponsors for the event, said Twestival was the first global charity event organised by Twitter users and it was the first meeting for Tweeter users in Hong Kong.

He said Text 100 decided to support the event as the agency has a strong commitment to social media and "we believe it is a powerful tool for our clients to communicate with customers, bloggers, journalists and other stakeholders".

Taylor said the underlying strength of Twitter is that it is a quick and cost-effective way to build relationship with customers.

He said companies such as those in the US that are first using Twitter are innovators and it is good for their reputation to have an early Twitter presence.

"Particularly in the current economic climate, it is a quick way to reach customers and an opportunity to differentiate themselves as innovators," Taylor said.

 

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As marketing budgets come under pressure, companies are looking for new and innovative ways to communication and marketers turn to innovative tools such as Twitter.

Taylor said starting on Twitter is easy. However, companies need to be clear why and how you are going to use it and who you are going to talk to. He said it is not a one way mechanism and when people start conversations with you, be prepared in responding.

And Twitter can actually generate sales for your company. A report in December revealed Dell produced US\$1million in revenue over the past year and a half through sale alerts via Twitter.

Jay Oatway, editor of *Charged* and a Twitter enthusiast, said marketers could use Twitter as a marketing channel but warned companies from sending Twitter spams as followers could easily unsubscribe.

Oatway, with more than 6,000 followers from around the world, advised if a business is keen to use Twitter, it should have a full-time person dedicated to this social networking tool.

On the ad agency front, Chloe Reuter, manager of PR & special projects manager for DDB China, recently started a Twitter account for the agency to enhance its digital PR strategies and optimise the platform to spread news about DDB China group.

She aims to use Twitter to make her agency's PR news travel as wide as possible and as part of a talent strategy to communicate with internet savvy marketers.

In response to rumours that Twitter might start charging companies, Reuter said it's still too early for her to comment as she has just started to discover the possibilities of Twitter and looking at how successful a tool it is in driving traffic to her company site and blog but she is definitely "quite excited about it".

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**report**

[jeff@webguruasia.com](mailto:jeff@webguruasia.com) at Feb 13, 2009

I really like Twitter but I think it has a ways to go in Asia because it still does not



Lori Sobel, Managing Director Sales and Operations Southeast Asia, Google Inc.



& Siva Ganeshanandan, Marketing Director Asia Pacific, Interwoven

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have enough critical mass. With only 4-5 million users worldwide, it doesn't come close to YouTube, Facebook or any of the other social networking big boys yet. Therefore I wouldn't spend too much time and effort on it although it's still a useful tier 2 or tier 3 strategy to play with for now without spending too much time on it.

In the short term, I would use Twitter as another channel for engaging popular/influential bloggers. Here's why:

1. Regular bloggers are more likely to use Twitter
2. With so few Twitter users in Asia now, a brand can efficiently leverage the much larger audiences of top bloggers' readers in this way

But the really good news is that it's really easy for brands to know when it's finally time to start taking Twitter seriously. Here are 4 easy steps to do this:

1. Go to search.twitter.com. This is a special search engine just for Twitter posts.
2. Set up searches for keywords related to the brand such as the brand or product name, company name, geographic area of our local market, CEO name (if he/she is closely tied to the brand identity as in the case of Tony Fernandes/AirAsia or Richard Branson/Virgin), etc.
3. Save these search results as RSS feeds. It just takes a click of the mouse on search.twitter.com.
4. Import these RSS feeds into a free RSS reader such as Google Reader with another easy mousclick. This means we can get automatically updated every time there is a Tweet that matches the search criteria with no more effort than checking our Google Reader once a day (or once a week or however often it takes at the beginning).

As soon as the brand starts to see many Tweets, it's a clear signal that there is now a groundswell of conversation and it's time to move into Twitter more aggressively. This is a free, automatic, early warning system that takes only a few minutes to set up and just a few minutes each time to monitor—until it's time to make a more serious move into the Twittosphere, of course. But by that time, we would have already determined that Twitter is worth the extra effort.

Finally, I think Twitter has got to be a long way off of charging for its service. And even if it does have a large user base, I think it would be a big mistake to charge for its service anyway because people don't want pay for services like this. This is because related services such as full-blown blogging platforms like WordPress and Blogger and hybrid micro-blogging platforms like tumblr are free.

Jeff Zweig  
Chief Guru, Web Guru Asia  
[www.webguruasia.com](http://www.webguruasia.com)

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