Twitter:

How to set up and leverage micro-blogging to disseminate #evidence and build a community of practice

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There is no doubt that we live in a world where we feel both strapped for time and under pressure to keep up with the latest evidence. We also live in a society where we can access knowledge and glean answers in real-time on smartphones and tablets, literally from the palms of our hands. One of the most widely used information apps is Twitter, a platform for the art and power of a few well-chosen words. For busy health-care professionals who need to keep up with new and emerging evidence in their field of practice, this short-message approach has definite advantages.

Twitter is catching on. It is not only being used to disseminate notifications about the latest evidence, but live streaming Tweet chats are also being held to discuss topics of interest online and at conferences. While many criticize the content on Twitter as being trivial, the Twitter dichotomy can be summed up as follows: "This is what the naysayers fail to understand: it's just as easy to use Twitter to spread the word about a brilliant 10,000-word New Yorker article as it is to spread the word about your Lucky Charms habit." — Steven Johnson, author of *The Invention of Air*

With this article, we hope to tweak your interest in the potential of Twitter to find and disseminate evidence, create worldwide communities of practice in your fields of interest and to introduce you to a few basics to get you started.

Microblogging

Twitter, also referred to as micro-blogging, provides a platform to sum up the essence of a message in 140 characters or less. Registered users can read and post tweets, while non-registered users can only read tweets. Users access Twitter through the website interface,

SMS, or mobile device app on a smartphone or tablet.

Twitter founder Jack Dorsey (@Jack) has explained the origin of the "Twitter" title: "...we came across the word twitter, and it was just perfect. The definition was 'a short burst of inconsequential information,' and 'chirps from birds.'" A perfect name, said Dorsey, because "that's exactly what the product was."[1]

Trending

What's trending on Twitter? A word, phrase or topic that is mentioned at a greater rate than others is said to be a trending topic. Trending topics become popular either through a concerted effort by users or because of an event that prompts people to talk about a specific topic.

Trends are determined by an algorithm and, by default, are tailored for you based on whom you follow and your location. This algorithm identifies topics that are popular now, rather than those that have been popular for a while or on a daily basis, to help you discover the hottest emerging topics of discussion on Twitter that matter most to you.
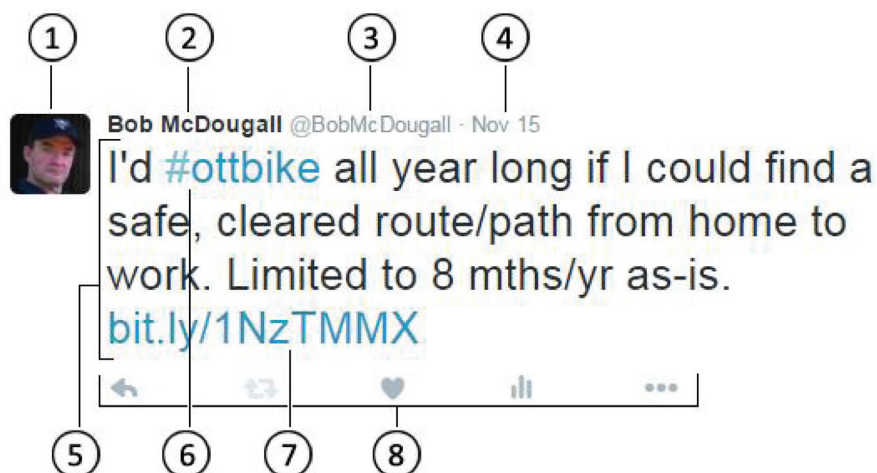
You can choose to see trends that are not tailored for you by selecting a specific trends location on twitter.com. Location trends identify popular topics among users in a specific geographic location.[2]

The Anatomy of a Tweet

A tweet may contain photos, videos, links, a quick poll and up to 140 characters of text.

1. **Profile picture:** The image uploaded to your Twitter profile in Settings. If you still have an egg as your profile picture people may perceive your account as fake. Change it.

Bob McDougall @BobMcDougall · Nov 15
I'd #ottbike all year long if I could find a safe, cleared route/path from home to work. Limited to 8 mths/yr as-is.
bit.ly/1NzTMMX

2. **Twitter account name:** The name of your account. You can use your real name or some other identification.

3. **Twitter @username:** Your @username is your unique identity on Twitter. Think of it as your Twitter URL, as in: twitter.com/bobmcdougall. The @ sign is also used to mention people in tweets, like this: Hello @bobmcdougall! Your account name and username do not need to be the same.

4. **Tweet timestamp/date:** This tells you when the tweet was sent.

5. **Tweet text:** Every tweet fits into a space that is under 140 characters—just the right size for a big idea, a headline or a timely observation.

6. **Hashtags:** A hashtag is any word or phrase with the # symbol immediately in front of it. This symbol turns the word into a link that makes it easier to find and follow a conversation about that topic.

7. **Links:** You can link to other websites, articles, photos and videos within a tweet. Links can be shortened to save space using the Twitter URL shortener or bit.ly.

8. **Tweet actions:** Here you can *reply to*, *retweet*, or *like* a tweet and view tweet activity. On your tweets, you can also access the "more" option, which allows a user to Share via Direct Message, Copy Link to Tweet, Embed Tweet, Pin to Your Profile Page or Delete the Tweet. In addition to the options on your tweets, on another user's tweets, you can use the "more" option to Mute, Block or Report.

Twitter Bio

Think of your Twitter bio (1, below) as your online business card. People are looking to connect with others who share the same interests. Twitter accounts search results give preference to those users who have a complete name, username and bio on their profile. You are limited to 160 characters. Use hashtags to allow yourself to be searchable to those with similar interests. Keep your bio information current. Include a link to your website, blog or other social media page in your Twitter bio. When the details of your business or work life change, ensure that your Twitter bio is updated.

Social Media Dashboards

TweetDeck is owned by Twitter and is a social media dashboard application for the management of Twitter accounts. TweetDeck gives the Twitter experience more flexibility by letting you view multiple timelines (viewed as columns) in one easy interface. Like other Twitter applications it interfaces

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#RegisteredNurse. Enterostomal Therapist. Striving to reduce incidences of #ChronicDisease through #PublicHealth. I mom. I bike. I write. — ①

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with the Twitter API (application programming interface) to allow users to send and receive Tweets and view profiles.

Advanced users can take advantage of TweetDeck's features to get the most of Twitter. TweetDeck's interface consists of a series of customizable columns, which can be set to display your Twitter timeline, mentions, DMs (direct messages), lists, trending topics, favourites, search results, hashtags or all tweets by or to a single user. All columns can be filtered to include or exclude words or users. Tweets can be sent immediately or scheduled for later delivery. It also allows users to manage several Twitter accounts at once. This is helpful if you have a personal account, but also manage one for work or your association. Sign in with your personal Twitter account at tweetdeck.twitter.com to get started. Other social media management programs you might want to explore include Hootsuite, Buffer, Everypost and Tiempy, among others.

Building a Community of Practice: Find-Follow-Interact and Build

Authors have spoken of the power of social media to connect and unite like-minded individuals.[3,4] A recent study of advanced practice nurses in the U.S. showed that 19% were using Twitter.[5] Building a community of like-minded thinkers in Twitter can be seen as having a basic recipe: "Find-Follow-Interact-Build." But how does one do this?

Known leaders in any field of interest can be found by searching their name preceded by the @ symbol. Most professionals use their real names and include a personal photo for ease of identification. Any account with a blue verified badge on their Twitter profile is a verified account. Twitter verifies accounts on an ongoing basis to make it easier for users to find who they're looking for. They concentrate on highly sought-after Twitter users in music, acting, fashion, government, politics, religion, journalism, media, sports, business and other key interest areas.

Bios

Twitter users include a brief bio that describes their interests or their niche, often preceded by hashtags (see Twitter Bio on page 32). This is indispensable for those seeking to build a community of interest. Scroll through the first page of Tweets of someone you think you might want to follow to gauge whether their tweets and retweets are of interest. To start receiving their tweets on your own feed, simply click the Follow button.

Hastags

Another way to find Twitter users with similar interests is through the use of hashtags (#). Hashtags are used to categorize content. As mentioned, by adding a hashtag to a keyword or phrase, the content becomes searchable to other users.[3,6] By

Twitter by the Numbers

Since its debut in March 2006 Twitter has grown to include:

320million
monthly active users

1billion
unique visits monthly to sites with embedded tweets

80%
of active users are on mobile

4,300
Twitter employees around the world

35+
Twitter offices around the world

79%
accounts are located outside the United States

35+
languages are supported

*All numbers approximate as of September 30, 2015. (Company, n.d. Accessed November 19, 2015: https:// about.twitter.com.company)

finding content related to your area of interest, you can find Twitter users who are creating content on that subject.

Suggestions from Twitter

Twitter will also suggest other accounts that you may be interested in following. Those suggestions are based on many factors, including your email or phone contacts (if you have chosen to upload them) as well as patterns from your "follow" history. These suggestions for "who to follow" or "people you may know" are generated by an algorithm, which means you may or may not know the accounts or find them relevant or interesting.

Retweeting, Replying, Questions

Twitter is an interactive tool, and not just based on "send and receive." Retweeting other users' content is a simple way to disseminate knowledge through your own community. When retweeting, the option is given to quote a tweet before sending it out. This is an ideal way to add your own opinion or comment to the topic and therefore personalize the content and create greater interaction. Tweet replies also add interaction through conversations, comments and questions to the author. These replies can be private, going only to the originator of the

Suggested Twitter Users by Topic *(not an endorsement)*	
Wounds	@welsh_wounds @woundconnect @woundsUK @woundsIntnl @CochraneWounds @WoundCareCanada
Continence	@cdnContinence @ContinenceMat @AusContinence @MyPelvicHealth
Diabetes	@dgarmstrong @DiabetesAssoc @DiabeticFootCa
Chronic Disease/ Comorbidities	@eliserodd @ChronicDisease_ @HealLymphedema @GetGutsyBC @CDCgov @PHAC_GC @OstomyCanada @theCDPAC

Tweet. But by adding a period before their username, the reply will be sent out to your followers as well. You can also use Twitter to crowd-source your needs. Perhaps you are looking for ways to find research participants or answers to your clinical questions. Using Twitter is an ideal way to disseminate your questions worldwide. Polls can be created on Twitter as well.

Content and Approach

Building a community of like-minded users worldwide comes with the collection of those you follow and who follow you back in mutual interest. Twitter research reflects anecdotal observations that often communities of practice have a small percentage of members

who produce the majority of content.[7] These may be the Tweeters who are worth following, as they have an interest and a dedication to this type of evidence dissemination platform. One recent nursing study outlined some key enablers to establishing an online Twitter community of practice. These included a sense of ownership by its members, a dedicated core group who posted regularly and included aspects of sentiment and practice and a shared identity that enabled an understanding of each other's perspectives.[4] Grajales and colleagues recommend the following principles be applied to social media to mitigate risk and engage audiences: "(1) maintain professionalism at all times, (2) be authentic, have fun, and do not be afraid, (3) ask for help, and (4) focus, grab attention, and engage."[8]

There are other ways in which Twitter can be used to interact in a community of practice. One group of urologists started a professional Twitter journal club, which they found was an exciting way to glean global input.[9] Many conferences are using Twitter as a way of engaging participants and creating interactions between speakers and the audience as well as peer-to-peer interactions. These interactions are typically done by dedicating a screen in the

room to the projection of live tweets during the session. Each session is given its own hashtag. Followers outside of the room can also follow the comments, questions and other interactions during the session. These tweets can be reviewed after the session as well to gather a sense of the proceedings.

Engaging with the Evidence

Twitter information moves at great speed and, as mentioned, categorizing the information on topics by using tools like TweetDeck is essential for avoiding information overload, especially when you follow hundreds of users on a variety of topics. For this reason, it is also an excellent tool for keeping up with news and emerging evidence in your field of practice.[9] In the course of my work to keep the PHAC Canadian Best Practices website up to date, I would continuously scan my Twitter feed for new content in the area of chronic diseases. Many government agencies worldwide employ Twitter to announce new strategies, guidelines and publications. Ideally, it should be part of any knowledge dissemination strategy.

When reviewing content, you may hit upon topics or articles of interest that you would like to return to at a later time. By "favoriting" a tweet, it is added to a list that you can access on your account. Journals or articles often make it easy to tweet about a given topic by embed-

ding a tweet function into the margin of the article itself. If you are signed in to your Twitter account on another tab, you can tweet about the article with one click, otherwise you will be prompted to sign in to your Twitter account before the feature is enabled.

Style

When creating content of interest to your followers on a topic, you must employ the art of brevity. Many Twitter users inject elements of their own personality into the 140-character limit by adding humour, a question or an opinion. Desai and colleagues found that the most effective educational Twitter content was informative, included a citation and had a positive sentiment score.[10] Developing this style takes a bit of practice for many. See below for an example of different styles of tweets:

EXAMPLE 1:
Study shows coffee drinkers less likely to die of certain diseases. http://bit.ly/1OOAqJR

EXAMPLE 2:
Coffee said to reduce insulin resistance & systemic inflammation? I'm off to make my morning cup now! http://bit.ly/1OOAqJR

How often?

The more active you are on Twitter, the greater the engagement with your followers, and the more followers will join you. It is recommended to tweet original content at least once a day. Retweeting is a great way to

disseminate information curated by other users in your field of interest.

We invite you to visit the Twitter website on your computer or download the Twitter app onto your smartphone and tablet. Set up an account, be curious and start searching for content. Keeping up with the evidence in your field of interest is an easy way to use a few spare minutes while riding the bus, waiting for your kids or winding down at the end of the day. ✍

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Elise Rodd – @eliserodd – A registered nurse since 1988 and an enterostomal therapy specialist since 2005, Elise is known nationally for her unique skills in telehealth service development and delivery. She has extensive experience as a nurse advisor to international and federal governments, as well as for First Nations and Inuit Health in Ontario. A prolific author, Elise uses multiple platforms for knowledge dissemination, including Twitter.

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Additional Resources

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