

Microblogging

Using Social Media to Share Updates and Offers

Learning Objectives. This chapter examines how to:

- Use Twitter to broadcast updates about organizational activities
- Create attractive microblogs on Tumblr
- Tap into microblogging-like capabilities on personal message services such as Snapchat, Kik Messenger and LINE.

Overview

Microblogging is a form of *social media messaging* used as an alternative to email or text messaging (Chapter 2) and full-form blogging (Chapter 11). Microblogging entails posting short news announcements that are broadcast to subscribing followers of an organization. In turn, followers can comment, forward messages to friends or family, or take up a call to action contained in the message.

Today microblogging is most commonly associated with the 140-character updates found on Twitter. However, microblogs can take a variety of forms. More than 100 microblogging platforms operated in 2007-2010, when the idea became popular.

Microblogging requires setting up an account with a microblog service that permits users to distribute very short updates and/or images, videos or other documents to followers. Details vary by service. Almost all microblogging sites provide access via their own website or app, but some also enable contributions via text, instant, email and telephone voice mail messages.

People use microblogs to share news about themselves, to obtain updates about current events, and to search for information and sources. Increasingly, microblogs such as Twitter and Tumblr are being used to distribute commercial messages, announcements about special sales events, offers and opportunities to buy directly via the update.

Notably, various social networking sites – Facebook, LinkedIn, My Space and Google+ -- incorporate microblogging features in the form of their News Feeds or Status Updates (Chapter 12).

Today, the most popular stand-alone microblog platforms are Twitter and Tumblr, while mobile-based personal message systems such as Snapchat, Kik Messenger and LINE, offer some similar promotional opportunities.

Twitter

Microblogging on Twitter

Twitter is the best-known and most popular microblogging service, with just under 300 million users worldwide, and captures an incredible amount of public attention and discussion despite the fact that only about 20% of the U.S. population tweets. Indeed, about 10% of Twitter users account for more than 80% of all Twitter activity.

The social media site allows subscribers (“followers”) to receive real-time messages (“tweets”) from specified senders on the system (sometimes referred to as Twitterers or the “Twitterati”). Although Twitter can be accessed from a web browser (Twitter.com) or via social media management tools such as Hootsuite (Chapter 9), most users tweet from mobile devices using Twitter’s own mobile app or one of the numerous enhanced apps such as TwitterFon, TwitterBerry, Tweetie and Twitterific.

To use Twitter requires registering and creating a profile (with photo) and adopting a user name in the same way of many other media platforms.

Twitter messages allow a maximum of 140 characters and spaces (15-25 words), and thus was created as short messaging alternative to texting.

Twitter provides access to all site users, but also permits creating custom lists and organizing groups to better target users and/or restrict exchanges. Twitter feeds traditionally have included only tweets (in reverse chronological order) from people the user is following, but Twitter is considering adding an algorithm-driven alternative to make the service more appealing to new and other users. As a result, tweets could appear in a user’s Twitter stream from people and organizations they do not follow

Twitter has its own complex lexicon of terms. (See Twitter.com’s Help Center for definitions and details.) Some of the most important terms to know are:

Hashtag (#term) – A hashtag consists of a hash mark preceding a term (without a space) and indicates a topic of the message. A hashtag thus serves as a searchable keyword.

@username – The @ symbol followed by a username (with no space) indicates a user and serves as a link to the user’s profile. Include the @ tag whenever referencing other known Twitter users within messages (also referred to a **@Mention**). Encourage others to mention you, as appropriate. **Handle** is another name for username.

Reply (also referred to as @Replies) – A hyperlink accompanying each post allows the user to respond to a tweet. A reply can be seen by all Twitter users. Reply messages begin: @senderoforiginalmessage.

Direct Messages – A separate Message link allows sending private messages (or responses) between people who follow one another. A direct message is abbreviated as *DM* in tweet texts. Messages begin: *d usernameofsender*.

Retweets – Involve forwarding or resending a message to all of a user's followers. Referred to as an *RT* in tweets. Retweets begin: *RT@usernameoforiginalsender*. Whenever possible, encourage others to RT important messages to their followers.

Favorites – Indicates tweets that a user likes and has saved. Anyone can see a user's Favorites.

Compared to email and many social networking sites, Twitter offers restricted functionality and until recently offered only limited search capabilities. (In 2014, the site opened access to its entire database of more than one trillion tweets produced since 2006 and added an advanced search function.) Notably, however, a dizzying array of third-party can be used to perform specific functions. Examples include shortening messages, facilitating chats, analyzing results, linking resources, following and unfollowing others, organizing and filtering posts, updating feeds, scheduling, tracking trends and lists, posting managing multimedia and searching. Locate these by searching Google.

Uses of Twitter

Despite its limitations, and early reputation as a frivolous personal activity, Twitter allows users to share observations about their surroundings, information about events and opinions on a wide range of topics. For individuals, Twitter is a form of empowerment. Evidence suggests a link between bursts of Twitter activity and feelings of elation, power and creativity.

Twitter offers organizations valuable opportunities to communicate short, timely messages to important constituents. Marketers and public relations professionals (along with media personnel and public figures) are among the most avid users of Twitter and typically accumulate large numbers of followers – far more followers than the typical individual user.

Sampling of Other Microblogs

A variety of smaller, specialized microblog platforms operate today and offer unique features:

Friendfeed primarily focuses on facilitating discussions among organized groups on the site and permits posting items via Facebook in addition to other mechanisms.

Plerb also fosters discussions among friends and within groups, and permits sharing photos. Messages can up include up to 500 words.

Plurk begins each message with color-coded “qualifiers” or keywords. “Plurks” typically are about what people are *thinking, feeling* or *doing*.

Flipter strives to gauge *public opinion* about the specific topics posted by members on the site.

Other microblogs are devoted to *dating* (Meetme.com), *sharing videos* (Keek.com, Tout.com) and *collaboration* among working professionals (Passle.com, Solabrate.com, Yammer.com).

Sina Weibo and Tencent Weibo are two leading microblogs sites in China, where microblogs (weibos) are a hybrid between Twitter and Facebook.

Compared with the likes of Twitter or Tumblr, smaller microblog platforms are at a disadvantage because effective microblogging requires a sufficiently large cadre of potential and actual subscribers or followers. Many organizations are inclined to use only one microblogging platform because of the considerable time commitment required.

Beyond providing immediate knowledge that might be valuable to recipients, Twitter can enhance an organization's reputation by generating a continuing flow of news, updates and offers that are relevant to followers. It also can be used to *amplify* exposure for other online communications, such as blog posts or news announcements.

The following are examples of how various organizations successfully use Twitter:

Media and Entertainment

- News organizations – announcements and updates about breaking news stories—intended to drive audience traffic to more detailed broadcast, print or online reports.
- TV shows, music networks, musicians – reminders/previews of upcoming episodes or performances, concurrent messaging during shows.
- Writers/consultants/bloggers – snippets highlighting new blog postings or upcoming articles or publications.
- Celebrities/athletes – details about current involvements or activities of interest to fans
- Events sponsors – live reports about the start, progress or results of concerts, ceremonies, races, sporting competitions, special programs, demonstrations/rallies, etc.

Businesses

- Manufacturers – teasers about new products, special offers, contests, promotions. Also tie-ins to newsworthy events through the process of *newsjacking* (see sidebar).
- Retailers – special offers, daily (or even hourly) sales events and promotions, recognitions received, etc.
- Employers – acknowledgments of individual and group accomplishments, employee engagement activities, business developments, local alerts, etc. (Note: Most employers use *protected* -- versus *public* --

Newsjacking on Twitter

Various organizations can seize upon news events, holidays or other observances to send topical messages that are intended to merely create awareness or a positive affinity with the sender. This practice is sometimes known as *newsjacking* – riding on the coattails of a current event.

A notable example was when Oreo brand cookies gained attention – and lots of secondary public media exposure – when it deftly distributed a tweet with a stock photo that reminded people they could still dunk their cookie into a glass of milk during the blackout that occurred during the 2013 Super Bowl. Such tweets need to be really clever—and not be shallowly exploitive.

Similarly, the Omaha Convention and Visitors Bureau seized upon the use of “Omaha” in snap calls by the quarterback of the Denver Broncos in early 2014. “We certainly appreciate all the love from #PeytonManning :) #OmahaOmaha” generated wide exposure on Twitter based on inclusion of the hashtag with the popular player’s name.

Newsjacking is not without risks. Avoid co-opting hashtags dealing with controversial, emotionally charged or negative news events merely to gain attention. Case in point: Celeb Boutique tried to capitalize on the trending popularity of #Aurora in the aftermath of the mass shootings of theater patrons in Aurora, Colorado in 2012 to promote its Kim Kardashian-inspired dress of the same name – a move that generated harsh criticism for being insensitive and exploitative.

Twitter accounts for internal communications.)

- Crisis Communications – updates about extraordinary events affecting employees, customers, investors, or community members and how the organization is responding.

Political Actors and Public Agencies

- Government – weather, traffic and missing-persons alerts; reminders about upcoming hearings, other events or deadlines.
- Politicians – announcements about pending actions, appointments, or positions on key issues (an increasingly important source of news for journalists).
- Political activists – announcements to organize supports, gain media coverage, and on-site news reports about protests, rallies and other events.
- Social services agencies – alerts about the need for financial or volunteer resources
- Emergency responders – police news about crime and arrests, warnings, news updates about disasters, public safety issues or crises; information about late openings or early closings of facilities; notifications about rumors, product scares or recalls.

Many organizations today now encourage employees to send their tweets to their own followers (customers and prospects) and to retweet organization-originated messages. Strategies include offering special incentives, soliciting feedback, and thanking customers for their business and supportive messages. (See Chapter 9 about creating social media policies to guide Twitter users within the organization.)

Organizations also can monitor Twitter using Hootsuite (Chapter 9) and social media apps such as Twirl and Tweetdeck to monitor what's trending and determine what's being said about them and about topics related to their operations. Twitter has proven to be a valuable customer service tool used by astute and empowered employees to respond to customers who post insightful comments, questions or complaints. The key is to be quick, candid, direct, personal and sensitive to the recipient's concerns. Airlines, for example, have deftly allayed customer dissatisfaction using tweets to communicate about flight and customer service delays. Similarly, organizations can follow tweets involving competitors to gain valuable insights, seize opportunities, and avert similar problems.

Topics for Tweets

A challenge for organizations wanting to maximize their Twitter presence is to develop a variety of different types of messages that will appeal to the various interests of followers and still advance the interests of the organization.

Experts recommend developing a flexible weekly schedule of topics that can be planned, produced and scheduled in advance using tools such as Hootsuite (Chapter 9). Such posts can be supplemented by posts on current events, upcoming events, industry news, links to valuable news stories or blogs, interviews with industry experts, updates on recent posts, and other items.

Sample Topical Schedule

Monday: Preview of the week
Tuesday: Current promotion/offer
Wednesday: Customer profile or success story
Thursday: Helpful hints/tips
Friday: Behind-the-scenes look at your organization
Saturday: Vignettes of interesting employees

Successful Use of Twitter

Organizational Considerations. Despite its potential to be a consumer engagement and customer service tool, only about one-quarter of Tweeting organizations actively use Twitter effectively in this way. Doing so requires a philosophical commitment, the allocation of staff resources, a compatible (not over-lawyered) culture, coordination among social media staff members, and being prepared to respond to unexpected situations.

User Motivation. Success also involves understanding users. Some people follow brands, celebrities, local news posters or only friends. Others follow users as a matter of reciprocity or courtesy because they simply interacted with them. Some followers are highly strategic or purposeful because they think they can gain valuable information or are attracted by a user's profile photo, while others choose followers randomly. Organizations can use software algorithms (such as keywords), while others ignore posts by the people who are following them because of the sheer volume of reciprocal messages they could receive. As a result, the sheer number of followers for a particular organization is not always a quality indicator of engagement.

Network Patterns. Various types of networks also operate within Twitter where the pattern of interaction differs. The Pew Center identified six patterns of conversation networks: *polarized* (two groups interested in the same topic that share different sources but don't interact with one another), *tight crowds* (close communities where participants closely connect with one another for information), *brand clusters* (large groups attracted to a product or celebrity, but with little connectivity), *community clusters* (disconnected individuals who come together because of a common interest in news events and popular topics), *broadcast networks* (followers of particular pundits or sources who actively retweet information) and *support networks* (followers of organizations or people who provide help). <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/02/20/the-six-types-of-twitter-conversations/>

Message Formats/Formulas. With billions of tweets already produced, basic formulas for effective tweets have emerged can serve as models for constructing effective Twitter messages. Hubspot identified 8 prototype messages (with key components and an example provided):

- **The Basic Shared Content Tweet**
[ARTICLE TITLE] - <http://url.com> #hashtag by @TwitterHandle
8 Tweet Formulas to Get You Started on Twitter - <http://hub.am/Sgsvt5> by @DianaUrban
- **The RT With Commentary**
[YOUR OPINION] #hashtag - RT @TwitterHandle [ARTICLE TITLE] - <http://url.com>
#7 is important but often forgotten - RT @mvolpe "10 Things Great Marketers Do Every Day" <http://hub.am/1m6RPK4> by @kellykranz
- **The Problem/Solution Tweet**
Don't let your [ASSET] [NEGATIVE RESULT]. Find out how to [GOAL] here - <http://url.com> #hashtag

Don't let your blog fall into a rut. Find out how to churn out new blog posts quickly - <http://hub.am/1nD3y5M> #blogging

- **The Stat or Fact Tweet**

Did you know that [STAT]? <http://url.com> #hashtag

Did you know 6.5% of blog posts are published on the weekends & they get 18% of all social shares? <http://hub.am/1otH7QF> #blogging

- **The Endorsement Tweet**

I loved this article by @TwitterHandle about [TOPIC] - <http://url.com> #hashtag /

Lots of valuable info on [TOPIC] in this article by @TwitterHandle - <http://url.com> #hashtag

I loved this article by @lkolo25 about how to not screw up your landing pages - <http://hub.am/1p2LQwy> #leadgen

- **The Question Tweet**

[QUESTION] #hashtag / [QUESTION] - <http://url.com> #hashtag

What do you use to schedule your social media posts? #socialmedia

- **The Tip or Advice Tweet**

[YOUR OWN WORDS OF WISDOM] #hashtag /

[QUESTION] #hashtag 1. [ANSWER #1] 2. [ANSWER #2] 3. [ANSWER #3]

Do you pass reshare test? Be valuable on #socialmedia 1. Provide information 2. Provide analysis 3. Provide assistance 4. Be entertaining.

- **The Inspiring Quote**

"[QUOTE]" - @TwitterHandle #quote /

"[QUOTE]" - [NAME OF PERSON NOT ON TWITTER] #quote

"Our time is limited so don't waste it living someone else's life." - Steve Jobs #quote

Courtesy, Hubspot. <http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/tweet-formulas-to-get-you-started-on-twitter>

Writing Effective Tweets

Creating a tweet is easy. Access the "New Tweet" button on upper-right-hand corner of the screen and type in a message in the box provided. A counter tracks the remaining available characters and spaces and prevents exceeding the 140-characters-and-spaces limit when the user clicks the Send button.

Before starting, observe several days of Twitter message streams. Pay particular attention to posts by industry peers and competitors. Recognize in the advance that becoming a successful Twitter user involves developing online relationships with others: Actively engage others by retweeting posts from others and by replying to and favoriting their posts.

When writing tweets: Be creative. Think visually. Tap into current conversations. Some useful tips for writing tweets:

- Although the maximum is 140 characters and spaces, greater engagement occurs when messages are than 100 characters and spaces. The unused space also enables recipients to add comments, hashtags and @mentions when messages are retweeted.

Note: *Overly* short posts often do not engage people.

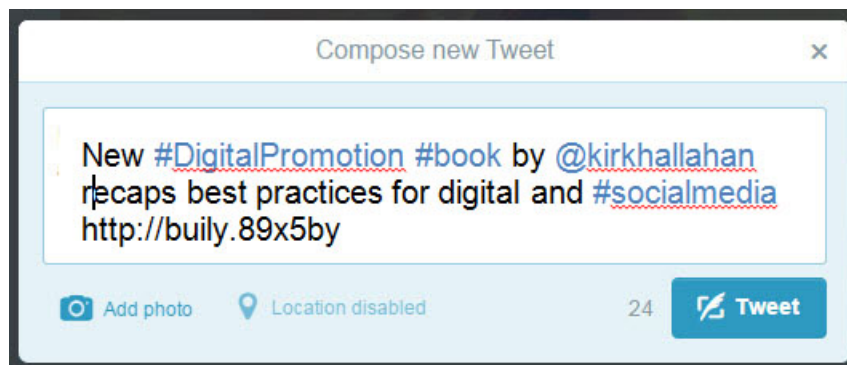
- Make sure messages are meaningful and helpful to the target audiences. Ask: Will recipients want to retweet it or to reply?
- Generate genuine conversation by announcing exciting news, sharing a story, making thought-provoking observations, or posing potentially controversial questions.
- The first several words of each tweet should be carefully worded to maximize impact and elicit a response. Tell people what they should do: Go to... Email..., Call..., View ..., Tell a friend, etc.
- Include a call to action: Ask people to retweet, reply, favorite, etc. Specifically requesting people to retweet can increase engagement 12-fold.
- Establish a consistent voice and but vary the tone appropriately to the message and situation.
- Use short sentences and short words. Rely on acronyms and abbreviations familiar to most people to conserve space and facilitate searching.
- Verbs and adverbs suggesting action generate more responses than nouns and adjectives.
- Insert @mentions of people known to be on Twitter, if important.
- Including one or two hashtags enhances engagement, but three or more hashtags decrease responses.
- When choosing a new hashtag, pick the shortest possible term (preferably 6 characters or less). Shortened URLs conserve precious space in tweets and retweets.

Direct Response Tweets.

Special care should be used in creating tweets where the purpose is for recipients to respond using a hyperlink embedded in the message. Consider this example. Note how this tweet includes:

- A compelling and relevant offer that entices prospective purchasers
- A strong, clear call to action with vivid verbs (order, visit)
- A sense of urgency to take advantage of Twitter's immediacy
- No distracting hashtags, @mentions or rich media – all the focus is on the shorten URL.

Aspenvale Ski Company @aspenvaleski
Winter is coming! 15% off all snowboards during our pre-season sale! Order by Nov 15! Visit our online catalogue bit.ly/58dpytZi



Sample Tweet

This example illustrates how to conserve space. Hashtags are used to describe the product name and 2 product-related categories. The @mention identifies the author. "Best practices" promotes a key benefit. A shortened URL leads to a landing page. Yet 24 spaces remain for retweets.

SIDEBAR

Brevity in 140 Characters and Spaces.

The sparse writing to effectively communicate ideas in a tweet is illustrated in the accompanying sidebar showing three treatments for the same message where the original mobile email was adapted as a text message and as a tweet.

Comparison of Same Message in Three Formats

Mobile Email

(Header and footer omitted)



OBAMA-BIDEN
TRANSITION TEAM

Dear Kirk,

Barack Obama is now officially the President of the United States. In his inaugural address yesterday, he laid out a challenge for all Americans to unite in common purpose and tackle the challenges our nation faces.

In case you missed it, or would like to see it again, the full video, along with the text of President Obama's remarks, is at WhiteHouse.gov. Watch the video now at WhiteHouse.gov.

Thank you,
Obama-Biden Transition Team

Please note that replies to this email will not be answered.

Text Message

(160 characters and spaces max.)

From: Obama-Biden Transition Team
Inauguration Video Online
Date Time

Go to whitehouse.gov. Read the speech and watch the video. See how Barack Obama charged Americans to unite in common purpose and tackle our nation's challenges.

Microblog (e.g. Twitter)

(140 characters and spaces max.)

@Obama-BidenTransitionTeam If you missed it, check out how Barack Obama challenged Americans at yesterday's inauguration. Read speech and watch video at whitehouse.gov 1/21/09 1:10 p.m.

Other Best Practices for Using Twitter

Microblogs can be effective as a messaging tool only if the sponsoring organization develops a cadre of loyal followers. Thus obtaining sign-up for followers is critical, followed by continued engagement.

As possible, avoid giving people reasons to “unfollow” your posts. In addition, because Twitter now allows users to “mute” or hide feeds from Twitter accounts they continue to follow, it's critical to make sure tweets will be read. To do so requires posts not be too frequent, too promotional, too personal or too laden with @’s and #’s. Tweets need to be relevant, timely and engaging.

Proven tactics that have been demonstrated to increase followers include using more photos and hashtags, retweeting other people, engaging others, and encouraging retweeting and favoriting. Followers are dissuaded by the inclusion of links (a sign of spam) and by posts that are off-topic.

Promotion

- Set your account profile to be “public” (not “private”) to encourage new followers.
- Create a compelling user profile (160 characters and spaces). Begin by describing your position or role using concrete terms; avoid superlatives and hype. Most importantly, give two or three reasons to follow you. Write from the perspective of the recipient, e.g. “Followers will receive my latest thoughts about” Include a link to a supplemental About page that details and/or qualifications. Update your profile and About page regularly.
- Promote the organization’s presence on Twitter in all relevant promotional activities, including offline advertising and publicity.
- Embed Twitter buttons or hyperlinks on websites, blogs and other online venues to enable Twitter users to sign up as followers.
- Include #hashtags and @mentions on Facebook and other sites that now allow or encourage using Twitter tags.
- Download and embed a Twitter widget on organizational webpages that displays the organization’s Twitter feeds – a useful way to share information and invite new followers.
- Append properly formatted suggested Twitter message blog posts and other materials that current Twitter users can simply copy and then send.
- Encourage users to permit Twitter notifications to be distributed to their followers whenever they engage in favorite activities. For example, some cable TV control boxes now allow users to tweet whenever they watch a favorite TV show. Visitors can similarly report every time they access an organizational website or blog, view a video on YouTube, or sell an item on eBay or Craigslist.

Co-viewing: Using Social Media In Tandem with Television

People love to talk with others about what they watch on TV, and today many of those conversations take place using smartphones, tablets and computers, often via Twitter and Facebook.

Today social media are critical in building a fan base before, during and after telecasts -- especially for sports and other special events. Witness the famous “selfie of the stars” organized by emcee Ellen DeGeneres during the 2014 Oscar show.



TV shows and commercials today extensively feature hashtags, Twitter handles, Facebook Pages and other social media references to engage users. Shows sponsor their own mobile websites and apps, and invite viewers to vote on their favorite social elements via phone and social media platforms.

Sports fans use social media as second screens to track scores, other games, player stats and other perspectives.

The integrated use of social media can enhance memorability of TV content and heighten purchase intent, especially when brands can time tweets or sponsored posts to coincide with key actions or their own commercials. Brand mentions in social media can increase 30-fold in the month following major events where the brand is featured.

Username and Branding

- Create an easy-to-remember user name. For organizational accounts, a clever name such as “QuiznosSubber” probably will attract more attention than “QuiznosCorp.”
- Personify employees who tweet on behalf of an organization by including their photo instead of an impersonal corporate logo or default icon. Include brief but relevant biographical information that enhances the poster’s credibility as an organizational representative.
- Select usernames and hashtags carefully. Avoid @ and # terms that can be misinterpreted or become the subject of ridicule. Celebrated examples include #susanalbumparty (singer Susan Boyle), #nowthatchersdead (death of Margaret Thatcher death -- or was it the singer Cher?) and #RIMjobs (for Research in Motion employee recruitment).
- Organizations – especially retailers – should be sure to list a “Tweet Location” in their profile to facilitate searching. Many mobile users use Twitter as an alternative to traditional search engines for locating merchants and services.
- A problem plaguing Twitter has been a rash of hackings where unauthorized users hijack Twitter accounts and broadcast derogatory or offensive tweets directed to the account owner or others. BurgerKing and Jeep are among companies that have been “brandjacked” in this way.

Frequency and Timing of Posts

- There is no standard for the right number of Twitter posts per day or per week. Some organizations distribute 5 or 10 tweets a day, some less, others more. The key is to make every tweet count! Each message should be relevant to recipients.
- Send tweets with sufficient frequency that followers become accustomed to hearing from you and observe messages involving retweets, replies, favoriting, etc.
- Consistency is important. Develop a pattern to which recipients can become accustomed. Avoid long absences followed by a deluge of posts. Pacing can be facilitated by scheduling default tweets in advance using a calendaring tool.
- Disperse direct response tweets with other messages (e.g. retweets). Continual (or even consecutive) requests to click on hyperlinks to make purchases or take other action results in reduced response rates.
- Time of day: Daytime posts enjoy 30% more engagement than nighttime posts. The best times are 12 noon and 6 p.m., along with the six hours in between. Generally, avoid sending tweets after 8 p.m. (after 3 p.m. on Fridays), except for urgent updates or announcements.
- Day of week: Weekdays are definitely best for business-to-business (B2B) updates. Weekends can result in higher engagement rates for many business-to-consumer (B2C) tweets because people often have more time to consider offers. Calendaring tools can facilitate distribution of pre-scheduled consumer tweets outside business hours.
- Mobile users often access Twitter during key parts of their day: when waking up, while commuting or at school or work, while shopping, and just before bed.

- Use Hootsuite or other social media management software to pre-schedule posts. Twitter also provides its own management dashboard that incorporates a planning calendar and scheduler.

Message Activity

- Similar to email and digital advertising campaigns, carefully design landing pages if the purpose is to drive traffic to a website or microsite for recipients to take action.
- Invite followers to RT (retweet) messages to their followers and possibly save the message as a Favorite.
- Consider using Twitter Direct to respond to individual users with questions or problems instead of addressing all followers. Respond to every query whenever possible.
- The same tweet can be posted more than once (retweeted by the sender) to reach followers who might have missed the original post.
- Prevent Twitter from becoming a massive time drain. Balance Twittering with the use of other potentially more valuable messaging and promotion media.
- Avoid being designated with the dreaded **#fail** hashtag – assigned by users in retweets and replies in conjunction with errant tweets that have gone awry for some reason. Criticisms typically stem from messages that are deemed inaccurate, offensive, inappropriate, politically incorrect or insensitive to the others. (See the sidebar discussion in Chapter 9 about the unintended consequences of haste when posting social media messages.)

Images and Video on Twitter

Images have been popular fare on Twitter for many years and originally appeared as thumbnails with links to the full images. Twitter now enables inclusion of four images per tweet and permits inline images that expand in the Twitter stream in order to increase user engagement. Evidence suggests that this larger format significantly increases retweet rates. Images should be uploaded to Twitter's own server (pic.twitter.com) directly or using a Twitter app. Images posted elsewhere can continue to be linked using a thumbnail. In addition to images and videos, Twitter supports embedding animated GIFs and SlideShare decks (presentations, including documents) and introduced a new mobile video camera app enabling the direct creation of multimedia posts.

Vine is an application available for mobile phones and tablets that allows sponsors to post very short (6-second) videos in the Twitter stream (and directly to others, in bulk or as a personal message). These micro-productions are intended to quickly communicate a single idea and/or a particular aesthetic feeling. By necessity, Vine messages must be simple and direct. Vines can be used for a variety of purposes – to tease audiences, start a conversation, create brand awareness, announce an offer, promote an event, or attract new employees or customers.

Advertising on Twitter: Promoted Accounts, Tweets and Trends

Similar to Facebook and other social networking sites, Twitter is seeking to monetize its activities through advertising and has redesigned its pages to be more appealing and offers more targeting options. Twitter's advertising program continues to evolve and it's

not yet clear which kinds of organizations might best benefit from paying to promote themselves on Twitter. For details, see the Twitter for Business website (<https://business.twitter.com/>).

Advertisers can start by setting specific objectives and are only charged when desired engagement outcomes are reached – an increase in followers, clicks, retweets, replies, being designated a “favorite” tweet, or converting the visit into an action (visiting a website, downloading an app or generating a lead).

Twitter’s three principal paid formats include:

- **Promoted Accounts** – Listings of suggested organizations that users do not currently follow but might find interesting. The purpose is to grow the sponsor's follower base.
- **Promoted Tweets** – Ordinary tweets (including multimedia) purchased by advertisers who want to reach a wider group of users. Promoted tweets appear in the regular Twitter stream, but when clicked expand to one of 5 *Twitter cards* (originally known as *lead generation cards*) tailored to different objectives: attract followers, website clicks, Tweet engagements, app installs or business leads. Audio cards now allow user to preview and download music from sites such as SoundCloud. Promoted tweets can be retweeted, replied to, or favorited. Twitter’s algorithm uses a variety of indicator, based on behavior and usage patterns, to determine which promoted tweets are relevant to particular users.
- **Promoted Trends** -- Users see time-, context-, and event-sensitive trends promoted by advertisers on top of the “Trending Topics” list that appears on their Twitter stream. These are clearly marked as “Promoted.”

Twitter has introduced several other special programs for advertisers:

- **Twixslusive Coupons** – An exclusive offer on Twitter that followers can’t find elsewhere. Brick-and-mortar merchants can tweet a discount code for customers to redeem at the register. Online merchants can send a tweet with a

Microblogging at Special Events

Nowhere are the popularity of Twitter and other social media better evident than at major public events—such as football, soccer and baseball games, concerts and public parades and pageants.

The sharp spike in demand among users at public events all too often leads to service blackouts as the Wi-Fi and cellular transmission systems become overloaded. Events managers need to keep this problem in mind when planning major special events, especially because more than one-quarter of attendees can now be expected to engage in social media exchanges on site.

Recognizing how social media sharing enhances users’ experience, venue operators, event promoters, performers and service providers are struggling to assure sufficient capacity and access.

Efforts include upgrading Wi-Fi networks at venues and beefing up cellular networks (known as distributed antenna systems) in arenas, stadiums and parks where concerts are held. In the future, performers can even be expected to travel with Wi-Fi rigs along with their instruments, sets and sound equipment.

Several companies now specialize in outfitting venues with permanent and temporary transmission equipment. Meanwhile, venue operators employ special staffs, such as the “Ninerds” at San Francisco’s Levi’s stadium, to help fans log on to the venue’s Wi-Fi system and navigate the stadium’s own mobile app.

discount code that users can redeem at checkout.

- **Flock to Unlock** – Incentivizes recipients to retweet a message to friends. As a reward, they are eligible to unlock exclusive content, such as a discount, special product or early purchase opportunity.
- **Buy Button** – A link embedded in promoted tweets (comparable to the Buy Button on Facebook) leads users to a landing site where they can enter credit card information to complete a merchandise purchase, which then will be shipped to the recipient. This feature was initially introduced in ads for about three dozen advertisers but is expected to be available to others.
- **Offers** – Enables advertisers to create credit-card-connected promotions and share them with Twitter users directly on their timelines. Users qualify for the deal by using their mobile phone to link the deal to the credit card information on file with their Twitter account. Later, the user can redeem their offer in stores and the discount will be automatically applied to the purchase (if using the same credit card) without the need for a coupon or code.
- **Website tags for remarketing.** Advertisers can embed code in their websites that identify Twitter users as a means to track conversions or later reinforce the website experience by exposing Twitter users to the advertiser's Promoted Tweets or Promoted Account listing.

AC Nielsen now provides measures of exposure among shows on Twitter in tandem with its TV ratings and publishes a Top 10 list weekly.

Twitter-Based Events

Live-tweeting an event involves posting tweets before, during and after an event using a #hashtag that is circulated to attendees as well as people who are not present. Live-tweeting creates a documented stream of event highlights for people, adds an extra element of engagement to the event, and can increase follower counts and facilitate connections. Tweets can provide moment-by-moment reports, summaries, contextual information (drawing from sources outside the event), anecdotes and comic relief, questions for recipients to ponder, and observations about the importance or implications of the event. Live-tweets can also prompt post-event actions. Always tag speakers and companies with the appropriate #hashtag or @mention, feature images and videos, and engage with other live tweeters. Coverage should cover highlights of the event, but should be selective in order to not overwhelm or annoy recipients.

Two types of meetings created around Twitter are also valuable forms of promotion:

A **tweet-up** is an *offline* or in-person gathering of Twitter users. Politicians often refer to such get-togethers as Twitter Town Halls. The purpose typically is for people to meet to discuss a topic of mutual interest or simply to socialize and build community. The event can be announced in advance and details updated on Twitter with a specially designated hashtag (#eventname). Various Twitter apps, such as Twellow, a directory of Twitter users, can be used to expand the invitation list beyond existing followers of the organizer. Participants can then post updates as the event happens.

A **tweet-chat** or **Twitter Party** is an *online* or virtual meeting of Twitter users interested in a particular topic. An organizer announces the topic and time, establishes a unique hashtag for the event, and people rendezvous online using their mobile device or computer. Participants can follow the conversation using their regular Twitter feed, but also can narrow the number of posts they need to follow during the meeting by using a Twitter client such as Tweetdeck or Hootsuite, or apps such as Tweepchat, TwitterFall, Tweet Grid or Twubs. Twitter chats allows crowdsourcing ideas, researching an industry, connecting with new leads, extending your reach, creating community, and tracking success through analytics.

Twitter in Perspective

Twitter can be a power broadcasting tool to share updates and offers with followers, despite being used directly by only one-fifth of all Americans. Its impact on the flow of information, however, is significant in light of the dependence of many opinion leaders on Twitter and the coverage that Twitter activity can receive in the news media.

Police departments, for example, use tweets to announce important developments related to crime, both to the public directly and to the news media, the traditional news channel. Notable examples include news provided in real-time about the Boston Marathon bombings in 2012, the Navy Yard shootings in Washington, D.C., in 2013, and the arrest of singer Justin Bieber in Miami Beach in 2014.

Notably, organizations take risks when using Twitter – and unintended consequences can result. The New York Police Department distributed a tweet using the hashtag #myNYPD that invited citizens to tweet photos of themselves with NYPD officers. However, the result also included a rash of posts chronicling alleged police brutality. Similarly, AT&T was criticized for posting a photo intended to commemorate the 9/11 shootings. The photo featured a hand holding up a smartphone with the Tribute of Light Memorial in the background and the caption “Never Forget.” But the reference as to what should be remembered was not clear. Actor Ashton Kutcher similarly was attacked for posting a tweet defending fired Penn State football coach Joe Paterno but without knowing about the sexual abuse charges involving one of Penn State’s assistant coaches that were the basis for the dismissal.

Twitter unquestionably accelerates the speed at which news – and false news – can be distributed. In the Navy Yard shootings, leading news organizations were required to withdraw unverified initial reports that incorrectly identified the shooter. Similarly, the Associated Press was embarrassed when it incorrectly distributed a bulletin on Twitter in 2013 that said two explosions in the White House had injured President Barack Obama. The report was based on a hoax and precipitated a short-lived panic selling on Wall Street.

Tumblr

Tumblr is an increasingly popular microblogging platform that differs considerably from Twitter because of its strong focus on the visual attractiveness of posts (not just content)

and its philosophical commitment to promoting quality content, creativity and self-expression. Now owned by Yahoo, the site is growing in popularity among adult users, of whom only half reside in the United States. Tumblr draws its name from *tumblelog*, the term originally used to describe microblogs. A post is often called a *tumblog* (note inclusion of the “r”).

Overview of Tumblr

Although anyone can view Tumblr blogs, posting a blog requires establishing a Tumblr account and creating a *primary* blog. Thereafter, registered users can create multiple *secondary* blogs. On their primary blogs users can follow other Tumblr blogs, which are queued up on the user’s Dashboard or Home Tab (the equivalent of a Twitter stream). Mobile device users scroll through posts by swiping the screen. In web browsers, posts appear in a grid where users can preview posts and then open them using their cursor.

The Activity Tab summarizes the user’s likes, reblogs and followers and provides access to account Settings. The Account page lists other blogs the user is following. The Trending Tab displays the most popular current blogs.

From their primary blogs, users can take advantage of the full range of Tumblr’s standard and unique social features. Users can follow, reply and like blogs, ask questions, send messages (“fan mail”), or submit contributions other bloggers might consider publishing. A “like” is indicated by clicking the heart icon.

Designing a Tumblr Blog

Tumblr distinguishes itself from other microblogs by placing major emphasis on design, believing that the blog’s appearance is as important as its content in terms of impact.

Thus, Tumblr provides considerable latitude in the use of HTML and CSS coding to create the theme of each blog and then tweak its appearance.

- *Theme* refers to blog’s basic structure that is universal throughout the site. Every Tumblog features space for a header graphic or photo, a title, a description, and an avatar (a small circle or

Trumblog Topics and Content

Most Tumblr blogs appeal to niche audiences with very special interests. Focusing on specific, narrow topics makes sense in light of the fact that Tumblr users are permitted to create multiple Tumblogs and because users often quickly browse posts.

Organizations that use Tumblr for promotional purposes often focus on visuals with very short texts, although some feature long-form texts comparable to a traditional blog. Many posts resemble Pinterest Pins and are akin to promotional advertisements.

Sponsors use Tumblogs to create the equivalent of:

- New product catalogs
- Photo albums
- Visual collections of new fashion concepts and designs
- Archives of past posts
- Exhibits of artist’s’ creative works
- Updates about breaking news
- Tips for performing various interest-specific tasks
- Summaries of research findings
- Previews and recaps of media news coverage
- Coupons, discounts and offers
- Infographics
- Short thought-provoking comments or questions for public discussion.

square intended for a photo of the blogger or other identifying image or logo or the sponsor). Similar to Twitter and Facebook, a thumbnail image of the avatar will appear next to comments posted to blogs and next to search listings. The theme defines how the blog will appear on web browsers. Tumblr offers free standard theme templates plates, which themselves can be customized with 33 type fonts and an array of background and accent colors and sells premium template designs. Use the Edit Themes tool in Settings to change themes, revert back to a previously used theme, or insert snippets of code.

- *Appearance* refers to adjusting or optimizing the look of the blog on the mobile devices, on the Tumblr Dashboard, in search results, and in the popover that appears whenever someone hovers over the producer's username. The Edit Appearance tool appears as a super over blog images.

Creating Tumblog Posts

Word Counts. Unlike Twitter, Tumblr imposes no fixed limit on the number of characters or spaces that can be included in a post. However, research suggests short posts are most effective and generate the most user engagement. The only character-and-spaces limits apply to blog titles (50), replies to posts (250), ask messages (500), and replies to ask messages (140)

Posting Form. Tumblr features an easy-to-use text editor (posting form) with templates based on whether the user wishes to post text, images, video, audio, quotes, a chat or hyperlink. Begin by selecting which of the owner's blogs to post to, then the Gear icon on the top right corner.

- A toolbar for text and photo caption posts allows altering the format and inserting hyperlinks, images or custom code.
- Multiple photos (photo sets) can be uploaded at one time. Photos must be in .JPG, JPEG or .PNG format. Photos also can be imported from Instagram to a primary blog using the Share Settings on the photo sharing site and then selecting Link to Tumblr.
- Animated GIFs must be less than 1.75MB and no more than 540 pixels wide.
- Music can be uploaded from Spotify or Soundcloud, or MP3 files can be uploaded directly. (M4A, M4P WMA files are not compatible.)
- To embed a video from YouTube or Vimeo, paste in the embed code or video link, or upload MOV or MP4 files directly.
- "Buy" buttons from specified partner sites also can be embedded in posts.

Writing Tumblr Posts

Many of the principles of effective online writing apply to Tumblr:

- Recognize the importance of visuals. Always include a label or caption if the subject of an image is not readily identifiable.
- Include links to the your organization's website
- Link photos images to your Instagram account, if applicable.
- Use #hashtags and @username mentions to facilitate searching topics and users on Tumblr as well as on posts shared on Facebook and Twitter. Other Tumblr users will be notified whenever mentioned.
- Use shortened URLs to conserve space.
- If appropriate, end posts with a question to engage users. Or select the "Let people answer the question" option before posting.
- Use Tumblr's mega-editor when making corrections or updates on multiple posts.
- Use the Dashboard keyboard shortcuts to facilitate navigation and editing.

Email, Bookmarklet and Call-In Audio

Submissions. Each blog is assigned a private mobile publishing address (see Settings for the blog and then find the address under Post by Email). Email allows sending text, quotes and #hashtags (in body of email), photos or photosets (as attachments), and hyperlinks (in subject line). Alternatively, users can download a Tumblr bookmarklet (small icon with required code) to embed in the bookmark toolbar on their browser. While browsing other sites, users can then open the bookmarklet to make the same kinds of posts as with the regular post form. To submit an audio post by phone, first configure the blog's "Call in Audio" feature, then dial 1-866-584-6757 and leave a voice mail message that becomes an audio post.

Add Pages. Tumblr enables users to include links on blogs to static web pages that can provide supplemental information, such as contact information or listings, resumes or portfolios, fact sheets, or fliers about events. A Page can be created on Tumblr using standard or custom layouts or using a hyperlink to a document with its own external URL. Use the "Add Page" link in the blog's settings. Note: Pages themselves do not appear on a user's Dashboard.

Using Tumblr for Promotion

Tumblr actively encourages commercial entities to promote themselves on the site can be an especially effective promotional tool based its flexibility in creating blog content. Here are some specific tips for optimizing exposure:

- **Include social/sharing buttons for Tumblr** on web pages and blogs so that Tumblr users can post hyperlinks to content they find interesting.
- **Encourage others to follow your Tumblr blog(s)** – including employees, customers and members. Suggest that they subscribe using the RSS (real simple syndication) tool in order to receive automatic notifications about new posts.
- **Create secondary Tumblogs.** Create multiple secondary blogs on specialized topics that

4 Special Tumblr Tools for Engaging Others

Fan Mail enables sending handsome email letter to other users, complete with stationery, using the envelope icon found in the user's message inbox, Dashboard, or blog pages. Fan mail cannot be sent until following the other use for 48 hours, must be signed, and cannot be reblogged (reprinted). Send up to 500 messages a day.

The **Ask** feature permits posing a question to which the recipient can reply – a good means to establish a dialogue and create followers. Asks can be sent anonymously (within limits to avoid spam) and can be answered publicly by publishing on the recipient's blog as a response to an identified sender's inbox. Send up to 10 Asks per hour.

Submit enables a user to send a post to other Tumblr users with a suggestion to reblog the item on their blogs – a good way to extend exposure. The recipients of the request can decide whether to respond or to publish submissions. Bloggers can use the Setting on the Account menu to decline or accept submissions, and can create a customized Submissions page to specify guidelines and tags.

Chat is an asynchronous exchange between multiple Tumblr users that can be created by any user using the Chat icon on the Dashboard of a primary blog. Create a title for the chat, pose a question or comment, and provide tags that will help other users locate the chat's topic. Chats can be private or public. The most popular Chats appear on under the Chats link on the Trending Tab.

might appeal to niche audiences by using the “Add Blog” link on your primary account. Tumblr allows creating 10 secondary blogs per day and permits these to operate as group blogs with multiple users who can be added using the Add Members link. The creator serves as blog administrator, but can designate others to also serve as administrators. Note: Unlike a primary blog, secondary blogs cannot follow other users, like posts, ask questions or submit content to other blogs. Nonetheless secondary blogs are valuable tools to extend an organization’s exposure and user engagement.

- **Reblog posts to your other blogs**, especially posts on secondary blogs to your primary blog.
- **Share posts on Twitter and Facebook.** Tumblr enables users to cross-post Tumbllogs on Twitter and Facebook using the Settings control for each blog. Select a theme that supports Twitter, and make sure that the text complies with the 140-character limit for tweets. Users also can share tweets on their blog using a special Twitter widget. Blog posts can be added to a designated Facebook Page but not Groups (at least for now). Whether the blog will appear in the Facebook News Feed for page followers is subject to Facebook’s algorithm. Bloggers cannot alter or control the appearance of blog posts on Twitter or Facebook.
- **Engage other Tumblr users.** As with other social media, become an active participant in the site in order to build a presence. Follow other blogs and reply (comment) and like the blog posts of others. Tumblr offers four special ways to engage with other Tumblr users (see sidebar).
- **Create a custom domain outside Tumblr.** User can enhance the branding for their blog by registering a domain name through an ICANN-designated registrar (see Chapter 3). On the blog’s Settings, then choose “Use a custom domain” and provide details. Visitors to Tumblr will be automatically transferred to the URL.
- **Measure results with Google Analytics.** Tumblr does not provide its own analytics, but Google account holders can create a Google Analytics account to track their account by specifying their unique Tumblr domain name (username.tumblr.com) to Google. Then, paste your assigned Google Analytics ID number into the Tumbllog’s Settings using the Appearance link.
- **Adhere to Tumblr policies.** Tumblr’s Community Guidelines emphasize the importance of creativity and free expression but impose restrictions on certain questionable or unethical behaviors, including malicious speech, harm to others, the glorification of self-harm, gore, sexually explicit content, impersonation, misrepresentation of identity, harassment, invasion of privacy, and unlawful use of content.

In the arena of promotion, Tumblr requires owners to only post material they own or for which they have obtained permission through a Creative Commons license (see Chapter 15). Tumblr prohibits the use of “non-genuine social gestures” to drive up the numbers of followers, likes or reblogs; deceptive and fraudulent links, username/URL squatting and abuse, spam, and the acquisition of primary and secondary blogs through automated registration systems. Special guidelines apply to contests, sweepstakes and giveaways.

Paid Promotion on Tumblr

Tumblr enjoys a top position among social media for positive sentiment toward brands and offers an expanding array of paid advertising programs explained on its Tumblr for Business page (<https://www.tumblr.com/business>). More than 150 commercial entities are advertisers.

- Sponsored Posts are comparable to Sponsored Tweets and appear as native advertising the regular blog stream with a user's Dashboard. Sponsored Posts can expand visibility and be targeted based on users' gender, interest and location.
- Radar Posts appear in a preferred position near the of the blog stream.
- Trending Blogs embed paid posts in the Trending Tab that features the blogs rising in popularity.
- Mobile App Install Ads are used to promote downloads of software programs directly to the users' mobile phones.
- Direct purchases are available on a pilot basis through a inclusion of Buy Buys (Action Buttons) in posts for advertisers such as Artsy, Etsy, DoSomething and Kickstarter.

Personal Messaging Apps: Snapchat, Kik and LINE

Personal messaging services, also known as chat apps, are especially popular among teenagers and young adults as alternatives to Twitter and Facebook. In growing numbers teens find Twitter and Facebook too staid, too skewed to older users, too public, and just not "cool." Chat apps have been characterized as "dark social" media because their activities cannot be easily tracked or subjected to the analytics commonly associated with other, more established social media.

Chat apps enable smartphone owners to communicate, chat or share images or videos with others on a one-to-one basis without incurring SMS charges. These are comparable to encrypted text-based messaging found on AOL's AIM (instant messaging), Facebook Pages, Google+ and Twitter Direct, and often incorporate the image sharing and video chat features of Instagram Direct, Apple FaceTime and Skype.

Although chat apps are intended to facilitate person-to-person exchanges, marketers and others have experimented with personal messaging apps to engage in promotional activities directed to multiple recipients. Two of the largest, for example, WhatsApp and WeChat (which operates almost exclusively in China) are offering free share buttons to media publishers so short snippets of content are accessible to chat app subscribers. In particular, WhatsApp has been found to play a growing role in the dissemination of news to young people.

Three personal messaging services are especially courting organizations to become active users for promotional purposes that are similar to microblogging: Snapchat, Kik Messenger and LINE. Other notable examples to watch include Tango, Frankly and Whisper as well as Secret, Post Secret, sixbillionsecrets, Facebook's Slingshot, and Instagram's Bolt (now promoted in only limited regions worldwide).

Snapchat is the best known in the United States. The service enables individuals to produce and send short 10-second video clips, known as “Snaps.” These mini-videos must be created using the Snapchat app on iOS or Android phones. Videos now can be enhanced with drawings as well as captions produced with an on-screen keyboard. When sent to friends, a simple snap only appears on the screen once, and then disappears and cannot be replayed.

Snapchat’s value for microblogging and digital promotion was advanced with the addition of Snapchat Stories that allow users to string together additional snaps during a 24-hour period. Newer features intended to make the service more appealing to users include instant messaging via texts, video calling, and Our Story – a tool that allows people attending at the same event to share images and videos. Our Story episodes about major events have been sponsored by major advertisers such as Amazon, Samsung and Macy’s. Stories and Our Story are now the service’s most popular features.

Today brands and other users can set up an account, create a profile, and then add the app’s users as friends. Snapchat provides the option to send stories to all Snapchat users to specially created groups, but still are more typically sent to individual users. The majority of Snapchat users are young, ages 13-24.

Because Snapchat is intended as a private messaging system intended to nurture conversations, not for broadcasting to a large audience, Snapchat might never materialize as a valuable tool for large-scale microblogging or digital promotion. Nonetheless Snapchat Stories are being used by fast-food restaurants to distribute promote coupons, discounts and offers, and by automobile and apparel makes to preview new products. Media companies use Snapchat to preview or summarize news coverage and new entertainment fare. Not-for-profit organizations have challenged followers to submit “selfies” and Snapchat Stories that advance their causes. Organizations have also used Snapchat

Promotional Activities on Other Personal Messaging Apps

As personal messaging apps grow in popularity, the goals of owners are to make these the primary social medium for a large segment of users and to defray operating costs through revenues.

Facebook now owns two of the most prominent private messaging apps and can be fully expected to monetize their operations in the same way as its namesake social networking site by offering ads and sponsored content services to organizations.

WhatsApp already is the world’s largest private messaging service, with a huge user base outside the United States. The service allows sending private texts, images, videos and audio messages. The service has already shown itself to be major way that its young users share news about current events. The service is well positioned to adapt to some form of microblogging because of its broadcast messaging and group lists capabilities. The site has already begun experimenting with the inclusions of ad messages—a move staunchly opposed by its creators prior to Facebook’s acquisition.

Facebook Messenger was spun off as a mobile-based messaging service to replace the private messaging tool that enable individuals with Facebook *Profiles* to send private messages to other users. (Sending messages to and from organizational owners of Facebook *Pages* was not discontinued.) Although Messenger does not offer a broadcast service, it supports group conversations – a potentially valuable promotional feature.

to give consumers behind-the-scenes glimpses of events and their operations, and to make announcements and answer questions. In one especially notable example, Wet Seal retained teen blogger MsMeghanMakeup to take over the account and produce snaps targeted to prospective purchasers of the company's apparel. Other early users included 16 Handles, Taco Bell, Acura, Karmaloop, GrubHub, fashion designer Rebecca Minkoff, MTV UK, and Universal Pictures.

Snapchat has moved toward the commercialization of the site by adding various new services beyond snaps, including real-time personal text and video messaging. Its new Discover platform sets separate channels for media organizations to promote content produced specifically for Snapchat's young audience and began with 11 media partners in 2015. Separately, AT&T premiered its own sponsored show on Snapchat. The scripted series called "SnapperHero" featured a handful of top online video celebrities.

Snapchats can create a sense of excitement among users, but users cannot easily share messages with others -- a disadvantage that limits the virality of Snapchat Stories. The biggest challenge for marketers is building an audience, which often requires cross-platform promotion on Twitter or Facebook to encourage Snapchatters to send a message to the marketer, who can then reply with an individual or group message. However, opening and responding to individual queries can be time-consuming. Another disadvantage is the lack of metrics.

Kik Messenger claims to be the only mobile-first viral sharing network and the first smartphone messenger with a built-in browser. Users can chat but also send images, videos, sketches and emoticons to friends. Images and videos created on Instagram and other social media can be easily shared. The smartphone interface mimics the look and functionality of a smartphone short messaging service (SMS), but relies on user names instead of phone numbers to identify users. Users invite friends by sending standard SMS texts (including numbers imported from the contact lists on their phones) but also can promote linkages using Twitter, Facebook and other social media.

Because users are already engaged in conversations and the system provides many of the required tools, brands, content providers and gaming companies can easily employ the service for microblogging and digital promotion. Kik is specifically attempting to attract brands as users and promotes special services to businesses and organizations. These include Promoted Chats that combine broadcast messages with one-to-one conversations, mobile web experiences that feel like native apps, editorial placements, and banner promotions. Unlike Snapchat, Kik content can be shared virally and doesn't disappear once viewed.

LINE is a proprietary instant messaging application for mobile phones, tablets and computer web browsers that allows exchanging text messages and graphics as well as audio and video files. LINE also provides voice-over-the-internet telephone calls (VoIP), and facilitates audio and video conferencing. Since its founding in 2011, LINE has already become the largest social network in Japan and now operates in a dozen languages, primarily in Asia. LINE's penetration in the United States and Europe remains limited.

In addition to serving individuals, LINE offers Official Accounts to various organizations, which enables them to send mass messages to people who befriend the organization, including rich media messages that integrate visuals with text. Users can like and follow comments on Official Accounts and can search the site for keywords on topics of interest to them. A PR Page Function allows posting long-form texts, such as documents (fact sheets, news releases, promotional fliers) as well as coupons. LINE also has developed an elaborate system of stickers and coins, a form of virtual currency, which can be used by organizations to build brand awareness and reward users for taking particular actions, such as downloading mobile apps or watching sponsored videos.