

# How companies #fail at using Twitter

Twitter is second only to Facebook in brand marketing (85% to Facebook's 91%, according to Social Media Examiner's 2013 Social Media Marketing Report). It's safe to say that Twitter is part of most organizational social media strategies. Yet, many companies do not seem to understand how to use Twitter or how to use it to connect with their customers.



FAIL stamp by Hans Gewirtz on Flickr.  
Read more here:  
<http://hans.gewirtz.com/2011/03/07/fail-stamp.html>

How do companies #fail at Twitter?

## 1. They fail to update their profile

Have you ever gone to a Twitter profile and found a link to a blog that has not been updated since 2009? Or how about a company that does not list its current website? It takes minutes to update a Twitter profile. There is no excuse. And don't even get me started on those companies (and individuals)

who are using the default Twitter egg as their profile pic...

## **2. They fail to seize opportunities**

As on most Sundays, yesterday I watched CBS Sunday Morning (some of the best morning TV out there). There were lots of great stories, including one about a Brooklyn pickle manufacturer. It was a nice story, and gave the company great publicity. CBS tweeted out a link to the video and mentioned the company's Twitter handle. I went to check it. The company never promoted its appearance on CBS and the only mention of it was the re-tweet of CBS's video link after the fact. That is a missed opportunity.

## **3. They fail to use Twitter beyond self-promotion**

Too many companies think that Twitter is a one-way megaphone where they can trumpet their awards and recognitions or think of it as an easy way to push out news releases and personnel announcements. While there is room for this type of promotion, if a company's stream is devoted solely to itself, it is not "engaging" with its audience.

## **4. They fail to understand how people expect companies to use Twitter**

Related to the above, companies who use Twitter as a self-promotional news stream, don't understand people expect to be able to interact with them. Twitter is a social media network, and the word social is there first for a reason. Social has up-ended the way that companies must communicate with their audiences. Instead of one-way communication, social media has given companies a way of having two-way communications with their customers.

## **5. They fail to understand that Twitter is real-time**

Perhaps waiting 24 hours to return a phone call or an email is standard business practice, but it won't fly on Twitter. When

somebody is asking something on Twitter (or other social media networks), they are expecting a real-time answer, much the same as if they were having an in-person conversation. Answering a Twitter @ query hours or days later is ineffective and completely inappropriate to the medium.

## **6. They fail to understand “social shame”**

Companies who disregard/ignore/fail to check @ messages on Twitter are unaware of the concept of social shame. Like it or not, individuals turn to Twitter when they have a problem, figuring companies want to preserve their reputations and will respond or try to fix the problem. Many companies don't seem to understand the amplification involved in social media. If I complain about a company, my followers may see it but people who use Twitter's search function will also see it.

What other company failures on Twitter have you seen? Please add your thoughts in the comments.

### **UPDATE July 9, 2013**

Failure can include auto-tweeting replies. Seems that Bank of America has been doing that, quite inappropriately, according to this story on Consumerist.

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# **How to use Twitter and not be obnoxious**

It seems that there are lots of people out there who either don't know how to use Twitter or don't really care. Their behavior –from ignoring people to being excessively self-promotional– is just plain obnoxious. “In real life” if you

engage in obnoxious behavior, people start avoiding you, right?

These are a few obnoxious behaviors that you should avoid:

**Behavior:** Not responding to @ mentions

**Why this is obnoxious:** Someone is trying to talk to you. In person, would you ignore someone who is speaking to you?

**Behavior:** Retweeting every comment that includes a mention of you

**Why this is obnoxious:** It is clear that you are trying to make sure your followers know that others have mentioned you. In person, what would you think of someone who is constantly saying, things like “Joe really likes me, and told me so.”

**Behavior:** Bragging or posting completely self-serving tweets

**Why this is obnoxious:** When you are going on (and on and on) about yourself, you are acting as if the world is your echo chamber. The only person that benefits from your behavior is you.

**Behavior:** Following people but never interacting with them

**Why this is obnoxious:** If you are interested in following someone, perhaps it is because you enjoy what they share or have to say. When you don't COMMUNICATE with that person, you are giving absolutely no reason why that person should follow you or value your follow.

**Behavior:** Never interacting with anyone at all

**Why this is obnoxious:** Would you go to a party, stand up and start talking and ignore everyone else in the room? Would you show up to a networking event and not speak to anyone? Why are you there? Presumably, you are there because you want to speak with other people—not to or at them.

**Behavior:** Scheduling Tweets

**Why this obnoxious::** When you schedule Tweets you are using Twitter as a place to dump information rather than a place to interact with people. It takes the social out of social media.

**Behavior:** Automatically Tweeting your check-ins

**Why this is obnoxious:** Do you walk around announcing yourself everywhere you go? “Hi, I am at the corner of Main and Elm. Hi, now I am dropping my clothes at the dry cleaners. Hi, now I am stopping at the drugstore for my seizure medication. Hi, now I am picking lint off my jacket while standing on line at Starbucks.”

If you don't want to be obnoxious on Twitter, think whether you would do those things if you were to see your “Tweeps” in person. It really is that simple.

What obnoxious behavior have you encountered on Twitter?

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## How to be a better Twitter user

Twitter is not for everybody because it takes some time and skill to use it to its full effect. Since there are so many conversations and so much information being shared, its easy to get lost and not see any usefulness.

**First, define what you want from Twitter.** Do you want to follow like minded people? Are you a news junkie and want the latest breaking news? Do you want to get your name out there?

Once you have defined what you want, you can then choose to be a “lurker” or a participant. Lurkers just listen and gather information without adding anything to the conversation. They generally don’t start conversations nor share ideas. Participants are more active—choosing to share links, engage in conversations, re-tweet content.

Obviously, you will get more in the way of real connection by participating actively.

**Second, understand how Twitter works.** Twitter is real time conversation. People are talking to each other right now. And they are talking to many people. Sometimes, newbies just respond to a question someone has posted hours ago, without any reference to the original question. That is confusing.

**Third, get a Twitter client like Tweetdeck or Hootsuite.** It is far easier to see what is going on using a Twitter client than it is to use the Twitter web interface. You can see your @ responses (responses that mention you) and you can create specialized feeds for different subjects or groups of people.

**Fourth, monitor Twitter for @ responses or for Tweets mentioning your name or product.** There is nothing worse than lack of response or super delayed response. I posted something five months ago and someone is just getting back to me. That is not timely...and it shows a complete lack of understanding on how to use Twitter.

**Fifth, understand and use hashtags wisely.** Hashtags that define a topic are useful when conducting searches or grouping tweets into one heading. Some people love to make up hashtags and use many of them on a single tweet. I say choose one that encompasses the topic, if you want to have a greater presence around that tweet.

**Sixth, interact!** If you have chosen to participate in Twitter, make sure you are interacting with other people. If you see something that is interesting, re-tweet it. Answer people’s

questions, comment on their posts.

**Seventh, don't just sell, sell, sell or self-promote.** Nobody wants to see a sales message all the time or your bragging. Twitter allows you to unfollow people quite easily.

This is not the Twitter Bible. I am sure there are other things to keep in mind...what would you add?