

## Technology Trend: Microblogging



### ***Keeping track of people in your group is made easier by tweets.***

Microblogging can take the form of a symbol on one's computer screen or a mobile phone text message. On the Internet, it may look like a blog—a website with dozens of small pictures, representing dozens of people who are online now. It is live and mobile and based on a simple idea.

Micro-blogging, made popular by Twitter, enables delivery of short messages similar in form to text messages. The actual content is less important than the brief message "Here I am. Talk to me." That message can be sent to one other person, to everyone in a group, or to everyone logged onto a particular website.

By posting these short messages, posters are signaling their location and, optionally, availability for contact by another method. Recipients can get in touch by phone, e-mail, online chat, or by arranging a face-to-face meeting. Followers (those signed up to receive the tweets) can answer with their own short responses.

Instant messaging is slightly different. It can convey the same message but requires all users to install the same software on their computers or mobile handsets. Also, some large organizations, such as universities, may block the use of certain software programs such as AOL Instant Messaging in favor of their own systems. Microblogging does not have that limitation.

The most well-known microblogging platform is [Twitter](#) [1]. It is also a feature of popular social networking websites [Facebook](#) [2] and [Myspace](#) [3]. Like many new technologies, youth use them for social purposes, but they also have useful applications for family life, programs, and business, notably public relations.

Most Twitter users send their messages by mobile phone to people who have agreed to be in their group. Group members can tweet saying "I'm in the Main Street Café," and those in the group know they can reply or wander down to the café for a face-to-face meeting. Most

messages are only seen by people in the same group, but there is a public space as well, which allows social networking.

Parents could use Twitter for routine daily interchanges, such as "I'm home from school now?" or "I'm leaving the office now. Home in 30 minutes." Teachers or group leaders sending groups out on field assignments could ask students to tweet progress reports periodically.

Twitter has become so popular that its tech-savvy fans have developed novel add-ons such as Twittlevision, a website where twitter messages appear on screen as they are sent, jumping from their exact locations on a world map. The messages are fascinating non sequiturs as the world map shifts from location to location.

More usefully, downloading a program called Twitteroo (PC) or Twitterific (Mac) gives the user a private list of group members' names and latest messages. One could imagine this being used for a group in which mobile phone users were in the field and the group leader was in an office. Using one of these desktop applications could also enable work teams scattered across the country to stay in touch throughout the working day, signaling availability for teleconferences. This could allow meetings to be set up on short notice, by just glancing at the screen to find out who's available.

Twitter's website also has a public area, organized by group. Twitter members can join any public group. On a recent day, there was a lot of traffic on public twitter groups from Hollywood by scriptwriters on strike, communicating news about the strike and their whereabouts. Elsewhere, 47 people were signed up to give and receive weather bulletins in Finland. More than 200 in a wine group were tapping in messages about wine they were tasting, interspersed with non-wine trivia about music, their locations, and their opinions about things they were seeing and feeling as they sipped. Los Angeles Fire Department crews post bulletins about emergency responses, giving address details and telling when they are en route to hospitals or back to the station.

Twitter messages are necessarily short?twitter has a 140-character limit?that is approximately the same number of characters as there are in this sentence.

Yurbo and pownce allow longer messages, file uploading, and hyperlinking, pulling them into the category of social media. The social networking category is dominated by Facebook and Myspace, which allow a much broader range of interaction. Jaiku was just bought by Google, indicating that its functions will soon be linked to the myriad Google tools already available. However, because the content they deliver is richer, all but Twitter require mobile phones to be Internet enabled.

One thing that all of these offerings have in common is that they are free, requiring only user registration. The only potential cost is that of sending and receiving text messages, which varies by mobile phone service provider. So groups that want to stay in touch during the work day need only to sign up all members of the group and get them into the habit of using it wherever they are. Twitter helps get members into the habit by sending a reminder text when the user hasn't checked in for 24 hours.

**You may wish to consult:**

PBS's Mediashift column on Microblogging and Twitter [4]

**Common Measure:**

Technology [5]

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**Links**

[1] <http://www.twitter.com/>

[2] <http://www.facebook.com/>

[3] <http://www.myspace.com/>

[4] <http://mediashift.org/2007/05/your-guide-to-micro-blogging-and-twitter135/>

[5] <https://cyfar.org/resource-common-measures/technology>