

Making The Most of Twitter:

Search, Tools and Analytics

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Boring Legal Stuff and Other Notes

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What is This All About?

You may have a Twitter account, but you may not know how to leverage it for your business. With the coming holidays, and given that social media continues to explode and become an ever more important part of all marketing in any industry, now is the time for you to learn some of the tools at your disposal to understand what is happening on Twitter and measure your success in social media.

This whitepaper gives you a brief introduction to the basics of Twitter, discusses Twitter search then jumps into advanced query modification; discusses some key Client applications for intermediate and advanced use of Twitter; defines some metrics that you can use to determine whether your efforts were successful or not; and finally wraps everything together with an implementation plan.

Each section is clearly labeled so feel free to skip ahead or skip around to the chapter that's most important or interesting or relevant to you.

An Introduction to Twitter

Twitter is a microblogging website where you can have conversations 140 characters at a time. Individual users can include hyperlinks to other websites; add friends, “follow” your friends, and make new friends; find industry leaders in your area of expertise; speak to anyone on the internet (or at least anyone on Twitter); speak directly to someone; speak privately with someone; and even re-submit what someone else already said if you think it's something worth reading (and give them credit at the same time).

You can do all of the same if you are a business, however, you should be using Twitter to humanize your business, not just as another venue for cramming marketing garbage down users' throats. Businesses should use Twitter to follow their partners, vendors,

suppliers, industry advocates and competitors alike to keep abreast of all happenings, as well as interacting with followers and customers.

Let's define each of the above a little more specifically to Twitter.

A tweet is something that you write. You can use up to 140 characters of text (including links). It can be hard to fit what you want to say and often, users will use a shortened version of a word, such as – i.e., aka, lol, IMO, 4, r, u, and &. If you tweet from the website – www.twitter.com, there isn't a default URL shortening tool built in, however most third-party services have some sort of shortener for your URL's and for the words in your tweet.. You cannot tweet more than 140 characters; anything over 140 characters will be truncated.

A retweet is akin to an e-mail forward and means that you have found a tweet that is interesting or important to you and you want to pass it along to your audience. Almost universally, you will type RT and then “@username” this signifies the account from which you are retweeting. Many Twitter services provide a button to allow you to easily retweet someone's tweet. Typically people add their personal commentary at the end of retweets. You should be very clear what portion is your own commentary as well as give recognition to the person whom you are retweeting. While there are no true rules/etiquette to Twitter, these are the generally assumed proprieties. There is an alternate behavior for retweeting that is used to make your commentary on a link but still give credit to the original user: (via @username).

You will see a timeline that includes all of the tweets from the people that you follow. From this you can retweet, or even reply, commonly known as “@ing” someone. The Twitter website and many of the other Twitter tools out there typically have a one-click button to allow you to reply to someone, and in your tweet you will see @username at the beginning and then you'll see the rest of the tweet. Replying to someone is typically

the best way to create a conversation with your followers, and as well, your Twitter account operator should be constantly mindful of responding to any replies to your brand account. Anyone who is following both you and the person you are “@ing” can access this conversation, so keep in mind that this is not a closed interaction between the two of you.

A direct message (DM) is a closed conversation between two accounts who are each respectively following the other. Technically you can DM anyone who is following you, but they cannot direct message you unless you are following them, so make sure that you are following anyone that you may wish to communicate with privately. Ideally, you should be following at least some of your own followers, especially any who are especially dedicated or influential. Again, Twitter is about having a conversation. There are two prevalent strategies for business accounts. One strategy is to follow a limited number of people and leverage the search function and reply tab; the other is to follow everyone who follows you so you can have DM conversations. In either case your success will be highly affected by your ability to make intelligent use of search functions.

We should back up and discuss how you “get on twitter”. Go to www.twitter.com and create an account. It is advisable to utilize your brand images and colors on your Twitter page, however keep in mind that this is a very informal medium, so you can feel free to err on the side of a more liberal vs. a conservative branding approach. Do keep in mind that this will and should be a very transparent medium, so make sure that the person or people that you have in charge of operating this account are fully aware of how to properly utilize Twitter to its fullest capacity. Twitter is an opportunity to improve your relationship with your customers, so let your customers tell you what they are looking for.

Once an account has been activated an individual will “find friends” via a search box. This can be done by searching a username, first or last name, business or brand. You can

also find friends that you email with in Gmail, Yahoo!, or AOL (who are also on Twitter); or you can invite your friends to join twitter. Finally, you can browse the suggested users (you'll find that these are mostly the "famous" / top followed people on twitter). For businesses, again, you should follow partners, vendors, suppliers, industry advocates and competitors. There are tools out there similar to a "yellowpages" that will help you find the proper account names to follow. Another way to approach your new account is to search for users that are talking about you and follow them to get the ball rolling.

Your business is now a part of Twitter, so what do you do next? Assuming you've already added all of the accounts that you want to follow, you should start by talking directly to someone that you are connected to: user, vendor, friend etc.

Advanced Twitter Usage

There are many tools that can increase the utility of Twitter: phone applications (such as Tweetpic, Tweetie, Ubertwitter, and Twitterific), the ability to tweet via text message (this is how Twitter started) and desktop applications such as Tweetdeck or Seismic.

Further there are even more advanced tools like Digsby, and Ping.fm which allow you to tweet to multiple sources in addition to Twitter, such as your Facebook/Myspace status update, Gmail Status, and LinkedIn. You might also have multiple accounts that you run and simultaneously. Many of the applications, sometimes called apps, have the option to run multiple accounts at the same time, however there are some stand alone applications built solely for tweeting from multiple accounts like CoTweet, which also allows multiple users to tweet from one account.

Finally, if you aren't a Starbucks or a McDonalds, or any of the highly recognizable Fortune 500 companies, you might not have thousands of followers instantaneously. You will have to work fairly hard to get followers. The key is not to try the churn and burn approach that makes you out to be a spam account. Instead you need to find a

service that offers some sort of a CRM approach (customer relationship management). One such service is Tweet Spinner. This allows you to target specific followers who are interested in the things you are going to tweet about, or more importantly, things specific to your business.

Taking Advantage of Twitter Search

One of your primary opportunities for leveraging Twitter is their own site search (search.twitter.com). Once you are familiar with this feature you will have better understanding of what third party tools are working with, why there are limitations and a clearer sense of what Twitter is building toward.

Twitter Search works very much like the search engines you are used to (Google, Bing, etc.); it employs 16 operators, or additives that affect the search's meaning.

Operator	Meaning
No Operator → user driven	Containing both "user" AND "driven"
Quotation Marks → "user driven"	Containing the exact phrase "user driven".
OR → user OR driven	Containing either "user" or "driven" (or both).
Minus → user -driven	Containing "user" but not "driven".
Hash → #measure	Containing the hashtag "measure".
From: → from: UserDriven	Sent from username "UserDriven".
To: → to: UserDriven	Sent to username "UserDriven".
@ → @UserDriven	Containing the username "UserDriven"
Near: → Sale near: seattle	Containing "sale" and was sent near "Seattle".
Within: → near: 98122 within: 2.5km	Sent with in "2.5 km" of "98122".
Since: → sale since: 2009-10-04	Containing "sale" and sent since the date "2009-10-04".
Until: → sale until: 2009-10-04	Containing "sale" and sent up till the date "2009-10-04".
:) → delivery :)	Containing "delivery" and positive sentiment.

:(→ delivery :(Containing “delivery” and negative sentiment.
? → sale ?	Containing “sale” and a question.
Filter:links → funny filter:links	Containing “funny” and includes a link.
Source: → funny source:tweetdeck	Containing “funny” and entered via “TweetDeck”.

Several of the operators are old favorites Quotation Marks, OR, and Minus are available in most popular search engines. The new tools are the user, location, temporality (time) and sentiment (feeling).

User and Hashtags

To: and **From:** are most powerful once you have identified key influencers for your customer group. **From:** will allow you to section out all of the tweets sent by the specific user and can be paired with search terms to identify the specific issues that you need to address. **To:** is used to identify who is speaking to, or dialoguing with, a specific account. The **to:** operator returns all tweets that start with the selected username.

Example:

@userdriven where is the meet up?

This will show up for **to:userdriven**.

I am going to the meetup @userdriven is sponsoring.

This will not show up for **to:userdriven**

If you want to return all mentions of a username then you use “@username” so **@userdriven** will return all tweets to the account and all uses of the username in tweets.

The hashtag # is used to tie together tweets on the same subject. One of the best examples of hashtag use is #journchat. Journchat has a large group of participants and a

regular time each week when they hold a discussion, and everyone who wishes to participate can employ the hashtag to take part and follow the action. The hash is what allows Twitter to accomplish limited multi-person dialogue.

User and hashtags are the only operators that function as stand alone queries.

Location

Near: and **within:** will allow you to find out what people are saying in the vicinity of a specific location. For **near:** you can use a large area like City (Seattle), a smaller area like a Zip Code (98122), or extremely specific Longitudinal/Latitudinal values (47.625193,-122.3574).

Within: requires the **near:** operator and works best when paired with kilometers (km). Currently the dropdown that is found under the map on Twitter Search is in kilometers so you will do better to maintain consistency. Also, open Google Maps to verify that Twitter is correctly assessing your **near:** operator in the way you expect.

If you have both online and brick and mortar locations leveraging **near:** and **within:** will be especially valuable to you. Consider running vicinity searches around real world locations in tandem with online campaigns to drive awareness of your physical location and to expedite customer service resolution.

Temporality

Knowing when people react to your account, brand or product can be very useful. Unfortunately, Twitter has very finite server capacity. The result is that it does not hold data for very long. For the operators **since:** and **until:** Twitter only returns results going back 72-hours. This means that if it takes you more than three days to recognize that Twitter has spiked you won't be able find the issue directly through Twitter Search. This means that even though you can use these operators to segment a single day (sale

since:2009-10-04 until:2009-10-04) you have to do it very close to that date. *The technical limit for the operator is seven days, but most phrases are purged more frequently than that.*

For example:

If today is October 6, 2009 then you can use **since:** and **until:** for October 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th.

This means that Monday is extremely important for your Twitter campaigns. This is the only day that you can assess the run into a weekend spike.

Sentiment

One of the major concerns of social media marketing and brand PR is sentiment--how people feel about your product, service or company. Twitter addresses this with **:)** and **:(**. These operators, signified by a smile and a frown emoticon, pull back tweets with positive or negative buzzwords (or the actual emoticon).

While great in concept the execution of these searches can be spotty. Both operators will return a set of emoticons that are essentially neutral, causing overlap in the returned search. Also, you will see a variety of results where you are not the subject of the sentiment. The sentiment operators are a good way to take a snapshot of the Twitter's feelings.

The last operator that relates to sentiment is **?**. It doesn't actually affect sentiment, but it does allow you to find actionable issues. Appending **?** to your queries allows you to see tweets that ask a question. So if you pair it with **:)** or **:(** you are more likely to find a tweet that has a clear solution you can bring to the author.

Special note: sentiment modifiers can disrupt location modifiers.

Source and Filter:links

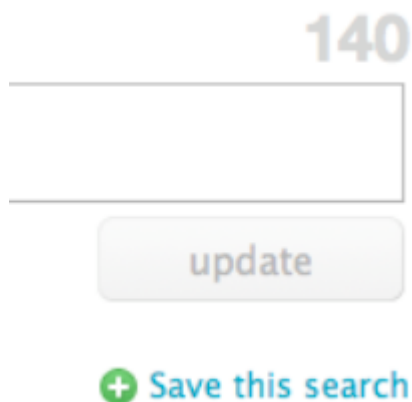
Source: returns all tweets that were delivered through a specific channel--like Tweetie, UberTwitter or the main site. This is useful for charting the value of advertising in third-party tools or web portals.

Filter:links return all tweets with links in them. At this time I am not aware of other valid filters, but Twitter does plan to add retweets and home timeline segmentation to the search function, which will likely be other filters.

The real power of these operators is in combining them together to find opportunities for visibility or service of your customers. Combining Location and Sentiment can help you overcome a localized issue. Combining Location ? can help you find a business opportunity (e.g. lunch **near:98122 within:1km ?**) like finding people looking for lunch in your neighborhood.

Now that you know how to construct your complicated advanced search let's cover some methods for saving you some time retrieving the results.

If you use the search box in the right navigation of your profile page you will find a "Save this search" button under the "update" button of your profile.



This is a good way to respond to searches quickly. You have your update field available, but the interface is a little confusing. Be sure you aren't typing your new searches into your updated field when you use this method.

The second tool Twitter offers for leveraging search in a persistent way is a search widget. You can find this widget in the Goodies section of Twitter. It will allow you to set up a widget with any search that you want and define how you want it to display. We have set up a simple reputation portal that lets you enter a query to see positive, negative, tweets with questions, tweets employing the #fail hashtag, tweets with links and retweets using via. You can download the page here:

<http://www.userdrivenchange.com/twitrep.php>

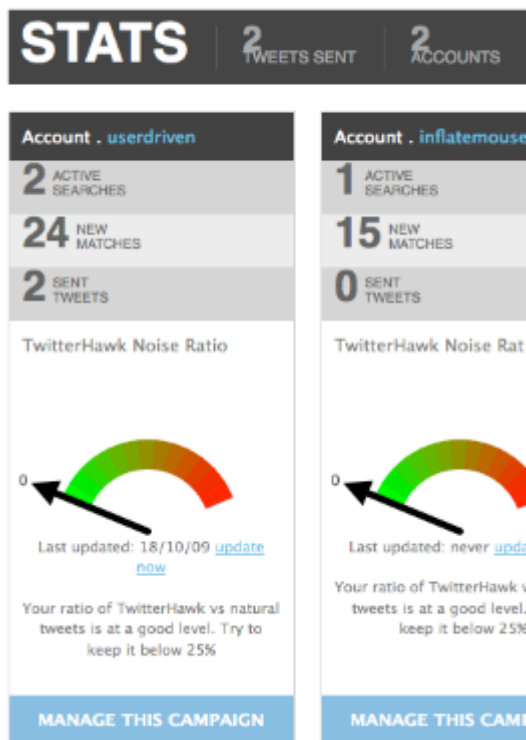
Tools to Improve Your Twitter Skills

Let's break down some of these advanced tools for Twitter; client apps such as Co-Tweet and Tweetdeck; and finally some stat crunchers such as Bit.ly and Twitalyzer

TwitterHawk

TwitterHawk is a third party tool that leverages Twitter Search to automatically reply to messages matching the search criteria at a cost of \$0.05 per message. The service protects against spamming by imposing a cap of one message sent every 2 hours, however, they do allow you to register multiple Twitter accounts to a single TwitterHawk interface.

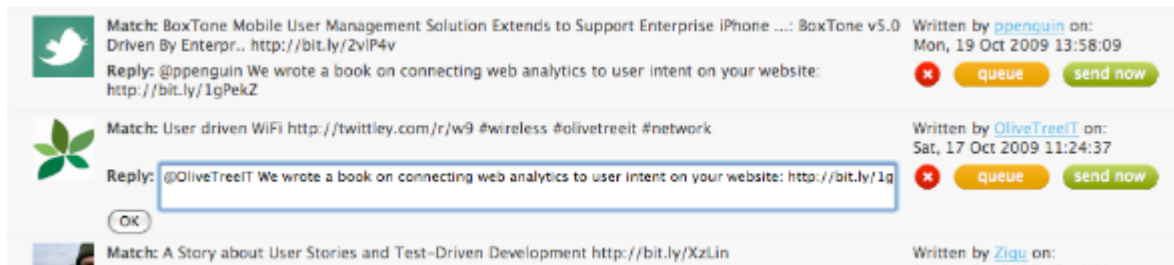
Dashboard



With each search you can provide five versions of your 120-character message including links. Notice that your message is slightly shorter than Twitter standard. For each search you can choose the frequency that TwitterHawk checks the search, whether you want to

auto-follow the message recipient and whether you want to confirm before sending. There is also support to connect a Bit.ly API to your account to improve the tracking that you receive from your links and automatically connect cost-per-click to specific messages.

Because of the limited number of messages that TwitterHawk allows you to send in a day we recommend using the confirmation option to pick the best results and queue them to be distributed. The send queue allows you to edit the messages to better match the tweet you are responding to. Creating three to five canned responses and editing them when you are confirming will help you keep your responses from being overly repetitive.



One interesting feature included with the account is a meter that graphically displays your percentage of TwitterHawk vs. Regular tweets. TwitterHawk recommends less than one of four tweets on your account originate from TwitterHawk. If you are maintaining multiple accounts for your business that share some overlapping searches the one tweet per two-hours becomes less restrictive.

CoTweet

For a business Twitter account to stay healthy and active, especially during busy seasons, it may be necessary to have multiple representatives interacting with the account. CoTweets tries to address this problem by giving a central interface that allows a group of people to:

- Sign in and out of duty on the account
- Set-up e-mail digests of messages to the account on duty at regular intervals
- Assign tasks to members of the group
- Schedule tweets to be posted
- Employ Bit.ly integrated links

CoTweet also offers an integrated search portal interface that allows you to save your search streams where all members can see them.

Tweetdeck

Tweetdeck is a very popular client app for single users and for businesses. The power of Tweetdeck is its column view. You can create multiple columns depending on what you want to view, so for instance if you want a column for any “@’s” or mentions, this is a default column you can choose. Other columns include Direct Messages, and additional account columns so you can tweet from multiple accounts. Also, multiple people can use Tweetdeck and tweet from the same account. You can also create columns for searches relevant to your business so that you can see who is tweeting or may be potential follower for you (follow them and engage them to garner their follow!). Tweetdeck will also automatically shorten your url’s for you through your choice of URL shorteners.

Some cons of Tweetdeck are that it’s about a minute behind the web, so you aren’t getting “real time” searches; you can’t get to your followers list, nor can you see who you are following unless they tweet something; there are some bugs with the follow mechanism from time to time.

Bit.ly

Bit.ly is a URL shortener, but more importantly it keeps stats on who has clicked on the url that you sent out, who RT’ed your tweet, shows all instances of the link being

tweeted by someone else via bit.ly and finally it gives you a running total of how many people clicked on your link out of the total number of people who viewed it.

Bit.ly is a great and simple tool for you to use to quantify your influence on your followers. Its graphical interface also allows you to see a timeline of influence so you can trend out key topics and see when you get the most traction. You can also see who your key enablers are (those people who are retweeting your tweets and spreading the love). You can either tweet from the Bit.ly website or you can merge your Tweetdeck account or many other client apps to Bit.ly, however, you'll have to log into the Bit.ly site to see your stats.

Twitalyzer

Twitalyzer is a more robust analysis program that doesn't get into the specifics like Bit.ly's tracking. Much like most analytics systems it aggregates the data instead of focusing on an individual term or URL.

It takes metrics such as Influence (followers, friends, retweets, conversations, and tweets); signal (URL's, Hashtags, RT's, @'s vs. tweets with none of the above in them); and generosity (RT'ing someone else) and tells you how well you are doing on those metrics (and more) based on a certain timeframe (some are for the last 7 days, some are longer).

Twitalyzer also references some other interesting metrics such as URL's cited, hashtags used, unique referrers (how many unique people @ or RT you), unique references to others, etc.

This tool is great to give you an aggregate frame of reference for how well you are tweeting, or the relative behavior of your key followers. It also provides insight into how

you can improve in areas such as engaging your followers, becoming an influencer and improving your clout in the realm of Twitter.

Metrics to Prove Your Work's Worth

Social media is supposed to be a conversation. How do you make a conversation tangible with standard measurements? We would liken it to the term “engagement,” which defines how deep a visitor was on a site regardless of purchase. Typically engagement is measured by looking at several metrics. We can do the same thing for measuring your conversation rating. For our purposes engagement means the three-Rs: reference, response and retweet.

Ideally what you'd like to do is read, listen and watch every mention and interaction. However, without some sort of third party tool that will be next to impossible. There are several companies out there that can provide this sort of tracking. VMS is a well known and established company that has transitioned itself from a solely traditional media tracker to more robust tracking than anything you will need starting off. However, if you want to dive in head first, you should look at their software. An alternative would be a newer and lesser-known company called StatsIT. They offer a social media dashboard that is pretty compelling. Finally, Coremetrics and Omniture offer some solutions that are integrated with their existing software, however these solutions are all things that you could build yourself.

You'll need to start with the metrics that you think are important to you. You could go as basic as appending marketing links to the tweets with URL's and then measuring clicks, visitors, shoppers, and orders for each link. However, you can only measure your online statistics this way. The metrics you might be more concerned with, or rather will be more successful at utilizing immediately are the statistics that you can glean from Twitter itself. Our metrics are intended to save you the time and cost of a developer in the short run and help you improve your engagement immediately.

Before jumping into the metrics we recommend, there are some points you should keep in mind. You should take a holistic and a detailed approach to each of these metrics. What this means is that you should have a top level mark for all of your social media, then a secondary level for each individual account and then you should consider grouping these by brand term, category, or region. Finally, you should be able to dive into each account and break down your measurement by individual data line.

Several metrics that you could use are the following: sentiment, reach, experience rating, and quality score.

Sentiment

As mentioned above, the search mechanism can be used to gauge how people feel about your brand. However, this is a fairly nebulous measurement and is not entirely precise. A live person looking through the tweets best determines sentiment, but Twitter Search can do a rudimentary filtering. Filter out invalid (non-actionable) tweets and if possible move them to the more appropriate bucket. We suggest that you establish a plan for responding to both positive and negative sentiment. You'll also want to tailor these to your specific request; keep your eye out for tweets that have questions. Tweets that contain questions are the low hanging fruit for improving your sentiment values.

Reach

Reach is the potential network of people who could be influenced by your social media. Think of a pyramid. Say your Twitter account has 100 followers, and in turn each of those followers has 100 followers of their own. Your reach would be 100 x 100, or a 10,000-person network (second-degree followers). You can then set up a query to show how many impressions per tweet you got and then divide that by your potential reach to determine a benchmark for success.

If you are doing a good job engaging your followers you should see a growing reach value. Once you have a large following (more than a 1,000 followers) you should consider refining your reach to only the people that have directly engaged in the recent past. Twitter will catalogue either 9-days or 100-pages of tweets--which ever comes first. Assume that your real reach is roughly the value based on the people who engage (reference, reply or retweet) in a 24-hour period. So, if you generally have 100 users engage in a day either an expansion of breadth, engagement number, or depth, second-degree followers, should be considered a success.

The reason that reach should be considered with breadth in mind as you grow is because Twitter as a channel has a high loss rate. Only about 40 percent of Twitter users are still active after one month of sign-up. This doesn't mean that no one comes back. If you have a large following reach is best measured by activity—not raw numbers.

Experience Rating

Experience rating is how you compare specific users based on the influence and quality of their interaction with your brand or account. So if @jhandy says that he likes your product but he only has a following of 10 and has never made a comment before, his rating would likely be 1. However if @welch says that he likes your product and he has a following of 10,000 and has made 100 comments on your product, he would likely have a rating of 100. You can aggregate your RT's and mentions and then base them on the average rating to determine whether what is being mentioned is really impacting anything. If you find that your growth is slowing you should consider engaging your middle to high experience rated followers.

Quality Score

Finally, quality score is used to measure the number of mentions or comments you receive on your tweet. If you have one tweet and get 30 responses then you'd have a 30:1 ratio. You should be looking at your quality score on the small level of individual tweets and on the larger level of total engagement for the day versus total tweets for the day.

There will be a point where your followers and reach will slow. This is the time that quality score will be of particular interest. If you do not have a high quality score when your growth slows you should be investing in improving your engagement with your mid-rated users.

Putting The Plan Into Action

1. **Decide who will maintain your activity:** is it going to be an identifiable voice representing the brand (like @EV for Twitter) or a team of people (like @GuyKawasaki)?
2. **Choose your system for interface:** tools like Tweetdeck and Twitter.com are good for single voice accounts; HootSuite and CoTweet are good for team accounts.
3. **Set your search criteria for action.**
 - a. Words: modify with quotation marks and OR
 - b. Sentiment: modify with :) for positive and :(for negative
 - c. Location: modify with near: and within:
 - d. Tweets with links: find these with filter:links
4. **Follow the stream on a regular basis.**
 - a. Respond to people directly
 - b. Answer the questions that people actually ask
 - c. Change your search criteria to match the phrase that people actually use
5. **Set up filters in your web analytics application to capture social metrics.**
 - a. Segment your high experience followers as a channel
 - b. Segment your high reach followers as a channel
 - c. Tag your social media links

Interest and behavior can move very fast on Twitter. It is important that you expand your engagement to meet the users on their terms. Because your followers will quickly grow to outnumber you, you will need to engage in their language or you will lose much of your velocity.

Additional Resource:

<http://apiwiki.twitter.com/Getting-Started>

http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/online_mobile/twitter-quitters-post-roadblock-to-long-term-growth

<http://www.twitalyzer.com>

Third Party Tools

Instead of giving a long list of tools here we recommend that you visit

<http://oneforty.com/> they have a well-structured presentation of tools that include user reviews. You can get to all of the tools we reference and many more from the One-Forty site.

Additional Reading

Carlos and Jeff also write for www.UserDrivenChange.com and published a book on using web analytics to make user driven decisions for your web site--you can download the [first chapter for free!](#)

Closing Up

We crave the crazy entertainment of the Internet so feel free to talk to us:

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Special Thanks to:

Coral Spitler for your editorial skills.