Effectively Managing Twitter

A plethora of Twitter tools can help

I TOOK A CRITICAL LOOK AT MY TWITTER stream the other day, and I was a bit dismayed at what I saw. By following too many people too quickly, I was being inundated with many irrelevant and useless tweets overwhelming the tweets that I truly wanted to read. In a larger sense, through hasty followings, I had deviated from my intended path for using Twitter in the first place.

Have you looked critically at your Twitter stream? Is it laden with the same sort of trite tweets that I receive? Apparently, we are not alone. After a bit of research, I discovered a recent study demonstrated that the vast majority of tweets—upwards of 87.7 percent—border on useless, falling between spam and 'pointless babble'. That leaves only one out of every eight tweets actually containing valuable information. Who has the time to sort through that? I certainly don't, and I suspect you don't either. So what to do?

I blogged about this problem a while ago (www.solari.net/toward-humanity/2009/08/21/how-useful-is-your-twitter-stream/) and proposed a few solutions. I needed to go further, though, to rectify this problem. As a result, I discovered a number of Twitter tools that can help better manage a Twitter stream and your use of Twitter and social networks in general. I present the tools I most liked and found useful.

One small piece of semantics: when I refer to your friends; they are the people you are following on Twitter.

Why are you using Twitter in the first place? Tools are great, so long as they have a purpose. Knowing that a hammer can pound nails and a screwdriver can drive screws is self-evident. But what are you trying to build with these tools? Knowing that a Twitter tool can do certain things is great, but it's better to apply that tool to a purpose. So define your Twitter strategy: why are you using Twitter? Elucidate that, and you are well on your way to choosing and applying the particular tools that best suit your needs.

Who are you following? Since your Twitter stream is comprised of the tweets of those you follow (your friends), it makes sense to choose these people judiciously. As for me, I've stopped following people who follow me simply because they look interesting. It's time to be more practical in choosing those I follow, the type of people who are more in tune with the communication topics that I want to know about.

Finding people. Here are a number of tools that let you find and follow people with similar interests and styles.

You can find potential friends who are most relevant to your strategy in a few ways. Twellow (www.twellow.com) allows you to find people by industry, categories, or your own search text, globally or in specific geographic areas. Register on the site, and you can edit your Twitter bio, create an extended bio, and create links to other social networks such as Facebook and LinkedIn so that like-minded people can find you.

Find people by their influence in particular categories at twInfluence (twinfluence.com). This tool measures influencers by followers, reach, velocity, social capital, and centralization. (Go to the site to see what that all means.) It even ranks the top 50 influencers in each category.

Try whoshouldifollow.com. Type your Twitter username and it returns users based on your account. You can then explore deeper as you see fit. whoshouldifollow works well with a 'clean' following list.

Find people who share your interests at SocialWhoIs (www.socialwhois.com). As the site says, its recommendations are "based on interests and 'personal relevancy' instead of popularity". Search by tag (keyword). When a list is returned, the tool lists all the tags associated with each person as well as a brief bio. You can register and create a bio for yourself. This helps others find you too.

After you've found and followed those ideal people, go to TwitterFriends (twitter-friends.com) to get more information about your conversations with them. Or simply use the tool to analyze your conversations with your current followers. The tool maps your followings and followers geographically. (Wow! I have friends on every continent.) You can also enter a username—yours or anyone else's—to analyze their tweeting behavior.

And finally, there is Twitority (twitority.com) which allows you to search Twitter by keyword and authority. Twitority assumes that those with large numbers of followers are authorities in a particular keyword area. These same people might, however, just be popular or know how to garner many followers. Either way, Twitority is attempting to replace Twitter's search engine and just might help you find actual authorities to follow.

Next time. This is just the beginning of tools that can help you better manage your Twitter account. Remember though, that your Twitter experience is greatly enhanced by the people you decide to follow. Choose well.

In subsequent position papers, I will present other tools that I've also found to be useful. 🟤

—RICH MAGGIANI