

Essential Dos and Don'ts for Twitter Users



Twitter may not be as contentious a subject as religion, guns, politics or sex – but people definitely have varied opinions about its utility and future. Those who love to use this nifty social media tool find it's a fun way to stay connected with all sorts of people. But as with everything, it behooves the user to know the rules of the game.

Even the so-called social media gurus (of which there seems to be an overabundance) give conflicting advice on using Twitter. At the end of the day, though, it really isn't that complex or mysterious. Twitter is just another way to connect and share with friends, clients, acquaintances and strangers. Different people will want to use it in different ways (or not at all – and that's fine too).

Is it even relevant to law firms? Definitely. I know of one firm that uses Twitter as an internal IM system to connect several part-time staff who work from home with the staff that work in the office. Wow – now that's thinking outside the box.

To a great extent, the type of information you will share simply depends on whether you want to use Twitter for personal or work reasons, or both. Many people see Twitter primarily as a channel for marketing purposes. In all cases, however, you should apply the same fundamental rules.

16 Commandments of Twitter for Lawyers:

✗ Don't take it too seriously. Don't live to tweet – tweet to have some fun. It's a great and easy way to share snippets of cool information with friends and strangers, and if it brings a client or two to your door, that's a nice bonus.

✓ Do consider the quality, not the quantity, of your followers. We all want to be popular, but ultimately the quality of your followers is more important than the quantity of them.

Followers who truly read and consider your tweets and, on occasion, retweet them to others are the brass ring.

 **Do put your name on your tweets.** Anonymous tweets (just like anonymous blog comments) are almost always total garbage. If you aren't willing to put your name on something, it's probably not worth tweeting.

 **Do write a clear description of yourself in your Twitter bio.** Help people know who they are following and why with a decent description of yourself.

 **Do tweet publicly and make it easy to follow yourself.** On your Twitter Settings page, uncheck "Protect my tweets." If this is checked, only people you approve can follow your tweets – that is, your tweets are private. Generally, this is not what Twitter is about – tweets are meant to be public.

 **Do be nice.** Your mother was totally right back when you were two years old, and she still is. What goes around comes around, and it doesn't matter if it's in person, in print or online. Be nice all the time because everyone is connected to everyone on the Web.

 **Don't post anything you wouldn't want your managing partner to read in the National Post.** What happens on Twitter stays on Twitter – forever. You shouldn't assume replies or DMs (direct messages) are private, either. And here's a closely related reminder that shouldn't be necessary: When tweeting you must at all times comply with your ethics rules.

 **Do inject some personal info, but not too much.** In both personal and professional spheres, social media connections are built on personal relationships. That means you need to share some personal information to better connect with your followers. But many things should stay in Vegas, the bedroom or the kitchen. An occasional restaurant recommendation is fine, as is a suggestion for a

good bottle of wine or Scotch (my personal favourite). However, most of your followers just don't care about your nightly dinner preparation and wine choice, and they certainly don't need to see pictures of it. I also don't need to know you go to Starbucks five times a day. In the language of texting, TMI (too much information)!

 **Do share ideas, news, links or information that your followers will find interesting.** Strive to send tweets that others will feel are truly worthy of reading. Send information that is practical, helpful, interesting or informative. Even funny things are fine.

 **Don't over-tweet.** Tweets should be weighed, not counted. Quality is far more important than quantity. The current consensus is no more than four tweets per day. Sending more than that makes it look like you have no work to do.

 **Don't send twam (aka Twitter spam).** We all get enough spam in our inboxes – so please don't send me tweets that are self-promotional, commercial junk. And please (and I know I will get grief on this one), go light on the retweet "thank yous." Saying thank you is a nice thing to do (your mother was right on this one, too,) but there is no need to say thanks to the whole world for each and every retweet of your tweets.

 **Do leave room for retweeters.** Part of the magic of Twitter is the ability to easily and instantly forward cool information from someone you follow to all of your followers. So, keeping this in mind, don't use all 140 characters in every tweet you write. Remember that retweeters will want to have their name in the retweet – leave them some room for that. Using one of the services that shortens URLs (e.g., tinyurl.com and bit.ly) can give you more space.

 **Don't automatically blast all your tweets to all your other social networks.** You should occasionally mention or link some of your tweets on your blog and your LinkedIn or Facebook pages. But don't bore us all by

telling everyone about everything concerning every single one of your tweets. As a filter, note that you can configure your LinkedIn account to display only tweets with the #in or #li hashtags.

 **Do use Groups or Lists and specialized Twitter tools to manage your tweets.** Let's be honest here, if you're following more than 25 people you can't catch everything that everyone says. To help filter your tweets appropriately, use Groups or Lists to categorize the people you follow into like groupings (e.g., friends, publications, must-reads, people that make me think, etc.). You can then use TweetDeck or other similar tools to track and read tweets in related groups. I consider TweetDeck an essential tool, as I find the multiple columns it displays really help me filter and find the tweets I am interested in.

 **Do send #FollowFridays.** To highlight your favourite tweeters, send FollowFriday tweets. Send these tweets on Fridays, include the #FollowFriday or #FF hashtag and list the Twitter names with the @ sign of a few of your favourite tweeters (e.g., @DanPinnington).

 **Do send "thanks for the follow" direct messages.** This is a great way to acknowledge and personally connect with your new followers.

So there you have it. Some simple rules to govern your use of Twitter. And remember, Twitter won't bring thousands of new clients to your office door, but it will allow you to connect and share information with all sorts of people. Go forth then, connect with your followers, and have some fun. Tweet, tweet, tweet! ■

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