



Twitter: I Admit – It Can Be a Business Tool

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First – the Apology – Sort Of...

In my keynote at the ATT Live conference in March of this year, I stated quite clearly “cut out the Twitter crap – except for immediate conference updates”. Ok... I’ve been pretty harsh on Twitter over the past year. I think it harkens back to many wasted hours on CompuServe in the late 80s and early 90s. As the first female SysOp I learned everyone’s likes/dislikes/sexual desires and guilty pleasures. I spent 75% of my time as an online psychiatrist/marriage counselor/sex therapist and 25% of my time as a technical support person.

With the IT industry losing employees faster than Britney Spears is losing appeal, I thought spending hours sharing DLS (daily-living-scrap) was a royal waste of time.

A marketing friend of mine (yes... I’ll admit I have one or two of those – just as I keep tabs on the old nuns from my Catholic boarding school days...) told me ‘GET ON TWITTER’ in no uncertain terms. I really felt it would be a major time-suck and had no intention of spewing my every movement – or listening to others’ daily trials and tribulations. I was already prepared to bail on Facebook for that exact reason.

The First Week

The first few days were rough... the Twitter servers were having problems – yes I did begin analyzing the traffic at that point and the Twitter servers were obviously over-loaded. Roundtrip times (latency) was fine, but the response time from the servers was horrible. Classic example of overloaded servers.

My first followers were hot women looking for dates (at a price). I learned to block users fast. I lost 85% of my first followers to the facts that (a) they seemed to think I was a man and (b) I am not a man (or a lesbian). Was I the ugly duckling in the Twittersphere? A Twuckling?

Struggling through the Twitter interface made me truly doubt these people flocking to this service. I worked on a background, got disconnected hundreds of times, tried to understand how to navigate in this somewhat lame interface – OMG. I thought “there’s got to be a better way!”

There were many!

Learning to Cheat

Maybe you don't consider it cheating, but I do. In the second week I learned how to tie my Twitter account to my precious iPhone (stroking it lovingly now). I also found out about TweetDeck (which I wrote a report about at www.chappellseminars.com/projects.html) and TweetLater. The three made the entire experience 'do-able'.

With a rum and coke nearby I sat down one evening on TweetLater to spew 140-character hints and tips that would be sent each morning around 8am. I found it no problem to come up with 60... 80... 100 short tips on network troubleshooting. I learned later that this can backfire. When you have a pre-defined tip going out at 8am and then you Tweet that you're taking the day off at 8:15am I think you're busted. Thank goodness TweetLater doesn't state "via TweetLater" which I guess it did at one time. (I've asked my marketing friend to get me a tool that I can load with "via Joe's Bar" or "Via Sensual Rendezvous").

The Revelation

One day... out of the Tweet blue... I got a request from Ed Moltzen, ChannelWeb star, to be on a podcast about making money using open source solutions. We made the plans and the podcast was a tremendous experience. I would never have met Ed and the ChannelWeb team without Twitter.

The business opportunities opening up through Twitter have overwhelmed me. I tried for months to get into a specific company to talk with a mucky muck. A fellow Tweeter made it happen. I got tied into securitytube.net and began recording short training videos for them – a great opportunity. I reconnected with a professional contact who was/and again will be influential in my career. I found a phone that could do penetration testing. I learned the hot bar for the Cisco Live event.

It was suddenly clear to me... Twitter was the new CompuServe. As I have a tendency to hide away in my lab and only come out into public when prodded... I'd lost contact. I'd lost touch. I didn't remember how it felt to mentor people – how tremendously important that was to me personally.

I began altering my Tweets to give, give, give. Share, share, share. I began listening to what people were saying – separating out the wheat from the chaff. I'm happy you had a great camping trip with your kids, but I can't help anyone with that information. How can I help people?

The Ratings Game

My marketing friend told me how to find my Twitter rank and it was a humbling experience. I had a grade of 7% on TwitterGrader and Twinfluence really didn't want to acknowledge my existence. I felt like a 10-year old in high school – rather unimportant and worthless.

Each few days I would check again... just to be shot down. In a world of 2,334,003 Twitters I ranked 2,334,002 (my daughter must have ranked below me as she hasn't sent a Tweet yet).

Over the days and weeks, I checked in every once in a while. I tried to understand what the scores were all about... I racked my brain – "how can I be more popular?" It reminded me of 8th grade and Doug Gonzalez – the hottest boy in class. I just couldn't compete with the girls who were wearing makeup and nylons. I was still getting to school late and smelled of chlorine from swim practice. I was the ugly duckling.

Then it dawned on me... why did I care what my Twitter score was? I would never appeal to the mass market. My jokes often related to dirty hex codes or funky protocol behavior. I am a specialist and I have a very specific audience. Even my daughter will likely stop following me soon.

I felt so relieved. Someone would see me as a swan!

Everyone Started Dying – Including Twitter

When Michael Jackson died, so did my Twitter access. Suddenly I realized I had switched from a ‘newbie Twitterer’ to a full blown TA (Twitter Addict). When I couldn’t keep a connection to Twitter I got all sweaty... my heart rate increased... I recognized the signs. I felt this way when I thought I’d lost my iPhone (for a total of 3 minutes).

Ed McMahon, then Farrah, then Michael, then Billy Mays... they were dropping like flies. Lordy – our world is fragile and interconnected.

When someone tweeted that MJ was dead I told Brenda and Angela in my office. I did a quick Google search and only found TMZ had reported he was actually dead. Ok... I lost all credibility in my office when I showed them “news” from TMZ. Within an hour it was confirmed.

I did learn to watch out for believing tweeters on the news feeds. It is a powerful medium – hmmm...

Being a Twass... or is it a Twitch?

I’d planned to keep my personal opinions to myself when preparing to enter the world of Twitter. Well that’s always been my downfall. Well... when the MJ death happened and people got all weepy I just couldn’t take it. My experience with the Internet Safety for Kids project hardened me to pedophiles. What part of “I liked to have young boys in my bed” didn’t sound like a pedophile? Well... I got vocal on that... and waited for my followers to drop off.

They didn’t.

I got a number of DMs in support and a few arguing the “he wasn’t indicted” route. Regardless – it took hours of my time to state my opinion and was not worth the time. Lesson learned.

OMG – You’re Ranked 101? I’m in Love!

When I did the ChannelWeb podcast I mentioned that I’d analyzed my Twitter traffic that morning. I shared a bit of ‘dirt’ on Twitter traffic... and (given that I have my Mother’s talking affliction) I stated that I’d do a Twitter analysis after the show and upload the results. That led me to the TweetDeck analysis and the eventual “TweetDeck Twice Analysis” project where I found that your Twitter picture retains the original name from your local system. Given the fact that some of the picture names were tremendously entertaining (“WhatSheWants,” “MeNoWife” and “Spoon_Too_Big”), the report was a humorous read. I released it to a Twitter review audience and it was leaked through a reTweet (which I’d not expected, but thankfully the report was in solid shape).

Sitting down on a Sunday morning I launched TweetDeck to see what was going on in my virtual world. EEEK! There it was – my article was called “hilarious” and was being reTweeted by none other than Twitter_Tips. I felt as if Doug Gonzalez (that hottie from 8th grade) had suddenly asked me to the dance!

Suddenly the Twitter scores mattered again. I was a flustered 14-year old girl again. “You like me... you really like me.”

Ok... I had to snap out of that. It was an ego boost, but most likely Doug would have danced with me and looked over my shoulder at Kristin Jenson – the made-up, stocking-wearing blondie with boobs. I’d go home feeling sadder than if I’d gone with the sweet-but-less-popular friends who’d never look over your shoulder during a dance (well... they’d never dance with you anyway so no worries there).

Being a Twuman

My daughter signed up for a Twitter account and followed me. It was sweet.

After weeks of spewing technical tips and just meaty geek spew, I sat one eve and wrote a tweet to tell people that she was following me. I asked her (via Tweet) if she was still awake and following me. I finished up my 140 characters with “I love you, honey.”

The responses were amazing. They made me cry.

DMs flooded in with warm thoughts about how much these parents loved their children. They could read between the lines and knew I missed my little girl so much. I realized that being human on Twitter could be a positive experience.

I’ll never feel comfortable writing about the mundane moments in the day, but I felt free to express my love for my kids and my passion for life and the profession I am in.

Suddenly there was a human element intertwined with my professional image. It mirrored what I project on stage. I still weep at the podium when I talk about how the Internet Safety for Kids project was founded. I am often overwhelmed with empathy towards the IT audience struggling to keep up – I give them all of myself for the few moments we have together.

I thawed on Twitter.

Now What?

We will see. Here are my Twoals (ok... it’s getting to be a bit much when I tell the kids we are having a Twourth of July Party) goals:

- Keep up with Tweeting daily tips – give, give, give - be seen as a content provider of value
- Pay attention to replies – it’s a two-way street
- Maintain a sense of humor - Stay out of the fray on über-emotional issues unless life-threatening
- Thanks re-Tweeters – they extend my reach in a flattering way
- Be human – be self-effacing and admit shortcomings – remain level with my followers
- Value my followers’ time – don’t be pithy too often
- Learn to compress my thoughts into 140 characters or less (Why not 150? I ache for 10 more characters at times)
- Tweet my daughter at bedtime when she’s not here

About Me

Good lordy... if you must know... I'm a horrid cook, but my kids seem to put up with it. They have a great sense of humor and pat me on the back to say "It's ok Mom – we'll start heating pizzas". Other than that, I am a wire tapper – I listen to network traffic for a living. I'm not a hacker – I'm "Glenda, the good witch." (Still a witch, but with much less fanfare.) I teach free online classes to the technical industry at least once a month from chappellseminars.com and am the founder of Wireshark University (based on the most popular open source wire tapping tool in the world). I work with and for my best friends. I've traveled the world to speak at conferences in front of awe-struck audiences whom I respect more than they will ever know. I am a twuman and a Tweeter. I am Twaura. <g>