

# THE TWITTER PLAYBOOK

How Authors Can Use Twitter To Grow Their  
Platform—Before And After They Are Published



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***The Twitter Playbook***

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Can you remember the first time someone tried to explain Twitter to you?

I distinctly remember rolling my eyes as soon as I heard the stomach-turning lingo (“tweet me”) and swore I’d steer clear of what sounded like the most self-centered and narcissistic social media platform yet (which is saying a lot). Honestly, I had enough on my plate—as I’m sure you do too—without having to worry about who to list for #FollowFriday or what planet an @ reply was from.

Putting aside questionable phrases like “tweet,” “follower,” and “DM,” what bothered me most about Twitter is what I perceived to be the me-first application of it. The last thing people needed was another way to keep up with what I was doing.

For example, people didn’t need to know that I was attending Book Expo America, SXSW Interactive or the Writers League of Texas Conference. Rather they need to know how what I’m hearing about can benefit them. My tweets these days focus less on lunch and more on learning.

Perhaps you have a hard time imagining yourself tweeting at *Harvard Business Review* bloggers, Nobel laureates, or CNN anchors. Looking back, I was incredibly off base with my initial impressions of the platform: it has become a key—I might venture to say *critical*—part of the work I do with authors in launching best-selling books and national media campaigns. Perhaps the biggest thing that I have learned in watching which books sell and which don’t is the reality that a “me first” platform isn’t typically what generates strong interest or book sales. On

the contrary, it is a platform more focused on celebrating the accomplishments and insights of others that generates the kind of goodwill that drives early interest in a book.

For those who have been avoiding Twitter, this guide is intended to expose you to the fun side of microblogging, as well as to show how your efforts here will absolutely pay off in building meaningful relationships with authors, readers, journalists, and other key influencers.

### **From Twitter Stream to Bookshelf**

These books started out as Twitter feeds:

- *Sh\*t My Dad Says* (@shitmydadsays) Justin Halpern began tweeting the off-color rantings of his father, resulting in both a book and TV sitcom deal.
- *The F\*\*\*ing Epic Twitter Quest of @MayorEmanuel* by Dan Sinker began as a fake Twitter account that parodied Chicago politics. Scribner picked up the tweets (with commentary) as a book.
- *Fake AP StyleBook* (@fakeapstylebook) found a thousand followers in the first day and exploded from there. Authors Ken Lowery and Mark Hale soon after had an agent and then a book deal with Three Rivers Press.
- *Marching Bands Are Just Homeless Orchestras* by Tim Siedell (a.k.a. @badbanana) began as a Twitter feed, garnering over half a million followers within four years, along with a publishing deal with StoryPeople Press.

## The Unlikely Story of @CarolSanford

A successful speaker and consultant to international corporations like Colgate, Seventh Generation, and DuPont, Carol Sanford came to me skeptical about how Twitter could improve her platform. In the fall of 2010, she called Cave Henricks Communications, our strategic partner firm, to help launch her first book, *The Responsible Business* (Jossey-Bass, 2011). After putting four years of her life into writing her book, she wanted to make sure she left no stone unturned when it came to marketing. While Carol knew the importance of coverage from traditional players like *Bloomberg BusinessWeek*, CNBC, and other top outlets would be to her success, Twitter was not on her radar.

During our initial phone call, about eight months before her book's release, Carol said, "I'm so excited about getting more active online. I'm ready to make Facebook and blogging a priority." I loved Carol's energy and told her that her blog would be a big part of the social media strategy we developed, "but based on your target market, Facebook won't play a huge role. A smart Twitter strategy will make a much bigger impact with your audience."

This particular component of my introductory call with authors almost always creates the kind of silence that makes me wonder whether the line has been cut.

"Carol...are you still there?"

Carol broke the silence with the words I dread above all others: "Twitter? I don't think anyone cares to hear about what I'm doing each day."

When I give presentations about the use of Twitter to grow one's platform—their relationships with journalists, influencers, other authors, potential clients, and readers—I often

look out on a sea of blank stares. I understand their gut reaction. On the surface, Twitter feels superficial, self-centric, and even silly. As you know, I've been there.

Maybe you, too, have heard the wrong kind of buzz about Twitter. Most people who either haven't used Twitter or have used it fleetingly (to little or no success) exclude Twitter from their marketing strategy with comments like "Twitter? Really? That's not for me." What usually follows is a litany of reasons why Twitter isn't the right fit:

- My message is too deep for 140 characters.
- My readers are far too sophisticated to tweet.
- Twitter is great for Lady Gaga or the president, but who cares what I have to say?
- Anderson Cooper has millions of followers, there's no way he's going to see my tweet.
- I tried Twitter. No one engages there.

Bear with me if you share these views.

Returning to the noxious, "Who cares what I ate for lunch?" line, the answer is often "No one." At least, assuming what you ate for lunch didn't somehow relate to a platform you're building around nutrition or didn't provide a witty response to a delicious recommendation from a top local foodie blog.

Like everything else within social media, context rules the day. As I told Carol that day, Twitter isn't about updates or tweets—it's about relationships.

Within a month of the silence on the phone, Carol had mastered the basics of Twitter and we had developed a strategy to build relationships with journalists and key influencers in her topic area using her new Twitter skills. As a new—and relatively unknown—author, Carol



needed to mine every opportunity to connect with influential people, and Twitter offered her that chance.

Almost immediately, Carol connected with Sam Ford (@SamFord), a popular blogger at *Fast Company*. Sam had written a blog post that Carol loved, and she retweeted his tweet about the post, adding a “love this piece, Sam” comment. (By “retweet,” I mean that she passed along a tweet he originally sent, by adding “RT” in front of it, essentially quoting him for her audience.) Like many journalists, Sam kept a close eye on his Twitter account and thanked Carol for her comment. From there, Carol and Sam started a conversation on Twitter about what it truly means to be a responsible business. The connection was made and when Carol’s book released six months later, the front cover featured Sam’s endorsement.

Were it not for Twitter, Carol and Sam are unlikely to have ever connected.

### **Twitter Deals**

The following authors were discovered on Twitter by their publishers:

- Tweeter Adam Christopher was approached by a publisher on Twitter and signed a deal for his book *Empire State* with publisher Angry Robot.
- Mariam Kobras, author of *The Distant Shore*, got picked up by her publisher Buddhapuss Ink on Twitter, who saw her posts, went to her blog to read excerpts, and kept asking to see more until she sent her manuscript.
- Matthew Kimberley, author of *How to Get a Grip*, used Twitter to drive traffic to his blog by messaging people who tweeted “mtfu” or “get a grip.” One of his fans turned out to be a publisher.
- Mike Monteiro created a false (and humorous) account posing as oil giant BP Global and landed a book deal.

## Twitter—The World’s Largest Cocktail Party

If you are a fan of Twitter, you likely evangelize about its benefits to friends, authors, and business owners, urging them to hop on and connect. I know I do, and one of the hardest things about talking up Twitter is trying to explain it succinctly, in a way that doesn’t turn people off.

Many people just getting started on Twitter feel like they’re trying to read in a foreign language. It’s a confusing experience for beginners, not only in terms of how it works but, more importantly, because of the etiquette involved.

Twitter is frequently compared to a cocktail party or networking event, because, unlike Facebook—which concentrates on who you *already* know—Twitter often focuses on who you want to know. If you are new to Twitter, imagine a cocktail party with millions of people. The vast room is filled with people from all walks of life, and you immediately feel a mixture of intimidation and excitement.

Those in the room congregate in circles around millions of topics—the crowd seems endless and no subject is off the table. Some discussion circles, such as those surrounding politics, sports, or even *American Idol*, loom so large it’s hard to nudge your way in. Other topic circles seem so niche that only a few committed people enter into and maintain the conversation.

Most people in the room have a foot in many of the topic circles. They aren’t only there to talk about book publishing or small business marketing, they engage in ten to fifteen conversations around issues they feel passionate about. These can include bands they like, conferences they attend, or the game-changing movements they take part in. For example, I have my foot in a number of different circles, including social media, branding, book publishing, PR, Austin happenings, Texas Longhorns, college football and many others. In fact, Twitter has

become my preferred resource for accessing news—I rely on it more than any other medium. Like me, millions of other people tune into Twitter to read the latest news, discuss new ideas, events, and connect with people who have entertaining and informative things to say about that specific topic.

In short, people take to Twitter to make connections—which makes the site especially powerful for new authors.

### **How to Kill the Party**

If you've hopped on to Twitter, updated (or tweeted) for a week or two, and then left in a huff because no one seems interested in engaging with you there, you're likely thinking that Twitter felt much more like an inattentive Tuesday morning book signing rather than a welcoming cocktail party.

The problem is that most Twitter neophytes approach it like a speaking engagement, not a cocktail party. For the record, I'm not talking about an engaging and entertaining lecture you might find at a TED conference, but a sit-there-quietly-while-I-read-from-my-PowerPoint-slides presentation.

### **[Twitter graphic with the following lines packaged as tweets]**

“My name is Rusty Shelton and I just got published! Thrilled to be on Twitter to hear your thoughts on my new book.”

“Check out my new book, available everywhere! Go get it today!”

“What do you think of my new book? Here’s a free chapter.”

“Is anyone here? I’m going back to Facebook where my family has to suffer through my obnoxious book pleas.”

Think back to the most recent party you attended and imagine that—instead of going to meet new people and engage them in conversation—you’re there to network and make sure everyone knows about your new publishing deal.

You’re looking for book buyers. After all, you have a new book coming out soon.

You come prepared, wearing a T-shirt with your cover on the front, book-focused flyers in your pocket, and business cards linking people to the Amazon page for your book.

You walk in the door and see people huddled in circles, talking about a variety of topics. They’re going to be so thrilled to hear about your book. In fact, they seem disappointed that you’re late to the event—after all, you’re the main attraction.

You walk up to the first circle you see—five people chatting about politics. Perfect! Your book is a political thriller and these politicians are squarely in your target market. Instead of easing your way into the conversation by listening for a little while before inserting yourself or adding something interesting to the discussion, you lead with the line they’ve been waiting all night to hear: “Hey guys, my name is Rusty and guess what...(looks around excitedly) my new book coming out next week!”

You ease back from the table with an expectant grin, looking forward to inking the first order. Not only does no one acknowledge your great offer or even your simple presence in the circle, they move their conversation across the room.

Yikes, you assume they must be having a bad night and head to the next circle, filled with people gathered around the topic of leadership books. You nudge your way into the conversation, throw some flyers on the table, and inform them that Amazon is running a fifteen-percent-off special until the end of the day.

You receive a similar reaction from this group, although the lady to your left, a few glasses of wine into the night, grabs you by the shoulder and wants to know, “who sells at a cocktail party?”

You roll your eyes as you brush past her... how rude is she? You’ve had enough of this party. Time to take your flyers, business cards, and killer cover design and head over to the family reunion (Facebook), where the in-laws have no choice but to listen to you push your new book.

### **Twitter Isn’t About Commenting—It’s About Conversation**

As silly as this story sounds, I see this script play out daily on Twitter with authors who join the site and simply see it as a promotional tool. Most last a few weeks and leave sulking when no one responds to them.

Can you blame people for running for the hills?

Later in this book, I’ll teach you how to become the life of the Twitter party and how to avoid the cold shoulder. But first we should look at the Twitter application and how it has grown to become such an important platform-builder for authors.

## A Bit of Background

Software architect and businessman Jack Dorsey and a team at Odeo, the podcasting company, created Twitter in the spring of 2006. The idea was initially conceived as a communication platform that would allow specific groups to share short bursts of information. Dorsey sent the first tweet ever at 9:50 p.m. (PST) on March 21, 2006: “Just setting up my twttr.”

Dorsey and his cofounders, Evan Williams and Biz Stone, soon renamed the site “Twitter.” The official launch took place that summer. However, the site began to make waves a year later at 2007’s SXSW Interactive in Austin, Texas, which has since become social media’s biggest event. After an introduction at the conference, tweets per day grew from twenty thousand to sixty thousand<sup>1</sup> and the site continued to steadily pick up early adopters.

***Tip:** Today, many early adopters on Twitter can be distinguished by a first name as their user name (@Jack or @Lisa). With the growth of the website, now simply reserving your name (@JohnSmith) can prove challenging. Action item: Go to [Twitter.com](https://twitter.com) and reserve your name (if available)—it’s free. Even if you’re not ready to start tweeting, you should reserve it for the future. If you have children, reserve their names too!*

Roughly half a decade after the site launched, it has become one of the largest social networks in the world, with more than 200 active million users at the time of publication. In fact, 100 million of those users joined in 2010 alone. The growth of the site is due to a number of factors, including celebrity participation, increasing integration with traditional media outlets (you likely see tweets running along the bottom of the screen on many of your favorite TV shows), and the site’s role in socio-political movements and sports events, from the recent Arab

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas, Nick, [“Twitter Blows Up at SXSW Conference,” Gawker](#), March 12, 2007.

Spring uprisings to the Women's World Cup in the summer of 2011. For example, one point during the Final between the United States and Japan set a record (at the time) for the number of tweets per second at 7,196 tweets.<sup>2</sup>

## **Twitter Basics**

For you as an author, Twitter represents one of the most unique—and effective—ways to connect with readers, journalists, authors, influencers, and others who have the ability to make or break your book when it releases. However, rather than starting by swinging for the fences, you need a good understanding of the nuances of Twitter.

## **Getting Started**

To get started on Twitter, go to [Twitter.com](http://Twitter.com) and follow the link to sign up on the site. You will be asked to pick a user name that no one else has reserved, which can be difficult now that the site has more than 500 million registered accounts (200 million of which are “active” users). You will be lucky if your name (@FirstNameLastName) is still available, as Twitter handles have become almost as important as URLs. As an example, I have already reserved Twitter user names (@BradyShelton and @Luke\_Shelton) for my kids, who are both under age five.

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<sup>2</sup> Weir, Tom, “Women's World Cup Sets Twitter Records,” *USA Today*, July 18, 2011 (<http://content.usatoday.com/communities/gameon/post/2011/07/womens-world-cup-set-twitter-records/1>).

Although there are exceptions, as a general rule you want to use your name rather than your book title, blog name, or business name. As an author, you will hopefully publish many books, and you don't want to develop a lively and active Twitter handle for a year and then have to leave it behind or change it when your next book comes out. Just as you want to build your website around you as the central figure, your Twitter account should work for your long-term vision.

***Tip:** If you are a medical doctor, I recommend using “MD” in your Twitter handle to catch the attention of readers and journalists.*

***Tip:** There are always exceptions to the best practice of using your name as your Twitter handle. As Justin Halpern proved with @ShitMyDadSays, sometimes a great topic combined with funny content is the best platform builder.*

### **Setting Up Your Profile**

Once you pick a username and agree to Twitter's terms and conditions, you will be asked to set up your profile. Although we will talk later in this book about the importance of “listening” for at least two weeks before you start tweeting, do set up your profile as soon as you join the site. As you follow other Twitter users, a visible picture and bio will encourage them to follow you back.

***Tip:** Many people won't follow back an account that doesn't have a picture or a seemingly normal bio, in an effort to avoid spammers.*

Your profile consists of four main components—your bio, your picture, your background and your website—all extremely important to your success on Twitter as an author. Twitter



allows you 160 characters for your bio, which requires brevity and, ideally, a dose of wit. While you want to include your book title in your bio, start with your credentials or something unique about yourself and your background. After all, your strategy for Twitter must pull journalists, organizations, potential clients, and readers to your profile and by extension to your website. Just as a press release headline or the subject line of a pitch e-mail must grab attention, your bio needs to hook people quickly. Use the same head shot that appears in your website press room and across your social media infrastructure (if you don't have a strong head shot, I encourage you to get one).

Finally, you will be asked to add a URL to your Twitter account. If you have a website, use that link. As journalists and other thought leaders take interest in your profile, you want them to be able to get to your website easily. If you don't have a website, think about another place you could link people to—a corporate bio, a blog, a Linked-In profile, or a Google+ page.

***Tip:** Getting stuck writing your Twitter bio? Check out the bios for authors or thought leaders in your topic area to see what they say. This often leads to a breakthrough on your own bio.*

### **What Is a Tweet?**

A tweet is a message (limited to 140 characters) sent from a user on Twitter. Most tweets are just text, but many include pictures, links, or other action items. The 140-character limit forces users to be succinct, which is part of the huge appeal of the site, particularly for journalists. The tweet below illustrates a user encouraging her followers to check out her story by tweeting the link.

You may wonder why the link looks strange. I used a link-shortener to take a long website link and abbreviate it (so I didn't use up all 140 characters on the link). I encourage you

to use Bitly.com, a free link-shortener that allows you to track how many people click on your link.

Tweets from the people you follow show up in your general Twitter stream, which is the column on your Twitter home page after you log in.

EXAMPLE: Are you reading [@johnsonwhitney](#) on HBR? Great stuff. Here's her latest "What Job Does Social Media Do For You?" ([bit.ly/pRNVKT](http://bit.ly/pRNVKT))

Tweet Review: This tweet was intended to provide value to my followers by tipping them off to a great blogger on *Harvard Business Review*, Whitney Johnson. Rather than saying "Whitney Johnson" in my tweet, I used her Twitter user name (@johnsonwhitney) so that my followers could follow her if they so choose. At the end of the tweet, I included a link to her most recent blog (shortened using Bit.ly) to provide a call to action. It is always a great idea to lead your followers to the story, photo, or topic you are tweeting about so they can find more, if they are so inclined.

### **What Is a Retweet?**

A retweet is a tweet that quotes another Twitter user. Notice on the tweet below that I added "RT" before @LisaTener, which denotes that I am "retweeting" a message Lisa originally tweeted via her account. I might retweet a message I think important for my followers to see, and by retweeting I give Lisa credit for being the originator of the message. Part of the etiquette of Twitter is to give credit where credit is due, so the more you provide attribution for ideas, quotes, links, and so on, the more successful you will be on Twitter.

With a retweet, add commentary when possible. I added two slashes "/" at the end of Lisa's message to let my followers know that the text after the slashes is my own. It also allows Lisa to see my additional insights.

Retweets show up in the “@ connect” section of your Twitter interface—there you can see which of your tweets are retweeted the most (and who retweeted them). Keeping track of which tweets get retweeted helps you tailor future content to your readers’ interests.

EXAMPLE: RT @LisaTener In a memoir, be true to your story. If you make changes, be clear what they are (names, composites, dates) // Good advice

Retweet Review: By adding “RT” before @LisaTener (her user name), I am letting my followers know that everything that follows her user name is her original tweet. By adding the “//” at the end, I am effectively letting all who see the tweet know that everything following the // is my commentary. It’s a good idea to add commentary where possible; it personalizes the tweet a bit more and gives the person you are retweeting a reason to respond to you.

### **What Is an @ Reply?**

Without a doubt, the most important nuance of Twitter is the use of the @ reply or @ mention feature. When anyone on Twitter sends a tweet that includes your username (such as @RustyShelton), your Twitter account flags that tweet for you and includes a stream of those @ replies in the second tab of your Twitter interface.

Most people on Twitter follow so many people they cannot possibly keep constant track of their general Twitter stream. In many ways, the Twitter stream is similar to the general noise you’d hear at a busy cocktail party: you might catch something here or there, but it’s tough to follow each conversation and know what to respond to. When someone sends a tweet using your user name (an @ reply), it’s as if someone is walking up to you at that party and saying “John, I

loved that piece you wrote in the *Boston Globe* last week—what was your inspiration?” While this tweet does show up in your Twitter stream, it also shows up in the second tab, which is labeled “@ connect”. This level of personalization makes the tweet visible to you and should make you want to respond to it.

The first thing I do when I log on to Twitter is go directly to the @ connect tab to see if anyone has directed a tweet at me that I need to respond to. Other authors, journalists, and influencers typically do the same thing. The etiquette of Twitter calls for @ connect to be responded to or acknowledged whenever possible, because such interaction encourages more people to tweet using your user name, increasing the likelihood that more people follow you.

In many ways, the @ reply is like a public e-mail or a question at a speaking engagement. Although it is directed to the person whose username you mention, if you include the username in the body of your tweet (instead of at the very start of your tweet) all your followers can see what you have said to this person. Think of it as a public shout-out, directed at a user on Twitter and meant specifically for him (or for a group of people, if multiple Twitter user names are included). In the “Finding Your Grove on Twitter” section below, you will read more about how to use the @ reply to your advantage.

EXAMPLE: A big congrats to @Mike\_Hofman on his new role at Glamour.com—they are lucky to have you there!

@ Mention Review: A username on Twitter always follows “@” and in this tweet I am congratulating my friend Mike Hofman, former editor of Inc.com, on his new role as the head of Glamour.com. In this tweet, all of my followers are able to see the news of Mike’s new role. Most people will view it as a public shout-out and it serves as a great relationship-builder.

VERY IMPORTANT NUANCE: Whenever you start a tweet with an @ symbol (for example, if the above tweet were phrased “@Mike\_Hofman Congrats on your new gig at Glamour.com”) only people who see the tweet are those who follow both myself and Mike. So, if you want all of your followers to see the tweet you are sending as an @ reply, you need to make sure you don’t start the tweet with the person’s username – package it in the body of the text.

### **What Is a Hashtag?**

One of the most confusing features of Twitter for many authors is the hashtag, denoted with a “#” sign. Hashtags allow you to search on a specific topic such as a publishing conference (#WLTCO) or an ongoing discussion among writers and publishing industry professionals (#PubTip). Everything that follows the “#” is considered the hashtag (no spaces).

Think about the benefits of a hashtag at a writers’ conference. Before Twitter, authors attended a writers’ conference, made a ton of connections, and lost touch shortly after the event. Today, most writers’ conferences establish a hashtag before the event so all attendees can tweet using the same hashtag, like #WLTCO (the hashtag for the Writers’ League of Texas). Attendees search for what other authors at the event tweet about and follow them to stay in touch in the future. Likewise, those who aren’t attending the event can follow it by entering the conference’s hashtag (“#WLTCO”) in the search bar—the next best thing to being there. The hashtag does count as a part of your 140 characters, which is the reason most hashtags are as short as possible.

Many of those on Twitter who attend events think of themselves as reporters (as they should), chronicling the best comments, stats, and suggestions for their followers who are unable

to make the trip. Such tweeting provides immense value and is one of the best ways to grow your number of followers.

EXAMPLE: Excited about attending #WLTCOON this weekend in Austin. Looking forward to hearing @JaneFriedman's keynote.

Hashtag Review: In this example I use the hashtag for the Writers League of Texas conference. The great thing about this hashtag—in addition to coding the tweet for the event—is how it also allows me to shorten my tweet (I don't have to use the bulk of my characters on "Writers League of Texas," as I can just include #WLTCOON). If those following me don't know what it is, they can click on it, pull up the Twitter stream for the event, and find out quickly.

### **What Is a Direct Message?**

Although most conversation on Twitter is public, you can send private messages by using a direct message, called a DM. Before you tee up a DM to your celebrity crush, you should know that you can only send direct messages to those Twitter users who follow you. Use the DM feature sparingly—for private matters, setting up a meeting, or anything else that isn't worth the time of your followers.

EXAMPLE: @LisaTener how are things? I'd love to grab coffee soon—does next week work for you?

Direct Message Review: Direct messages are a great way to communicate about personal matters that offer no value to those following you. For many, they act similarly to text messages and let you prevent one-on-one discussions from clogging up your Twitter feed.

**Tip:** Make sure you are in the “Messages” section of your account before firing off what you think is a DM. Think this is obvious? Just ask former House Representative Anthony Weiner how easy it can be to mistakenly send a private message to your followers.

### Using Stats to Make the Most of Your Time on Twitter

Thanks to Buddy Media (@BuddyMedia) for the original research and to social media expert Mari Smith (@MariSmith) for introducing us to this data:

- There are three times more clicks on full links versus shortened links.
- Get to the point—posts of eighty characters or fewer get 27 percent more engagement
- Brands posting outside of regular business hours get 20 percent higher engagement.
- Thursday and Friday posts get 18 percent more engagement.
- Posts get the most views when posted between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. (EST).

### **Finding Your Groove on Twitter**

Enough about cocktail parties and the basics of Twitter; how can authors create a Twitter strategy that builds a larger platform and builds relationships with the *right* people and organizations?

Twitter is an effective platform builder for authors because of the “let’s network” culture of the site, and also because many of the most active users are authors, thought leaders, journalists, organizations, politicians, celebrities, athletes, and readers—providing a perfect environment for authors looking to expand their networks and build relationships with key figures who can make their book successful when it comes out.

As a general rule, once you get started on Twitter you should not send a single tweet out until you have been “listening” for at least two weeks. When I suggest you “listen,” I mean follow 100 to 200 Twitter users and simply view the Twitter stream a few times a day to get a feel for how the site works before starting to contribute content. While it may sound a bit overwhelming to follow a few hundred people, you can efficiently find the right people to follow by locating lists from blog posts suggesting “top follows” in your topic area and by using sites like MuckRack.com. Don’t feel pressure to follow everyone at once—it’s an organic process, and you’ll find yourself adding people as you identify additional media members, influencers and groups that make sense for your topic area.

## **Whom to Follow**

Whom to follow is perhaps one of the most important tasks you have as you get started on Twitter. I see most authors waste time either not building a strategy on who to follow or following a few people and waiting for readers to come to them. *The Twitter Playbook* calls for a focus on four main groups:

- **Journalists and bloggers.** You should seek out and follow at least fifty “traditional” journalists and at least fifty bloggers in your topic area. These media members have the power to ramp your visibility to large levels and Twitter has one thing few other places have from them right now—their attention.
- **Authors, influencers and experts.** Who are the key influencers within your topic area? I want you to identify influencers on both a local and national level and create a list within your Twitter account that features at least fifty of them.



- **Businesses, conferences, associations and other groups.** This category focuses on collections of end users (whether they are readers, potential clients, etc.) and should feature business development targets and groups or conferences that could potentially bring you in for a speaking engagement. I want you to create a list of at least twenty-five of them.
- **Potential customers.** The fatal flaw that I see from most authors is connecting with their potential customers. Build your “follow” list around your book-readers’ key groups and people likely to recommend your book or introduce it to potential readers in your target market. As a new author, your biggest challenge is awareness. Even if nobody has any idea who you are, you should use Twitter to contribute to the right conversations in your topic area and, subsequently, become a known quantity.

You’ll want to focus your Twitter content strategy on several groups—journalists, authors, and influencers—depending on your unique goals.

### **Connect with Journalists**

Few industries have changed as much over the past five years as journalism. As a result of major changes in the way we consume news, newsroom staff at top traditional media outlets have been slashed, leaving fewer journalists to cover more stories than ever before. The last thing these journalists have time to do is sit back and take calls or read e-mails from PR reps or authors pitching them ideas on the next big story.

Increasingly, journalists are utilizing social media to connect directly with authors, experts, and others when working on a story. This “don’t call us, we’ll call you” approach is the

future of PR. What Twitter has is something every author, business, PR professional, and other publicity-seeking person is desperate for—journalists’ attention.

***Stat:** According to a recent Cision/George Washington University study, 52 percent of journalists use Twitter as a research tool for stories they are working on.*

If you are reading this and thinking, “Really? If they have less time, how can they have time for Twitter?” then consider the journalist’s perspective. If, as a journalist or blogger, your pay scale, bonus structure, or status within your given media outlet was determined by the number of “clicks” your stories received, wouldn’t you spend time on a site that drives significant traffic to news stories?

In addition to Twitter’s appeal to journalists as a traffic generator, it serves an important role in research. Many journalists active on Twitter receive hundreds—if not thousands—of pitches in their e-mail inboxes every week. Can you imagine trying to sort through that many e-mails to find story ideas? As a result of this overload, some journalists have told me they just hit “delete all” or have a separate, private inbox they give only to personal contacts and the best publicists.

While their e-mail inboxes overflow, those same journalists might only receive a handful of @ replies on Twitter. As counterintuitive as it may sound, there isn’t nearly as much noise on Twitter. For this reason, the site allows authors to avoid the black hole of a journalist’s e-mail inbox or voicemail and to connect directly with her in an environment that has her attention.

Before you run to the computer to send @PiersMorgan a tweet, remember: it is never a good idea to pitch journalists on Twitter. The quickest way to turn them off or get blocked is to push a pitch. Your goal when tweeting with journalists is not to get singular coverage but to create a relationship. The only way this can work is if you target only those journalists who cover your topic area and—instead of pitching or marketing to them—focus on adding to the conversation and encouraging them when you see a well-written article.

### **Three Steps to Building Relationships with Journalists**

Although many journalists are attentive to Twitter, that doesn't mean you will be the object of their attention, particularly without the right approach. Here are three steps to begin building relationships with leading journalists and bloggers.

#### **Step 1: Decide Whom to Follow**

Make a list of the top seventy-five to a hundred journalists in your topic area and follow them. You can find them on MuckRack.com, a site that allows you to search journalists by beat (which means the topics they cover, from business to sports), city, media outlet, and other terms. It also allows you to follow those journalists directly from the site. This is a great way to start developing a list of journalists in your area to target. In addition, as you read stories or blog posts, or watch or listen to the news from outlets you think might be a good fit for your book, do a quick Google search for the journalist's name and add him or her to your Twitter list. You want to constantly grow and filter this list.

## **Step 2: Cultivate Relationships with @ Replies**

Most journalists are not likely to follow you back, which means they won't see tweets from your account, unless you @ reply them (in which case, the tweet will be flagged for them in their @ reply tab). For many authors, it only takes a few smart @ replies to start a conversation and get a follow-back. However, don't be lulled into a false sense of security. It often takes several conversations to build a relationship, which is one reason we recommend beginning this process as early as possible, ideally at least a year before your book comes out. So, note any articles written by those journalists and @ reply them with a link to their post and a positive, meaningful comment, observation, or addition.

## **Step 3: Create Lists**

As you follow this initial group of seventy-five to 100 journalists, build a list within your Twitter account that allows you to filter their tweets from your general Twitter stream. You can create a list by clicking on the "lists" tab and then clicking "create a list" from the options. Then, go to your "followers" section by clicking on "followers" and add media members to your list by clicking on the downward arrow. This will save you time and make sure you target the right journalists. If you follow a large number of journalists, build sub-lists of journalists in your topic area(s) based on format or specialty (business print, food blogs, etc.).

***Stat:** According to a 2010 PR Week survey, 37 percent of journalists are required to be on Twitter by the media outlet that employs them.*

## **How to Interact with Journalists on Twitter**

I've told you never to pitch yourself or your book. However, you may do so if the journalist specifically asks for pitches (and they will from time to time). Your Twitter strategy should not be focused on any "push" marketing. Rather, you want to pull journalists or bloggers who are genuinely interested in connecting with experts and authors in your topic area to your profile. Once they click through to your Twitter profile, journalists or TV hosts will often go a step further and head to your website to see whether or not you are a good fit for their program or article.

Few stories provide a more compelling example of the power of Twitter to build relationships with journalists than that of Ellen O'Neill. Ellen found out at the age of thirty-two that she was a love child, the result of an affair her mother had with her "Dad's" coworker.

Ellen set up her Twitter handle as "@A\_Love\_Child" to ensure that those who interacted with her on the site knew her topic area immediately. It should be noted that, although I usually suggest setting your Twitter user name as your actual name (so that it sticks with you through multiple books, career shifts, and other changes), there are times when it makes sense to establish a Twitter user name that is more topic-focused (a very timely topic, a funny pun, a topic area you feel 100 percent sure you will stick with). Amidst a news cycle filled with love child stories (from John Edwards to Arnold Schwarzenegger), Ellen created a list of journalists she wanted to build relationships with ahead of her book's completion. She hoped to build a following that would attract a publisher.

In mid-July 2011 @AndersonCooper started tweeting about his new daytime talk show, suggesting it would be "driven by what I'm interested in." Ellen retweeted Cooper's tweet as part

of her plan to connect with key journalists. The next morning she received an e-mail from one of the producers at Cooper’s new daytime talk show, saying they were working on an episode about love children and were interested in talking with her about a potential interview.

My favorite part of this story is that Ellen didn’t pitch herself or do anything incredibly witty or out of the ordinary in her interaction with Cooper. She simply retweeted his message and added a quick comment about the show. Like many journalists, Cooper pays attention to his @ replies on Twitter (even though he only follows seventy-three people) and Ellen’s Twitter handle (@A\_Love\_Child) was clear enough that it caught his attention and caused him to forward her website to his producer.

I would venture a guess that, if a PR firm had tried to go through the front door and pitch Ellen directly to Cooper’s producers, the note would have been lost amidst the daily flood of pitch e-mails. Standing out among 750 to 1,000 e-mails a day is not easy. The power of Twitter is that it has the media’s attention—at least for now. If you can successfully use the strategies advanced in this section to interact with those journalists, you will build relationships that will make a major impact on the success of your book.

### **Connect with Authors and Influencers**

In addition to building a list of journalists to connect with on Twitter, make a list of top authors and influencers to interact with. A good way to do this is to search Amazon’s best-seller list in your category and click through to the author pages, which should include the Twitter account for each author. Get as specific as you can (“fiction” is too broad a category if you’re writing young adult suspense) and then follow every single one of those authors on Twitter.

As with the journalists you target, you're not honing in on these authors to make an "ask" or push your book, you're there to network with them. When you see an author get a great book review or see her tweet about a recent event, find ways to engage with her around that content. Many authors—even very established ones—don't have a ton of followers on Twitter and an @ reply can stand out. Great ways to interact with authors include retweeting their blog posts (with a comment), answering questions they may tweet, and adding insightful commentary to their tweets.

### **Twitter as a Data-Mining Tool**

Much of this playbook has focused on how to use the @ reply function to proactively interact with key contacts. However, one of the most effective uses of Twitter is one that doesn't require any proactive tweeting – it focuses on using Twitter as a listening tool to leverage social data for connections that can lead to speaking engagements, media opportunities and other high-value conversions.

Many of our clients are bloggers who have managed to secure ongoing columns at leading sites such as Forbes.com and Harvard Business Review, where they write regularly in their topic area. Other authors choose to blog regularly on their own websites, where, with a bit of commitment, they can build large followings over time. Many of the advantages of contributing to a large media property like this seem very obvious—prestige, access to millions of readers and potential book sales—but I would argue that the biggest upside to blogging at a large media property is the social data you can gather on those who share your posts.

For example, let's say you are a business author who writes regularly (once every week or so) on Forbes.com. If you are like most authors, you write your post, publish it and sit back to

answer any questions that come through from readers via your Twitter handle. If that is the only place you look for replies you are missing out on the bulk of those tweeting about your piece. Many authors are miffed by the fact that the social counter on their blog page shows more than 200 shares on Twitter, but their “connect” page on Twitter only includes a handful of @ replies. What gives?

Here is what is happening - when people share a post from a site like Forbes or Huffington Post, they rarely take the time to compose a stand-alone tweet—instead they click “tweet” or other one-click social share buttons on the blog page on Forbes.com. In doing so, they send out a tweet that is pre-packaged by the website itself and that pre-packaged tweet very rarely includes your Twitter handle. As a result, the only way to access the names of the more than 200 people who shared your article is by using the Twitter search bar to search for the actual title of your blog post. Assuming that the title of your blog post is not a generic one or two word title (which will pull up thousands of tweets), a search of your full blog title will pull up a stream of tweets about your blog post. The first Twitter stream you will see is the “top tweets” stream, where you can find tweets from the largest users. Additionally, you can then click “all” at the top of the search results page to get the full stream of the 200 plus people who have tweeted about your blog post.

You may be thinking, “OK, great – I’m glad to know people are sharing my post on Twitter, but why do I want a list of their tweets?” Twitter does something that most social media channels don’t do: it gives you unfettered access to social data—the ability to access not only the number of shares, but the bio of the person who actually shared the post.

Why is this important?



Interacting within Twitter is wonderful, but most authors use the site as a way to discover information about their key demographics. When you search for tweets about your work, you gain a list of more than 200 people who you now know are interested in your topic area. If you are a business book author, it's likely that your book is written in your topic area – an area where you're hoping not just to sell books, but also to gain speaking engagements, PR opportunities and even new customers. Each time you publish a blog post, I want you to pull a report of all the people who share that post via Twitter. Some posts will be shared only a few times and others, particularly if you are writing on a highly frequented site like Huff Post or Forbes, will be shared hundreds of times. Once you pull the report, go through the list and assign people to the following categories, based on their Twitter bio:

- Journalists/bloggers (potential PR targets)
- Authors/influencers (potential relationship targets)
- Groups/organizations/associations/conferences (potential speaking targets)
- CEOs, executives, businesses (business development targets)

What should you do next?

The list of journalists and bloggers should go to your publicist – they now have a warm lead to reach out to with a review copy of your book—“I saw that you tweeted about Jennifer Kahnweiler’s recent Forbes piece on introverted leaders and I thought you might be interested in receiving a review copy of her new book, *Quiet Influence*.”

Take the list of authors and influencers and review it with your publisher to consider the correct next step. In some cases, there may be a chance to do a Q&A with that author on your

blog. Reach out to them with an offer for a review copy of your book (they may write about it on their blog) or, at the very least, they are worth a follow.

Take the list of groups/organizations/associations/conferences and send it to your speaking agent (or handle it yourself, if you don't have one). This list becomes a directory of warm leads for potential speaking engagements and gives you a great reason to reach out to them.

Take the list of CEOs/executives/businesses/any others who fall into your target audience for your business and give it to your sales and marketing team. They now have a reason to reach out to those people and follow-up on their tweet about the article.

How do you get their contact information?

I recommend not using Twitter as the platform for the follow-ups I recommend above. Instead, use their Twitter bio to link through to their website and search for an email address. For most people, this should be very easy to find. Email allows you to have a bit more room to personalize the message.

One very important consideration that accompanies this strategy is to make sure your communication with those on the lists above doesn't feel formulaic or salesy—it should stay true to the etiquette of Twitter. Wherever possible, look for a point of reference on their site that shows that you're genuinely interested in the relationship—not just the upside of a potential speaking engagement or PR opportunity. For example, you could mention a recent blog post or look for a joint connection on LinkedIn as another reason, in addition to the tweet, for your outreach.

If you handle this outreach the right way, this data-mining approach will become an extremely important tool to ensure the real ROI that comes from focused relationship building through Twitter.

### **My Suggested Twitter Formula**

Once you have listened to the conversation on Twitter, prepared to data-mine your blog posts and strategically followed people who could really make a difference with your book launch, it's time to build your Twitter formula. You don't need to use this formula in any exact way, but it is a good guide for you as you get started:

- 25 percent of your tweets should be focused on the list of journalists and bloggers you developed. These tweets should include retweeting stories (with commentary), @ replying journalists (tweeting with their user name) in response to their questions or articles, and linking your followers to great stories (again, always including the Twitter user name of the journalist who wrote the piece). The key to these tweets is that they should not only be relevant to the journalist with whom you are tweeting, but also to your followers, which will grow as you establish yourself.
- 25 percent of your tweets should be focused on the list of authors and influencers you developed. These tweets should include retweeting, @ replying authors and influencers in response to their questions, articles, and tweets, and just generally providing content with a focus on building relationships. As with journalists, the key to these tweets is staying within your topic area to provide value to your followers.
- 25 percent of your tweets should be stand-alone tweets that link followers to key stories, videos, statistics, and other interesting content you believe they will be interested in.

These tweets should include the user name of the content generator (author of a post, creator of the video, etc.) whenever possible, but these tweets will go beyond the lists you have created.

- 20 percent of your tweets should focus on interacting with readers and others interested in your topic area. These tweets will be @ mentions (referring to a tweet including the user name of another Twitter user) responding to tweets, news, and thank yous, as well as recommendations of people.
- 5 percent of your tweets should be focused on you. That means one in twenty tweets can link to your blog posts, a great review for your book, promotions, and so on. While you-focused tweets will only be a small portion of your tweets, they will actually be more influential based on the good will and relationships you have built with the other 95 percent of your tweets. Guy Kawasaki calls these tweets part of the “NPR Model,” in honor of the fact that NPR provides great content year round and, as a result, listeners put up with, and even contribute to, rare fund drives.

This formula is meant to be a guide, not a set-in-stone content strategy. Another thing to keep in mind with Twitter is the need to include topics beyond your platform that interest you. Twitter works because it’s fun for people—they are able to keep track of their favorite sports teams, celebrities, causes, bands, etc., so it is a good idea to follow people and organizations you are truly interested in. If it’s not fun, it won’t keep your attention and, based on what I know about the power of Twitter, I want it to keep your attention for a long time.

I have seen Twitter open doors for authors and experts in many different ways, from major speaking engagements to interviews with national media outlets and I am so excited to

hear about the impact that it has on your career. As you move forward, you are likely to have questions about how to continue to apply these principles and I welcome the opportunity to answer those questions on Twitter. Just tweet your questions to @RustyShelton and I'll look forward to continuing to share my playbook with you.

### **About Rusty Shelton**



Rusty Shelton first spoke at Harvard on the changing world of public relations at the age of 23. An NSA speaker and book industry veteran, he founded Shelton Interactive in the summer of 2010 with a vision to build the country's top digital agency for books and brands through providing clients with the best agency experience they will ever have. The company integrates website design & development, social media, public relations, design and search engine optimization under one roof for fully integrated digital marketing campaigns. To learn more about working with Shelton Interactive, please visit [www.sheltoninteractive.com](http://www.sheltoninteractive.com) or email Rusty at [rusty@sheltoninteractive.com](mailto:rusty@sheltoninteractive.com).