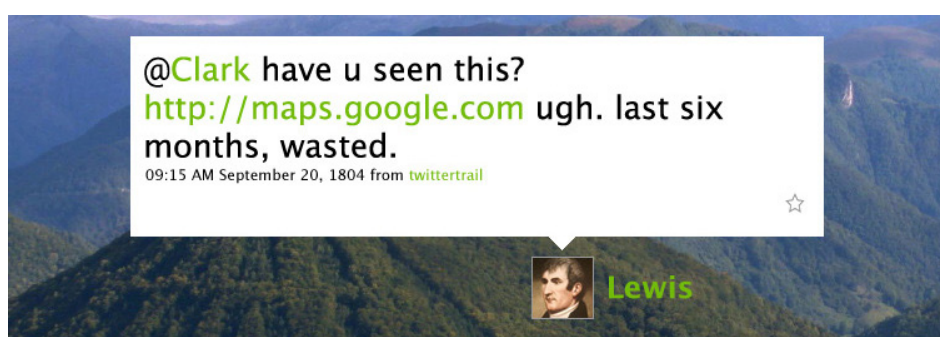


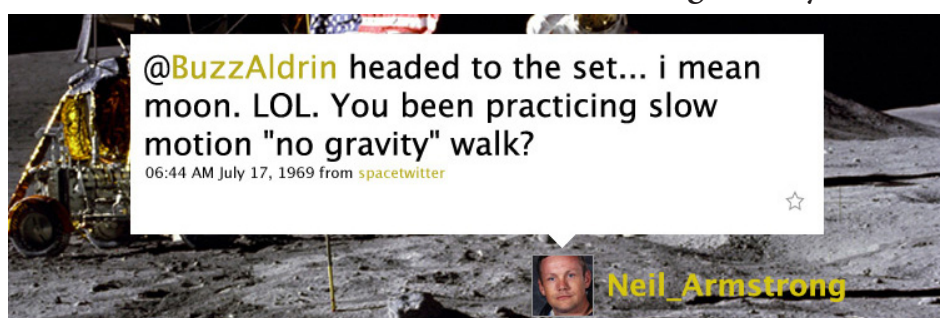
# Twitterphobics Anonymous

## The First Step is Admitting You Have a Problem

We've noticed something funny happening in recent meetings. While we're thumping our chests about **Driven by Data** Twitter visualizations and using the Twitter API for **Life in the OOC** applications, we're often met with nodding approval...along with some shifting eyes and simmering discomfort. We wondered: was there something in our teeth? Did we have bad breath? Probably, and possibly, but neither was the *real* problem. Eventually, we got people both inside and outside the agency to admit (in shamed whispers) that they'd previously dismissed Twitter as a fad, or thought their consumers weren't using it, or were (understandably) confused by conflicting reports about Twitter's dominance / irrelevance / significance / shallowness / growth / stagnation / obsession with why *#youdeservetobesingle*. Realizing their mistake, they asked us to take it back to step one. Luckily, they've found a safe place.

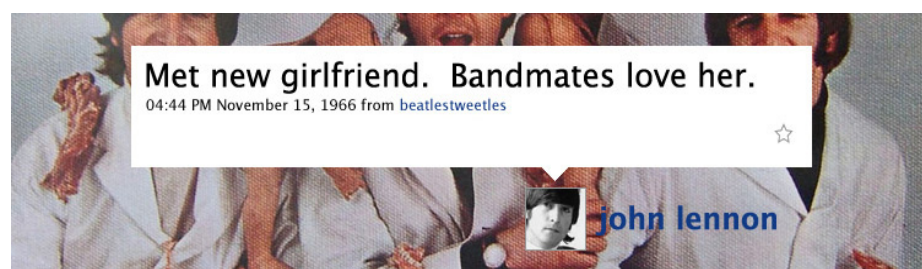


First things first. You'll never understand the nuances of this service if you don't set up a Twitter account... like, *right now*. (Being on the throne is no excuse – **Google already told us** how often you surf in the bathroom. Eww.) If you're in marketing and you don't have a Twitter account, you are **#FAILing**. We're *not* saying you have to tweet. But, we *are* saying you have to follow a handful of marketers, brands, and industry smarties to see how they're using the service (a good place to start: Upshot's own **The Awesome Blog**.) In fact, having an account would've clarified why there's a pound sign in front of "FAILing" above. On Twitter, any phrase preceded by the pound sign is called a hashtag, and its purpose is to organize disparate tweets into a single conversation stream. (Oh yeah, we'd already put the cart before the horse with a blog post describing how brands can **advertise via those hashtags**.) For instance, let's say I want to have a wine tasting with some friends who are spread out across the globe. Option one: everyone flies out just to sit in my too-cramped living room and resent having to pick cat hair out of their wine glasses. A better idea: tell anyone who's interested to grab a bottle of this week's selection and tweet their comments, including a predetermined hashtag in each tweet. Without that tag, our comments would get lost in the stream of other tweets, but the hashtag allows anyone to track or contribute to *this particular* conversation, regardless of geographical (or shedding feline) obstacles. We'll even give you a chance to sample some hashtags yourselves – read or contribute any tweets about this posting using the hashtag **#twitterphobia**. Unfortunately, *#pottytweet* was already taken because... well, see that aforementioned Google study.



But, following a couple of Twitter conversations isn't going to quiet your inner skeptic who continues to question the significance of Twitter. With countless social networks vying for consumers' attention (and giving old-school ad-types heart palpitations), what makes the tweet so special? How about its ridiculous, lightning-quick, superpower-esque speed? You can argue about the ramifications of Twitter all you want, but there's no debating that Twitter is the fastest system for information dispersal ever created. With a click of a button, users can re-broadcast another person's tweet to their own social network (called re-tweeting), enabling information to jump across social circles in a matter of seconds. Case in point: hours before the official announcement about the demise of one particularly evil Abbottabad resident, many Twitter users had already passed around a tweet from a Washington insider revealing this information. Still, the most widely-shared tweets generally include links to online content *outside* of Twitter; for instance, when the Bulls' Taj Gibson dropped bombs on another embodiment of evil, the documenting images, videos, and **commentaries** were racing across Twitter mere moments after impact. Plus, unlike Facebook, Twitter tends to be *radically* public, meaning strangers can see (and respond to) tweets on any topic from anyone around the world. In fact, many tweets are written with the *expectation* that total strangers – including marketers like you! – will read them, share them, and respond to them.

And that's the whole point here. Don't get hung up on the insatiable efforts to build up or tear down this service. Instead, take it for what it's worth – a chance for marketers to step into the conversation. Twitter isn't just about tweeting on your brand's behalf (although that's a whole 'nother topic – see [this site](#) for tons of great thought-starters). And while Twitter's one of the most powerful PR tools ever created, even *that* doesn't tell the whole story. Those who dismiss Twitter as a bunch of self-important narcissists who are just tweeting about their Nikon ads and their new TV shows with one and a half other men... well, okay, that *does* describe one user pretty well. But dismissing Twitter altogether because of a handful of twits is just undermining your own ability to keep up with *what's* captivating the public, *why* those things are captivating the public, and the shifting ways in which the public digests, shares, evaluates, disbelieves, mocks, and mashes-up information in the modern world. In this case, the medium really *is* the message.



Still have questions we didn't answer here? Of course you do. How do you generate followers? How often should you tweet? Did this post convince Dave Nigh to finally open a **Twitter account**? Tweet any additional questions with the hashtag **#twitterphobia** and we'll keep the conversation going. In the meantime, **Mashable's Twitter guide book** is a great introduction to the service's component parts. *And thanks to [historicaltweets.com](#) for the images used in this posting.*

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