

Twitter to the people

 By [Herman Manson](#)

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Brands are venturing onto micro-blogging platform Twitter - with mixed results.



Twitter has a funny side - though you might not think so, considering the current media and PR push (into Google's arms, if reports are correct) surrounding this very useful microblogging service.

Take this one-word piece of advice that comes as part of the lowdown on how corporates can use Twitter for marketing and PR purposes at <http://howtousetwitterformarketingandpr.com>. The one-word piece of advice is, of course, DON'T. Luckily, on Twitter, you get another 135 characters to discuss.

Just a quick note for the uninitiated: Twitter is a rather nifty broadcast service that allows users to send and read text-based posts of up to 140 characters. You follow people, brands or news channels, and they have the option of following you.

Great resource

Marketers should embrace Twitter in a personal capacity, because it is a great resource for gathering news, picking up on industry gossip and networking across your industry. For media workers, Twitter is a tool to interact with their audience and provides another platform from which to disseminate their content.

Brands also have a role to play on Twitter, but brand owners should not expect it to happen on their own terms. Advertising is losing its edge as consumers increasingly demand two-way communication. Twitter is about communication, and people, which also means it's complicated: not the technology itself, but the psychology, the interaction and the sense of humour and flexibility required to work with people in a fairly anonymous space.

Yet a number of brands are successfully using Twitter to answer questions, dispel misconceptions and engage directly with

users.

Vida e Caffé ([@vidaecaffe](#)) has quite a vibrant Twitter community following. It addresses all sorts of questions relevant to Vida e fans, including the lack of credit card facilities at two of the shops, and discussions about the closure of three others. Or it's used to announce special deals. It doesn't do corporate speak here, that's for sure.

Ian Jepson is the guy behind the Vida e account and he says the group initially joined Twitter after noticing there were numerous comments coming from Twitter users about the company.

“Quickly snowballed”

"Our plan was to simply join, get in contact with those people, and sort them out with a free coffee or two," says Jepson. "This quickly snowballed (as things do on Twitter) and before we knew it there were 30 - 50 messages in our inbox from Vida-fans enquiring about the giveaway and all asking the same thing, 'Can I have some too?'"

Vida e Caffé was now officially 'on Twitter'.

"It's an amazing platform, especially because of how easy it is to see what the average person thinks about your brand and products," says Jepson. "We've had amazing compliments, polite criticisms and many, many mentions since we've joined. Twitter allows customers to instantly ask a question. We've gotten everything from business requests to 'what time does your _____ store open?' and we reply to every single one of them. Our account isn't overtly active - we make about two or three posts a day - but we are constantly watching and listening to our customers to see what they have to say next."

Not everybody is successful

Not everybody is successful. I find the [@SteersFastFood](#) Twitter feed, um, cheesy. Is cheesy really the Steers brand image? I always thought Spur had first dibs on cheese.

[@Nedbank](#) has only one post on its feed, which reads: "Need more info on Nedbank service? Want to complain? Want to compliment? Follow us, or DM us to tell us what's on your mind."

What, no news on how to ride out the financial crisis? No "Good news, folks, interest rates are dropping"? "Make things happen", indeed...

Media brands are doing better, especially [@MyNews24](#), which could be a case study in the successful use of Twitter by a media organisation. It has a human being posting breaking news updates, replying to reader queries and following followers. It has recognised that Twitter is about more than simply dumping headlines. [For a listing of SA news brands on Twitter, see [MyNews24 shows how media can use Twitter](#); [SA Newspapers sees growth in followers on Twitter](#); [5 steps to a successful Twitter feed for your content company](#); and [SA Newspapers and their no sense approach to Twitter](#).]

Key point

A key point to remember when venturing onto Twitter is that it is about people, not brands. Actually, that is also true about business, a point many managers have conveniently forgotten, but which is once again being brought home by the big noise that 140 characters can make.

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