

You are finally on Twitter. Now what? (Inc. magazine 01/10)

Four ways to attract followers

1. Get listed - How is it that some people have two million followers, and you have only two? Well, they are probably famous (sorry) and wound up on Twitter's "suggested user" list. The list encourages new users to follow the likes of Ashton Kutcher (3.9 million followers) and JetBlue (1.4 million). Faced with charges of favoritism, Twitter now allows anyone to create a list-say, business owners in Cleveland which makes it easier for the hoi polloi to get noticed.
2. Follow others - Don't underestimate the power of vanity. When you follow people, they get an e-mail alert with a link to your Twitter page. Some, pleased with this development, will follow you back .. But use caution: If you follow too many people, you will look like a self-promoter, and they will be less likely to reciprocate.
3. Talk to people - Twitter replies are public, which means that when you engage others in conversation, people will see you for the thought provoking person you are. How to do this gracefully? Look for users with common interests and then send them a message. And if someone tries to talk to you, talk back.
4. Retweet - Can't figure out what to say? The lazy approach is to simply repeat, rather, retweet-interesting messages. Find one, copy the message, and send it to your followers with a reference to the original author. (Do this by typing RT and then the @ symbol followed directly by the person's username.) The author will often pay you back with a reply. And your retweet might just get retweeted, which is confusing, but good.

Four ways to make a fool of yourself

1. Air private grievances in public - Want proof that being a jerk on Twitter is tantamount to being a jerk in real life? Look no further than serial entrepreneur and Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban. "How do they not call a tech on JR Smith" Cuban tweeted angrily during a game last March when a referee's calls didn't go his way. The NBA fined him \$25,000 for the digital outburst.
2. Diss your customers - Earlier this year, a PR executive named James Andrews tweeted about a certain city: "I would die if I had to live here!" He discreetly did not mention where here was, but he did not think about the fact that he was en route to a meeting with a major client, Fed Ex, which promptly issued a statement in defense of its hometown, Memphis. The lesson: Think about the context of your tweets, not just the content.
3. Screw up the etiquette - "HI TWITTERS. THANK YOU FOR A WARM WELCOME" wrote Oprah Winfrey in her first-ever tweet. Twitter users gasped. Writing in caps is the equivalent of yelling online. Do it only when you are actually angry. But don't get angry on Twitter. (See No.1.)
4. Get too personal - Look, everyone has different standards of decency. There have been tweets about giving birth, undergoing surgery, and everything in between. We're not going to judge you if you reveal too much about yourself (OK, maybe a little). But your employees, customers, lawyers, and kids will. So be careful.

