

Tweet... Tweet

Using Twitter can help superintendents on several fronts,
most importantly increased communication

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YOU WERE JUST GETTING THE

hang of Facebook — the complicated request dynamics, the mindless status updates and, most of all, the constant reminders that the aging process is cruel (as evidenced by old high-school friends requesting your friendship, only now with more hair on their ears than their scalps) — and now along comes Twitter.

It's the "micro-blogging" and "social networking" tool popularized by celebrities who post their profound inner thoughts on shopping, sports and other mindless vagaries in 140 characters or less. Twitter also appears poised to change the way everyone does business. Because unlike Facebook, Twitter has the potential to revolutionize how we receive and disseminate all forms of information.

There's a reason the tycoons at Facebook keep trying to buy Twitter: It's leaner, more user friendly and extraordinarily practical once you get it up and running. In a nutshell, Twitter takes all of the information on blogs, Web sites and our minds, and consolidates the information in an easy-to-follow way.

Are you overwhelmed by all of the Web sites you'd like to visit but just don't have the time to check into daily? Twitter lets you sign up for feeds from most of your favorite sites and delivers them to one easy-to-read page. Even better, there are several handy smart-phone applications that let you read "tweets" while standing in line at the post office or when the green chairman launches into a hole-by-hole replay of his round. (See sidebar on page 32 for best Twitter apps.)

Besides making the consumption of information simpler, Twitter is the future of communication with customers and employees. Whether you're a golf course superintendent updating your "following" golfers on a frost delay or the golf shop alerting customers to a sale on Callaway drivers, Twitter is the ultimate word-of-mouth tool. In addition to following friends and news sources, you'll find yourself signing up for Twitter feeds from your favorite local vendors for news about deals and new products.

Signing up is as simple as going to Twitter.com (<http://Twitter.com>) and registering with an e-mail address. If you anticipate attracting thousands of followers, you might want to use a back up e-mail address to register since Twitter sends you an e-mail each time someone becomes a "follower" of your "tweets." (To preserve egos, Twitter doesn't send out an e-mail letting you know when someone has unsubscribed from your feed.)

Do keep in mind this e-mail address is also where you'll be notified if someone sends you a "direct message," which happens infrequently these days but could become a more popular component of Twitter in the future.

Once you're registered, sending a tweet is as simple as logging into the Web site either on your computer or through your cell phone, then typing in your messages in 140 characters or less. Twitter also offers a simple search tool to look for other folks you'd like to "follow."

Following and tweeting

I follow those ranging from pure news to feeds devoted to my favorite sports teams, bands, writers and famous pro golfers. My own Web site blog feed goes out and I do post comments from time to time, particularly if I'm at a golf tournament and have thoughts or news that I want to share.

The portability of Twitter on today's smart phones — both reading and sending out messages — makes it a

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These Twitters Are Tweeting Like Canaries

- http://twitter.com/RCC_Grounds — Solid, basic, need-to-know information about the status of the golf course from Todd Raisch, certified superintendent of the Ridgewood Country Club in Paramus, N.J. Also includes occasional links to blog content. A great model for superintendents.
- <http://twitter.com/GCSAAmedia> — Tweets from the home office about industry and show news posted by Bill Newton.
- <http://twitter.com/greensuper> — Certified Superintendent William Brown posts golf course updates and links to his blog posts, which were often sent previously from his phone. Twitter lets him post straight to Twitter.
- <http://twitter.com/nccturf> — Duluth, Minn.-based Northland Country Club superintendent Chris Tritabaugh keeps it informative and fun by posting plenty of photos.
- <http://twitter.com/fsr3> — Cornell University turf professor Frank Rossi offers a variety of thoughts and interacts with those who message him.
- <http://twitter.com/JohnKaminski> — If you can handle the Penn State University football updates, a very interactive Tweeter. Kaminski is also involved with the helpful <http://twitter.com/TurfDiseases>.
- <http://twitter.com/GlenEagleTurf> — Toronto's Glen Eagle Golf Club's turf maintenance department keeps followers updated on conditions via text and photos.
- <http://twitter.com/JustinRuizCGCS> — Justin Ruiz of The Rim Golf Club in Payson, Ariz., posts regularly (300-plus Tweets already) about all issues related to maintenance and also links back to his excellent blog, where maintenance practices are explained in greater detail and always in an educational tone.
- http://twitter.com/Tipton_CC — Mostly golf course updates, but also some club news interspersed into the Tweets for this Tipton, Iowa, golf course.
- <http://twitter.com/PSUTurf> — Penn State turfgrass programs are consolidated here with mostly news and notes.

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natural for the golf course industry. A few top superintendents are already using Twitter to keep their golfers informed, but so far it's been slow going for them in building an audience.

"I have 86 followers and a little more than a dozen of them are associated with the club," says Todd Raisch, certified superintendent of the Ridgewood Country Club in Paramus, N.J. "However, those who are followers and members of the club have commented favorably. It can be a bit disheartening at times that more people at the club are not following, but communication is so important in our business that there really isn't a good reason not to do it."

Raisch has found Twitter most practical in communicating with club staff.

"I can tweet that the course may be closed due to rain or that we have a frost delay," he says. "Then those working with the restaurant and golf shop receive the tweet via text message before they arrive. Based on that information, they have a better idea of what to expect when they get to the club in the morning and can plan accordingly."

Raisch envisions additional benefits where superintendents can help each other.

"If a [superintendent at the course] down the street saw some dollar spot or hyperodes on his course during his morning scouting tour and tweeted about it, [other superintendents in the area] would know to be on the lookout for similar problems," he says. "A good secondary reason to participate in Twitter is to hear what else is going on out in the world of golf course management. Researchers, including Frank Rossi of Cornell University and Lane Treadway of North Carolina State University, and several superintendents are all active tweeters and I've learned a lot by following them."

"It's like a real-time question-and-answer session with other superintendents. It's pretty powerful when you think about it."

— JUSTIN RUIZ

Justin Ruiz, superintendent of The Rim Golf Club in Payson, Ariz., quickly found his Twitter footing after suffering "tweeter's block" early on. Now he regularly posts updates, photos and has experienced the benefits of

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interacting with fellow superintendents. But Ruiz especially finds the turfgrass university Tweets beneficial.

"Twitter also helps me document a majority of happenings on the course," Ruiz says. "Not only can I look back at my previous tweets and see when an event took place, but I also can use Twitter as a way to air out some issues on the course and know that other people may have already had the same issues. It's like a real-time question-and-answer session with other superintendents."

"It's pretty powerful when you think about it." ■

Follow Geoff Shackelford at

<http://twitter.com/GeoffShac> and follow Golfdom at <http://twitter.com/Golfdom>.

Apps to Make Twitter Easy to Follow



■ **For Blackberry Users:** TweetCaster is a stylish, feature-rich Twitter app for BlackBerry. Great for managing multiple Twitter accounts. TwitterBerry is for posting updates to Twitter that works over the data network, so you don't need to use Short Message Service (SMS).

■ **For Windows Mobile Users:** moTweets lets you experience Twitter from your Windows Mobile device, including photo uploads that post your location. Quakk is another popular full-featured and attractive Windows Mobile Twitter app.

■ **For iPhone Users:** Tweetie for the Mac costs \$2.99 at the iTunes store and makes tweeting from the iPhone simple and fun. Tweet-Time supports multiple accounts, makes uploading pictures from camera and library easy and will also use the phone's GPS to document your location.

■ **For Windows Users:** TweetDeck is a computer desktop app that allows you to sort tweets into columns: tweets, responses and direct messages.

■ **For Macintosh Users:** Tweetie for the Mac is a simple desktop app that functions beautifully and allows you to follow tweets. It's free if you can tolerate the occasional advertisement, \$14.99 if you want an ad-free version.