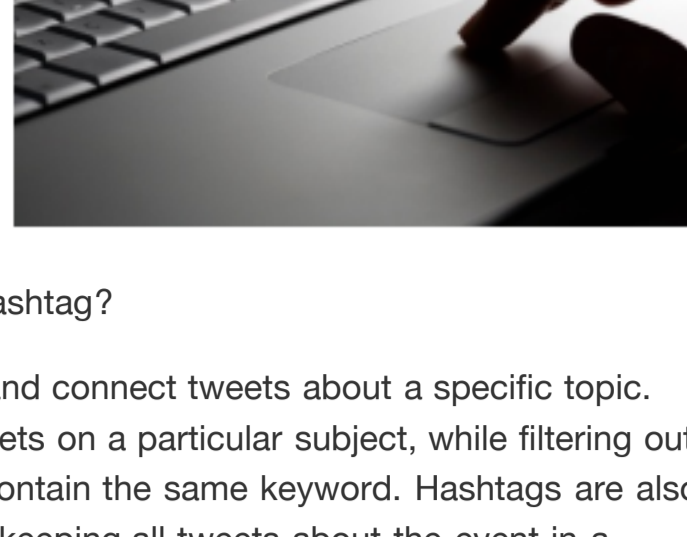


About 4 months ago Josh Catone 31

HOW TO: Use Twitter Hashtags for Business

This post originally appeared on the American Express OPEN Forum, where Mashable regularly contributes articles about leveraging social media and technology in small business. If you've used Twitter for more than a couple of hours, you've probably already seen a tweet or two containing a word with the hash symbol ("#") attached to it. That's what Twitter users call a "hashtag," and at any given time at least one of them can usually be found among the trending topics on Twitter. But what exactly is a hashtag?



Hashtags are essentially a simple way to catalog and connect tweets about a specific topic. They make it easier for users to find additional tweets on a particular subject, while filtering out the incidental tweets that may just coincidentally contain the same keyword. Hashtags are also often used by conference and event organizers as a method of keeping all tweets about the event in a single stream, and they've even been used to coordinate updates during emergencies. In fact, hashtags were first popularized during the 2007 San Diego wildfire, when the tag #sandiegofire was used to identify tweets about the natural disaster.

You can create a hashtag simply by appending the hash symbol to a word, like this: #hashtag.

How to Utilize Existing Hashtags

Because hashtags tend to spread so quickly and because Twitter users often search hashtags for content from people they aren't following, using hashtags can be a great way to extend your reach on Twitter and connect with your current audience in a more meaningful way. There are a wide variety of already established hashtags — and new ones being created daily — that you can join. You need to be careful, however, that your use of hashtags is consistent with both your brand and the tag itself.

Unfortunately, as hashtags have become more popular, they've also become a vehicle for spam. You should never use a hashtag on a tweet unrelated to that tag, and you should never stuff your tweets with currently popular hashtags with the sole purpose of appearing in Twitter search results. Proper etiquette dictates that you should only use hashtags if your tweet is actually relevant to the tag's associated meme or topic.

So which tags should you participate in? That depends wholly on your business and your purpose for using Twitter. For example, it's probably a bad idea to participate in the #robotpickuelines hashtag if you own a health club and use your Twitter account to offer customer service to members. But if you own a record shop, you'll more than likely want to join in the #musicmonday hashtag, in which people tweet about what music they're listening to and suggest other musically-inclined users to follow every Monday. Or if you own a restaurant, why not tweet out your specials or some recipes on #tastytuesday.

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Sponsored Links: Twitter Tools, Twitter Apps, Social Media Optimization, Twitter Updates, All A'witter, Social Media Platform, Twitter Search, Twitter Account. Includes a search bar and ContextLinks by NetSeer.

TOP 5 TODAY: 1. Sharing Your Bra Color Is the New 25 Things on ... 2. Eureka Earthquake: Twitter Pics Tell the Story ... 3. Eureka Earthquake Caught on Video [YOUTUBE VIDEO] 4. Google is Going Down the Toilet [PIC] 5. Eye-Popping 3D YouTube Videos. Includes a 'See why we're #1 for small business' badge and UnitedHealthcare logo.

Use sites like Twubs, a hashtag directory, and What the Trend?, a wiki that attempts to explain what certain hashtags (and other Twitter trends) mean, to locate and identify hashtags that make sense for your business. Also, pay attention to tags being used by your followers and search for them on Twitter to see what kind of tweets are associated with those tags. If it makes sense for your business to jump on board, compose tweets that are on topic and compatible with that hashtag.

How to Start Your Own Hashtags

While you certainly shouldn't use hashtags to describe all of your tweets, they can be very helpful for small businesses as a way to track social media campaigns or create memes that help establish a sense of community and build your company's mindshare among your core customers. The first step in creating a hashtag is deciding on the tag word itself. You should pick something memorable, easy to spell, and perhaps more importantly, as short as possible. Remember that Twitter gives everyone just 140 characters per tweet, so no one wants half of it to be taken up by an unwieldy hashtag.

Once you've figured out the tag itself, the next step is simple: start using it and promoting it. Make sure your tweets using the hashtag are worthwhile and add something of value to the conversation. Promote your tag or the social media campaign that uses the tag via other social media channels, such as your blog or email newsletter. Tweet out calls to action explaining your new tag at regular intervals (but don't overdo it). For example, let's say you own a bookstore, and you're running a Twitter contest to give out a gift card to your store. Your explanatory tweet might be something like, "What's your favorite summer reading material? Tweet using #beachreads to win a \$100 gift certificate to Al's World of Books!"

How to Keep Track of Hashtags

Advertisement for various services: TicTacDo, Shop Mashable Gear, rackspace HOSTING, MailChimp, blippr media you'll love from people you trust, Hire Web Experts, maxcdn save bandwidth costs, Clickatell SMS enable your social network, and a social sharing icon.

More Twitter resources from Mashable:

- Tweet Ideas: 13 Things to Do on Twitter Besides Tweet
- 40 of the Best Twitter Brands and the People Behind Them
- 10 Most Extraordinary Twitter Updates
- 6 Gorgeous Twitter Visualizations
- HOW TO: Do Good on Twitter

Image courtesy of iStockphoto, urbancow

Tags: business, hashtags, twitter. User reviews: HootSuite, Seismic, TweetDeck, Twitter, iStockphoto, tweetzi, Twitter Search. Includes a Print Story button.

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Kevin 4 months ago
Hashtags are old and boring. www.TwitPets.com is run by a product that takes the twitter conversation and controls it on one brands website. Communities, Brands, Companies - they pick the question, the customers answer and its all powered by twitter!

Matthew Roche 4 months ago 1 person liked this.
Hashtags are an interesting area and have been used successfully by some companies and people to create awareness. However a lot of the time hashtags can be a channel for spam

possiblybob 4 months ago in reply to Matthew Roche 1 person liked this.
There are services like TidyTweet (http://tidytweet.com) that allow you to set up feeds or searches that pull out spammers who latch on to hashtags. It's one way to safely use hashtags in a corporate environment.

Houseofmax 4 months ago
Thanks for clearing that up for me.

modemlooper 4 months ago
Twitter search sucks. It looses a lot of tweets. My main account does not even show in search and they will do nothing about it.

Name 4 months ago in reply to modemlooper
use Seismic desktop

davereinhardt 4 months ago
McKinsey Quarterly (@McKQuarterly) publish a hashtag at the end of some articles as a way of encouraging discussion on their material, obviously a different hashtag at the end of each article. This provides a mechanism for using Twitter as a place to comment and discuss these articles. It's a brilliant idea.

slashby 4 months ago in reply to davereinhardt
I attended a webcast on Wednesday by MarketingProfs (@mprofswire) where they asked us at the beginning to use #summersocial (kind of long but...) on any tweets about the session. It really made the webcast more enjoyable with all the side discussions and seeing people send ideas etc. to peers/co-workers.

JDGRAPHICS - 4 months ago
wow that's very helpful thank you!

Netvalar 4 months ago 1 person liked this.
With Hootsuite and maybe others you can not only create your hashtag but create a widget to share only those tweets with that hashtag on any web-site you want.

David Rosen 4 months ago in reply to Netvalar
Thanks, Netvalar. Hadn't heard about the widget feature in Hootsuite, and it's about to make life a lot easier for a buddy of mine working on a new site.

Netvalar 4 months ago in reply to David Rosen
Well I am still researching as much about hashtags as possible plan to do a 5 day E-Mail course on it for musicians and music fans. That is how I found out about the hootsuite search widget function.

Lama Kalla 4 months ago
Thank you thank you so much for a GREAT ARTICLE. I was wondering about the hashtags and the information you provided is BRILLIANT. Warmest Regards, Lama Kalla

cuzzy 4 months ago
I have been meaning to fill myself in on hash tag as I see them all the time. This is one of the better posts that details everything. Thanks for sharing.

semas87 4 months ago
I am new to twitter and was wondering what and how of #.An informative post.

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