

## **Learning Bytes: Session 27: Thursday 25 October 2012, 12:15-13:30**

### **Using Twitter as a Personal Development Tool and in Teaching and Learning**

The session was facilitated by:

- Sue Folley, Academic Development Advisor
- Cheryl Reynolds, Senior Lecturer, Post-Compulsory Education and Training, School of Education and Professional Development

#### **Sue Folley – Computing and Library Services**

##### **Introduction**

Sue introduced the session by explaining that it would initially cover the use of twitter as a personal development tool and secondly using it with students for teaching and learning. There would be examples of use in practice and an opportunity for questions and discussion towards the end of the session.

There are five distinct stages that people often go through prior to becoming dedicated twitter users:

1. Denial – people who think it is a waste of time etc
2. Anger – a common misconception is that twitter users only talk about mundane personal activities, information or communication that is of no consequence, hence the ‘anger’
3. Bargaining – individuals who sign up to appease friends, join in etc , may be very active initially but then ignore it for weeks
4. Depression – doesn’t make any sense, all fears are confirmed, like talking into a vacuum etc.
5. Acceptance – many people don’t get to this stage and abandon Twitter somewhere between stage ‘1.’ and ‘4’. However for those who do persevere, they tend to ‘suddenly get it’; often those who have been the most critical become the biggest evangelists, should they reach this point.

##### **The history of twitter – what it is and what it is about**

Twitter was started in 2006; it works on a system of status updates which are restricted to 144 characters, plus the ability to link to other things e.g. Blog posts, images etc. In addition it works on ‘followers’ – you follow people, but they don’t necessarily follow you back and likewise you shouldn’t feel under any obligation to follow people back. Just follow the people who you think you

will find interesting. In general people like being followed. However you can choose to block people if you want to. You can access /use the twitter interface either via the web or via aps e.g. on a smart phone or iPad. You can tweet (send a status update) immediately e.g. take a photo and tweet.

Twitter is primarily a networking tool; it sits somewhere between asynchronous communication (like email) and synchronous communication (like instant messaging) You can get pretty instantaneous responses to queries but it can also be a longer time. You can direct message people i.e. just send a tweet to one person that no one else can see. Twitter can be linked with other tools, so for example on can set up an automatic tweet and post tweets to Facebook etc.

### **Different ways of engaging with Twitter:**

- As a consumer of information: subscribe to sites you want to hear from e.g. the BBC news, Times Higher etc. You can just consume without engaging if you prefer.
- As a broadcaster: many companies use Twitter just to send out information and choose not to read or engage with incoming information.
- As a marketing tool: can do it badly (in the broadcasting way) or very cleverly, e.g. some large companies for example T-Mobile and British Gas, trawl 'tweets' using bots to try and find mentions of themselves, and try and fix the problem being complained about. You may well get a response from a help department via Twitter if you have tweeted about a problem.
- As a communication tool: Twitter can be used to contact friends etc, similar to instant messaging.
- As a means of sharing, and debating, start replying to people who ask for help... if you start helping people then you are more likely to get help yourself.

### **Setting up an account**

Set up a Twitter account via Twitter.com, it is very important to add your biography and photo/avatar include interests both professional and personal (hobbies etc) as this is what people will follow you for. Decide who to follow; it is best to follow a lot of people fairly quickly, this will help your Twitter experience to make sense. Sue suggests initially following somewhere between 40-100 people. Twitter is designed to make suggestions of who you might want to follow based on your interests. Another option is to find someone who you know and see who they are following. If you decide in a while that you do not wish to follow someone you can simply choose to un-follow them. Then start engaging and responding.

One of the tools you can use on a computer is the 'TweetDeck', this is a piece of software that you download and register. It basically allows you to organise your incoming Tweets into columns, so for example you could have a column showing Tweets from friends (where you select people you know individually), a column for Tweets in which you are mentioned personally, specific Hashtags etc.

You can set up a hash tag which is the symbol '#' with a word, in order to collate and track tweets and to facilitate searching. You could choose a word for an event (or your course) and ask everyone to use this for any tweets they send which are related. Remember to search for tweets with that hash tag first to make sure no one else is using it for other purposes.

For example Cheryl Reynolds (School of Education and Professional Development), uses a hash tag with a cohort of distance learning students who do not get to meet up that often. Not all of the students use Twitter so Cheryl embeds a Twitter feed into the module on UniLearn to pull in all the tweets. In this way, the majority of students' preferences can be met, engaging those who do not want to have to login to UniLearn frequently via other mediums, whilst ensuring others are not left out. Using a platform like Twitter can also draw in a wider group; Cheryl finds that previous students may still contribute. Cheryl suggests choosing a hash tag which is as unique as possible, you have to be aware that you do not own the hash tag and be vigilant as anyone could choose to use it.

Another way of using Twitter with students is to use in class (large lectures), you can ask your students/audience to tweet questions/comments during the lecture this can encourage those who are reticent or shy to ask questions.

### **Developing your own Personal Learning Network (PLN)**

A PLN comprises those people around you, who help you learn things. Via twitter you can expand this to a very wide circle and be in a better position to learn a huge amount in a more time efficient way. There are different ways in which you can use Twitter, for example, collating views, gathering resources and communicating with experts.

An e.g. of a supportive network available via Twitter is PhD student from across the world all going through the same journey, #phdchat, this is a network which is made up of three areas:

- a synchronous chat on twitter Weds 7.30-8.30pm UK time, (topic is decided on via a vote).
- asynchronous discussion on twitter, 24/7.
- a phdchat Wiki, where all the transcripts from the live chats are available plus links to resources etc.

Finally Sue advised being aware of your digital identity, so, be wary of responding quickly to things especially if you are angry, be careful of spam and fake identities (e.g. fake celebrities) there is a way of verifying authenticity. If you find a post offensive you can block and report it.

The more you put into Twitter the more you get out, and it does take time to build these relationships, so start by following people initially and then start engaging in dialogue.

Further information and resources are available on the [iPark website](#)

Please consult the University's [Social Media Policy](#) regarding etiquette.