

all a twitter



A Personal and Professional Guide to
Social Networking with Twitter

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Tee Morris

Foreword by Chris Brogan

All a Twitter: A Personal and Professional Guide to Social Networking with Twitter

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Foreword

Postcards from Five Years Forward

Living in the future must be frustrating, especially when you are forced to live among those in the present. You see what's already here, clear and obvious, and everyone else stares at you like you're crazy. I get glimpses of the future and formulate plans from them. Tee Morris *lives* there.

This is the man who wrote a book about podcasting before most anyone actually even knew there was such a word. You see, that's another super power that Tee Morris has: Not only does he see the future, he comes back and trains us on it for when we're ready. And now, it's time again.

Twitter. Let's be honest: It just *sounds* stupid. The first impression most people have when they hear about Twitter is that it's a website for a bunch of people to talk about what they ate, their cats, and other information we could all live without. Some folks stick around for about 30 days, and then they *get it*. Heck, they don't get it; they switch from being haters to viral evangelists. It happens. Over, and over, and over.

I believe Twitter is as important as the telephone, email, and several other (sometimes used for) business tools that were first misunderstood, then maligned, then adopted as a very important part of business. It might not be *this* Twitter, but I feel Twitter is the testing grounds that will bring us the next communications tool we consider imperative.

Tee Morris is thoughtful, thorough, insightful, and lacks pretension. He is, thusly, the best kind of teacher. Learning from Tee Morris means learning at a pace that matches your comfort level. But then, you've already bought this book (or borrowed it, or stolen it). You'll see this soon.

My personal hope, the hope of someone writing the Foreword to someone else's book, is that you don't shelve this when you're done. Give it to someone else. Spread what Tee Morris shares with you to those who need it. If you need another copy, buy it later. But share this one with someone who needs to be on top of the biggest communications shift in recent years.

And if you glimpse Tee Morris at an event, shake the man's hand before he escapes back to the future. Ask him for a postcard. It seems only fair.

Chris Brogan

President, New Marketing Labs

chrisbrogan.com

Introduction

Welcome to All a Twitter

Hey there! Thanks for picking up my book on Twitter. With all the hype you have heard and with all the books out there, both in bookstores and online, you have stopped to consider my book over the others grouped alongside it. Because you're giving me a moment here, allow me to give you a quick rundown on what makes this book different and why this book is for you:

- This book is written by a user.
- This book focuses on building a community.
- This book is for users of all levels.
- This book follows a logical progression with Twitter.
- This book is written in more than 140 characters.

That is just a sampling of what you can expect with *All a Twitter*. If you're still reading, this means you saw something in that glimpse. So let's expand on these points, and I'll give you a more detailed look at what you can learn and who you can get to know in this book.

This Book Is Written by a User

Many of the books produced on Twitter are written by folks who specialize in making money off the Internet, by marketing experts determined to show you how to make a fast buck by “monetizing” your Twitter experience. These authors also have tens of *thousands* of people following them.

What makes me different from them is two-fold:

- I have only a few thousand follows (between two accounts), far from the colossal numbers of these other authors.
- My updates number well into the tens of thousands.

What does that mean? That means I have worked to build a community, to make connections with people around the world. My feed ranges from updates to link exchanges to direct conversations. I don't focus on regurgitating the thoughts of others, and I stand against the automation of anything in Twitter. I use Twitter to promote on occasion, but I focus more on communication, on sharing a thought with a group of people and seeing how it might make a difference.

I am not an Internet Marketer, a Social Media guru, or an SEO expert. I am a user. Have been for years. And I connect with my community.

This Book Focuses on Building a Community

If you are new to Social Media, that is what makes this innovative approach to the Internet so very cool: the community you nurture around your likes and interest. *All a Twitter* not only gives you a primer on exactly what Social Media is, this book also gives you a variety of tips on how to engage that community. Whether this engagement is for personal or professional purposes is completely up to you. Yes, there is some talk about how you can use Twitter as a means for promotion and public relations, but that isn't going to happen without a community to connect with. This is the intent of *All a Twitter*: helping you create a community and connect with its members.

This Book Is for Users of All Levels

Twitter continues to change, continues to grow; and whether you are completely new to Twitter or have been "tweeting" for a time, you can learn something from this book. *All a Twitter* begins with the simplest of steps and then ends with true stories, real time applications, and philosophies behind Twitter where anyone at any level can pick up a new idea or refreshing perspective on this social networking initiative.

During the writing of this book, I introduced absolute beginners to the language and the culture of Twitter and also introduced someone who had been tweeting since 2006 to a new application that has become a

favorite on his iPhone. In this book, whether it is Twitter from beginning to end or looking for a new service or client to help make Twitter more efficient, there is something for you in *All a Twitter*.

This Book Follows a Logical Progression with Twitter

All a Twitter is designed to guide you through the process of setting up a profile to sending out your first tweet. With each chapter, you discover there is more to Twitter than just messages composed of 140 letters, numbers, and symbols.

- **What is Social Media?**—Chapter 1, “What Is Twitter (and What It Is Not),” is the primer for Social Media, also known as Web 2.0. It is a simple summary of different initiatives that work together to compose this *next step* of the Internet. This chapter gives you a background that helps you understand more about building communities and using the Internet to connect.
- **Working with Twitter**—Chapter 2, “Setting Up Twitter,” Chapter 3, “Talking on Twitter,” and Chapter 4, “Working Beyond the Website,” can get you on Twitter and get you talking, or *tweeting*. Covered in this section of the book is the process of completing a profile and why that is so important. You also get an idea of how to tweet, or how to communicate effectively under the limitations of 140-characters. Finally, you are introduced to several applications available online that work independent of Twitter.com and automatically deliver you the most recent tweets from members of your network.
- **Expanding Twitter’s capabilities**—Chapter 5, “Terrific Twitter Tools,” and Chapter 6, “Tracking Twitter,” offer a sampling of the many websites that offer services for Twitter users. Some of these services help you build your network and suggest people of various backgrounds that might be good matches for you and your network. A few of these services help you track your impression on Followers reference links you can circulate among your network, and tell you what you can do to improve your application of Twitter. Here, you improve your performance and unlock more potential from your community.
- **Taking Twitter on the road**—For owners of smartphones like the Blackberry, the Android G1, and the iPhone, Twitter is readily available through a variety of applications that offer many of the options

found in the desktop clients featured in Chapter 4. Chapter 7, “Twitter to Go,” and Chapter 8, “iPhone, Therefore iTweet,” go into the pros, cons, benefits, and challenges of making your experience on Twitter a portable one.

- **So I have the basics, now what?** Chapter 9, “The Trouble with Twitter,” Chapter 10, “Getting Personal,” Chapter 11, “Taking Care of Business,” and Chapter 12, “ANTI-Social Media,” are different from the rest of the book because I go into the Zen of Twitter. Exactly what is that? I cover the times when Twitter falls short of its expectations. I explore where people are comfortable and lines drawn concerning what they do (and don’t) share on Twitter. For the professional wanting to use Twitter for business, I cover success stories of corporations and nonprofits all successfully implementing social networking. Chapter 12 is a tough, hard look at people tending to dismiss their communities and implement Twitter more for self-satisfying purposes.

Whether you hop from chapter to chapter or if you read from beginning to end, *All a Twitter* is an all-purpose book that takes you through the process of getting onto Twitter, getting the most out of Twitter, and most important, how to approach Twitter and the network.

This Book Is Written in More Than 140 Characters

Yes, I’ve heard that joke. I’ve heard it often. If you are at a book signing and are thinking of asking me, “So is this book written in more than 140 characters?”, please reconsider. The fact that this book is as thick as it is and has thirteen chapters should be the hint that there is a bit more to Twitter than you might expect.

And just tonight, as I was writing this, someone cracked that joke. So, please, don’t make that joke. It’s just not working for me anymore. Thank you in advance.

What to Expect from Here

As you can guess, there is a lot to this book, just as there is a lot to Twitter. Throughout the book you can also find a few gems to help you in your own experience on Twitter.



A Little Birdie Told Me...

You have a lot to learn about Twitter, and now and then I throw into the mix some tidbits and tips that are helpful to make Twitter that much better. These bits of advice range from interesting background trivia to truly cool options you might miss in desktop clients and applications if you blink at the wrong time. These are the Easter Eggs of Twitter that you need to know.



Fail Whale Says...

The Fail Whale (discussed in more detail in Chapter 9) is synonymous with Twitter. You will hear users talk about Fail Whale sightings, and on your own third sighting, you will just sigh and shake your head. With *All a Twitter*, the Fail Whale sightings are the cautionary tales and networking faux pas you will want to take to heart and make sure you avoid before jumping in feet first with Twitter. Tempting as it is to start tweeting and figure things out as you go, the Fail Whale Says... segments are your safety nets to make sure Prime Directives are intact, protocols are protected, and etiquette is upheld.

Going Beyond the Book

Keeping books on anything involving your computer up-to-date is a Herculean task. Just in the time of writing *All a Twitter*, a lot of things have happened and there are promises of new changes and developments coming. So how do I compete with the books that are about to hit the shelves or compare to the books currently on the shelves?

I don't stop. The book may conclude at the closing of its cover, but the lessons, the assistance, and the insight continues online through a variety of outlets.

We'll Always Have Twitter...

Of course you can find me on Twitter, and of course, I would be more than happy to answer your questions concerning Twitter. If you find yourself stuck or curious as to what to try next, go on and drop me a tweet at @ITStudios (for Imagine That! Studios) and I will reply when the tweet arrives. Feel free to also share with me feedback, both the congratulatory and the critical, on this book. Twitter is all about reaching out and connecting, and I'm out there if you have a question for me.

Imagine That! Studios

Imagine That! Studios (<http://imaginethatstudios.com>) is my online home where I discuss creative solutions in the workplace. Through Social Media, audio and video production, and clever thinking, solutions are discovered. That's my mantra there, and on occasion, my blogposts will turn to Twitter. If you are looking for additional resources or commentary concerning the subjects addressed in this book, you might find what you need at Imagine That! Studios. Come on by, take a look around, and enjoy what my blog has to offer.

Bird House Rules

Finally, there is the official podcast of *All a Twitter*, found at <http://allatwitterbook.com>. This ten minute podcast picks up where the book leaves off, keeping the content you'll find here current and up-to-date. It is a handy audio addendum to this book and your chance to put a voice with the tweets. The podcast will also feature interviews, clips from Twitter seminars I host, and topics generated by you, the new and experienced Twitter user. Have a listen through the podcast's blog or subscribe through iTunes or your podcatching client of choice.

Now that you know what to expect, it's time to take a closer look at the most popular social networking initiative. It's all about the community, the connections, and the camaraderie. It's all about the people you reach out to and get to know. It's all about speaking your mind in 140-characters or less.

Forge ahead, and soon you'll find out what has the world *All a Twitter*.

2

Setting Up Twitter

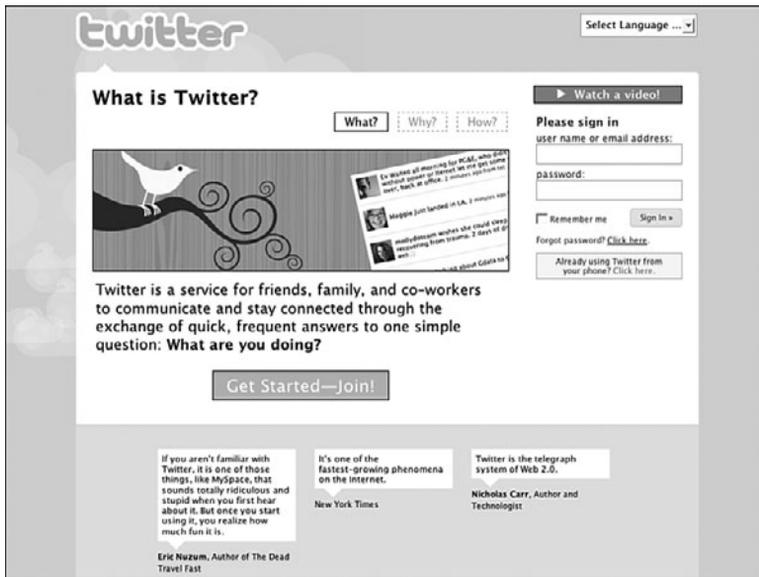
The appeal of Twitter, after you grasp the notion of what it is and what it can do, all boils down to ease. When it comes to a user-friendly interface, it rarely comes as easy as Twitter.

Our goals here are to set ourselves up with an account, and what I mean by “setting up an account” is more than just signing up. To attract followers and effectively begin building your network, we will be going deeper into establishing our presence in Twitter. We will complete our online profile, put some serious thought behind our avatar, and then start seeking out people online that we share common interest with. The first few steps are a breeze, but it is in the details where people tend to trip up. No need to worry about those details because when you get the lay of the land, the Twitterverse becomes an easy one to master.

So, fire up your browser of choice and let’s begin this adventure into self-expression with 140-characters or less.

Registering on Twitter

Welcome to the first step in building your network. As you see in Figure 2.1, the developers at Twitter want to help you through this process, too. Along with this book, you can watch online, through Twitter.com’s welcome page, a two-and-a-half-minute video from “Common Craft” that explains how Twitter works. If video isn’t your thing, you also have the What?, Why?, and How? buttons that take you to Twitter Support, offering everything you want or need to know to start.


FIGURE 2.1

Twitter greets users old and new with a simple, easy-to-follow user interface.

Whether it is with me or with the website, we're all here to get you tweeting.

First, let's register.

1. Go to <http://twitter.com> on your Internet browser.
2. Just underneath the boldface phrase "What are you doing?" is a button reading "Get Started—Join!" Single-click that button.
3. In the field marked full name, type in your full name or your business' name, or both.

Honesty is the best policy when building your profile, so don't be shy or elusive here. A real name or a company name here can better help you in establishing an identity on Twitter. Also, you can change this to fit your mood or intent at any time under Settings, which we discuss later in this chapter.

4. Set up a User Name for yourself, no longer than 15 characters (Twitter's built-in limit). This can be a nickname, clever moniker, or wordplay you create, or simply you or your organization's name or acronym.



A Little Birdie Told Me...

Keep in mind when creating usernames that others might be typing in your username when “tweeting” you. You can use underscores in lieu of spaces, but keep your monikers simple. Avoid using numbers in your usernames as these IDs immediately grab Twitter’s security attention. Many spammers use auto-generated names like Darrin123 and Jessie654, for example. Also, for some third-party applications, the usernames are case-sensitive. Be aware of that, as well.

5. Create your password.

Along with letting you know if a full name is “too big” or a username is available, Twitter also tells you if a password is *strong* (meaning it will be difficult to crack) or *weak* (meaning “Yeah, I can hack that....”). Strong passwords usually have uppercase letters in the middle of them and a number instead of a letter in some instances. When you come up with a password, make it something easy to remember but not easy for others to figure out.

The screenshot shows the Twitter registration interface. At the top, it says "Join the Conversation" and "Already on Twitter? Sign in." Below that, it asks "Already use Twitter on your phone? Finish signup now." The form has several input fields: "Full name" with the value "Tee Morris" and a checkmark indicating it's OK; "Username" with the value "ITStudios" and a URL "http://twitter.com/ITStudios"; "Password" with "*****" and a checkmark indicating it's "Very Strong"; and "Email" with "tmorris@imaginethatst" and a checkmark indicating it's OK. There is a checkbox for "I want the inside scoop—please send me email updates!" which is checked. A CAPTCHA section asks to "Type the words above" and shows the words "ROCK!" and "MERITS" in a stylized font. To the right of the CAPTCHA, there are options: "Can't read this?", "Get two new words", and "Listen to the words". At the bottom, there is a "Create my account" button.

FIGURE 2.2

When creating your Twitter account, you start with the basics: who you are, where Twitter can contact you, and what your password will be.

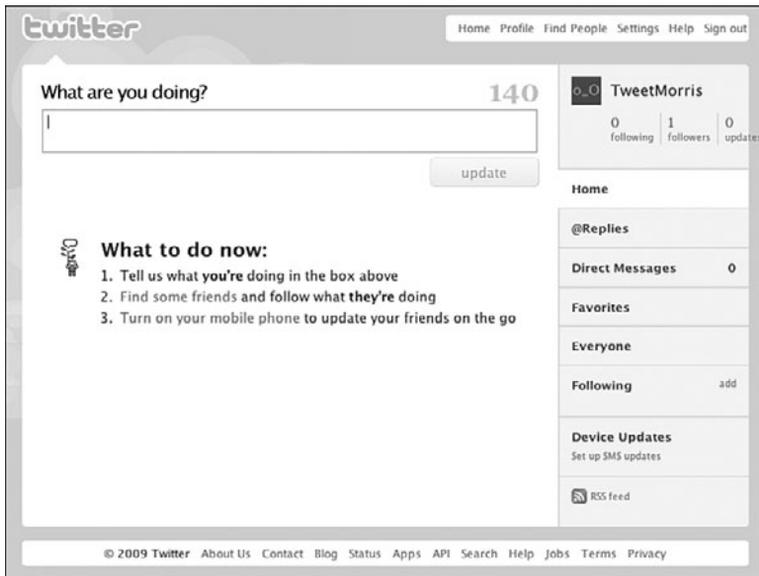
6. If you want to be notified of new followers and when people send you direct messages, check the box for email updates.

7. In the final field, type the verification code provided by Twitter. If you cannot read the code, you can refresh the verification by single-clicking on the Get Two New Words option or hear an audio version of the verification code by single-clicking on the Listen to the Words link, both located to the right of the field.
8. Single-click Create My Account to finish registration.
9. Following the creation of your Twitter account, Twitter offers you the option to check for Twitter-registered friends on a variety of email services. If you choose any of these services, have your user details for your mail accounts ready to enter. You will be asked for them. If you do not want to check for friends, single-click on Skip This Step at the bottom of the interface.
10. Twitter then selects at random a variety of Twitter users for you to start following. This can include celebrities, organizations, frequent Twitters, or Twitter accounts often referenced or retweeted by others. If you decide to follow any of these Twitter accounts, click on the check boxes located to the left of their accounts, and then single-click on Finish at the bottom of the interface. If you do not want to follow any of these randomly selected accounts, single-click on Skip This Step under the Finish button.

Congratulations! If you have a desktop similar to Figure 2.3, you are now registered with Twitter!

Okay, okay...so it is a little lonely right now. If you skipped all the opportunities to add other Twitters, no one is following you. Your window is looking like an artist's canvas fresh from the supply store and mounted on an easel. And what is with that avatar of the O's and the underscore?! (Look closer...there is a face in there. Sort of.) This is merely the first step. Everyone starts here. If you are fortunate, a friend or a group of friends invited you to join Twitter. If you are particularly lucky, you might be friends or colleagues with a "power user" and can automatically tap into his or her network. If you start from scratch, you might be surprised at how many friends you can make in a matter of tweets. After all, you already have something in common: Twitter.

So, you are all set up and ready to build that network? Well, not quite. Although it is tempting (as many new Twitter users find) to start building up your network, connecting with others that share the same passions that you do, and embracing this hot new social networking initiative, let's stop a moment and consider that. *Social networking*. It's all about the first impression, and when making contacts and building a network—even the virtual ones—it is imperative to put your best foot forward.

**FIGURE 2.3**

By default, Twitter accounts have a basic avatar in place along with a basic background, your username, and even quick tips on building your network.

Setting Up your Twitter Profile

It's a little alarming how many people new to Twitter skim over these details. Failing to set up your profile is a bit like heading out on a first date without making that last check in the mirror. Before making that first impression—you know, the *unforgettable* one—it is always a good idea to check the small details: breath check, teeth check, and wardrobe check. Skipping those precious few minutes of preflight puts you at risk of making your first night on the town your last night on the town, which is why we always run down the basics before heading out.

Twitter is no different. You are now registered and ready to make new friends and connect with current ones. To people who don't know you, what does your home page say about you? Does it say too much? Does it say enough? What kind of introduction are you making on the Twittersverse? This is what the profile is all about: your chance to introduce yourself and make a good first impression. You want to let people know as much as you can (in a short amount of characters), who you are, and what you will bring to Twitter. The more you let people know about who you are, the easier it will be for you to foster a strong community.

What's in a Name? (Quite a Bit, Actually!)

Let's begin with the name. Right now, you have your username displayed, the default option for Twitter. Many people stick with this as their identity, perhaps out of that nervousness in revealing too much online. A legitimate reason? Maybe, but it is not like you are giving out your credit card or Social Security number as your Twitter name. You are introducing yourself, and if you want to go with a nickname or a company brand name, you can do that as well. This moniker is how people will see you in their Twitter clients (Twitterrific, Twhirl, and so on). (More on that in Chapter 4, "Working Beyond the Website")

So how do you want to be seen on Twitter? If you are not comfortable with your real name on Twitter, give a nickname a go. It could be an alias hung on you in college, which went on to become my username here, or you can use a character's name from your favorite role playing game or latest read. Or come up with your own clever spin from the last book you read. For example, if you're a fan of Dan Brown's riddle-solving hero, Robert Langdon, call yourself "PuzzleGuy" or "SolutionGirl". When you deduce how people will see you on Twitter, take a few moments to move beyond your username.

1. Log into Twitter (if you haven't already) and when your home page (found at <http://twitter.com/home>) loads, click on the Settings option, located at the top of the page.
2. In the Name field, you can set up your real name, nickname, company moniker, or your own moniker-of-the-day.
For your name, you are allowed twenty characters. That includes spaces.
3. In the Username field, you see the identity you logged in with. Although you can change this, it is best to stay with the one you originally came up with, for simplicity's sake. Same goes for the email address, unless you decide to give your Twitter account a complete makeover, which you can do here.
4. In the Time Zone field, select what time zone you currently reside in or where you are in the world. These are for the time stamps appearing in your tweets and details that other clients report to their users.
5. More Info URL is where you can enter in a website that best represents you. If you have a personal site or are using Twitter for your day job, here is your chance to invite potential members of your network to see you beyond that 140th character.

The screenshot shows the Twitter account settings page for 'Tee Morris, author'. At the top, there are navigation links: Home, Profile, Find People, Settings, Help, Sign out. Below the user's name, there are tabs for Account, Password, Devices, Notices, Picture, and Design. The 'Account' tab is selected, showing the following fields:

- Name:** Tee Morris, author (with a note: 'Enter your real name, so people you know can recognize you.')
- Username:** TweetMorris (with a note: 'Your URL: http://twitter.com/TweetMorris. No spaces, please.')
- Email:** teemonster@comcast.net
- Time Zone:** (CMT-05:00) Eastern Time (US & Canada) (dropdown menu)
- More Info URL:** http://www.imaginetthat: (with a note: 'Have a homepage or a blog? Put the address here. (You can also add Twitter to your site here)')
- One Line Bio:** Author, Podcaster, and S: (with a note: 'About yourself in fewer than 160 chars.')
- Location:** Virginia, USA, Planet Eart (with a note: 'Where in the world are you?')
- Language:** English (dropdown menu) (with a note: 'What language would you like to Twitter in?')

Below these fields is a checkbox for 'Protect my updates' with a note: 'Only let people whom I approve follow my updates. If this is checked, you WILL NOT be on the public timeline. Updates posted previously may still be publicly visible in some places.' At the bottom is a 'Save' button.

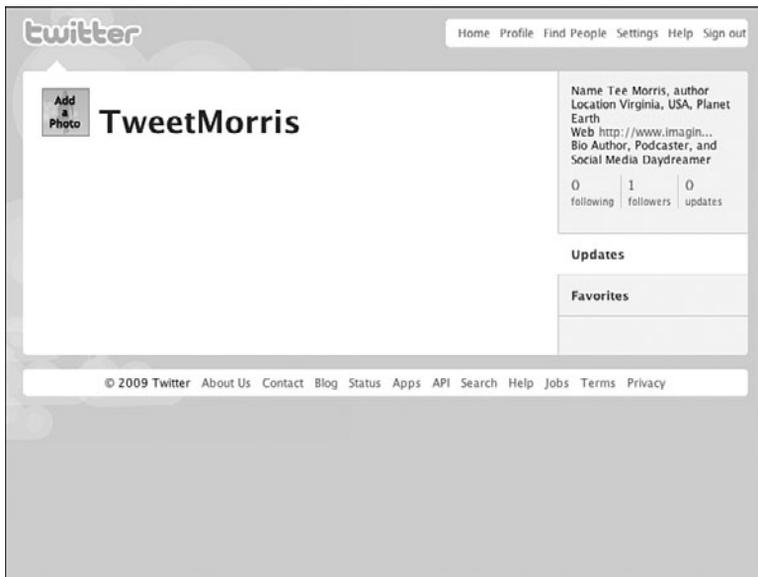
On the right side, there is an 'Account' section with a note: 'From here you can change your basic account info, fill in your profile data, and set whether you want to be private or public.' Below that is a 'Tips' section with three bullet points:

- Filling in your profile information will help people find you on Twitter. For example, you'll be more likely to turn up in a Twitter search if you've added your location or your real name.
- Change your Twitter user name anytime without affecting your existing updates, @replies, direct messages, or other data. After changing it, make sure to let your followers know so you'll continue receiving all of your messages with your new user name.
- Protect your profile to keep your Twitter updates private. Approve who can follow you and keep your updates out of search results.

FIGURE 2.4

At the top of your Twitter homepage are options for your Twitter account. Settings is where you can customize and adjust your Twitter presence to fit your mood or intent.

6. In the One Line Bio field, enter in a message, a personal tagline, or a quote that best represents you. Twitter limits what you can say here to 160 characters or less.
7. In the Location field, enter in where you are hailing from. This can be a literal location, a state of mind, or (for some Twitter users) coordinates from Google Maps.
8. If you tweet in a different language, you can change your dialect in the Language drop-down menu.
The final options under Language are security options: Protect My Updates and “Delete My Account.” We cover those later in this chapter.
9. Single-click on Save to save your changes.
10. When your changes have been verified, click on the Profile option at the top of the screen to take a look at your profile in progress.

**FIGURE 2.5**

The Profile option in the Twitter menu gives you a look at how your page appears to others in Twitter and displays your public tweets and replies independent of other tweets in your network.

And so begins the building of your Twitter profile. You can see in Figure 2.5 by the small icon (also known as an avatar) to the left of your user-name that Twitter is making a suggestion: Add a photo. Why not? Anything (within reason) can serve as your avatar, but your avatar is much like your Name on Twitter. It can fit your mood for the day, week, or in general. Some images do make better avatars than others, but these are also easy to add to your Twitter account.

The Importance of a Good Avatar

It might seem like a tiny detail to concern yourself with, but in the same way a name, bio, and URL say a lot about you, so does your avatar. The icon you create for Twitter becomes (to coin a marketing term) your personal brand on Twitter. When using Twitter for business, it stands to reason that your company's logo (used with permission, of course) serves as your avatar. With your own personal account, your avatar can work as a "mood ring" and can be replaced within a few clicks to reflect what kind of a day, week, or life you are having. The avatar can take the "What are you doing?" aspect of Twitter to a visual level.

1. Click on the Settings option at the top of your Twitter interface, and then single-click on the Picture tab.
2. Currently displayed to the left of the blank data field is your current avatar. Single-click Browse to search through your computer for an avatar that best represents you, your business, or your current mood. Images you consider should be no larger than 700K in file size, no larger than 600 x 600 pixels in dimension, 72 pixels per inch in resolution, and saved as either JPEG or PNG formats in RGB mode.
3. When you find the image you want to use as an avatar, select it and then click OK.
4. Single-click on the Save button.
5. You receive confirmation that the avatar is in place when you see That's a Nice Picture along the top. (This message disappears after a few seconds.)



A Little Birdie Told Me...

If you have difficulty using an image for Twitter, or still are not sure what makes a good avatar, take a look at the suggestions from Twitter under the Picture bar along the right side of the page. You can get a few helpful hints on what to consider or what could be causing the problems with uploading the image.

6. Single-click on Profile and then click on the image. Twitter shows you the image at its full size with the Name you entered.



FIGURE 2.6

Once a new avatar is in place, Twitter renders it in your Profile full size for potential followers to see. (How's this picture for a first impression?)

When creating an avatar, you should consider that impression you want to make. The priority is, of course, to get away from the default image that Twitter has given you; but what do you want your avatar to say about you? Is this a professional impression you want to make or are you wanting to introduce yourself to your growing network with a sense of humor? And although you might find one picture to be a terrific picture representing you, does it work as an avatar? Camera phones and simple photo editors make avatar creation a breeze, but what should you use and what should you avoid?

Using your Own Likeness

Perhaps the simplest and best way to introduce yourself to people is to use the headshot, a photo of you preferably from the neck up. With this avatar people now have a face to put with a name. It is a more personal connection you are making with the people you're reaching out to and communicating with through Twitter; and depending on your creativity, the avatar of you can also work on reflecting your particular mood that day.



FIGURE 2.7

Here are a few examples of personal avatars from my TeeMonster account. They range from simple to candid.

One of the arguments against personal avatars is that you might not consider yourself photogenic or you don't want to make such a personal connection with your network, and that is your own choice. The personal avatar is just that: personal. If you are comfortable in sharing your likeness with your network, then feel free to do so. The important thing here is to represent yourself as accurately and as honestly as possible.

When selecting a photo of yourself, here are a few things you might want to consider:

- **Find images that are taken either from the waist or neck up**—Images that will become avatars are usually reduced in size. Any full body shots of you will be discernable on Twitter and third-party clients. The curious (such as myself) will probably follow the links to your profile picture (as shown in Figure 2.6), but if you are trying to give people at a glance who you are, the full-body shot may be lost. Try to keep the avatar tightly cropped and close up.
- **Use images that are square**—Although you can use images that are rectangular, Twitter—for your avatar—crops it for you and might crop out a detail you wanted to point out. Refer back to my suggested settings for your avatar featured in this chapter, and then consider your scanned image or digital photo from that perspective. Many inexpensive photo editors allow you to preview an image cropped before actually cropping it.
- **Avoid images with busy backgrounds**—If you take a closer look at Figure 2.7, you notice that what is behind me in the photos does not overpower or distract you from me. What is happening behind you is just as important as the picture of you because too much detail (or what some photographers refer to as “noise”) in the background can make avatars on Twitter difficult to make out. Keep it simple.
- **Avoid offensive imagery**—No, this is not some sort of “Oppression of your Right to Expression,” but this is Twitter laying down its law: If you use the site, you need to keep it clean. No nudity. Refrain from obscene gestures. Keep your gore level to the barest of minimums. Does everyone follow these rules? Not always; but on a whole, the community does a good job in policing themselves. Still, Twitter asks that your avatars remain within the boundaries of good taste. It's not asking a lot, and your network will appreciate it.

Using a Logo on Twitter

Branding has been a term associated with big business, public relations, and marketing strategies for years. Although there are many definitions and practices involved in building a brand, the simplified definition of branding is an approach to your business through association with a word, catch phrase, or an image. If you see two golden arches, you're probably pulling into a McDonald's. When you hear someone say "Are you in good hands?" then you might be working with Allstate Insurance. You can even brand with music. If you were to play the theme to *Star Trek*, it might surprise you how many people "can name that tune in four notes." (Another kind of branding as well with a reference to the game show *Name That Tune*.) If you have a product or a service that people associate with a phrase, name, or some other identifier, that is successful, effective branding.

With the rise of Social Media, this concept is no longer reserved for advertising agencies to pitch and charge corporate entities top dollar. Now, other Social Media enthusiasts, small businesses, and even the passionate Twitter-from-Home are taking the same principles of branding and applying them to their networking outlets. Outlets like Twitter.

When using a personal brand as an avatar, keep this in mind:

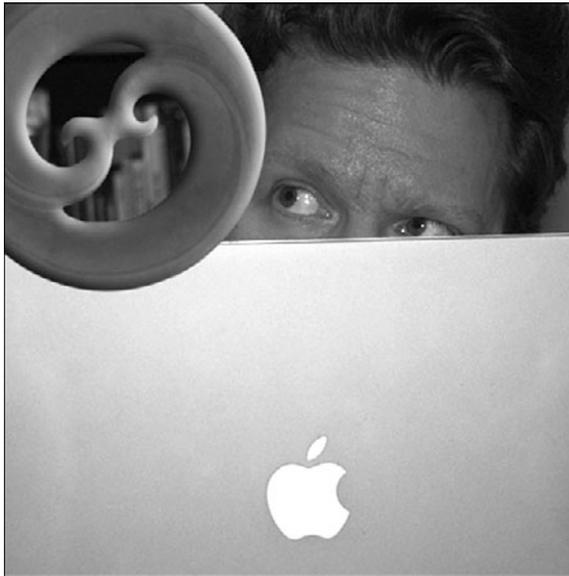
- **Using a logo lacks the personal touch**—One of the intimacies of using a picture of yourself is that your network feels as if it is getting to know you. That is a really nice feeling, but when your avatar is a company logo or podcast artwork, is your network getting to know you or getting to know the company's or media's communication outlet? Again, there is nothing wrong with using brands as avatars, but in making that all-important first-impression, keep in mind that those joining your network already have an expectation level in place. They know you are the voice of a business, group, or professional perspective.
- **With a brand as an avatar, you speak with the voice of that entity**—I admit, that does sound rather ominous, but there really is no way around that. If you are branding your Twitter account with a logo, be it for a podcast, a start-up, or the business you are working for, you are now speaking as the voice of this company. Maybe you

knew that from the start and think, “So long as I stay in the parameters....” but with Social Media being as new as it is and so many businesses clamoring to become part of it, there are no guidelines in place. (Don’t worry, I offer a few suggestions in Chapter 11, “Taking Care of Business.”) What exactly are the parameters? What if there is a talk on my network about politics? About religion? How much interaction should you take with this network you have built up? When you are working Twitter from a professional status, you need to stop and think before you tweet, and ask yourself, “how will this reflect on me and my company?”

- **As with a personal avatar, avoid text-heavy or busy images**—Some Twitter accounts attempt to fit in tag lines and show slogans and key names or locations into an avatar that, at first glance, will appear in a space smaller than 50 x 50 pixels. How you create your professional avatar is up to you; but the busier you make it, the harder it will be to recognize it at a glance.

When using a professional brand for your Twitter account, this does not mean you cannot give it your own flair or personal touch. As seen in Figure 2.8, I use a photograph of me looking over my faithful PowerBook G4 at a rendering of the double koru, the logo I use for Imagine That! Studios. In the early days of Imagine That! on Twitter, I simply used the double koru image, but during the Christmas holidays, I used an image of myself with the computer and logo, a stocking cap clearly visible and setting a festive air. The response to it was so positive I went with a more personal avatar from that point on. Imagine That!’s end result is a professional brand with a personal touch.

A personal approach to the corporate brand can be highly effective if you have a number of employees of the same corporation on Twitter. What is important in creating the avatar for your professional Twitter account is that it represents you and your company or organization in the manner you are happiest with. Much in the same way you create an avatar for personal use, take a moment to consider your company’s avatar. Are you going to keep it professional, or do you want to give your branding a personal touch?

**FIGURE 2.8**

When using a personal brand on Twitter, you can give it that personal touch to remind your community that there is a person on the other side of the username.

Using Interests, Hobbies, or Out-of-the-Ordinary for Your Avatar

Then you have the not-so-personal and I-really-hate-to-be-photographed avatars, and there are many online at Twitter. Some avatars I've seen on Twitter that make me tip my head to one side have included a zombified George Washington, a variety of characters from anime (Japanese animation), video game icons (both of the 8-bit days and the modern *Halo* resolutions), popular characters from television and film, and political posters during the 2008 Election.

You might think these nondescript images don't say a lot about a Twitter account, but they speak volumes.

Twitter users that choose not to use their own likeness are simply choosing to keep their visage to themselves, but the same precautions and considerations for the other avatars discussed here apply. You want to avoid the overly busy imagery, too much text (especially when you consider the 50 x 50 space you're filling on your Twitter home page), and the nature of the image you choose. Also, you need to consider what the avatar says about you. During the last race for the White House, it was clear by the Obama/Biden—McCain/Palin avatars where users were showing support.

If your avatar is an image of William Shatner being carried off by a group of Imperial Stormtroopers, you are a fan of *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, or all of the above. If your avatar is your profile picture from *World of Warcraft*, then chances are you are a gamer. While you are protecting your identity by using a generic image, you are still telling the community something about yourself.



A Little Birdie Told Me...

Online you can find a variety of websites that help you create avatars in your likeness. Maybe they are not exact likenesses, but they can be a lot of fun to display in the stead of photographs. If you are a fan of Comedy Central's *South Park*, you can always create an avatar of yourself in that style at its site. Bitstrips (found at <http://bitstrips.com>) gives you the ability to not only create a caricature avatar of yourself, but also an interface to place yourself (and others) into your own comic strip! Whether it is "Face Your Manga" (at <http://faceyour-manga.com>) or seeing yourself as someone from the world of *The Simpsons*, the Internet can give you the best of both worlds when it comes to finding that avatar just right for you.

Most important, you are taking a moment to create or select an avatar for yourself. The default avatar from Twitter should be regarded as a placeholder, not a solution, temporary or otherwise.

Fitting Your Mood: Switching Your Avatar

As seen in this chapter, changing your avatar only takes a few minutes. Why would you want to swap out on image for another? After all, it's just a picture, right? Why would anyone really care?

The amount of people that do pay attention to your Twitter avatar might surprise you.

Picture those mornings when you wake up in a bad mood. No matter how good that morning shower feels or that morning's cup of java tastes, you can't shake that grumpy feeling. And what makes the day worse? It's Friday. Now comes the time to get dressed for work. Are you going to don cheerful colors or that wacky Tobasco necktie? Probably not. You're going to dress down and, if you can find it, head into the office with the giant travel mug that reads "Talk to Me if You Dare."

Taking a moment to swap out your avatar is your "shot across a ship's bow" for the community, letting folks know that the following tweets might be slightly punchy. On those days when I want my network to know that I'm not in the best of moods, I have two avatars on call: one of R. Lee Emery giving "good drill sergeant" from *Full Metal Jacket*, and

another of me holding a cap gun with a perturbed look on my face. This is my nonaggressive way of telling friends “I’m in a state.” They work pretty well.

Not all avatar swaps need to hinge on your mood. Sometimes the avatar can be a tribute, such as my “HAL 9000” and “Paul Newman as Henry Gondorff” avatars. Sometimes, it can be a theme such as my *Robocop* or *Star Trek* avatars for when the conversations turn particularly geeky. On holidays, avatars can be festive and lively, stocking caps are quite popular around the Christmas season. Avatars can also help you promote events, as seen in Figure 2.9. With every tweet, you can remind your network of an upcoming event where you are either making an appearance or promoting a cause. Again, hop ahead to Chapter 11 for more on using avatars to promote. You can even offer the avatar to others, making it viral in nature and spreading the word about your special date. Make sure, however, that you keep your avatar timely and swap it out for a more-current one when the date has passed.



FIGURE 2.9

Authors have used their avatars as reminders or countdowns to their respective networks of upcoming book releases and special promotions.

The problem you run into with swapping out avatars on professional Twitter accounts is that you are no longer branding yourself or your company. Part of what makes branding work is the repetition of a logo or image so that consumers associate you or your company with it. If you want to take advantage of establishing a personal brand or identity, consider keeping your avatar consistent. (Of course, there are exceptions to this advice, but consider the branding aspect of your avatar before swapping it out.)



Fail Whale Says...

A growing trend with Twitter has been incorporating animated avatars. They are cute. They are unique. They are also annoying with a capital A-N-N-O-Y-I-N-G. A throwback to chat room and forum artwork that, on the rare occasion, caused a problem with browsers, animated avatars are not only an eyesore on Twitter, they are also inconsistent as to where they work. Sure, they work on Twitter's web page and they might work on versions of Twitterific, but when it comes to TweetDeck, mobile devices, and Twhirl, only the first frame is visible. If your first frame is a blank space, that won't work out so well on these applications.

The long and short of what kind of animated avatar you should incorporate on Twitter is don't. They are eyesores in the long run and are inconsistent as to where they work in the Twitterverse.

Protecting Updates: The Good and the Bad

If you take a look under the Account tab of your Twitter settings, you see under Language the Protect My Updates option. This is explained in brief, but as seen in Figure 2.10, your home page looks a little different than the other Twitter pages that are not taking advantage of this security feature. Protecting updates not only keeps your tweets off the public timeline, but also anyone who comes across your profile—whether by random or following the email link that informs them you are following them on Twitter—must wait until you approve them, and only after approval is granted will your updates become visible.

A positive in protecting your updates is that no one enters your network or even becomes privy to your activities or whereabouts unless you grant access. For people who want to enjoy the benefits of Twitter without dealing with cyberstalkers or abrasive individuals, protecting updates gives users the best of both worlds, allowing for the social aspect of Twitter's network while providing security, if desired.

The only adverse effect of protecting updates, though, is how the action completely works against the whole intent of social networking. After all, you go onto Twitter for more than just connecting with friends. You are there to cultivate a community and make new contacts. Arriving to a page with protected updates can seem a touch defensive, especially after visiting other Twitter accounts requesting to follow you sans such security measures in place. Why request a follow from me if you are so protective of your own updates? It could be interpreted as a mixed signal, and some may not want to request a follow back.



FIGURE 2.10

Twitter accounts with protected updates can offer you the option to send a request to the user for approval. When granted, the user's updates are revealed, but only to those in their Twitter network.

Another deterrent for potential followers is that the protected updates limits them to only your name, bio, and any website you offer to serve as a reference to you. A lot can be found out about people based on their updates (which we find out more about in Chapter 3); but if these updates are protected, potential followers will either move on to other accounts or take a chance, watching you carefully as some phishers and spammers are using this security measure to get their numbers up.

Working with Protected Updates is a judgment call. There are pros and cons to having your updates protected, but remember where the option is located in your Settings. When you decide it is time to turn the measure on or off, you will know where this option is located.

Making Twitter Your Own

Right now, your Twitter profile is set, but there are still a few options offered under Settings that go beyond your avatar and preferred URL. How about that web page Twitter offers you? Did you want to reset the color scheme and overall look of the page? What if you want to change

your password? Or what if you have an unlimited text messaging plan, how can you get Twitter to send updates to your phone?

All this you can do from the Settings window in Twitter.

Changing Your Password

Under Settings is the Password tab. If you have forgotten your password, you can have Twitter help you out and send you a reminder of what it was, provided you give them the email you opened the account with. The email is sent and you follow the steps through Twitter to set up a new password. You can also, after you enter in your old password, create a new password. These changes will not take effect until you single-click on Change and are given verification that the change has happened.

As with the avatar, Twitter also provides you with password tips on the right side of the page.

Receiving Tweets on Your Mobile Phone

Even if you are not using a “smart phone” along the lines of a Blackberry Storm or Apple’s iPhone, you can still get your Twitter fix by going into the Settings of your Twitter account and clicking on the Devices tab. Provided you accept the permission for Twitter to send you SMS text messages, enter in your mobile phone number and click on Save. Twitter works with you and your carrier to keep you connected.

Heather (@HeatherWelliver) is a podcaster and singer who is an active member of the Twitter community. She is also one of the first people I know who took advantage of the SMS option. For a while, Heather’s SMS Twitter experience was no different than anyone else’s. “The way you reply to tweets with text messaging is to send your reply or DM to Twitter’s phone number.”

A downside of using SMS with Twitter is when you are charged on how ever many messages you are allowed in your plan. If you have unlimited messaging, though, you can follow everyone’s tweets and reply without worry. It can become overwhelming when you have many followers, so Twitter offers an option to follow specific Twitters in your network instead of everyone. “The messages you receive can also take up a lot of memory on your phone,” Heather adds, “but by filtering out whom you receive notifications from, you can manage that.” Another advantage to receiving SMS tweets is you can assign “dark times” for when you don’t want to receive tweets at all.

Staying in the Loop

The Notices tab is where you customize how Twitter is keeping you in touch with your network. Auto Nudge, if you feel the need, sends your phone a text message that reminds you that it has been 24 hours between tweets. With Replies, you can set up your Twitter account to show all replies from anyone and everyone, from only the people in your network, or no replies at all. It is also here where you control the amount of email you receive from Twitter. You can either receive an email on new followers, the arrival of a Direct Message, and new developments at Twitter H.Q., or receive no extra email at all.

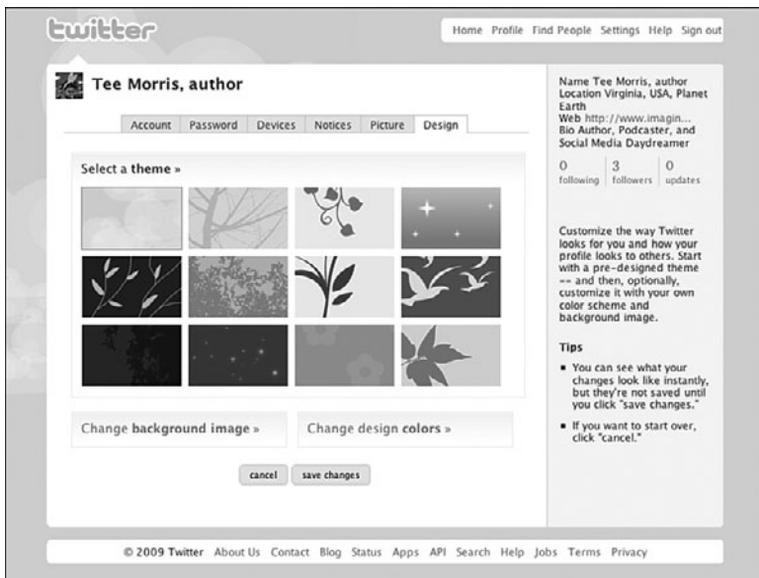


FIGURE 2.11

Want to give your Twitter home page a style that is truly you? Click on the Design tab and start creating!

Giving Your Twitter Home a Redesign

The final tab is the Design tab where you can apply to your Twitter page a template that includes a background image and a color scheme suited for it with one click. You can then customize the template to your own look with either a new background image (uploaded from your computer) by clicking on Change Background Image, or a new color scheme by

clicking on Change Design Colors. The changes are not live online until you single-click the Save Changes button.



FIGURE 2.12

Custom backgrounds, provided they are kept to the basics, can give additional information about a user, but be wary about how they appear in a browser with sidebars (above) and without (below).



A Little Birdie Told Me...

Many Twitter users create custom backgrounds that tell visitors to Twitter a little more about themselves, what they do, and where they can be found online. Designing backgrounds like the one featured in Figure 12.12 is a clever way to give people additional information beyond the standard profile, but you should try to test the background in different screen resolutions and in browsers with sidebars collapsed and expanded. Otherwise you take a chance in having your additional information covered up by the Twitter interface.

Building the Network

When your profile is complete, it is now time to start building your network. With help from Twitter, though, you can start right away, as shown earlier in this chapter. You can also go to the top of your Twitter page and click on Find People, which gives you four options:

- **Find on Twitter**—This search option lets you look for people already on Twitter by username or their first and last name.
- **Find on Other Networks**—This option searches other networks such as Gmail and AOL for friends who have accounts registered with Twitter. After you log in, you can then follow them on Twitter.
- **Invite by Email**—Whether it is on a popular service like Yahoo, Gmail, or AOL, or on a private server, you can email anyone in your address book and invite them onto Twitter.
- **Suggested Users**—Look familiar? This is the offered option at the beginning of your registration, now offering a bit more as you have a complete profile. Twitter takes a look at the details of your bio, finds active Twitter accounts, and then makes suggestions. With each one you check, Twitter lets you know whom you are following when you click on the Follow button.



FIGURE 2.13

Now that you have Twitter the way you want it, it's time to build that network, and Twitter's Find People option is there to help.

This option is usually a popular one because Twitter features a variety of account all showing active use. It should not take long for people to find you. Within the first 24 hours of setting up the TweetMorris account, I picked up three followers. It's that easy to get your network underway!



A Little Birdie Told Me...

Mr.Tweet (<http://mrtweet.net>) calls itself "Your personal networking service" and also aids you in finding people on Twitter that it considers would be good match-ups for you. To sign up with Mr.Tweet, you simply follow @mrtweet on Twitter and then the service will contact you via DMs with suggestions on who you should follow. Services like Mr.Tweet are popping up everywhere and some will be discussed in Chapter 5, "Terrific Twitter Tools."

Along with what Twitter offers, you might decide to venture out into the Twittersverse, just to see who is out there. Much like Capt. Jonathan Archer of the (original) *Enterprise*, you are boldly going into the open spaces to make First Contact.

Don't be nervous. This is the easy bit.

Following Someone at Random on Twitter

1. If you are new to Twitter, click on the Everyone option on the right side. This shows you the public timeline of everyone on Twitter.
2. Scroll along the first page. If you find a tweet that strikes your interest, click on the username. Twitter immediately sends you to that user's home page.
3. Look over that first page of tweets. If this Twitter sounds like someone you want to connect with, go to step 4. Otherwise, click on the Home link at the top of the page and repeat steps 1 and 2.
4. Under the user's avatar is a button that says Follow. Click on it.

Congratulations! You just made your first random connection on Twitter. This is social networking at its easiest and at its finest. This is, however, following someone at random. What if you get a business card with a username on it? How do you find this person on Twitter?

Following Someone You Know on Twitter

1. With the person's username on hand, log into Twitter.
2. In the URL field of your browser, edit the address from <http://twitter.com/home> to <http://twitter.com/username>. (Examples: <http://twitter.com/ITStudios>, <http://twitter.com/TeeMonster>)

3. After the user's Twitter page loads, single-click the Follow button under the user's avatar.

Now comes the ominous emails you receive at random points throughout the day: *Someone is following you on Twitter*. That does sound a bit stalker-ish, sure, but that is what happens when someone clicks that Follow button on your Twitter home page. So you receive email notification that you are being followed by another Twitter user. What do you do now?

Following Someone That's Following You on Twitter

1. In your email notification, you see under Check out User Name's Profile Here: a URL for that user's Twitter home page. Single-click the URL in the email or copy the URL.
2. Your browser should launch automatically if the URL is active in your email, or launch your browser of choice and paste the URL you copy from the email into the URL field. You will find yourself at that user's Twitter home page.
3. Review that Twitter's opening page. If you think this is a follower you want in your network, click on the Follow button under the user's avatar.

From here, it is up to you. You start tweeting. You start communicating. You let your network know what you are doing in Twitter. That's all there is to it. From here, all you need to do is maintain your network, keep an eye on the activity, and participate in the chat or simply post your current status wherever you are, keeping those in your network informed.

So, come on in. The chat is always on, and you might learn something new before the day is done.

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