

### About the Author



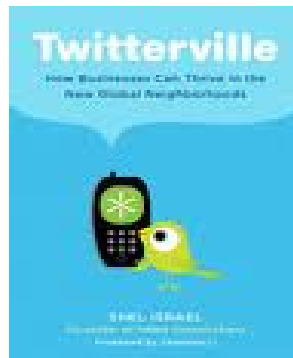
Shel Israel is a writer and speaker on social media issues. He co-authored with Robert Scoble the book *Naked Conversations, How Blogs are Changing the Way Businesses Talk with Customers* (John Wiley & Son 2006).

He has completed a second book called *Twitterville* on business uses for Twitter, published in September 2009. He has contributed editorially to *BusinessWeek*, *Dow Jones Co*, and *FastCompany.TV*.

He was the host of *Global Neighbourhoods* with Shel Israel, an online video blog series, which was produced by *FastCompany.tv*, covering enterprise and trends in social media. He lives in Silicon Valley, California and frequently speaks on social media related topics. happiness, and lasting romance.

# Twitterville

How Businesses Can Thrive In The New Global Neighborhood



**Author: Shel Israel**  
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## ■ The Big Idea

Twitter is the most rapidly adopted communication tool in history, going from zero to ten million users in just over two years. On Twitter, word can spread faster than wildfire. Companies no longer have the option of ignoring the conversation.

Unlike other hot social media spaces, *Twitterville* is dominated by professionals, not students. And despite its size, it still feels like a small town. Twitter allows people to interact much the way they do face-to-face, honestly and authentically. One minute, you're complaining about the weather with local friends, the next, you're talking shop with a colleague based halfway across the globe.

No matter where you're from or what you do for a living, you will find conversations on Twitter that are valuable. Despite the millions of people joining the site, you'll quickly find the ones who can make a difference to you.

## Why You Need This Book

This book will explain how global neighborhoods will make geography increasingly irrelevant. It even explains why people sometimes really do care what you had for lunch.

## THE TWITTERVILLE MARKETPLACE

Every market has unique characteristics. Television's was that you could sit in a studio in Burbank, California, and put ads in front of the eyes of people all over the world. This was a golden moment in broadcast or mass media marketing.

Twitterville is a golden moment as well, but takes the concept in a new direction, one that can be called micro marketing. It is a conversation, rather than a monologue. It's also more personal. In Twitter, what the community thinks of an individual usually has more value in more cases than does traditional brand identity.

Here's some of the world's largest companies and see how they use Twitter to demonstrate a very local touch and thus earn more business in the process.

## GLOBAL COMPANIES, LOCAL TOUCH

- H&R Block, America's granddaddy of tax preparation services, faced an issue that Twitter helped them with. Twitter has given them a way to engage people in tax-related conversations year-round, and in these conversations the company gets to point to their expanding array of digital products. What Twitter does offer is a golden opportunity to listen to people and find out how they perceive your brand.
- Henry Ford Hospital has subsequently performed three live-tweet surgeries, one in which a patient's cranium was removed while he was still unconscious. They have added both YouTube and TwitPic components to their social media coverage. In short, live-tweeting surgery is good for business. Henry Ford's first such surgery generated attention first on Twitter, followed by mainstream press coverage. By May 2009, five additional hospitals had begun to live-tweet surgeries and other medical procedures.

- Jim Deitzel, Rubbermaid's Marketing Manager has helped a lot of individuals get better deals as resellers, despite the fact that professional organizers tend to buy in low volume. None of this would have happened without the Twitter piece of Rubbermaid's strategy.

## BRAIDED JOURNALISM

There is a convergence of old and new media in the short-term future. And in that convergence, there is a great possibility. This convergence is called "braided journalism."

There are three strands to braided journalism, each comprising a great many fibers. The strands are coming together, intertwining and changing the way people get information and interact with it.

1. **Traditional Media.** Organizations that pay professionals to gather and report on that which is timely, interesting, or useful. Their roots are in print and broadcast media. They pay people to go out and get content that will be reported and published. As these organizations move online, they remain traditional, publishing news to derive ad revenues.

2. **Citizen Journalism.** This, quite simply, is the reporting of news by amateurs. Very often, these reporters stumble upon something that newsworthy, and they share what they see with others. Citizen journalists have been around since the beginning of recorded time. A key point is that they are amateurs who report news for free because they believe others should be informed.

3. **Social Media.** This simply involves places on the Internet where people communicate and collaborate. It is the newest and shortest of the three strands. Not everything posted to social media involves reporting, but it is where traditional and citizen journalism touch and braid into the very fiber of social media. Something new and different is forming, which includes and encompasses both the professionals and the amateurs.

## THREE ACTION AREAS

All sorts of government activity are showing up on Twitter. In the United States, there are three areas that seem to be growing legs.

**1. Transportation.** Mobile access makes Twitter an ideal medium for broadcasting time-sensitive transit information. Ferry and train schedules as well as highway delays are being tweeted by at least twenty public agencies in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Greece. In most cases, authorities and passengers use them to discuss delays or hazards and to suggest alternative routes.

**2. Law Enforcement.** The second area where you can find widespread yet still nascent activity is on all levels of law enforcement. It seems to be developing fast, however. An initial research in October 2008, no law enforcement agencies can be found using Twitter. By March of 2009, a fifteen-minute search produced more than thirty accounts.

**3. Disaster Response.** Twitter has played a role during many natural and manmade disasters. Earthquakes are routinely reported on Twitter well before traditional media picked it up, as Casper Oppenhuis de Jong demonstrated in the Sezchuan earthquake.

## DARK STREETS

Here are some of the unsavory incidents that have happened so far in Twitterville. It does not intend to scare you off but just to make you aware so that you may avoid them.

**Spam.** This is the Internet's most common form of abuse. Much of it is just annoying, but some are worse than that. It is based on the premise that the more people you can approach with an enticing but deceptive offer, the more people will take the bait. Here are some three ways to spot a Twitter Spammer:

1. The profile picture is a young girl (usually blonde) and typically showing a rather generous amount of cleavage.
2. Even though the user is newly registered, he, she, or it follows hundreds of people and has very few followers.
3. The user name is complete gibberish – a weird and random collection of letters and numbers.

**Bots.** The weapon of choice for spammers and other sordid abusers in Twitterville and for most of the interactive Web is the bot. Basically, a bot, short for "robot" is Internet software that tirelessly executes redundant tasks at great

speed. Hackers have used bots at least twice to break through Twitter security using password bots.

**Ruses of the Phishermen.** Phishing is a time-tested online criminal activity. Basically, someone creates a fraudulent site that impersonates an authentic one. Often the phishing site looks like a site you know – counterfeit eBay, Google, Paypal, and bank sites are common. The bad guys lure you into baited traps. The ruses take two common forms: rewards and alarms. The reward promises you a worthwhile prize while the alarm is a warning that your bank account is under attack, wherein the assailant is the fraudster who sent you the message. You are then compelled to provide your username and password which the phishers will then use.

**Stalkers, Tolls, and Identity Thieves.** Sometimes the bad guys don't want your money. They just want to damage your reputation.

## EIGHT STEPS

Begin your Twiterville journey on the right foot with these eight steps:

1. **Show Yourself.** Scroll through some Twitter pages and see what first catches your eye. Chances are good that it will be the avatar image. Most people like to see who they're talking to; they're more likely to follow someone who uses an authentic photo over another whose avatar is a cartoon or brand icon. In the small space allotted by Twitter, give some specific info about yourself and your work. Supply links to your blog or web site. In your bio, say something useful about why you're on Twitter. Say where you live.
2. **Read first. Talk later.** Start by reading what others have to say. Get a sense of the rhythm of a conversation before you join in. Wait until you have something useful or interesting to add to the conversation.
3. **Post Second. Follow Later.** After you've read other tweets for a while, it's time to put up a few of your own. When you start, say what you are hoping to talk about. This may start to get you some attention from the neighborhoods that matter the most to you.

4. **Friends Over Stars.** While Twitterville luminaries may automatically follow you back if you follow them, they are unlikely to join a conversation you start. You may think it impressive that these big names are following you, but since most everyone knows that these stars will follow just about anyone, few Tweepers are impressed. It's wiser to follow people whose conversations matter to you.
5. **Avoid Spammer Stats.** The worst thing you can do is have stats that show you follow 1,149 people and only 4 people follow you. These are spammer stats. Perhaps no one is following you because you've revealed so little of yourself. You can easily fix this by growing slower. Post more informative tweets, and be more transparent.
6. **Have Favorites.** There's a little star icon to the right of each tweet. You can use it to make someone's post a "favorite."
7. **Take Your Time.** Twitterville works like any other neighborhood. People start by chatting about weather, lunch – the day-to-day things. Often the conversation goes nowhere, tapering off into cyberspace. If you try pushing yourself too aggressively, people may respond to you in the same way they do the loudmouth at the party. They walk away and talk in circles that exclude you.
8. **Think Neighborhood.** If you move to a large city, the first things you do are learn your way around the neighborhood, find the best way to get to work, and where to shop and eat. Do not think of Twitter as a mass media tool, but a social tool.

## SOME BEGINNER TIPS FROM TOM RAFTERY

Tom Raftery is the one who got his job at RedMonk entirely through Twitter-based conversations. Here are a few suggestions from him:

- **Start safely.** Your first few posts should be well inside your comfort level. Talk about your interests, but serve up content that you don't mind anyone knowing.

- **Check out people who follow your friends.** When you find people you know on Twitter, see who follows them. Chances are good you'll find more people you know, as well as new people with whom you share common interests. They, in turn, will show you more people you might consider following.
- **Shortcut.** Make sure not to confuse the private "d" with the public "@" – a common Twitterville gaffe.
- **Be accessible.** Use your Twitter username everywhere – add it to your e-mail signature, put it on your business card, leave it in blog comments – don't spam; just do it where appropriate.

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