

# An Introduction to the Social Media Landscape

Once upon a time, anyone could be a media publisher. All you needed was several million dollars, a team of editors and writers, a printing press capable of shooting out a dozen copies a second, and a distribution network that would put your publication in stores across the country.

Unless, of course, you wanted to go into radio or television. In that case, things were just a little harder.

The result was that information came down from on high. We didn't talk among ourselves, and we weren't part of the conversation; we were talked *to* by writers, editors, and producers who controlled the conversation. If we liked what we were reading, we kept tuning in, and the publishing company made money.

If we didn't like it, we stopped buying the magazine, or we switched channels. Advertisers turned away, and all the millions of dollars the publication took to create disappeared.

Today, it's all very different. It now costs as little as nothing more than time to create great content and make it available for other people to enjoy. That low cost means that it doesn't matter if millions or even thousands do not read it if your target market is smaller or nascent. The rise of social media means you can profitably focus on even tiny markets—such as stamp collectors in Mozambique—and still find enough people to form an online community and profit through advertising and product sales.

The buzzword for this rise of small and micro communities, as *Wired* editor Chris Anderson coined it, is *the long tail*, and it's absolutely been rocket fuel for our Internet race to the moon.

But the lowered barrier to entry for publishing online has had another positive effect: We aren't being talked to by professional writers and publishers anymore; we're talking to each other.

Average folk like you and me—the kind of people who didn't study writing at college, who never spent years as cub reporters covering local court cases or high school sports, and who were never even very good at Scrabble or Words with Friends—are now writing about the topics they love and sharing their views and opinions online.

And they're hearing from their readers, too. The conversation is flowing in both directions.

Anyone can now launch a website or blog, write articles, share their thoughts and views on Facebook or other social media, or even create videos and upload them to YouTube. And anyone can comment on that content, affecting both its nature and the direction of the publication.

That's social media; it's a publishing revolution, and we're smack-dab in the middle of it!

## What Exactly Is Social Media?

Social media can be all sorts of different things, and it can be produced in all sorts of different ways. Perhaps the best definition of social media, though, is content that has been created cooperatively with its audience.

Facebook, for example, is not a publishing company. It doesn't create any of its own content. It doesn't write articles or posts, and it doesn't upload films or images for people to view and enjoy.

It allows its users to do all of that for their own amusement, edification, and profit. Facebook is a platform, a set of tools that enable this activity.

It's as though the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) or Showtime were to fire all its actors, producers, news anchors, and scriptwriters; throw open its doors; and tell the world that all are

welcome to come in, shoot their own programs, and broadcast them on the channel. Or as though *People* magazine were to open its pages up to anyone who wanted to publish a photograph or write some celebrity gossip. That would be sweet, wouldn't it?

Of course, if that were to happen, you'd still have to tell people what channel you were on and when they could see your program. You'd still have to produce content that other people might actually enjoy and, inevitably, the people who took the most professional approach, put time and effort into what they were doing, and connected with their audiences would be the most successful.

But even that wouldn't allow viewers to take part in the program, to participate in the creation of something bigger than a video segment or article in the next issue of the magazine. That participation is the cornerstone of social media.

Create a group on a site such as Facebook, and you won't need to supply all of the text and all of the images to keep it lively and interesting. You'll be expecting other group members to add their stories and photographs, to engage in discussions, and to share their own experiences.

Even bloggers, when they write a post, hope that their readers will join the discussion by leaving comments at the bottom of the post, taking the conversation in new directions and adding new information and perspectives.

This is the *social* part of social media, and it means that publishing is now about participation.

Let's say that again because it's so darn important to *Twitter Power* and to success on social media in any venue: *publishing is now about participation.*

Someone who uses social media successfully doesn't just create content; he or she also creates conversations, and those conversations create communities.

That's the real beauty of social media, and although creating a separate community may or may not be a primary goal—depending on the site—the result of social media can always be solid connections among participants.

When those connections form around businesses, the results can be the sort of brand loyalty and commitment that sales

professionals have been dreaming about since the first days of direct marketing.

We'll admit it; our definition of social media is rather vague. At its broadest, it describes a form of publishing in which people swap rather than publish stories and the exchange of content happens within a community, rather like a chat in a restaurant.

At its narrowest, it describes a tool set that lets publishers and marketers put their messages in front of thousands of people and encourage them to build strong connections and firm loyalty.

However it's defined, social media has proved incredibly popular!

As of September 2014, Facebook claims to have 864 million active daily members—that's *active* members, not just people who created a profile and never used it—and 703 million active daily mobile users. Expand the data to monthly active users, and there are more than 1.3 billion people busily posting and discussing things in the Facebook community. That's billion with a *b*.

Twitter, which launched almost a decade ago—a lifetime in Internet terms—has similarly impressive statistics, and its growth has been phenomenal. As of this writing in late 2014, Twitter has 271 million active users, 78 percent of whom are on mobile devices. Together, we send more than 500 million tweets per day, and the system supports more than 35 languages.

Helped by the appearance on the site of celebrities, such as Katy Perry, Taylor Swift, Rihanna, Ellen DeGeneres, Britney Spears, Ashton Kutcher, and Oprah Winfrey (who posted her first tweet live on her TV show, assisted by Twitter cofounder Evan Williams), Twitter's growth chart has changed from a gentle climb into a hockey stick, a phenomenal accomplishment.

There is another fact about Twitter that's particularly interesting, though: It's massively underused.

The average Twitterer has 126 followers and has sent out fewer than 300 tweets across the life of his or her account. Not only that, but 30 to 40 percent of Twitter accounts are also dormant, never having posted a single tweet.

To put a few numbers here, Joel currently has 81,119 followers and follows 1,372 people, and Dave has 12,574 followers and follows 932 people. And to put things in perspective, when Joel

was asked to write the first edition of *Twitter Power* back in 2009, he had only 5,000 followers, and not a single person had yet come close to having 1 million followers.

Twitter's growth has turned it into a massive marketing opportunity.

All of these figures just scratch the surface of the popularity of social media, though. YouTube attracts more than 1 billion unique visitors each month. Visitors watch more than 6 billion hours of video content each month. Oh, and 100 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute. Every minute!

Throw in the countless millions of blogs and social networks, such as Pinterest, Instagram, Google Plus, and Reddit, and it becomes pretty clear that social media is a massive phenomenon that's changed the way all of us create and use content—and the way that businesses use that content and their distribution channels, too.

## Social Media Really Is a Big Deal

So we can see that social media sites and users can be big. Really, really big. But so what? There are lots of people in the telephone book, and that's very big, too. Being big doesn't make it a particularly useful marketing tool.

Social media sites don't just list people, though, and they don't just list any old people.

Each site lists a very special group of people.

At first glance, that might seem a little strange. Whether you're browsing through Facebook, Pinterest, Flickr, or Twitter, you're going to see small pictures of people, short messages among them, and profiles in which those people share things about themselves, such as where they work, where they're from, and what they do in their spare time.

Look a little closer, though, and you'll start to notice differences because although the sites may seem similar, in fact, each site has its own unique feel and its own unique demographic.

Because Facebook started at Harvard University, for example (it had signed up half the undergraduate population within a month of going live), and because it was initially restricted to

university students, it continues to have a higher percentage of well-educated members than of the general population.

Clearly, that suggests many of Facebook's users are also college students—a fantastic market for companies hoping to acquire buyers and fans, then turn them into invaluable lifetime customers and evangelists.

By comparison, tracking Twitter's demographics isn't easy. Although some people have had fun following the frequency with which certain wealth-related terms (such as *well-to-do neighborhoods*) turn up, there's no easy way to conduct a demographic survey of the site's users. Hitwise, an Internet monitoring service, did, however, manage to produce some very interesting, and some very impressive, results.

Figure 1.1 shows some Twitter stats from the company.

Pew Internet reports that as of January 2014, 18 percent of online adults use Twitter, broken down into 17 percent of online

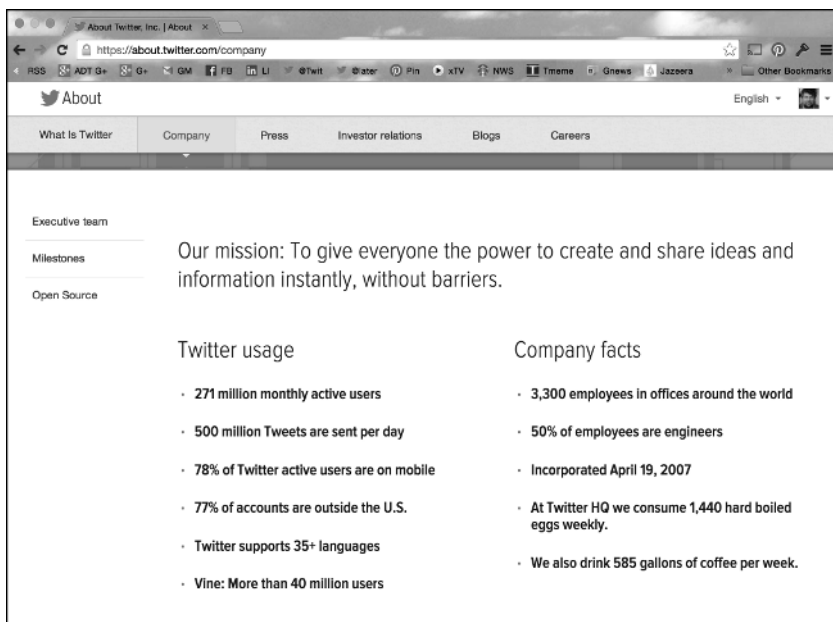


Figure 1.1 Now you know how much coffee they consume at Twitter's headquarters!

adult males and 18 percent of online women, with 16 percent of white, 29 percent of African American, and 16 percent of Hispanic ethnicities represented. Twitter also biases younger: 31 percent of users are 18- to 29-year-olds, 19 percent are 30 to 49, and less than 10 percent are older than 50.

Most fascinating of all, though, 18 percent of Twitter users have completed some college, and another 18 percent have an undergrad or graduate degree. When you consider earnings, the greatest percentage of online users who are on Twitter are those who earn \$75,000 or more. That's a lot of dough!

Although a number of twentysomethings might have joined Twitter out of curiosity, it is clear that the site isn't just used by young people as an alternative to text messaging and Facebook chats. Twitter has a large following among older, professional audiences, and a full quarter of Twitter's users are high earners, a valuable piece of information that makes the service a must for any serious marketer.

We can see that social media sites aren't just attracting kids looking for places to chat with their friends and find out where to load up on free music downloads. They're also attracting smart, educated people with money to burn.

They're attracting experts, too.

You can see this most clearly on specialist sites, such as Flickr, a photo-sharing service. Although Flickr too isn't very forthcoming about its demographic details, spend any time at all on the site, and you can't help but notice the number of professional photographers who use it.

Part of the site's appeal isn't just the pictures; enthusiasts also can pick up advice from experts who are working in their field and are ready to share the benefits of their experience.

Whatever site we look at, there's no question at this point in the evolution of the Internet that social media sites attract huge numbers of people. We can see too that many of those people are highly educated, are well paid, and are experts in their fields.

You should be realizing that social media offers a gigantic opportunity for business owners to promote their products to exactly the sort of market they want to reach, whether it's

predominantly male, female, rich, poor, geographically based, or of a specific ethnic group.

## The Different Types of Social Media Sites—Content to Suit Every Market

One of the reasons that social media has proved to be so popular is that it's available in all sorts of different forms. Although the networking sites with their tens of millions of members might be the most familiar, there are actually all sorts of different ways of creating and sharing social media content.

### BLOGS

Yes, blogs are a form of social media, too. They're written by people on every topic you can imagine. (See Figure 1.2.) And only a tiny fraction of them are produced by professionals, even though all have the potential to generate revenue. Figure 1.2 is Joel's blog.



Figure 1.2 Joel's blog's home page at JoelComm.com. He writes it; you read it and comment on it. And yes, Comm is his real last name!



Meanwhile, Dave has three blogs. Really! Check out GoFatherhood.com to learn about his life as a dad, visit DaveOnFilm.com to read his film reviews, and then hang out at AskDaveTaylor.com to read his daily tech questions and answers and product reviews!

What really makes blogging part of social media is that it has incredibly minimal costs associated with getting started and running your site. Sure, if you want to have your own domain name and place the blog on your own server, you might have to pay a small fee—and when we say *small*, we mean less than \$10 per month. There are strategies you can use to bring in readers that will cost money, too.

But you don't actually *need* to do any of that.

To become a blogger, you don't need to do any more than sign up at Blogger.com, WordPress.com, or any of the other free blogging services and start writing.

Within minutes, you'll be creating content, and you'll form a part of the social media world.

Blogs, though, do take some effort. They have to be updated regularly, and although you can put anything on a blog, from favorite quotes to short stories to feature-length videos, you'll have to work to keep your readers entertained, informed, and engaged. Blogging is fun and can be very profitable, too, but it's not a sweat-free business.

Most important, although you can accept guest posts and hire writers, and although your comments will be a crucial element of your site's attraction, it will still be *you* guiding the content and setting the subjects.

Blogs *are* a form of social media, but blogging is a society with a clear ruler, someone who has to head to the mines every morning and work for those gems. They don't just fall into your lap!

## MEMBERSHIP SITES

That top-down feel that can be present in some social media channels is also present in membership sites. There are far fewer of these on the Web than there are blogs, but there's still no



Figure 1.3 All dating sites are membership sites.

shortage of them; like any social media site, they rely on the members to produce the content and discussion that serves as the site's primary attraction.

A great example of a membership site is Match.com. In fact, all dating sites are a narrowly targeted form of social media, with people identifying their own attributes as they sign up, as shown in Figure 1.3. The content that people are paying to use are the profiles and pictures that the site's members have created and uploaded.

Match.com might have an online magazine, but no one is paying \$20 to \$25 per month to read the magazine. Users are paying that price month after month to read the descriptions and look at the photos that other people have posted, and to contact those people.

It's not the site that's the attraction of social media sites; it's the society.

## PHOTO SITES

Ever since cameras went digital, there's been a need for a low-cost—and even free—way to share those images with anyone

who wants to see them online. In addition to the millions of photos posted every day on Facebook, sites and services are dedicated just to photos and images, notably including Pinterest and Instagram.

What makes these sites, and photo gallery sites such as Flickr, so cool is that they're designed specifically around displaying and sharing photographs, so the presentation is bigger, bolder, and more visually engaging, all of which is good!

Let's focus on Flickr for just a moment, because it's the granddaddy of photo-sharing sites. As a social media site, it of course depends entirely on the photos that users upload to bring in other users. (See Figure 1.4.)

That broad-based content sourcing already makes sites such as Flickr—one of the most popular photo-sharing sites—part of the social media phenomenon, but Flickr also has the networking power of those sites.

Like Facebook, it's possible to create large lists of friends and join groups where you can submit images, enter competitions,

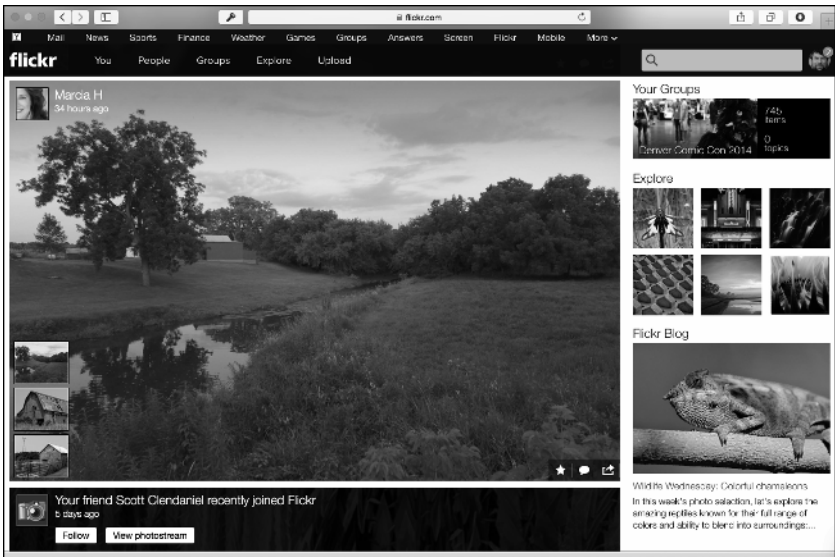


Figure 1.4 Flickr is the big daddy of photo-sharing websites.

and participate in discussions about the best way to light a child's portrait or which lens to use in which conditions.

Flickr also allows its members to mark images as favorites and to place comments beneath them. Both of those activities can be valuable ways of adding new friends. Pro members, who pay a subscription fee of \$44.95 for two years, can even see stats that indicate how many views, faves, and comments each image has produced and even where their visitors came from.

All of that networking is vital to success on the site, and that success can have some spectacular results. Even way back in 2006, Rebekka Guðleifsdóttir, an Icelandic art student whose images and networking had brought her a huge following on Flickr, was spotted by an advertising executive on the site who hired her to shoot a series of billboard shots for the Toyota Prius. Many of the images used in various versions of Microsoft Windows were bought from photographers commissioned after they were discovered on the site.

Every day, images are licensed and prints are sold on Flickr, and it's all based on the content created by the site's users and promoted through careful networking.

That's classic social media.

## MICROBLOGS

And finally, we come to microblogging. This is a whole new thing in social media, though teens have been embracing this low-attention-span-friendly social networking for years. In fact, in some ways it's the exact opposite of everything we've seen so far.

Social media sites tend to want their members to contribute as much content as possible. They may restrict that content to just photographs or video (e.g., Flickr and Pinterest), restrict it to participating in the site only through a mobile device (e.g., Instagram), or restrict membership to a select few (in the case of dating sites, to dedicated singles), but on the whole they want their members to offer as much content as possible.

Microblog sites place strict limits on the content that can be uploaded, and they find that those limits encourage creativity.

And some microblogging sites are completely hands-off, including Tumblr and WeHeartIt.

## A Closer Look at Microblogging

Just as there are many different kinds of social media sites, so also there are many different ways to microblog. One of the most popular ways now actually takes place within the larger social media sites.

When Facebook realized that its members loved the idea of being able to update their followers on what they were doing, it added the status update feature, which sure seems a lot like microblogging. (See Figure 1.5.)

Facebook's system only works within the site, though, so unlike Twitter, which can broadcast your tweets to mobile telephones as well, updates are visible only to friends who happen to be on the site at the time.

For Facebook users, though, it's still very powerful, and Twitter users who want their updates to reach further can use Facebook's Twitter application. This lets them send tweets from within Facebook itself. We use it, and think it's great. You can find it at <https://apps.facebook.com/twitter/> or by searching the apps for Twitter.

Facebook isn't the only social media site to add microblogging to its list of features, though. Google Plus and LinkedIn are also social networks targeting specific communities. LinkedIn, for example, is geared toward your professional life, with a system that lets you share status updates just like Facebook, but also lets you create blog posts within your LinkedIn account, as shown in Figure 1.6.

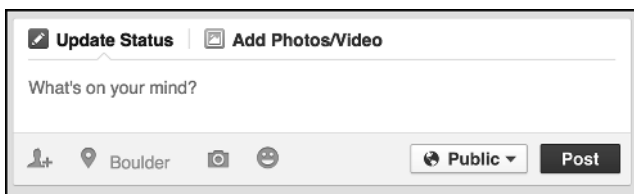


Figure 1.5 Facebook status updates = microblogging.

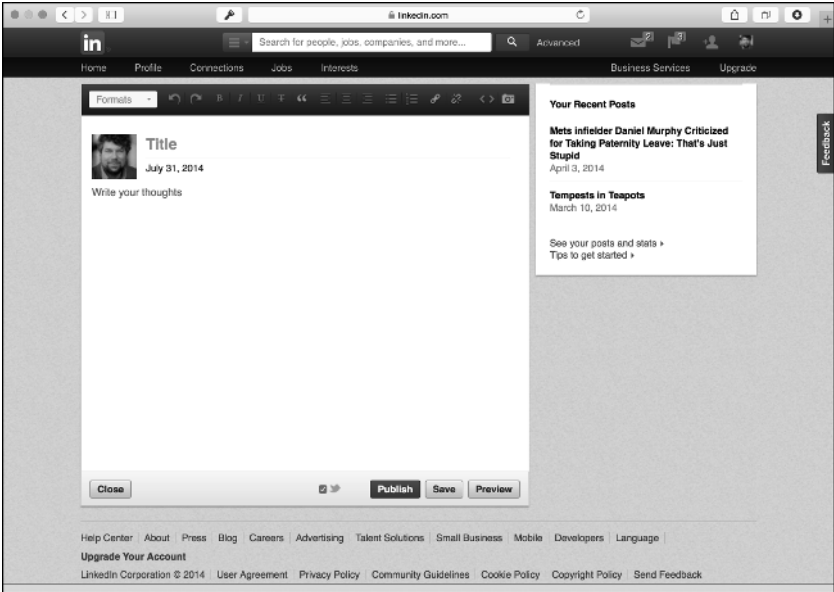


Figure 1.6 LinkedIn supports blogging, too.

Just as important, the site also lets its users track what people are saying in their posts, what new jobs they get, and much more. And that's just smart business, and social.

## YAMMER

Microblogging services thrive most when they ask users to answer a simple question and allow anyone to see the answer. Yammer ([www.yammer.com](http://www.yammer.com)) keeps to those roots but narrows the focus of the question—and the audience, too. (See Figure 1.7.)

Instead of inviting people to share what they're doing (and receiving answers that might range from saving an oil-soaked bird to eating an avocado sandwich), it asks users to explain what they're working on.

But it reveals those answers only to people on the network with the same corporate e-mail address, making it what geeks would call an *intranet* system, which makes it a useful tool for

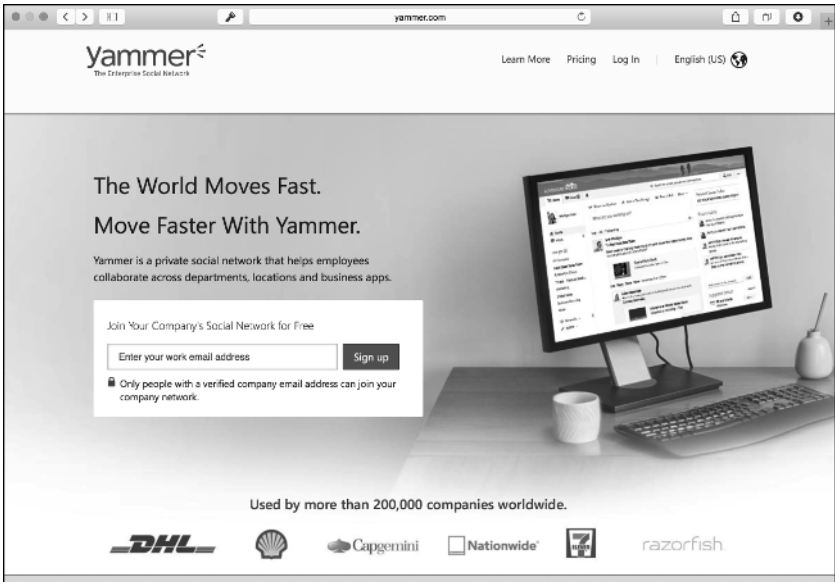


Figure 1.7 Yammer's restrictions make Twitter look like a free-for-all.

communicating within a business, but not so useful for marketing of any sort.

## Introducing . . . Twitter!

And finally, we come to Twitter—the site that has really set the standard in microblogging. Twitter, originally called *twttr*, was founded by programmers Evan Williams, Jack Dorsey, Biz Stone, and Noah Glass in July 2006.

Williams was a serial entrepreneur who had founded a company called Pyra Labs that made project management software. A note-taking feature on that software went on to become Blogger, the free blogging service later bought by Google. In fact, some people credit Williams with coining the word *blogger* to describe people who write Weblogs.

In 2004, Williams left Google to form podcasting company Odeo, and two years later, he created Obvious with Stone, a

programmer who had joined Blogger after its acquisition by the search engine giant. The new company bought Odeo, which it later sold to a company called Sonic Mountain. Round and round. It's a game of musical chairs that makes our heads swim, too.

The important thing is that Odeo launched and then began to focus exclusively on a simple chat application called Twitter.

The original idea for Twitter came from Dorsey, an Odeo employee. In an interview for ReadWriteTalk.com Stone described the moment when they first discussed the idea:

*A few of us were thinking about what are some interesting ways that maybe we can merge SMS [short message service] to the Web," he said. "[Dorsey] had come up with this idea where if you just look at only the status field of an instant message application like AIM, and you just look at that as a sort of really small version of what people are already doing . . . and you just make it super simple, 'Here's what I'm doing.' . . . [W]e kind of went off in a corner and we worked for two weeks and we created a prototype. We showed the rest of the team and everyone just sort of giggled. They all kind of loved it. It was really fun. We used it over the weekend. We found it very compelling and we decided that we would keep working on it.*

That was in March 2006, and initially Twitter was used by the company's employees as a fun form of internal communication. (Tech companies, it seems, might have lava lamps and pinball machines, but they never seem to have watercoolers!)

The service launched officially in October 2006, picked up a South by Southwest (SXSW) Web Award in March 2007, and by April was a hot, up-and-coming social media business, structured as a separate company headed by Dorsey.

Helped by the publicity the SXSW award generated, boosted by references on Blogger (where the company, of course, had good connections), and most important, making itself attractive with an open platform that let other developers extend the service, the site started to take off.



This growth, however, led to some problems. In 2007, Twitter was reported to have had just 98 percent uptime—a loss of three whole days over the year—and tended to suffer particularly badly during major tech conferences (which says something about many of its users, too). (See Figure 1.8.)

It has had some very impressive successes though. Some of the world's leading personalities, corporations, and government bodies are known to use the service, including Barack Obama (@barackobama), former California governor and film star Arnold Schwarzenegger (@schwarzenegger), popular writer Neil Gaiman (@neilhimsself), Whole Foods Market (@WholeFoods), and the British Parliament (@UKParliament).

The American Red Cross (@RedCross) and other emergency response organizations, such as the U.S. Federal Emergency

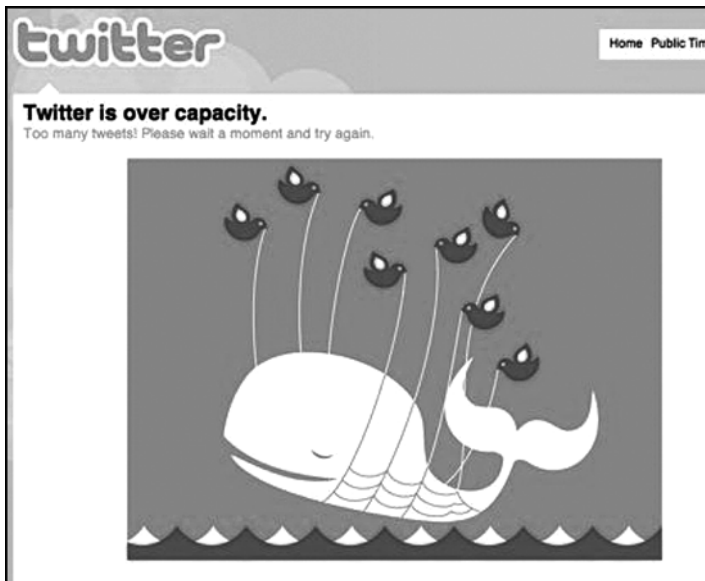


Figure 1.8 Twitter's iconic "fail whale." Designed by Yiying Lu, the beluga whale supported by twittering birds is now a brand in its own right after its frequent appearance on an overstrained Twitter site.

Management Administration (@FEMA), use Twitter as a fast way to communicate information about local disasters.

Two things really distinguish Twitter, though.

The first is its simplicity. Although the service now has piles of additional tools and add-ons, at its core Twitter remains a way of describing what you're doing, thinking, hoping, or dreaming in no more than 140 characters.

That brevity and simplicity have always been key, and they're what brought Twitter its second characteristic: critical mass.

The most difficult moment for any social network is the beginning. It's the chicken and egg problem: People don't want to join a new site until their friends are also online, but those friends are also waiting until their friends join. No one joins precisely because no one's yet joined.

It takes a special push to get a social media site to build a sufficient community for everyone to feel comfortable about climbing on board. For Facebook that came about through it focusing on dating and the social life at Harvard University, and it expanded to other universities only after it already had significant traction in its primary market.

For Twitter it was the boost it received with its SXSW award that had people on the Internet, whether they'd attended SXSW that year in Austin, Texas, or not talking about the service as the next big thing.

As long as it has that critical mass—and with more than 250 million monthly active users, it certainly has that—Twitter is always going to be the microblogging service to beat.

In the next chapter, we'll explain exactly why it's likely to retain its position as the leading microblogging service.