

Twitter: chatter and substance

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A lot of people look at Twitter and disregard it, usually with an attitude which equates to "I don't care what you had for breakfast this morning". While Twitter certainly does contain this sort of chatter, there are also very useful tidbits of information that can alert you to what is being said about your organisation, how you are being perceived by the general public and can even at times put you one step ahead of your competition.¹ So the question is why as legal librarians do we so often ignore this information? One answer may be that Twitter and social media in general can be hard to get a grip on.

This paper is going to look firstly at what Twitter is and how it is being used, as well as discussing why you would choose to monitor Twitter over other social media networks. Additionally the paper will discuss the risks which can arise from social media, and why it is important to monitor the area even if you are not actively participating in it.

Monitoring Twitter and any other social media is a research task, which is why libraries and librarians are so well situated to take this on as part of their roles. Most law libraries will already have processes in place to monitor newspapers and other forms of media to give the company a "heads up" when it comes to brand management and client relations. Similar processes can be set up to monitor social media. The information that is gathered can then be included in alerts already being

¹ Chester, S and Del Gobbo D, 2012 "How to create a Law Firm Social Media Policy" *Law Practice magazine* Vol 38, No.1
http://www.americanbar.org/publications/law_practice_magazine/2012/january_febbruary/how-to-create-a-law-firm-social-media-policy.html

sent out. In this way librarians can easily supply their clients with new information in a familiar form, and also establish the library as a reliable source of this type of media monitoring.

What is Twitter?

Founded in 2006, Twitter was originally intended to work using text messaging over mobile phones. This led to Twitter messages (known as "tweets") being limited to 140 characters, as this was the maximum length of a standard text message.² Originally Twitter was set up as a way to communicate with friends and acquaintances, but it quickly grew into a shared media space.

The mechanics of Twitter are quite simple. Anyone can sign up for a Twitter account; all it requires is a valid email address. Signing up requires using the standard Twitter webpage. In general, users are completely free to choose any name they want for their Twitter account. This has led to some users setting up accounts in the name of celebrities, so Twitter now enables people to "reclaim" Twitter accounts that are in their name. Twitter accounts can also be "verified" so you can be sure they are the person they claim to represent.³ Not all accounts are "verified" and Twitter does not, at this point, allow requests from the general public to have account verified. Twitter verifies accounts on an ongoing basis if they fall into the following categories "music, acting, fashion, government, politics, religion, journalism, media, advertising, business, and other key interest areas".⁴ You can tell if an account has been verified if

² Sarno,D, 2009, "Twitter creator Jack Dorsey illuminated the site's founding document. Part 1", The Los Angeles Times February 18, 2009

³ Twitter, FAQ's about Verified Accounts <https://support.twitter.com/groups/31-twitter-basics/topics/111-features/articles/119135-about-verified-accounts>

viewed 4th August 2012

⁴ ibid

it has a white tick on a blue background next to its name. If an account is not verified, do not assume that the account really belongs to the "named" owner.

Once an account is set up, the main means of communication is through posting a message, known as "tweeting". As these messages are limited in length, they tend to fall into two categories: short remarks or jokes, and messages that contain links to webpages of interest.

There are a number of ways to receive messages. The simplest is to "follow" a Twitter account. Following means subscribing to all the tweets a particular account produces. These will show up on the activity stream for your own Twitter account. So if you follow, for example, the ATO, Prime Minister Julia Gillard and your best friend, all the tweets from these people will appear in a single stream of information.

You can also search Twitter to retrieve tweets mentioning a specific topic. Originally this was somewhat limited to a narrow time range, but recently Twitter has incorporated broader search technology which enables it to go further back in time.

People who post tweets also frequently self-categorise their own messages. They do this through an ad-hoc method that developed in the user community, known as "hash-tags". For example, people posting tweets about Prime Minister Julia Gillard would, at the start of the tweet, type "#Gillard". This makes it easy to search for posts about these topics. Twitter monitors these searches, and will display, on its standard web interface, the most popular hash-tags based on posts and searches.

Another popular activity on Twitter is called "re-tweeting". This means that people who find or receive a tweet about a topic will repost that tweet with the acronym "RT" at the beginning of it, giving credit to the original poster. So, someone with a relatively small Twitter following may post a tweet, which will get re-tweeted by someone with a much larger following.

There are a number of “Twitter clients” available on PCs and mobile devices which allow users to monitor their twitter accounts and make actions such as re-tweeting simple and automatic. The simplicity of this action is contributing to the snowball effect you often find when tweets go viral. While using these tools is a good first step for anyone entering the Twitter universe (sometimes called the "Twitiverse"), there is specialised software which can help monitor Twitter for business purposes, a few of which we will look at later in this paper.

Why just Twitter?

Why concentrate on Twitter if it represents just a small part of the social media universe? The main reason for this is that Twitter combines two important characteristics: it is relatively easy to search (by design), and it is something of a central hub for social media.

Facebook, for example, is likely the locus of more activity than Twitter, but this activity is, for the most part, concealed and difficult to access. There are means of getting better access, but most of these involve writing Facebook apps, which is both complex, and in somewhat of a grey area as regards privacy and ethics.

Also, while people will use Facebook and Google+ as social media for communication with friends, Twitter is used more as a way to communicate opinions and join discussions about topical information, which may affect your organisation.

That doesn't mean by monitoring Twitter you will pick up everything that is happening within social media, but if you can only concentrate on one area of social media, then Twitter is the best area to choose.

Twitter research

Searching Twitter is like all research – you start by running a search for a key phrase, such as the name of your own organisation, then manually checking your results for any relevant tweets this search brings. Twitter has its own set of Boolean operators, which can be viewed on the Twitter search page; these operators are slightly different to the ones you might be used to using however they will allow you to achieve better search results⁵. Once you have found something of interest in the search results, the next step would be to check the Twitter account of the tweet to see what else may have been posted and to verify the account user (if necessary).

From here you will most likely find a number of hash tags, which in themselves can be searched and these hash tag will turn up more Twitter accounts you will need to research, so like all research it is a never ending task. All searches will lead you to a new term to search or Twitter account to follow, so it's easy to see how this kind of research, if done manually, can and will snowball into quite a large piece of work. Fortunately, there are tools that can help you deal effectively with this research. These tools are discussed under "Tools for monitoring Twitter" below.

Defining risk

AON Risk Services has suggested that social media now ranks in the top ten of potential risks facing modern businesses.⁶ But what exactly are these risks? In general terms we can characterise them as follows:

⁵ Twitter "Search page", <https://twitter.com/#!/search-home> viewed 15 August 2012.

⁶ AON, 2011, "Aon's Risk Survey exposes increasing anxiety amongst business leaders" <http://www.aon.com.au/australia/attachments/media-release/20110411-aon-risk-survey.pdf> viewed 4th August 2012

Internal risks: These stem largely from the engagement of staff in activities on social media where they appear to represent the organisation, but are in fact unmonitored and out of control. An example of this kind of risk happened with a major Australian law firm in 2011, where a group of employees established a Facebook group that was alleged to have denigrated female employees.⁷ Needless to say, this did not do the firm's reputation a lot of good.

External PR risks: These risks are quite similar to risks encountered in traditional media, except that they are far more generalised and likely to come from a wide range of sectors and situations. These risks would include negative commentary regarding a case a law firm is engaged with, or even be simply an unflattering or ambiguous picture of a law firm partner. An example of this kind of trouble occurred when the US fashion designer Kenneth Cole tweeted: "Millions are in uproar in #Cairo. Rumor is they heard our new spring collection is now available online at [http://bit.ly/KCairo -KC](http://bit.ly/KCairo-KC)". The company suffered a high degree of damage for making such a flippant remark about a serious social situation (the "Arab Spring" riots in Cairo).⁸

While this paper was being written, a similar event occurred after the July 2012 movie theatre shootings in Aurora, Colorado, when a British dress-shop tweeted that the word "Aurora" must be trending higher due to their Aurora dress range. Even though this was an innocent mistake, the small company received a lot of negative publicity.

⁷ Carson, V, 2011, "Legal firm Clayton Utz accused of sleazy practices" The Telegraph 01 July 2011, <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/sydney-news/legal-firm-clayton-utz-accused-of-sleazy-practices/story-e6freuzi-1226085185579>

⁸ Ehrlich, B, 2011, "Kenneth Cole's #Cairo Tweet Angers the Internet" *Mashable*, <http://mashable.com/2011/02/03/kenneth-cole-egypt/> viewed 11 August 2012

Breaches of confidentiality: Members of a law firm may not realise how much information they are supplying in a simple Twitter message. This could, for example, betray their location, which might enable people to track their activities in a manner which could lead to a breach of confidentiality. Similarly, casual remarks intended for a friend can easily be re-tweeted and become more general in distribution. One area where this has become a considerable problem outside law firms is with medical students, who have posted pictures of patients and made comments on Facebook pages.⁹

Reputational risks: The most serious reputational risks in social media seldom arise from direct events. Usually they are the result of attempts to respond to negative social media coverage, with inept users finding themselves wedged deeper and deeper into situations where a reasonable exit becomes almost impossible. A classic case of this occurred during and after the annual technology conference hosted by Wall Street Journal's AllThingsD division. The controversial Hollywood "super-agent" Ari Emmanuel was invited to attend the conference to speak about efforts to suppress piracy. During questioning after his interview, he called one of the leading technology journalists, Josh Topolsky, a "stupid idiot", then asked him aggressively "Who do you work for?". Later on Twitter one of the event's organisers, Wall Street Journal writer Kara Swisher, tried to deny Emmanuel had called Topolsky names. A number of journalists who attended the event affirmed that he had. Swisher then began telling people to just stop talking about the incident. This did nothing to stop the talk and in fact most likely just fuelled the fires.

⁹ Park, A, 2009, "Are med-student tweets breaching patient privacy?", The Times September 23 2009
<http://www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1925430,00.html>

While these are largely reactive incidents, there are times when Twitter has been used to actively embarrass a company. In July 2012 Shell experienced what has been termed a "social media oil spill".¹⁰ Shell was targeted by Greenpeace and The Yes Men, who set up fake websites and Twitter accounts pretending to be Shell. A fake campaign, titled "Let's Go! Arctic" was designed to show Shell as an unfeeling and unthinking oil company. The fake website was designed to mimic Shell's corporate site allowing members of the public to upload slogans to pictures of the Arctic with the "Lets Go!" Shell tagline on them.¹¹ Knowing about this kind of attack can give your organisation valuable time to formulate a response before the mainstream media pick up the story and clients start hearing about it.

Social Media policies

Unfortunately, you may still be asked to justify why you are spending time researching Twitter comments. This may be because your organisation does not realise the kind of information that is available through social media and may still think that it is all about "breakfast". However, these questions can lead you into a discussion about your organisation's social media policy or lack of one. Every organisation needs a clear statement of its principles in regards to social media. While responsibility for drawing up such a document may not and should not ultimately fall to law librarians, they can certainly contribute by doing some of the background research.

¹⁰ Moses, Asher, 2012, "Shell social media oil spill a 'coordinated online assassination'" The Age July 19 2012
<http://www.theage.com.au/technology/technology-news/shell-social-media-oil-spill-a-coordinated-online-assassination-20120719-22bpe.html>

¹¹ Greenpeace and The Yes Men, 2012, "Fake Shell website",
<http://arcticready.com/arctic> Viewed 21 July 2012

Before you start looking at social media it is worth having a look at a few big organisations' social media policies. This can give you a better understanding of how social media is being viewed and used by businesses. Two big companies that have publicly available social media policies are Telstra¹² and Coca-Cola.¹³ Both of these companies have clear policies outlining how and when it is appropriate for their employees to be using social media, how they should be representing their organisations, and what kind of information should be shared.

You may not be surprised to know that when it comes to law firms it was difficult to find a social media policy which is open to the public. However there are some great articles which you might want to suggest your management read, including, "How to create a Law Firm social media policy"¹⁴ which was produced by the American Bar Association. This article outlines why it is important to have a social media policy, stating "now that the use of social media is becoming so widespread, disengagement is not the answer" and going on to suggest reason why your organisation needs a policy. Michael Downey's article "Law Firm Online Activity policy"¹⁵ is also a great source. The article takes you through a sample online activity policy which cover all online firm-related activities, including anything posted on any site that contains the "firm's name, address, contact information,

¹² Telstra, "Social Media- Telstra's 3 Rs of social media engagement"
<http://www.telstra.com.au/abouttelstra/download/document/social-media-company-policy-final-150409.pdf?red=/at/m/d/smcpr150409pdf> viewed 28th July 2012

¹³ The Coca-Cola company, "Online social media principles"
<http://www.pamorama.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/TCCC-Online-Social-Media-Principles-12-2009.pdf> viewed 28th July 2012

¹⁴ Chester, S and Del Gobbo D, 2012 "How to create a Law Firm Social Media Policy" *Law Practice magazine* Vol 38, No.1
http://www.americanbar.org/publications/law_practice_magazine/2012/january_fbruary/how-to-create-a-law-firm-social-media-policy.html

¹⁵ Downey, M 2009, "Law firm online activity policy", *The Professional lawyer*, Vol.19 No.4.
http://www.alacapchap.org/resources/webinar0911_SocialNetworking.pdf

...email suffix or links to the firm's website".¹⁶ It is important that a social media policy distinguishes between what is happening in a work capacity and a personal capacity. A whole paper could be written on setting up a social media policy and whilst this paper does not deal with this matter in great detail; it is something that needs to be kept in mind whenever you are using social media in a business environment.

Assessing and reporting on Twitter

It's likely that virtually every law firm will encounter some negative social media every year. It may be that your firm has had to adopt a correct but unpopular stance on some issue, is defending a socially unpopular person or support measures that do not benefit everyone equally.

How do you know if a particular tweet poses a danger to your law firm? An obvious starting point is whether it says anything that is actually critical, negative or harmful. However, in any given month, there are bound to be quite a few such tweets, as it is impossible to keep everyone happy. The second thing to look at is just how popular any such tweet has become. Has it generated its own hash-tag? How many people have viewed the tweet, and how many have re-tweeted it?

What it all really comes down to, however, is how influential the person making the tweet is. Just as there is a big difference in the real world between something that is said by, say, the Attorney-General, and something said by your taxi-driver, so in the virtual world there are Twitter accounts with a great deal of influence and others with very little.

¹⁶ *ibid*

One word of warning about this: don't assume a direct mapping of influence between the virtual and non-virtual worlds. For example, where the Attorney-General might wield considerable influence with traditional media, it's unlikely her Twitter account is that influential. The most influential Twitter account that affects you may well be from some well-considered blogger whom you've never heard of.

So, how do you go about sorting all this out? One tool that can be used is a service named "Klout" (www.klout.com). Klout uses an algorithm to work out how influential each Twitter user is, based on a ranking from 1 to 100. This is based on metrics such as how many followers the user has, and how many of those followers, when the core user posts a link, actually visit the link, and how many subsequently re-tweet the link. An average Twitter user might have a Klout score of five or six. Well-known people such as US President Obama have a Klout score in the 80s.

These subtleties mean that reporting on Twitter activity requires more than just telling management that a tweet has been posted about such and such. You need to identify the source tweet, the reaction tweets, the hash-tags in use, the audience reach of the information, and the Klout scores of those principally involved. This is why, when it comes to this sort of reporting, that social media monitoring really needs to rely on librarians.

Tools for monitoring Twitter

While easy to use, the Twitter interface is not designed for media monitoring searching and does not have the ability to supply report about the information which is being produced about your organisation. Luckily there are a large number of tools available to help you monitor Twitter. These tools will allow you to keep track of all

your social media activities as well as any mention of your company or any issue which might be of interest. For the purposes of this discussion, this paper will look at two web-based services, Nimble and SproutSocial.

Nimble¹⁷

Nimble is a simple customer relationship management (CRM) tool designed to work with social media. It has a lot of functionality which is CRM related, which is not relevant to this discussion, however the social aspects of this site are very useful.

Nimble consolidates all your social activities into one single stream of information. While this paper concentrates on Twitter, you may decide to monitor other social networks as well and having a Nimble account already set up will allow you to view the activity from multiple social media platforms.

Nimble allows you to run basic Boolean searches these searches can then be saved and re-run at any time. Each search needs to be re-run separately and there is no functionality to view all results in a single stream. There is also no functionality to receive email alerts when new tweets are found, which does mean that searches would need to be run daily. It may be that this feature was deliberately left out, as the very nature of Twitter (with its large volume of information) does not lend itself well to email alerts. Depending on your search terms you may be receiving a new tweet every minute, so receiving emails would quickly become annoying and impractical.

When you find a tweet of interest you can view the account holder's details, which includes their biographical information and Klout score. This cuts down the need to spend time jumping between sites and can help you determine if you need to look any further. However if you need to verify an account you will need to do this in

¹⁷ Nimble, 2012, <http://www.nimble.com/>

the native Twitter interface, which is easily accessed by clicking on the account holders name.

This system is very basic, but it is easy to use and the saved searches are a great help. It also has the added advantage of offering a free single user account, which will assist if you are making a case to management to include social media as a source of information. There is also talk within the Nimble's forms of basic reports becoming available soon.

SproutSocial¹⁸

SproutSocial is different from Nimble in the fact that it bills itself as a "social media management company". Like Nimble, what you get is a tool that allows you to compile your social media accounts into one stream. SproutSocial refers to searching as "Brand Keywords" and at first it seems that is all you can search for are "keyword", however SproutSocial does offer basic Boolean searching. After adding your keywords you are given a view which allows you to see all the tweets your keyword/s have appeared. Unlike Nimble this system allows you to view all your search results in a single stream or choose to view one or two searches together.

If you are interested in a tweet you are able to click on the account holder's image, which gives you the account's Klout score and basic biographical information, much the same way that Nimble does. Just like Nimble SproutSocial does not allow you to see if the account is verified, once again you will need to go to the native Twitter interface.

SproutSocial also has the ability to produce reports which track your organisation's presence within social media, with information like who is following

¹⁸ SproutSocial, 2012, <https://sproutsocial.com/>

you, how many times your twitter account has been mentioned, how many people have re-tweeted your tweets and who has followed your links. These features are likely to be a useful tool if your organisation later decides to start using Twitter as a communication channel. There is no free version of SproutSocial, however with a 30 day trial it is worth having a look at, especially if your firm is going down the social media road.

Both of these tools give you the flexibility to save and re-run searches. They will also allow you to quickly analyse the Twitter account holder information which can help you to assess if the tweet is useful, dangerous or can be ignored. However it is important to keep in mind that there is no "wonder tool" that is going to solve your social media problems. These tools can help you to track and view Twitter however they are not going to do the work for you. Effective search strings still need to be devised, it would be almost pointless to set up a search for a hash tag. Topical hash tags change almost daily so while you may get a large volume of information for a few days, the chances of this information staying relevant are small. By choosing keywords carefully and which are relevant to your organisation, you will come across hash tags and conversations which you might never have seen otherwise. Social media research, like all research fits into the skill set that librarians have. These tools can help make the job of monitoring twitter become just another part of the day with Twitter becoming just another source of information.

Conclusion

This paper has not attempted to and really can not cover everything that you could know about Twitter. What it has attempted to do is give you an overview of the

issues which need to be considered when moving into this space. Twitter is only going to get bigger and the sooner organisations recognise and accept that Twitter is not going anywhere, the better placed they will be to move forward with this new information source. It is an easy and natural step for law librarians to use Twitter to track the reputations, interests and the general opinions of our organisations. By actively involving the library in the Twitterverse, librarians can help assert the relevance of this information, as well as making it clear that we are able and willing to engage with new technology. Twitter does still have a lot of information that is chatter, but there is also a large amount of substantial and relevant information, which when found can help to build and protect your organisation.

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