

twitter



Access to Information Unit

Twitter Policy

August 2010

This document describes why and how we intend to establish and manage a corporate presence on Twitter for the Access to Information Unit.

INTRODUCTION

Twitter is a 'microblogging' platform which allows users to post short text messages (up to 140 characters in length) and converse with other users via their phones or web browsers.

Unlike email or text messaging on cellular phones, these conversations take place in the open. The medium is experiencing a phenomenal adoption curve in the USA and slowly gaining traction in Jamaica, the region and other parts of the world. It is currently being used increasingly by government departments including the Office of the Prime Minister, media houses (both print and electronic) a number of our stakeholders as well as millions of businesses, non-government organizations and individuals.

The major advantage of Twitter is that it is free to use with a relatively low impact on resources and has the potential to deliver many benefits in support of our communication objectives. It allows people to “follow” other persons or groups mainly for links to content and to stay abreast with the content distributed by a peer group. Twitter also has a strong ‘viral’ capacity, with people redistributing significant and interesting links to content.

Why Twitter?

- It is a place where news often breaks - e.g. State of Emergency, accidents etc
- It is establishing itself as the main source of live update information – e.g. safety and travel information; school closures during the heavy rains; spread and prevention of H1N1etc.
- Trending: As everything being discussed on Twitter is by its nature, current and developing, it is increasingly being used as a way of monitoring and reporting on trends. Top trends are shown on the right hand side of every Twitter user’s stream, and tracked by other tools (e.g. Retweetist, Twitturly and Twitvision). Unfortunately this is only done on either a worldwide basis, select countries such as USA, Canada, Brazil and Mexico and major US States.

- Search Engine Optimisation – because it is updated frequently, Twitter content ranks highly on Google, and is therefore an increasingly important way to generate traffic and disseminate messages online.

Twitter usage

Nielsen statistics from February 2009 at <http://www.twistimage.com/blog/archives/the-rapid-growthof-twitter-with-the-stats-to-prove-it/> include the following:

- 1,382% year-over-year growth. Total unique visitors grew from 475,000 in February 2008 to seven million in February 2009.
- Twitter is not just for children: In February 2009, adults ages 35-49 had the largest representation on Twitter - almost 3 million unique visitors from this age group (almost 42% of the entire audience).
- 62% of the audience access Twitter from work only, while only 35% access it only from home. This could suggest a trend towards professional use.

In terms Hits, statistics from the site, <http://weblogs.hitwise.com/>, notes that:

- Twitter is becoming an important source of Internet traffic for many sites, and the amount of traffic it sends to other websites has increased 30-fold over the last 12 months. Almost 10% of Twitter's downstream traffic goes to News and Media websites, 17.6% to entertainment websites, 14.6% goes to social networks, 6.6% to blogs and 4.5% to online retailers.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Units Twitter account are to:

1. Extend reach of existing corporate messages online (e.g. news, speeches, web updates, YouTube videos) by building relationships with relevant audiences including intermediaries, stakeholders, and key influencers such as journalists and bloggers.
2. Provide an informal, 'human' voice of the organization to promote comprehension of and engagement with our corporate messages.
3. Provide additional, low-barrier methods for audiences to interact with the Unit to provide feedback, seek help and suggest ideas.
4. Monitor online mentions of the Unit, engaging with our critics and key influencers to resolve problems/dissatisfaction.

5. Provide immediate update and feedback on dates and upcoming developments. These include expos, sensitization sessions, media mentions particularly in the print media and alert followers to new ATI Principal Officers and Responsible Officers.
6. Promote debate; provide thought leadership and credibility, increasing our visibility as the experts in our remit within the online space.
7. Promote knowledge of and use and application of the Access to Information Act (2002) among the general public.
8. Under the current economic climate, demonstrate an ability to utilize cost effective, low maintenance means of interacting with our publics.

RESOURCES

The resource impact of running a Twitter account is very low, relative to other channels and will be regarded as an add-on to the usual day-to-day operations of the Unit. Updates will be made from the machines in the Unit and the web browser contained within. When expressly permitted or directed to do so, the Public Education Manager will be allowed to make updates outside of official office times and location.

RISKS AND LIMITATIONS

The Unit is also cognizant of the limitations and inherent risks in the use of social networking platforms such as Twitter. However these are dwarfed by the many opportunities that they present.

1. Ensuring and maintaining the accuracy of the information or publishing tweets containing factual or grammatical errors.
2. Technical security of the Twitter account and potential for hacking.
3. There is a limit in terms of content and delivery as tweets are restricted to 140 characters which means messages are confined to one sentence or phrase. Extended messages must therefore be broken down into follow up tweets which may compromise the effectiveness of the message.
4. Criticism of jumping on the bandwagon, wasting of public time and resources in a medium meant for the young and 'attention-deprived,' counter to the corporate image of a government body.
5. Though rare and brief, lack of availability due to Twitter being over capacity occurs from time to time.

Channel Management:

1. The Twitter avatar will at all times be the Unit's logo.
2. Though the account will be anonymous (i.e. no named officials will be running it) it is helpful to define a hypothetical 'voice' and tone so that tweets are presented in a consistent tone.
3. While all members should have and know the Twitter user name and password, all Tweets are to be made by the Public Education Manager in consultation with and/or the approval of the Unit's Director - unless another member of staff is so directed.
4. The Profile information will include and remain:
 - Name – ATI Unit
 - Location – Kingston, Jamaica
 - Web – www.ati.gov.jm
 - Bio - The Unit has been established to spearhead and guide the implementation and administration of the Access to Information Act (2002).
5. The background image may be changed occasionally to keep it fresh but this is to remain sober and neutral where possible. Soft and earth tones are to be used and not graphically distracting or elaborate. These will also be selected from among the defined Twitter background options.

PASSWORD

The password is to be known by all members of the Unit. Any change of password is to be made or directed by the Director of the Unit and communicated to the Public Education Manager and sent to all members of staff. Passwords must remain 'strong' at all times.

CONTENT PRINCIPLES

Content for twitter will comprise a mix regular business communications as well as content produced exclusively for Twitter.

All job openings at the Unit will be posted on Twitter.

All office closures, both for public holidays and extra-ordinary events (i.e. civil unrest).

- **Videos on Youtube and photos on Facebook** – alerting our Twitter followers to new media content on our other digital outposts.
- **Other website updates** - new or updated sections on www.ati.gov.jm.

- **Thought leadership (or “link blogging”)** - highlighting relevant research, events, awards etc elsewhere on the web related Access regimes locally and globally, to position the Unit as a thought leader.

- **Asking and answering questions** – occasionally, we may be able to ask questions of our Twitter followers for immediate user insight or to conduct a ‘straw poll’ on behalf of a specific policy area. More often, we will answer questions put to us via Twitter from our followers. These answers will be visible to all our followers, not just the person who asked them.

Social networking etiquette guides suggest that while submitting our own news and articles to networking sites is acceptable, social news is about reciprocal relationships and so we should also engage, contribute and share knowledge within the communities in which we are established. This may also help generate a better response to our own posts.

Content for our Twitter channel will be:

- **Varied:** The channel will cover a broad base of content types and sources to retain interest levels.

- **Human:** Users may be dismissive of the regurgitation of press release headlines. While corporate in message, the tone of our Twitter channel must therefore be informal spoken English, human-edited and – for the most part - written/paraphrased for the channel.

- **Frequent:** We would expect to tweet around twice a week.

- **Timely:** in keeping with the ‘zeitgeist’ feel of Twitter, our tweets will be about issues of relevance today or events/opportunities coming soon.

- **Credible:** while tweets may occasionally be ‘fun’, we should ensure we can defend their relation back to our objectives. Where possible there should be an actual link to related content.

- **Inclusive:** in keeping with the knowledge-sharing culture of social media, the Unit should pursue opportunities to note relevant content elsewhere and re-tweet messages from stakeholders and other government departments. Exclusive use of Twitter for self-promotion can lead to criticism.

Reactive re-tweeting

We may occasionally be asked to re-tweet content from other Twitter users. We will consider these on a case by case basis but generally aim to honour such requests on relevant topics.

In the interest of commercial propriety and competitiveness we will not honour requests from profit-making organizations.

Link Shortening

Unless they are already very short URLs in tweets will be shortened using the link compressing site, ***tinyurl.com***, or any such service with may provide equal of better service.

Proactive re-tweeting

We should actively use opportunities to re-tweet content that helps position the Unit as a filter of information and inclusive/supportive of stakeholders.

As such we may wish to consider re-tweeting interesting content in our own twitter stream, including:

- Research findings and statistics
- Relevant industry / business networking events
- Relevant celebrations/commemorations e.g. awards, themed days (e.g. International Right to Know Day)

Use of Existing Content

- **News releases, speeches and statements published on the web** - the headlines of news releases, speeches and statements. Depending on subject matter and length, these may be paraphrased to fit within 140 characters. **All** press releases, speeches and statements will be mentioned on Twitter unless there is a reason not to.
- **Marketing campaign messages** - information about events we are running or attending or campaign materials we want to disseminate online.

Political Campaigns/Elections

We will at no time, election or otherwise, actively or in any other way support any political party, carry or endorse campaign messages, slogans or agenda.

FOLLOWING

If persons follow **@atiunitjamaica** we will not automatically follow back. This is to discourage the use of direct messaging, avoid resource wasting and spamming. This will make it easier for others to identify other key Twitter users that we think are relevant to our industry and government in who we follow. However, being followed by the Unit does not imply endorsement of any kind.

As part of the initial channel launch we will actively follow other relevant organizations and professionals. We will not initiate contact by following individuals or personal users.

Availability

We will update and monitor our Twitter account during office hours 8:30 am-5:00 pm, Monday to Thursday and 8:30-4:00 pm on Fridays. Twitter may occasionally be unavailable and we will not accept responsibility for lack of service due to Twitter downtime. Based on the nature of the circumstances, updates may be made outside of these days/hours.

@Replies and Direct Messages

We welcome feedback and ideas from all our followers, and endeavour to join the conversation where possible. However, we will not be able to reply individually to all the messages we receive via Twitter.

**Adapted from the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) UK
Twitter Policy, updated February 2010**