

SAYING THAT TWITTER HAS GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH THE NEWS BUSINESS IS ABOUT AS MISGUIDED AS YOU COULD BE

BY ALAN RUSBRIDGER

1. It's an amazing form of distribution

Don't be distracted by the 140-character limit, a lot of the best tweets are links. It's instantaneous. Its reach can be immensely far and wide. That has profound implications for our economic model, never mind the journalism.

2. It's where things happen first

There are millions of human monitors out there who will pick up on the smallest things and who have the same instincts as the agencies – to be the first with the news.

3. As a search engine, it rivals Google

Google is limited to using algorithms to ferret out information. Twitter harnesses the mass capabilities of human intelligence to the power of millions in order to find information that is new, valuable, relevant or entertaining.

4. It's a formidable aggregation tool

If you are following the most interesting people they will bring you the most interesting information. No news organisation could possibly aim to match, or beat, the combined power of all those worker bees collecting information and disseminating it.

5. It's a great reporting tool

Many of the best reporters are now habitually using Twitter as an aid to find information. The so-called wisdom of crowds comes into play: the 'they know more than we do' theory.

6. It's a fantastic form of marketing

I only have 70 000 followers. But if I get re-tweeted by one of our columnists, Charlie Brooker, I instantly reach a further 478 000. If Guardian Technology pick it up it goes to an audience of 1.6 million. If Stephen Fry notices it, it's global.

7. It's a series of common conversations. Or it can be

It's not transmission, it's communication. It's the ability to share and discuss with scores, or hundreds, or thousands of people in real time. It's a parallel universe of common conversations.

8. It's more diverse

Traditional media allowed a few voices in. Twitter allows anyone.

9. It changes the tone of writing

A good conversation involves listening as well as talking. There is, obviously, more brevity. There's more humour. More mixing of comment with fact. It's more personal.

10. It's a level playing field

The energy in Twitter gathers around people who can say things crisply and entertainingly, even though they may be unknown.

11. It has different news values

What seems obvious to journalists in terms of the choices we make is quite often markedly different from how others see it – both in terms of the things we choose to cover and the things we ignore. The power of tens of thousands of people articulating those different choices can wash back into newsrooms.

12. It has a long attention span

Set your Tweetdeck to follow a particular keyword or issue or subject and you may well find that the attention span of Twitterers puts newspapers to shame. They will be ferreting out and aggregating information on the issues that concern them long after the caravan of professional journalists has moved on.

13. It creates communities

Or, rather communities form themselves around particular issues, people, events, artefacts, cultures, ideas, subjects or geographies. They may be temporary communities, or long-term ones, strong ones or weak ones, but they are recognisably communities.

14. It changes notions of authority

Instead of waiting to receive the 'expert' opinions of others – mostly us, journalists – Twitter shifts the balance to 'peer to peer' authority.

15. It is an agent of change

Companies are already learning to respect, even fear, the power of collaborative media. Increasingly, social media will challenge conventional politics and, for instance, the laws relating to expression and speech.



Jonathan Jones