November 2009

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Recommended Citation

Ferguson, Cris (2009) "Technology Left Behind -- All Aboard the Twitter Train," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 21: Iss. 5, Article 40.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.2676>

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Technology Left Behind — All Aboard the Twitter Train

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Created by software architect **Jack Dorsey** in 2006, **Twitter** (<http://twitter.com/>) is a micro-blogging service that allows users to post messages of limited length to the Web. **Twitter** asks users to answer one simple question: What are you doing? The idea for the service grew out of **Dorsey's** desire to be able to find out what his friends and family were up to. The site launched publicly in August of 2006, and quickly grew in popularity. In May 2007, **Twitter Incorporated** was born. The service currently has over six million users, but has yet to turn a profit (<http://twitter.com/about#about>).

Tweeting Basics

Twitter posts, also called tweets, are limited to 140 characters, including spaces. **Twitter** accepts message from the Web, text message, instant message, and several other methods, enabling users to update their **Twitter** status from just about anywhere.

Because of the limited number of characters, linking conventions have been developed to help **Twitter** users connect with each other and keep track of their posts. To respond to another user's post, you place the @ sign followed by the user's **Twitter** name at the beginning of the post. Your reply will appear in the user's profile. Similarly, you can mention another user in a post using the same convention (@username), but in the middle of a post, rather than at the beginning.

Hash tags, which begin with the # character, can be used to group tweets on common topic. For example, conference organizers of this year's **Special Libraries Association Annual Conference**, set up a hash tag (#sla2009) to facilitate communication among attendees. (Smith)

Another useful Twittering tool to be aware of is the use of tiny URLs. When posting URLs in a tweet it is very easy to exceed the 140 character limit. Many **Twitter** users take advantage of **TinyURL** (<http://tinyurl.com/>) and similar services that take a long, unwieldy URL and translate it into a much shorter, easier to use URL.

If you are interested in tracking what a particular **Twitter** user is doing or saying, you can sign up to follow his or her tweets. By the same token, other users may follow your posts. Similar to **Facebook**, users can, if they choose, block people from viewing their content by "protecting" their tweets. Unprotected **Twitter** posts are available on the Web, open for all to see.

Really, Who Isn't On Twitter?

Just about every type of library and library affiliated organization can be found on **Twitter**: public, academic and special libraries, librarians,

publishers, library related conferences, vendors, and authors. The format and functionalities of the **Twitter** service particularly lend it to use by libraries. 1) It's free to use, so there are no expenses to incur. 2) It's brief. Unlike blogs and **Facebook** accounts, which can take more time to keep up to date and administer, **Twitter** posts can be crafted in just a few minutes. 3) It's easy to use. Setting up an account takes only a few minutes, and posting is relatively intuitive.

In the June issue of *Library Journal*, **Sonja Cole** (@bookwink) lists 20 ways in which libraries can take advantage of **Twitter**. **Cole's** suggestions cover a wide range of possibilities, such as starting a **Twitter** book club; recommending books, movies, or other resources for patrons; posting links to library Web pages and events; or providing a daily tip on how to use a library resource.

Jenny Colvin, the Music Librarian at **Furman University**, uses **Twitter** to keep in touch with her patrons. She created a **Twitter** account for the **Maxwell Music Library** at **Furman University** (@fumuslib) in July 2009. At the beginning of October @fumuslib had around 40 followers, the majority of which are **Furman** music students. Other followers include music libraries at other institutions, music vendors such as **Naxos**, and **Furman** professors.

Colvin primarily uses the account to push information out to her patrons. She posts at least once a week, and focuses her tweets on items that are relevant to her Music Library patrons. For example, she has in the past tweeted about events at a local music store, new library acquisitions, and musical performances occurring on campus.

In addition to **Twitter**, **Colvin** also maintains a Music Library blog and a **Facebook** page for the Music Library. She has imbedded her **Twitter** account in the Music Library

Facebook page, so that as she tweets, she is simultaneously updating the **Facebook** page. **Colvin** notes that since she has begun posting updates to **Twitter**, she posts to **Facebook** and the blog less often. Where with **Facebook** and the blog she felt the need to compose longer, more detailed posts, **Twitter** allows her to post

brief messages of only one or two sentences. She can still connect with users, but can do so much more quickly.

It is interesting to note that, in addition to the Music Library **Twitter**, **Colvin** has two personal accounts, one dedicated to the books she reads and another for her baking hobby. For **Colvin** it was important to separate each of her interests into separate accounts to give her tweets some focus and direction. She felt that merging the content and all of her interests into

one **Twitter** account would muddy the waters and distract from the purpose of her tweets.

Tweet Your Way Through Charleston

This year the **Charleston Conference** has incorporated **Twitter** into its communication with conference attendees. Managed by **Leah Hinds**, Research Editor for *Against the Grain* and Assistant Director for the **Charleston Conference Twitter** account can be followed at @chsconf. The account was launched in September 2009, and **Hinds** strives to post something at least once every work day. Like **Colvin**, **Hinds** has set up the **Charleston Conference Twitter** to update the **CC Facebook** page. Says **Hinds**, "We can post one time and have the information displayed in both places." **Hinds'** tweets mostly consist of announcements regarding the conference. However, she has also posted links to blog posts or articles mentioning the conference's Plenary Speakers, as well as information about the **Francis Marion Hotel**, where the conference will be held.

Followers of the **Charleston Conference Twitter** account are an even mix of librarians and vendors, almost all of which are conference attendees. The main purpose of the account, says **Hinds**, is to provide a place for conversation during the Conference, and she expects more content to come later, during and after the conference. "We will email conference attendees with a hash tag to tweet the conference, #chsconf09, and have lined up a couple of the Student Interns to monitor the feed," she explained.

Home, Tweet Home

Recently, I hopped on the **Twitter** train myself, creating a **Twitter** account for this column. Technology Left Behind's home on **Twitter** is @tlbatg.

I had a **Twitter** account for less than a week, before I found myself in a tiny **Twitter** controversy. One of my very first posts highlighted the **RefWorks** Alumni program, which allows alumni of an academic institution perpetual access to **RefWorks**. I included in my post a link to the FAQ on the **RefWorks** site (<https://www.refworks.com/content/products/alumni/faqs.asp>). In less than 24 hours a **RefWorks** trainer had posted a response to my post, letting me know that I had linked to an old FAQ and had consequently posted some inaccurate information (<http://www.refworks-cos.com/alumni-program/faqs-user.html>).

I felt a little embarrassed for having been called out. (In my defense, I found my information by following the links to the Alumni program on the **RefWorks** Website. It's not my fault the site wasn't up to date.) In return, I posted a message thanking the trainer for the update, and mentioned that **RefWorks** might want to update its own site.

I did learn a valuable lesson from all this.

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Something to Think About— A Haunted Computer?

Column Editor: **Mary E. (Tinker) Massey** (Serials Librarian, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Jack R. Hunt Library) <masse36e@erau.edu>

Sometimes I sneak into my work area earlier than usual to understand the nature of my computer. When I leave in the afternoon, I shut the computer down and expect it to remain down until I arrive at 7:30 AM. To my surprise, the computer is dancing with lights that enunciate its name — **Dell**, before I come in. Even at seven, the lights are frolicking across the screen. I think if there was a second screen, they would be talking to each other. How is this machine cranking up so early by itself, when I shut it down at night? Well...this is a small problem, so I ignore it and sign in for the day. One annoying problem is that incoming messages I save to one file appear in another file more often than I wish or can control. What's that about? On occasion, I hit the button to save a message and it has disappeared completely. Is that normal? Then, there are those days when the computer decides to stop in the middle of everything I am doing. I try all the escapes, controls, deletes, and whatever is on the keyboard, but nothing and no combinations work. It just stares at me! Other people come and try their magic, but their sorcery doesn't work either. I do other non-computer activities and eventually return to my chair to find that the computer has cleared itself and is functioning again. Viruses and Trojans come and go...and yet the computer defies everyone. It has a definite personality and likes to play games. I'm just not sure I have time to do that while trying to get my normal work done.

You know, this reminds me of a computer back in the eighties that I used to visit in our communal computer room. Sometimes serials have specific convoluted search methods for finding them on **OCLC**, at least it did in those days. Well...I spent a little time sitting in front of the computer trying to design that specific search pattern when I looked up and saw on the screen, "Message unclear." Not wanting to have my mind read any further, I got up and left the room without the search being done. When I returned to our unit so quickly, I was asked why. I answered, "That computer reads my mind. If I go back in there, I'll use another computer instead. No way do I want computers trying to find my path before I locate it myself!"

Now, my desk phone takes messages and sometimes hides them. I'm supposed to get a red light, but sporadically that doesn't happen. Funny thing is, my mobile phone picks and chooses my messages that are available and others I can get a week later if the phone releases them. I'm beginning to think that machines have a lot of fun with me. One of my cars years ago blew a plug and we had to grind down a dime to make it run. I've had toasters that used to throw the completed toast a couple of feet in the air. This problem might be inherited, as my mother's pressure cooker blew its jig-gler and spewed pea soup all over the kitchen ceiling. Her sewing machines used to throw fits and the kitchen

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Tweets are truly open to everyone. People you don't know will find you. So, be forewarned. Don't post anything that you aren't willing for everyone in the world to see.

I plan to use this **Twitter** account in the same way I do this column, highlighting new technologies and their applications within libraries. If you have any ideas, feel free to tweet me. I'd love to hear from you.

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stove my Dad picked out for my Mom never would work right for her, too hot/too cold/intermittent?

What do you think? Are there rogue machines that cause difficulties in our lives or are there explanations that will some day make sense of all this? Is it me? I have had problems in my youth wearing watches with metal straps. They die of magnetism early in life and no changing of batteries or any other mechanism will make them work on my wrist. The best I could do in those days was a plastic coated watch or a pocket watch, hence the jeans I used to wear in the 70's. Do you have problems with some machines...unexplainable ones? I have decided that a little pat on the head of my illustrious dancing computer goes a long way to having it work properly. I say goodbye and hello in the morning, try a little conversation during the day, and give it recreation time doing Majhong at lunch. We are testing out a workable contract. How about you? My coworkers say I have a haunted computer, but I think it's just lonely. Perhaps we may have some kind of bad triangle in my corner of the room? Do you have some technology in your office with problems? I'm not sure whether to think too long or hard about this one! 🌻

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Acknowledgements

My thanks to **Leah Hinds** (leah@katina.info) and **Jenny Colvin** (jenny.colvin@furman.edu) for their kind assistance and willingness to answer my questions. 🌻

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