

A guide to using Twitter

What is it?

Twitter (<https://twitter.com/>) is a mini blogging site which allows people to post updates about their daily life and engage in online conversations with other people using twitter.

It is very successfully used as a networking tool, a campaigning and lobbying tool and a marketing tool.



Why should Ramblers groups use it?

Twitter is designed to share information and have conversations with likeminded people. It's perfect for the Ramblers because we can share our passion about walking and the outdoors. People use twitter for real voices and real views, so we can let our love of rambling shine through and allow people to tap directly into our activity, e.g. chat about walking with walk leaders, or the amount of work that goes into clearing paths.

Is it complicated to use?

Not at all. It really is simple to use, once you understand the basic concepts. You do need to think about a few things before you start using it though.

Firstly, think about why you are using it. Don't bog yourself down in rules or strategies, but consider the objective of twitter as you would any particular communication channel. Who you want to communicate with and what you want to achieve from it? This will help you to set up your account details much more easily and who to follow. See the **Objectives** section for more on this.

Secondly, the point of twitter is that people can make real-time updates and have an online conversation. This means that people can be tweeting regularly, up to many times a day. They want to have regular conversations with you and won't wait at your convenience. You shouldn't use it if you are only going to use it intermittently, nor should you use it only when wanting to post something about the group. It's about conversations so check messages and reply to people who have started conversations with you. See the **Tips for how to use twitter effectively** section for more.

Finally, there is very little privacy on Twitter! Everyone can see your tweets - always bear this in mind. Even if you reply to a tweet from an individual, this will appear in your live feed. If you need to contact someone privately make sure you use the 'direct message' option. Think of Twitter the same way you would think of any public forum or media tool – it is no different from making a statement to the national press or on the radio, in fact many journalists use Twitter to find material for their news stories and will see this is an official view from the organisation.

Objectives

Twitter is a communication tool like any other, and you should think about why you want to use it in the same way you would when considering using any channel - be it a press release, magazine article, web story, newsletter article etc.

Do you want to use it as a networking tool? For example you may be a walk leader who wishes to connect up with other leaders across GB to share ideas and tips.

Or do you want to use twitter as a marketing tool to promote the group walks you are leading?

Or do you want to use it as a campaigning tool to raise awareness about rights of way and access issues?

Audiences

These depend on the objectives. If you want to network, then your audiences are like-minded

people. If you want to market your activity you will be wishing to target those who enjoy outdoor recreation and other outdoors organisations who have members. If you want to raise awareness of a campaign, you may wish to target activists, media, politicians etc.

Resource

All of the above takes resource. So remember that whilst it is free and straight-forward to use, it still needs considerable effort to use it well, i.e. resource in terms of time, personnel/manpower and planning processes... you might want to identify a key person who has that time to give to manage the account.

The Practicalities

Start off by reading Twitter's own guidance – the basics will cover most of what you need as a new tweeter: <https://support.twitter.com>.

Setting up an account

Follow Twitter's instructions which will take you through the process step by step. It will suggest followers and explain everything to you.

When you set up your twitter account use the Ramblers official branding and the material you have used on your website; you don't need to reinvent the wheel.

As soon as you set up an account tweet @RamblersGB to say hello, so we can add you to our local group list and you can start networking with other groups.

Username/ Twitter handle @

Use a name which other people will immediately understand, e.g. HantsRamblers or HantsWalks not HA03RA. Think about how walkers might search for you if they were looking for you on twitter – they won't necessarily know how you internally label your group.

Also try to keep it short. Twitter has a character limit and you don't want to make it harder for other people to re-tweet your information when your name takes up half the tweet!

Bio and Image

Upload a friendly image which represents you as a group, for example people walking or mending paths. It's off-putting not to use an image.

Make sure you put in your bio that you are part of the Ramblers and a bit about your group. At the very least add a link to your group website in the bio, or if you don't have a website, add the Ramblers website.

Twitter's menu:

ME: A place where you manage your account and profile

CONNECT: A place where you manage the conversations you have with people

DISCOVER: A place where you discover new people and conversations

HOME: A place where you manage your feed – i.e. the messages from all your followers updating by the minute

Starting to tweet

1. Follow @RamblersGB and use its public lists to follow staff and volunteers:
 - Ramblers staff: <https://twitter.com/RamblersGB/rambler-tweeters/members>
 - Ramblers groups: <https://twitter.com/RamblersGB/local-ramblers-groups/members>
2. Retweet (RT) the @RamblersGB tweets and any other tweets you find interesting.

3. Search other people, learn from them, and generally have a play. Follow people who you find interesting and who may share Ramblers views/interests. In all likelihood they will then start following you. Have a look at other organisations' public lists to identify like-minded followers.
4. Have a look at the way other people tweet and learn from them – you will soon find your own voice. It's best to make your tweets interesting and relevant to you, i.e. personal, not just bland referrals to websites or news reports. If you are a group then try to tweet in the third person, i.e. use 'we' instead of 'I', unless you are tweeting as an individual walk leader or path warden.
5. Remember that you are representing the Ramblers local group. Don't use it as a soapbox to pursue your own agenda – you can set up your own non Ramblers twitter account for that! The views on your Ramblers group twitter account will be seen as official Ramblers views, so if stick to topics that are Ramblers agreed policies and themes that would interest potential new members to your group, as identified in your objectives.
6. Start having conversations with people – i.e. direct a tweet to them – either by replying to one of their tweets which you like, or by tweeting them something you think they might find interesting. Tailor these tweets though, don't spam people. For example if someone uploads an image of a walk in your area, tweet them with as compliment of the photo and ask them their favourite local walk. Once you start chatting you could highlight your group's walks on walks finder or your local website. Remember the tweet will appear in your live feed and will be seen by all your followers.

Tips for how to use twitter effectively

Have conversations with people

Social media was not designed to be a one-way street, so don't just broadcast messages. The whole point is to share and have a conversation with people. This means people will very quickly filter out what they perceive as sales pitches or advertising and anything too formal in tone. Talk as if you are talking to a friend, although remember to remain professional as you are representing an organisation.

When you are saying something which you think other people will be interested in, or you want to promote a Ramblers story then include the usernames of these people in your tweet. They will hopefully re-tweet you to their followers, thus increasing exposure and potentially increasing your followers.

e.g. RamblersBob might tweet: @RamblersGB and @healthywalks visiting @SwanseaRamblers today to find out about their path work: www.x*.co

Be responsive

If someone asks you a question try to answer it. At the very least point them to @RamblersGB or the Ramblers website. Your way to success is to engage with people. Check your private messages (Direct Messages) as people will contact you that way when they don't want the conversation to be public.

Be open and engaging

Try to use language that does not assume any prior knowledge and be concise.

Don't use *"PROW"*, use *"public path"*

Don't use *"I am leading a walk with X Ramblers from grid refence car park to X public house [URL]"*, use *"We're looking forward to enjoying the Thames Path this weekend – come along for 5 miles starting 10am [URL]"*

Direct people to our website

Remember that in most cases you are using twitter to get someone to take an action, be it from the low-key conversing with you on a networking basis, to the higher level action, such as attending a walk or signing a petition. It is therefore important to include website URLs if you want someone to do something – give them the pertinent info and then point them to the website for more info.

For example the tweet below is an excellent way of highlighting a weekend group walk:

What sort of animals will you see on your weekend #Rambles? The Sunday walk from #Whipsnade may add a touch of the safari to the day.

... but it would have been even better had there been a link to the walk details on Ramblers online Walks Finder as there is a higher chance of people visiting our website and actually attending the walk:

What sort of animals will you see on your #walkweekend? Our Whipsnade walk may add a touch of the safari to the day: www.ramblers.org.uk/walksfinder...

Hashtags #

You'll note in the example above that there are words with a hashtag in front of. These are the way in which Twitter files content. Often people will search for a keyword and the hashtag is used as a way to sort this information.

It's worthwhile including these as a way of reaching out to new people – e.g. if you add #walkweekend to one of your tweets, when people search for that, your tweet will be highlighted

You can also tag your tweets to those tweeting on similar subjects, essentially joining a conversation. For example search for #walkweekend #nationaltrails and see how people are using these hashtags. Have a think about how much more powerful your tweets could be if you added #walkweekend onto some of your weekend tweets – lots more people will see these tweets then, not just your followers.

However, don't use more than a few per tweet – it's overkill and can make tweets illegible.

Sharing images and words

Images are very popular. Consider posting images from walks to either get people sharing their walks, talking about their walks, or attending your next group walk. Alternatively posting images of spring flowers, nice sunsets, river scenes etc, make people smile and comment. This at the very least raises your profile and makes a user have an emotional reaction – hopefully a good one!

People love quotes

Check out #quote. It's sometimes worthwhile to share a walking quote particularly if it resonates with your own passion, however use them liberally as otherwise it's annoying. People want to hear your views, not read quotes all the time. Make them pertinent.

Automatic feeds

Don't set up automatic feeds to individuals unless you know and trust what they tweet. You can set up automatic feeds to other brand tweeters within Ramblers eg. Ramblers Cymru, Scotland, GB etc.

Spam and hacking

Spammers exist, so take care. There are a lot of fake accounts pushing unidentifiable links which can give you viruses or take you to undesirable websites. However spammers are not that intelligent and pretty easy to spot! They use very similar techniques, e.g. a message saying 'OMG I can't believe you shared this video of me' and a link to a website. Easy rule of thumb – if you don't know the recipient or the website, don't follow the link! Delete it and if you think it is spam then block the account.

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Sometimes people will get hacked which means the spammer is using their account to send spam – in this instance, don't block the person if you know they are genuine, just message them to say they have been hacked. They will then take the necessary steps. Messaging them will not hack you – you can only be hacked if you follow a dodgy link.

If you are hacked and someone tells you that you are sending spam, do not close down your account. Usually just changing your password will resolve the issue. See Twitter's @spam for more advice.

Terminology

Tweet

The term used to refer to a post, e.g. Jenny is going to tweet about a walk; Jenny tweeted about her group walk

RT

Retweet is a term used for when someone wants to share someone else's tweet – there is a mechanism within Twitter that allows you to do this, which is somewhat like forwarding an email.

MT

Modified Tweet – when you wish to re-tweet someone's tweet but add some more info of your own on

Tweeps / Tweeter

People who use twitter

@

The @ handle is someone's username e.g. @RamblersGB

#

Hashtags are a way of people organising information. They can be used to attract new followers, highlight an issue or track engagement with an event e.g. #walkweekend #walkwednesday #walkweek #nationaltrails #volunteer

DM

Direct Message, aka Private Message. Represented by the little envelope, the message also shows blue and says it is a Private Message which means it will not appear in your public feed.

Other Resources

Twitter's help guide: <https://support.twitter.com/>

Best practise: <http://www.growmap.com/twitter-best-practices/>

Find out how to use lists: <http://jobmob.co.il/blog/twitter-lists/> and get list info on Listorious: <http://listorious.com/>