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Understanding Twitter

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The world seems to be divided into two groups of people: those who "get" Twitter, and those who don't. I say this because whenever the use of Twitter comes up in a conversation, those who shout loudest are the ones who say "I don't get Twitter." This group often contains people who have a Twitter account—but have found it difficult—and not tried it further than setting it up and leaving it at that. I am not sure what they expected to happen. Maintaining a Twitter account is not without effort. However, the effort is worthwhile and it does not have to become a major investment in time and it need not become an obsession. Using my experience of running the *Journal of Advanced Nursing (JAN)* Twitter site, which I set up in December 2011, I hope to illustrate this. Here are some questions to ask yourself if you are considering setting up a Twitter account:

Why do you want to set up a Twitter Account?

The worst answer here is "because everyone else seems to be doing it." On the other hand, there is no best answer and no correct answer. Clearly, if you are considering using Twitter then you probably have some idea of what Twitter is about. You cannot have failed to notice the widespread use of Twitter by individuals, companies and journals. The Twitter logo is now common and usually offers a hyperlink to the Twitter site that you are being invited to follow. One of the best ways to find out what Twitter is all about is to click on some of these links, see what a Twitter account looks like and read what people say in their Twitter feeds. Try to find some Twitter feeds that are close to your interests. If you are an academic then look at the Twitter feeds of other academics; if you are an editor then look at the Twitter feeds of journals and other editors. Essentially, you should want to set up a Twitter account because you have something to say, and, in seeing what others with similar interests to you say, then you will begin to get some ideas.

What do People say on Twitter?

Frankly, some people share a remarkable amount of trivia on Twitter, and this is what gives Twitter a bad name. However, it is usually individuals who do this, and if you want to read trivia and share yours with others, then set up your own account and tell people what you are doing right now.

The best Twitter sites are informative. They share useful information about the product or organisation they are linked to, they keep you up to date on developments, and, given the limited number of characters you are permitted to use (140), they also provide weblinks where further information can be obtained. For example, on the ***JAN Twitter site*** we mainly provide links to our **Early View** articles before they appear in volumes of ***JAN***. In addition, we provide links to the **current issue of *JAN*** as it appears online. We also provide links to abstracts of a wide selection of our articles; for example, we always "tweet" about our editorials, systematic reviews, open access papers and a selection of the remaining papers. Other Twitter content related to the journal includes links to updated **author guidelines**, our **LinkedIn** page and the ***JAN blog***. We appear to be doing something right because in 2 years, we have accumulated nearly 5,000 followers.

Good Practice on Twitter

Some people worry about using Twitter because they think they have nothing to say; this cannot be true of any academic or journal editor. Some people worry that what they say on Twitter will get them into trouble, and it will if you are careless. If you have a tendency to make indiscreet remarks then avoid "tweeting" when you are angry, tired or under the influence of alcohol. If you are running a Twitter account for an organisation or journal, make sure that you do not also use this as a personal account. There is no harm in having more than one Twitter account. If you are concerned about Twitter etiquette and how to use an account, some excellent guidance is available, for example, from **Mollett et al** (2011) and **Reed and Evely** (undated). Both of these guides contain glossaries of Twitter terms, some of which I have used here (e.g, "re-tweet").

At *JAN* we have found it useful, in addition to material about the journal, to "re-tweet" material related to the journal such as links to good practice guidelines from organisations such as **COPE** (The committee on Publication Ethics), **CONSORT** (Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials) and **PRISMA** (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses). Whenever we do this, we try to include the "Twitter handle" of the relevant organisations in the form, for example, of @cope and @prisma. In this way these organisations will note that we have "tweeted" about their work, and, with any luck, they will "re-tweet" our "tweet". *JAN* will get a mention and others may decide to follow us.

Twitter is not the only form of social networking media we use at *JAN* to reach out beyond our usual readership and authorship, but it is the most effective. I am a great enthusiast, and if you have never tried it, I strongly encourage you to set up a Twitter account, follow a few interesting people and journals, and without pressure just take it from there.

References

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