

SOCIAL NETWORKING WITH FACEBOOK AND TWITTER

Sites like Facebook and Twitter are everywhere these days. You hear about tweets and writing on walls, and yet you wonder if the world of online social networking is for you. This quick lesson will help you understand what social networking is. Then we'll introduce you to the online social networks Facebook and Twitter, followed by instructions on how to get started and how to keep yourself safe. Let's get started!

What is social networking?

Simply put, social networking is all about connecting with other people on the internet. Social networking sites generally function around a user's profile—a collection of facts about a user's likes, dislikes, interests, hobbies, schooling, profession or any of a number of other points of commonality.

Generally, these sites offer various levels of privacy controls. For instance, Facebook allows others to find your profile by searching for your name or email address, but you can protect your private profile information from anyone you haven't specifically approved. With Twitter, you can set your updates to be private, and only people you approve can see them.

The goal of social networking is to build a group of people with whom you are interconnected by one or more of a collection of factors. You can keep up with both the significant and insignificant events of their lives, view photos, reminisce with old high school friends and more, all from one central location on the web.

Alternatively, some social networking sites are specifically grouped around special interests. There are communities for different hobbies, like parenting, cooking and dining out. If you can think of a niche, there's probably a social networking site to fill it. These sites exist to share expertise and build knowledge and camaraderie around specific topics.

Social networking: why bother?

Defining social networking is easy. Often, the real question from those who aren't using this new technology is "why?" Why spend so much time and energy exchanging tidbits of personal information online? Is it all just so much over sharing?

There are certainly some people who think so. However, most people who get involved with Facebook and Twitter see very tangible (as well as some intangible) benefits. When you create social networks, they tend to function a lot like your real life—in-person networks. You hear news, you discuss work and life problems, you sound out ideas and use experience and expertise you might not have otherwise.

Contacts are contacts, whether they're online or "in real life" (IRL). If the old adage "It's not what you know, it's who you know" is true, then the more people you know, the better. Perhaps that old high school friend is starting a new business and needs your expertise. Or maybe someone who shares your love of French New Wave cinema knows about a special screening of your favorite movie you'd miss otherwise. Knowledge is definitely power.

Intangibly, it's important to remember that humans are social animals. Modern life has led to disconnects from our sense of community, and online social networking fills some of those gaps. We feel closer to family, for instance, when we can show them photos and videos almost instantly, and communicate with them whenever we feel like it.

And lastly, don't underestimate the importance of fun. Quite simply, reading updates from your friends, coworkers and others can be vastly entertaining. You can become a fan of shows, movies, places and products you like on Facebook; you can follow celebrities and humorists on Twitter. Social networking can make for a welcome bright spot in your day.

FACEBOOK

Facebook was founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, then a student at Harvard University. Originally, Facebook required an email address issued by an educational institution (ending in .edu) to join. Then in 2005 and 2006, Facebook management opened membership to employees of various large companies like Apple and Microsoft. On September 26, 2006 membership was expanded to anyone over the age of 13 with a valid email address.

Today, Facebook is a worldwide phenomenon with more than [350 million active users](#), 50 percent of whom log on daily. Don't worry that you're "too old" for Facebook; the company reports that its fastest growing demographic is people 35 and over. More than two billion photos are uploaded every month, and there are more than 45 million status updates each day.

What can you do on Facebook?

At this point, the shorter question might be "What can't you do on Facebook?" Let's look at Facebook's most prominent features:

- **The Wall:** This is where you write your status updates, and where your friends can come to contact you.
- **Photos:** This allows you to upload photos, create albums and share them with friends. Also, you'll be notified when someone else uploads a photo where you appear if they tag you in that photo.
- **Profile:** This is where you share your pertinent data with your friends (including the kinds of relationships you're interested in, contact information, education and work information and more).
- **Fan Pages:** You can join with communities comprised of fans of sports teams, entertainers, movies, TV shows and just about any other thing you can think of.
- **Events:** This is where you organize events, get RSVPs, publish details of venues and changes to the plans all from within Facebook.
- **Links:** Facebook makes it easy to share links with your friends.
- **Bookmarks:** The Bookmarks Bar at the bottom of your Facebook pages offers one-click access to places on Facebook you visit frequently.
- **Notes:** In the notes section, you can write longer, more in depth posts than you can on your Wall. You can tag people in the note so that certain people will make sure to see it.
- **Pokes:** Haven't heard from someone in a long time? Poke them using the Poke application to remind them to update.

Whew! And that's just the tip of the iceberg! Let's talk about applications a little bit.

Facebook applications

Technically speaking, features like Photos, Pokes and Notes are all Facebook applications, but for the purpose of this section we'll focus on externally developed applications.

Because Facebook has made the Facebook Platform available to third-party developers, there's a bewildering array of applications available through Facebook. We'll discuss what's safe and what's not later when we talk about security. Right now, let's explore some of the categories of applications you can use:

- **Business:** Business applications can help you keep connected to colleagues, earn money for charity, share eBay items for sale, track investments and launch e-commerce sites on Facebook.
- **Education:** Educational applications cover a broad spectrum, from sharing books you're reading and have read to personality tests to horoscopes and more.
- **Entertainment:** Entertainment applications allow you to keep track of musical events, movies, promote your own band and even edit your Facebook photos.
- **Friends & Family:** Applications like FamilyLink let you build a family tree on Facebook, while others connect you with classmates, build quizzes to see how well your friends and family know you and create cards. The sky's the limit!
- **Games:** Games are extremely popular on Facebook. We'll talk more about them later specifically. For the moment, just remember that there are thousands and thousands of games you can play on Facebook.

- **Just for Fun:** This is where you can take quizzes, draw graffiti on your friends' profiles, get your horoscope and so on.
- **Lifestyle:** Lifestyle applications let you set up dating profiles, find online support for your lifestyle (such as parenting, etc.) and much more.
- **Sports:** Are you a fan? This is the category for you. Soccer, fantasy football, racing...you name it, you can find it here.
- **Utilities:** Life can't be all fun and games. This is where you find applications to help you use Facebook on various mobile devices, social calendars, "meta-communities" for Facebook games and even create your very own Facebook application.

Intimidated yet? Don't be! A great way to get started with Facebook applications, affectionately called apps, is to see what your friends and family enjoy. Give those apps a spin and then grow from there.

Speaking of getting started, let's walk through the sign-up process!

Let's take a step-by-step tour of signing up and getting started on Facebook. It's really easy, and shouldn't take more than a few minutes of your time to set up initially.

Initial setup

First, visit the [Facebook home page](#). You'll see the page represented below in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Facebook home page.

Facebook will ask you for some basic information: First Name, Last Name, Your Email and New Password. Remember to make your password strong by using both letters and numbers. You'll specify your gender, then your date of birth (to prove you are over 13). Finally, just click **Sign Up** to continue.

The next screen you see is the Find Friends screen. This screen allows Facebook to access your email contact list to determine whether any of your contacts are already using the service. Choose your email service from the list at the right, and then enter the information as requested in Figure 2.



Figure 2: The Find Friends setup screen.

When you click **Find Friends**, hopefully you'll see a list of your contacts that are on Facebook already. If none of your contacts are using Facebook, you have an option (as shown in Figure 3) to send them an invitation. Select the contacts you want to invite, and then click **Invite to Join**.



Figure 3: Invite contacts to Facebook.

[Enlarge image](#)

Now you're on Step 2 of the three-part signup process: Filling out your Profile Info. The purpose of this step is to automatically help you find people you knew in High School, College or in previous jobs. Facebook has conveniently provided you with dropdown options to make school and employer names standard across the board. For instance, in Figure 4 you begin to type "UT" and Facebook provides a selection of schools that might match yours.



Figure 4: Filling out your profile information.

In Step 3, you can upload a photo to represent yourself. It's generally suggested that you use a photo of yourself to help friends make sure you are who they think you are. However, you shouldn't feel compelled to do this if it makes you uncomfortable. You can use pictures of pets, abstracts, nature images—they're all acceptable. As you can see in Figure 5, you can even use your webcam to take a photo for you.



Figure 5: Uploading your profile picture.

[Enlarge image](#)

Facebook has strict standards regarding sexually explicit or copyrighted images used as profile pictures. Choose your picture with care!

After you've browsed for and found your desired profile picture on your computer, click **Save & Continue**. No need to do any special formatting; as long as your picture is under 4 MB in size, Facebook will automatically resize and crop if needed.

Create a profile

Once you've gone through the basic account setup process, you're taken to a welcome screen. You have two options, shown in Figure 6. You can continue to search for people you know, or view and edit your profile.



Figure 6: The Facebook welcome page.

Click **View and edit your profile** to continue.

The Info tab is one of three basic tabs across the top of the Facebook screen. This is where you enter your personal information, contact information, education and work information and more. Figure 7 shows you what a mostly blank profile looks like.

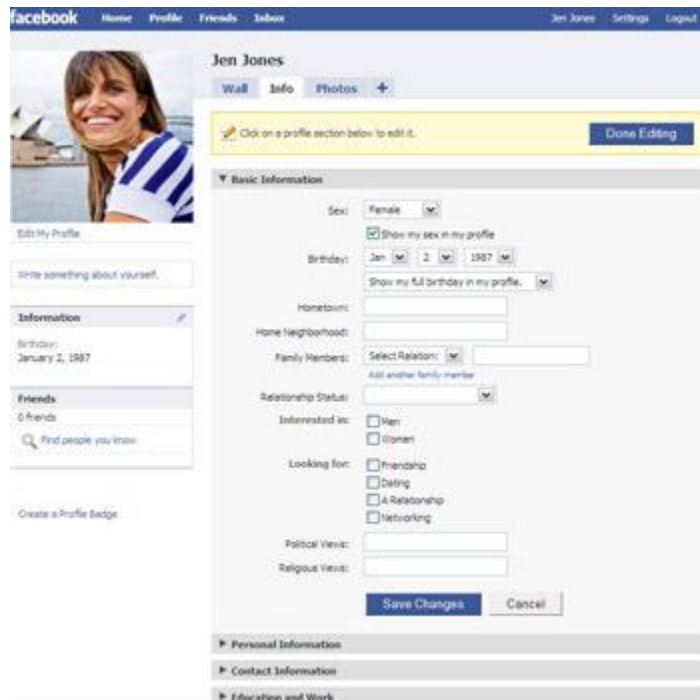


Figure 7: A Facebook Profile Page.

[Enlarge image](#)

You'll probably notice immediately the options "Interested in" and "Looking for". Facebook is often used for dating purposes, but you don't have to register your preferences if you don't want to. The same goes for your political and religious views. Only divulge what you're comfortable divulging.

When you specify that you're in a relationship, you're asked to correlate your partner's name with your status. If your partner is on Facebook, you'll link accounts. This doesn't confer any additional rights for your partner to access information you want private; it's informational only.

When you change your relationship status, it publishes to your friends' News Feeds. They'll all find out, and some may comment. Use your best judgment when it comes to publishing changes in your relationships.

Photos and creating albums

Facebook is a great way to share photos with your friends. Click the **Photos** tab (one of the three default tabs at the top of the Facebook page). Your Photos tab will be empty, like the one below in Figure 8, save for the profile picture you already uploaded.



Figure 8: The Photos tab.

Click **Create a Photo Album** to get started. You can enter an Album Name (May 27th Birthday, for example), a location (like Guadalupe River, New Braunfels, TX) and a description.

Finally, Facebook allows you to set the privacy settings on this album. Click the dropdown menu, and you'll see several options:

- My Networks
- Friends
- Friends of Friends
- Only Friends
- Customize

When you're all done, click **Create Album**.

Be very conservative when it comes to how public your pictures are. The news is full of people who have been turned down for jobs or advancements because of compromising Facebook pictures.

Once you're comfortable with Facebook, try clicking that second tab: **Mobile Photos**. Facebook allows you to upload pictures from your mobile phone, using a customized email address and the subject of your email as the caption for your photo.

Tagging photos

Facebook also lets you "tag" the people in your photos (and lets others tag you). When someone is tagged in a photo, the photo will appear in their status updates, as well as their profile. While tagging is a great way to keep track of friends and acquaintances, it can also be seen as unwanted publicity, especially if the person is tagged in a compromising picture.

If you don't want the photos you're tagged in showing up on your status update or your profile, or only want certain people to see them, you can customize your privacy settings to suit your preferences.

Another brick in the . . .

The Wall is your central publishing hub on Facebook. This is where you post your status updates, and where Facebook automatically publishes your activity on the site. A friend could look at your Wall and see when you upload photos, update your information and so on. Figure 9 shows our new Facebook user's Wall, and you can see that even in the short time she's been a member, the Wall has recorded two actions on her part. Needless to say, proceed with caution!

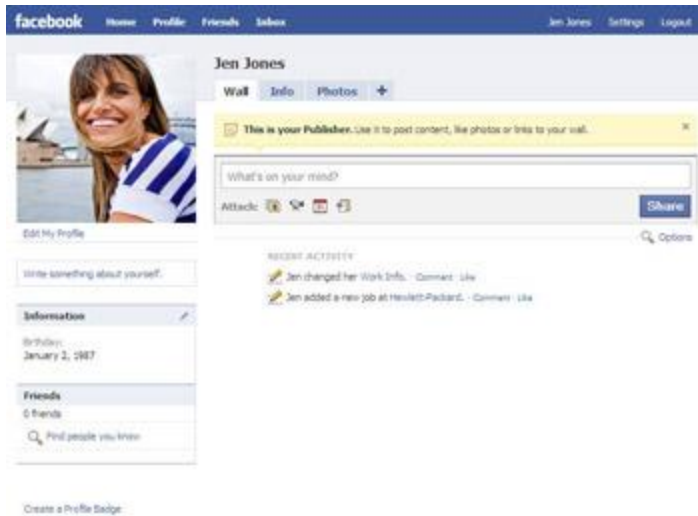


Figure 9: The Facebook Wall.

When posting on your Wall or your friend's Wall, you should remember that anything you write will probably be visible to others. If you want to have a more private discussion, it's probably best to send your friend a message, or send them an email outside of Facebook.

Protecting your privacy

Facebook has been dinged in the press and the courts before for privacy concerns. In response, they've increased the control users have over their data. Manage your Privacy Settings by clicking the **Settings** dropdown in the blue header at the top right of the Facebook page. You'll see a screen like Figure 10.

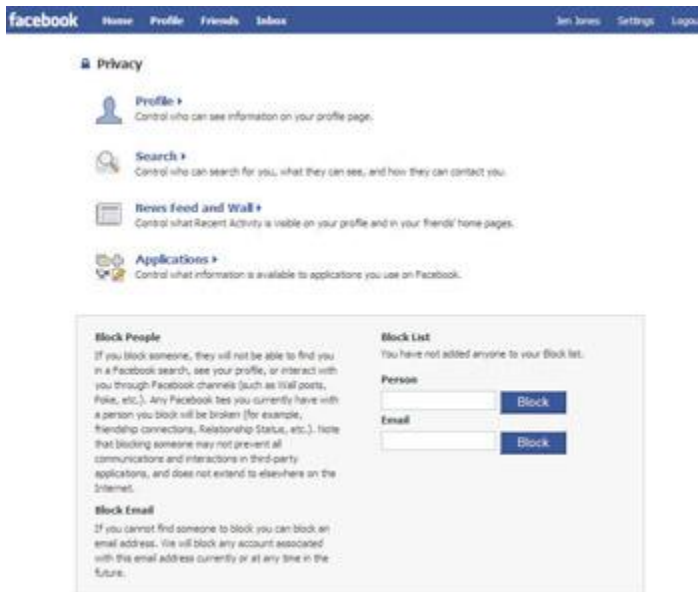


Figure 10: Facebook Privacy Settings.

Under the Profile options, you can fine tune which groups can see your basic information, personal information, status and links, photos in which you're tagged, education and work information and more. Just select the options you're comfortable with from the drop-down menu, and remember to save your changes by clicking **Save Changes** at the bottom.

The Search options make it harder or easier for someone to search Facebook and find you. If you're using Facebook primarily to reconnect with old friends, you can leave these settings pretty open. However, if you have any concerns about who may be searching for you, tighten everything up for maximum anonymity.

News Feed and Wall options allow you to designate which updates or activities are shown on your Friends' feeds. To the right of the screen, you'll see a list of which recent activities Facebook will never show, as well as various applications that might have the right to post on your Wall (we mentioned that before).

If you want to edit your applications, click the **Applications** link from the main privacy page. In Facebook, whenever you choose to use an application, it asks for permission to pull certain information from your profile. This is because games and applications on Facebook are social in nature, and you can play with your friends, invite them, gift them with in-game presents and so on. When you access the application privacy settings, the first thing you'll see is an Overview that thoroughly explains how applications and your private information interact.

The Settings tab is where you carefully select what information a friend can see about you through an application. Under "Applications Authorized to Access Your Information," you'll see a link to the Applications page. This is where you can remove applications and fine tune what your applications are allowed to post to your Wall.

Now that you're all set up and secure and have found a few of your friends, you're ready to start exploring. After you log in, go to your Facebook Home page. This is the portal for all your Facebook activities.

The default view is the News Feed, and you'll find soon enough that these updates are not necessarily in chronological order. You may prefer to keep up with your friends via the Status Updates located in the left sidebar of the page. These updates are in chronological order.

If you'd like to comment on any of your friends' statuses, you can do it quickly and easily with the Comment button. When you click **Like**, all you're doing is giving the post a quick thumbs-up. Use this when you like a post, but really don't have anything in-depth to say about it.

And if you find the status update, link or picture compelling, but it's not something you can really "like" (think link to a disturbing but important news story), what do you do? Right now, you can comment, but an intrepid band of users is campaigning for Facebook staff to add the "Dislike" button. That's the power of social networking in action.

From the Home page you can also update your status, and access your applications from the footer at the bottom of the page. Applications you've granted one click access to will be in the footer itself, but the rest are always available by clicking Applications in the bottom left of the screen.

Requests

On the right side of the screen, you'll see the Requests box. What are requests? Some say they're a terrible nuisance, but others live for them. This is where you're notified of friend requests, event invitations and gift and other application-based requests. If you don't clear requests out regularly they can really pile up. Bear in mind that if you're sick of seeing an invitation to an application, you can block the app or ignore all invites from a particular friend.

Finding applications

There are several different ways to find applications in Facebook. If you see one of your friends using an application, you can click on the application name in your News Feed to learn more about it. If you're searching for a specific application, say one you read about somewhere else, you can type its name into the search bar on the upper right side of the screen. If you want to browse all applications, select Applications on the lower left side of the screen, then click Browse More Applications.

Games

It won't take long before you start getting invited to play various games on Facebook. These can be a great pastime, offering the opportunity to build mock farms, crusade with fantasy heroes, run a café, join the Mafia, you name it.

You should remember that the people building and running these games are not doing it as a public service. They're moneymaking entities. It's entirely possible to play games indefinitely completely for free, and you can get plenty out of them. However, most games have some kind of "pro" level, or make available special items you can only buy for your game with their own in-game currency. The catch is that you have to pay real-world money for fantasy gold.

It's entirely up to you whether you like a Facebook game enough to pay real money for in-game upgrades or items. If a game ever demands money to play a basic version or tries to bully you into buying, report the makers to Facebook immediately and use your Application privacy settings to delete the game from your account.

Many games, like the incredibly popular Zynga Games titles FarmVille and Mafia Wars, have so-called "Trial Pay" options. These options allow you to trade your participation in special offers for in-game cash. Occasionally these offers may be for something you'd planned on getting anyway (like a Netflix trial membership), but all too often they are sneaky and hard to get out of without a big monetary or time outlay. You'd do best to avoid "Trial Pay" entirely.

Facebook etiquette

Any social setting has its own rules of etiquette, and Facebook is no different. As you navigate through this vast online world, keep a few things in mind:

- Take it easy on the gaming posts. Many real life friends and family can feel bombarded by your constant posts bragging about this or that achievement, or asking for help on quests or to finish levels. Just because an application pops up an opportunity to publish something to your wall, that doesn't mean you have to go through with it.
- Don't drunk-post. If you're impaired, it's better to stay away from Facebook altogether. True, you can always go back and remove posts, but by then the damage to your reputation is usually done.
- Not everyone is interested in every quiz result. Only post ones you find funny or particularly cool, and be sure to add a note to personalize it.
- Watch out for the dreaded constant cross-post. Many popular online services like Daily Mile (for tracking your runs and walks) automatically cross-post to Facebook. This can add up over the course of a day among several friends, and can really muddy the waters.

The bottom line is really personality—your friends and family are with you on Facebook to hear about you, and your personal insights. If you're routinely posting a great deal of content that's impersonal or auto-generated, then you're not making a strong connection.

TWITTER

Twitter baffles more people than Facebook. It seems completely counterintuitive: how can you say anything at all in just 140 characters? The meteoric rise in Twitter's popularity should clue you in that you can communicate very effectively, even with only a few words to play with. In fact, Nielsen.com noted that Twitter has a monthly growth of 1,382 percent.

Twitter was founded in 2006 by Jack Dorsey, and for such a young service, it has more than its share of fanatical followers. Microblogging (tiny blogs expressing just one thought or event) is growing in popularity at least in part for the same reason that Facebook is: the sense of community.

It takes little time to write a 140 character update and share it with your friends and contacts. And it takes little time for them to do the same. Knowing what people are doing, thinking and reading about fosters new definitions of community.

What's more, Twitter provides a lightning-fast way to disseminate important news or information. Posts on Twitter are called **tweets**, and when you pass a tweet along it becomes a **retweet**. This functionality allows you to spread the word about whatever's important to you by simply clicking a couple of buttons.

Hash tags represent a topic on Twitter. For example, popular TV shows will have hash tags with people commenting in real time while the show is airing. If you're watching *24*, for example, and you want to talk about it with a willing audience, you can follow the commentary on Twitter by searching for **#24**.

The Twitter lexicon

Twitter has its own unique vocabulary. Here are a few of the most common terms:

- **Tweet:** A 140 character or less update/post to the Twitter service.
- **Retweet:** Passing along a contact's tweet to your own contact list.
- **Hashtag:** The practice of putting a hash mark (#) before a topic in your tweet. For instance, you'd tag #houstonrockets when tweeting about them so that other fans can find your tweet easily.
- **Tweeps:** Twitter followers whom you follow through more than one social network (for instance, someone who's a Facebook and Twitter contact).
- **Twitosphere:** The larger community of tweeters.
- **@username:** This is how you link to a specific user in Twitter. @stephenfry, for instance, is the link for British comedian Stephen Fry's popular Twitter account.
- **DM:** This acronym stands for Direct Message. You can send another user a private message by typing d username.

Ready to get started? Let's get you signed up and tweeting!

Twitter signup is even easier than Facebook. Let's walk through it step by step, and then find you some folks to follow.

Initial setup

The first thing you need to do is navigate to the [Twitter](#) home page. As you can see in Figure 11, there are a series of popular topics at the bottom. You can explore those later. Right now, click the **Sign up now** button.



Figure 11: The Twitter home page.

Twitter makes signup easy. As you can see in Figure 12, all it asks for is some simple information, and the service even helps you as you type find a unique username and a strong password. The hardest part may be the Captcha you have to fill in at the end!



Figure 12: Twitter sign up.

If the next step looks familiar, it's because you just did it when you signed up for Facebook. As you can see in Figure 13, Twitter also pulls your contact list from your email to help you find current friends already using the service.

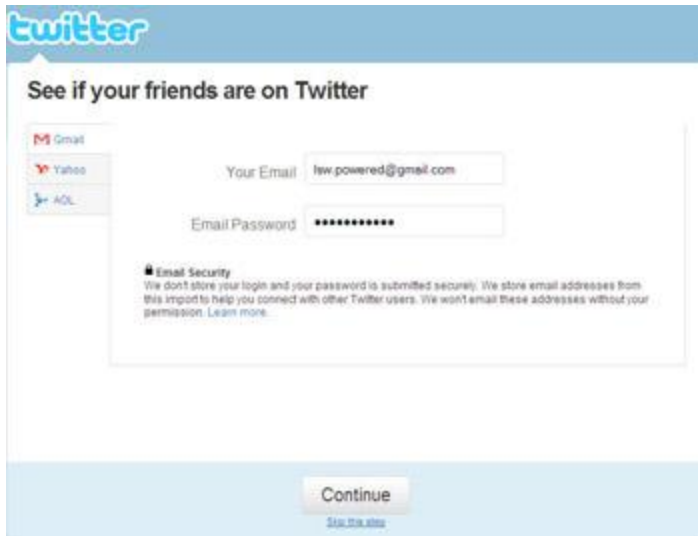


Figure 13: Twitter pulls email contacts.

Our new recruit doesn't have any contacts already on Twitter. Just like in Facebook, you can select and invite the contacts you want to join Twitter, as shown in Figure 14. Click **Invite** when you're finished.

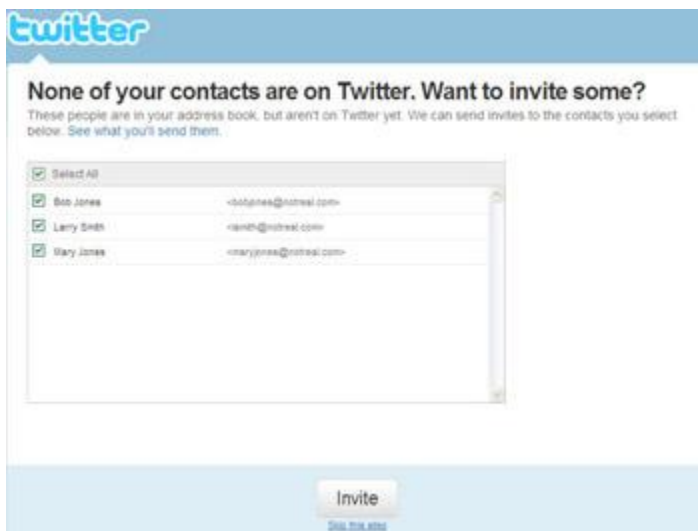


Figure 14: Invite friends to Twitter.

One thing Twitter excels in is helping you find people or organizations to follow to get started. After the previous invitation step, Twitter provides you with a list of the most popular tweeters. You can scroll through and find celebrity tweets, news agency tweets, gossip tweets and more—really just about anything you're interested in is represented thoroughly on Twitter. Figure 15 below shows you a tiny representative sample. Check the accounts you want to follow, and then click **Finish**.



Figure 15: Sample representation of popular Twitter users.

Congratulations! You've finished the initial setup. Figure 16 shows you what your default home page will look like. The main navigation is at the top-right of the screen, while the right column is devoted to statistics and quick links to common destinations.



Figure 16: The default home page.

Get your feet wet by posting a simple update.

Now that you're registered on the service, you'll need to do some tweaking to make it look and behave the way you want. Let's look at a few customizations.

Uploading a picture and customizing the layout

To upload a user picture, click your name at the top of the right column. You'll see a screen that looks like Figure 17.



Figure 17: Upload a user picture.

Clicking the large plus sign allows you to upload a picture by browsing for it on your computer. Get a preview of the process by examining Figure 18.

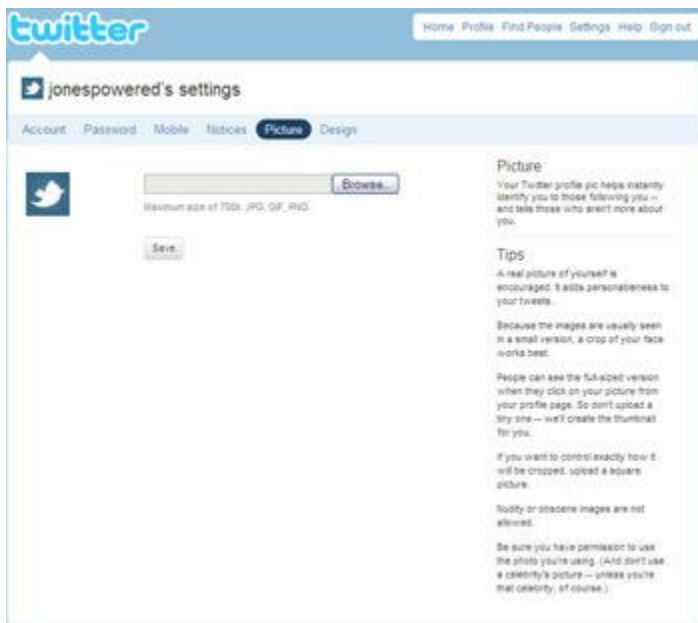


Figure 18: The upload screen.

You'll notice that Twitter helpfully provides quite a few guidelines to help you make the right choice when it comes to your profile picture.

Add personal information

Click **Settings** in the top right navigation bar. You have several options. The initial screen allows you to fill in some additional information. You can specify a personal URL, type out a "One Line Bio" in 160 characters or less and enable geotagging if you want.

Geotagging allows various services to pull your physical location when you're posting from a mobile device. Needless to say, you'll want to proceed with caution when enabling this feature.

Right above the Save button, you'll see an innocuous little checkbox. This checkbox is the all-important "Protect my tweets" checkbox. If you do not want unapproved parties reading your tweets, check this box. If you don't particularly care, leave them public. Click **Save** when you're done tweaking.

Personalizing your layout

Maybe you love the cloud-filled sunny default Twitter layout, but maybe you'd prefer something different. When you're in the Settings section, click **Design** in the top navigation. Just like in Figure 19, you'll find a nice selection of alternate designs.

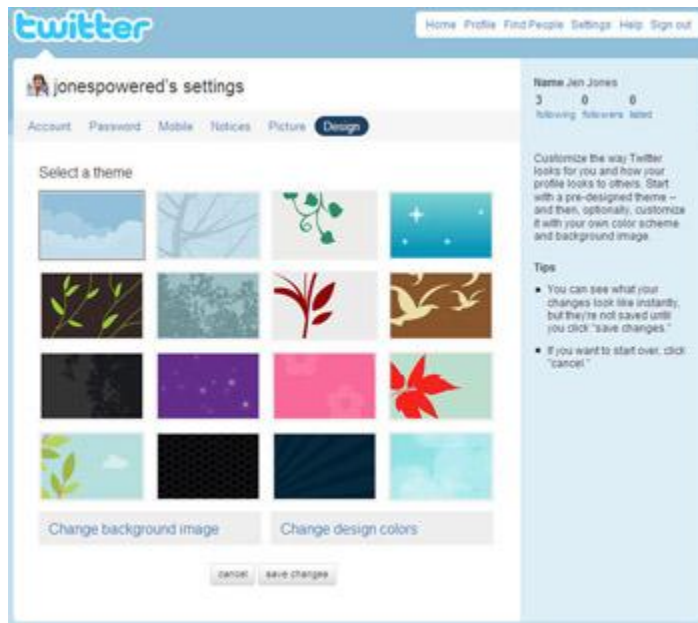


Figure 19: Alternate Twitter layout designs.

[Enlarge image](#)

Our new user likes purple and sparkly, so she chooses that layout. You'll note that you can also use the links at the bottom to upload your own background image or tweak the design colors. Once you click **save changes**, you have a brand new Twitter design. In Figure 20 you can see the purple sparklies.

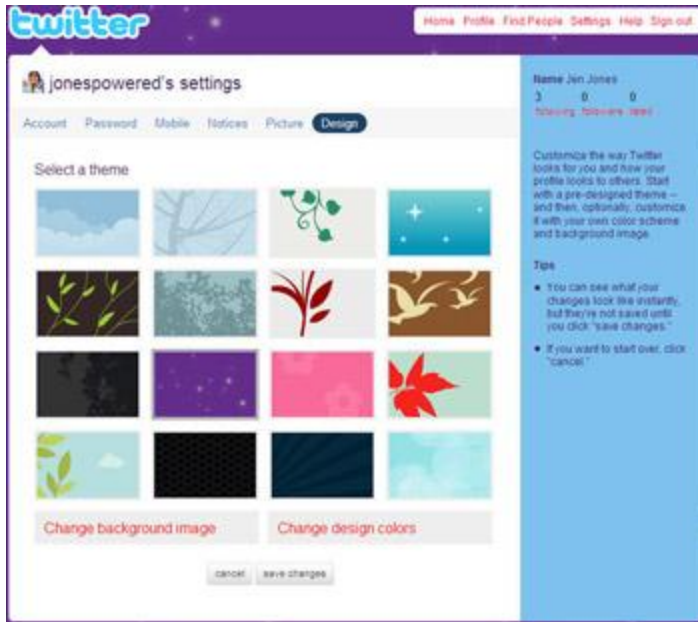


Figure 20: New background image.

Reining in email notifications

Clicking the **Notifications** tab at the top of the settings page takes you to a page much like the one in Figure 21.

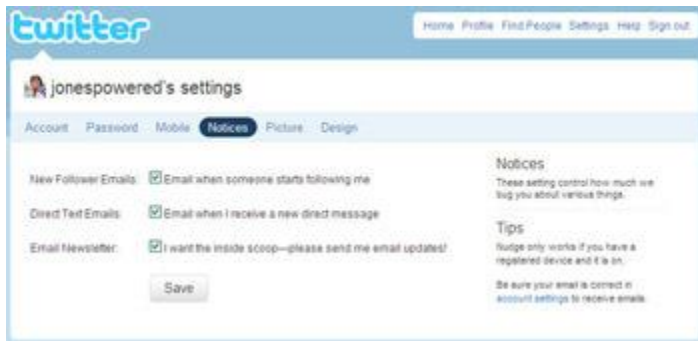


Figure 21: The Notifications tab.

You can specify which events trigger an email from Twitter. You can elect to receive emails when you get a new follower (especially useful if you protect your tweets), when you receive a direct message and when there are email updates from the Twitter service itself.

Select the level of communication you feel comfortable with, then click the **Save** button.

Sending updates from your mobile device

Tweeting on the go is very popular. Imagine you're in the grocery store and see something on a package that cracks you up. If you have Twitter set up on your phone, then you can share it with everyone before you forget, and everyone's day is a little brighter!

Click the **Mobile** tab at the top of the Settings menu to get to the page shown in Figure 22. You'll see a list of SMS codes you can use to update Twitter. Just text your update to 40404 if you're in the United States. It's that easy!

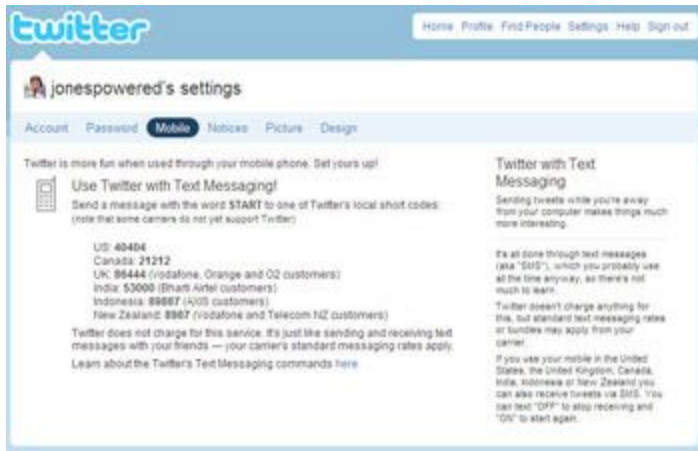


Figure 22: Text updates.

Plus, there are a number of third-party Twitter applications for the iPhone and other mobile smartphones. Look around and try them out to find the one that you like best.

Third-party desktop Twitter clients

There is a wide array of external companies developing Twitter clients that run on your desktop without having a web browser open. Here are a few of the most popular:

- **TweetDeck:** A robust Twitter client based on the Adobe AIR platform.
- **Twihirl:** A popular Twitter client based on the Adobe AIR platform.
- **Digsby:** A popular "all-in-one" client that handles not only Twitter, but other social networks, instant messaging and email notifications.

You can find a full list at the [Downloads](#) page on Twitter.

Finding people to follow

The most common way to find a person, business or organization on Twitter is to search on the [Find accounts](#) page. You can search by name, email or brand.

There is a more organic option to adding people to your Twitter feed. As you go about your daily web browsing, pay close attention for a blue button that says "Follow me on Twitter." It's almost guaranteed that the same people you go to time and again for news, opinions and entertainment already have Twitter accounts you can follow.

All major news outlets and many, many secondary or tertiary outlets have Twitter feeds to keep you up to date on the very latest breaking news. A local newspaper Twitter feed is often an excellent source of information. Many even have local traffic feeds so that you can avoid bad conditions on your commute.

On a more shallow note, celebrities love Twitter. It offers endless free publicity for them, and entertainment (sometimes unintentional) for you. Immensely popular tweeters like Stephen Fry, Ashton Kutcher, Kirstie Alley and many more can keep you apprised of their lives and travails. For a comprehensive list of celebrities on Twitter, check [CelebrityTweet](#).

Twitter etiquette

Yes, people on Twitter do like to put "tw" in front of every word. That said, there are still do's and don'ts even on this new service:

- Don't retweet a protected post. The original poster obviously does not wish to share, and retweeting violates his or her privacy.
- Make sure you use a URL shortener ([TinyURL](#), [Bit.ly](#), etc.) rather than posting a long URL in such a short space. Some of these services allow you to offer a preview of the content before your reader clicks on it.
- Remember that sarcasm is hard to convey in 140 characters. If you're trying for sarcasm and don't know your audience very well, play it safe and just say what you need to say.
- Don't have private conversations on the public Twitter stream. Use direct messages instead.
- Do try to have a complete profile. If you're going to use Twitter in a business setting, it pays to be up front and aboveboard about your company affiliation.

Twitter lore

Even though the service is a scant three years old, there is one piece of Twitter lore than you can never escape: the fail whale. As you can see in Figure 23, he's adorable.



Figure 23: The fail whale.

Even though he's cute as can be, when you see him it means Twitter is over capacity. As with any exceedingly popular service, sometimes Twitter's servers can't keep up with demand, and you just have to wait a minute or two or ten for them to get the load back under control.

Tweeters once saw the fail whale on a daily basis, but these days it's become much harder to catch this beastie in its native environment. If you do, just be patient and try your request again in a couple of minutes.

Even though this is only an introductory quick lesson, it's important for you to be savvy about how businesses and brands are using these services to get your patronage. Social marketing like this works because it relies on building community, which has its good and bad sides for the consumer. We'll take a look at each side.

Getting the most out of your brand relationships

When you join a brand fan page on Facebook (the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty is very popular, just to name one), you can get some great benefits. Often, marketers use their fan pages and Twitter accounts to solicit your opinion on their products. How do you use them? How can we make them better? What do you see as the biggest flaw? This is a great opportunity to make your voice heard in an environment where the brand is directly appealing to you. If you're asked such questions, try to take time to answer so that you can have a voice in your favorite products.

Another great byproduct of social marketing on Facebook and Twitter is the special offer. Businesses will often tweet specials that aren't available elsewhere, giving you a golden opportunity to get a deal no one else is. Or you can

become a fan of your favorite local restaurant on Facebook and be clued in on special fan happy hours or other events.

Since the social networking world is all about building relationships, brands really want to go the distance to make you a loyal customer. Unsatisfied customers who are socially savvy can become a public relations nightmare in no time. Just browse the consumer advocacy site [Consumerist](#) if you doubt the power of a spurned customer.

Want to see what HP is up to on Facebook and Twitter? Check out HP's [Facebook fanpage](#) or keep up with the latest HP news by following [@HPNews](#) on Twitter.

Don't let the brand off the hook

For all the benefits that come from being actively involved in brand fan communities and Twitter accounts, there are still some serious caveats. Unscrupulous businesses may try to misuse your private information by selling it to third-party scammers. If you suspect this has happened to you, do not hesitate to notify Facebook or Twitter support.

And what if the brand itself turns out to be a spammer? Often brands don't understand how to relate in the social space, and they end up coming across as obnoxious and spammy to the consumer. If you get multiple messages a day that are all promotion and no content, feel free to cut that company loose at once.

Moving on

Hopefully by this point you feel comfortable enough to start enjoying the many benefits that come with social networking. Get out there, and get connected!