

Editor's LETTER

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Twitter for Scientists

Twitter was only launched in 2006 but has experienced a meteoric rise in popularity, or notoriety, depending on who you ask (for the uninitiated, a useful guide to the service can be found here: <http://mashable.com/guidebook/twitter/>). To some, the notion that you could express anything of value in a mere 140 characters – the limit for a “tweet” – was unlikely, and the idea that your friends would be alerting you to the minutiae of their days was absurd. But the utility and appeal of Twitter has expanded since its inception, and scientists are among those who are finding it useful (*ACS Chemical Biology's* own experiments with Twitter can be found at <http://www.twitter.com/ChemicalBiology>).

So how can scientists find value from Twitter? The key lies in accepting, or even embracing, its limitations. It is true that the depth of content that can be conveyed in 140 characters is limited, but it is also true that the barrier to generating and consuming content is extremely low. That means that it is exceptionally easy (and currently free) for all sorts of entities to enter the world of blogging. Respected scientists, editors, publications, libraries, academic departments, companies, and journalists can all provide a steady stream of information, opinion, and referrals without needing to commit the resources and time required for long-form blogging. Obviating the need for extensive revision and copyediting also enhances the likelihood of posting real-time news. Further, the ability to include links in a post means that richer content is only a click away.

For the reader, it is easy to stay connected to many sources without setting aside the time needed to read full-length blog entries. However, one barrier lies in the challenge of organizing the massive volume of tweets that can appear on your screen. Several recent developments have made this prospect far less daunting. The first is the introduction of Lists, a subfeed that you design by aggregating existing feeds. Rather than having every post appearing on the same page, you can separate journals from news sources, from personal interests, etc., making each more useful and user-friendly.

The second development is real-time Twitter searching with Google. Twitter has a notoriously poor search function, but now that Google indexes all tweets, you do not need to rely on your own account to find information. And in cases where there is breaking news, the search results will update within the search results within seconds of new tweets being posted.

Searchability has also improved because more and more people have adopted the use of hashtags. A hashtag is simply a way to categorize your tweet by including a certain word or code in your tweet, preceded by the # symbol. For instance, we are encouraging attendees at the upcoming ACS meeting in San Francisco to use the hashtag #ACS_SF in their tweets. While you are attending, a simple search for #ACS_SF will provide you with up to the minute information about technical sessions, events, restaurants and more.

Of course, *ACS Chemical Biology* is not the only ACS Twitter feed. You'll also find JACS, C&EN and numerous others (more can be found in this List). And while Twitter is not for everyone, if you have never tried the site, or if you dismissed it in its early days, I suggest giving it another look. You may be happily surprised.

Eric Martens
Executive Editor, *ACS Chemical Biology*

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