

Sports franchises have been quick to embrace Twitter

March 10 2009, By Sarah Talalay

Sports fans are always looking for more news, insider information and opportunities for trash talking about their favorite teams. Those with accounts on social messaging system Twitter.com are getting that kind of satisfaction literally at their fingertips.

In case you haven't tried it, [Twitter](#) is akin to instant messaging, allowing users to send free short text messages known as "tweets" explaining what they are doing, seeing or thinking. The tweets are delivered instantly to users who are signed up to receive them, also referred to as "following" another user.

It's an easy way to send and get scores from live events, news of player injuries and tips that a certain parking lot is full. But fans are also using it for other applications - from tracking instant ticket sales to last-minute promotions for sporting events and even free sports-related gifts.

Toby Srebnik, a [sports fan](#) from North Lauderdale, Fla., has used Twitter to give his more than 1,100 followers play-by-play commentary and weather updates from a college football game and to report on the visit of a hockey VIP to South Florida.

"Waiting for NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman and Panthers (General Manager) Jacques Martin to arrive for open house meeting at BankAtlantic Center," Srebnik wrote in one of his "tweets." Another one Srebnik sent from his cell phone read: "Loving that NHL commissioner Bettman has a sense of humor; that, plus he is shorter than my dad."

"It gave me the opportunity to be the sports announcer I always wanted to be," said Srebnik, who works for a Boca Raton, Fla., public relations firm.

Teams, too, are embracing the new technology to drive ticket sales, announce promotions and offer news updates.

The Miami Dolphins have a [Twitter account](#) to advertise ticket offers and make other announcements. The Miami Heat sell tickets, posts gameday reminders and hosts trivia contests on Twitter, through [Facebook](#) and via text message.

"It's a 365/24/7 kind of world we're living in these days, and we need to allow our fans to access the Heat when, where and how they want to access us," Heat Executive Vice President Michael McCullough said. The idea is to deepen the connection fans already have with their teams, events and players and reach out to non-fans. John Sternal, a Plantation, Fla., marketing executive who has had an account since October, used Twitter to bet a couple of Chicago Blackhawks fans the Florida Panthers would beat Chicago in a game last month. When the Panthers lost, Sternal had to put the Blackhawks logo on his Twitter account the following day.

"I just got an avalanche of tweets. Not just Blackhawks fans, Detroit Red Wings fans and Dallas Stars fans," Sternal said. "At one point, I thought 'Where are the Panthers fans coming to my rescue to back me up?' Not even the team came to my rescue."

It might soon. The Panthers are preparing to launch a Twitter account to complement their YouTube channel and Facebook pages.

"It's possible to experiment and try all sorts of things," said Lee Berke, a Scarsdale, N.Y., consultant helping the Panthers and other teams develop

TV, online and cell phone communications strategies. With Twitter, "You can talk about whether the parking lot is full, you can do commentary during a game, you can create marketing events, say meet us at this location at 3 o'clock for a special player appearance," Berke said.

Last month, golf's PGA Tour kept fans on Twitter updated on Tiger Woods' return from surgery and saw its followers nearly double to more than 1,200. The tour plans to tweet from this week's PGA Tour event at Doral Golf Resort & Spa.

Scott Gutterman, executive producer of PGATour.com, said the tour recognized that making its Web site robust was important, but couldn't be its sole Internet strategy.

"You want to reach out to people in other environments, who may not come to PGATour.com," Gutterman said. "This is a great way to reach people in other ways."

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