

Scared of social media? Read this

May 7 2009, By Bridget Carey and Niala Boodhoo

Almost every day we receive questions about how to use Twitter -- both from online readers and people we meet in real life. The questions have been picking up since practically every media outlet jumped on the Twitter Train in the past couple months. Even Oprah got on Twitter two weeks ago.

One recent [e-mail](#) we got is from a publicist who wants to learn more about using both Facebook and Twitter for work purposes. The question: "Can you suggest the best resources, books and sites that I can use to quickly come up to speed so that I can offer my clients additional ideas on building their brands?"

We know it's scary, but our answer to everyone is always the same: Just dive in. No book or blog can help you understand social media until you sign up and use the site. Seriously. Click around. Don't worry! We know it's awkward, but trust us -- you're not going to break anything.

Picking a username is a great first step, but it doesn't count as diving in. That's just a toe. If you want to learn anything, give your clicking finger a workout and spend at least 15 minutes a day on the site. On Twitter, there are plenty of folks happy to help newbies and answer questions.

Here are a few basic pointers we can offer when it comes to building a personal brand on Twitter (twitter.com):

Use your real name as your user name.

- Don't auto-follow back people or use a program to send auto direct messages. (If you don't know, "Following" is [Twitter](#) lingo for connecting.)
- Be active in your network. It's not social if you don't have conversations.
- Mix up tweets about personal interests with business topics. You don't want the only messages you send out to be plugs for your Web site -- totally lame.
- Use the search tools to find people with the same interests and shoot them a message or follow them to catch their attention.

For folks who want to build a community using a Facebook (facebook.com) fan page:

- Build a personal account on Facebook (and be active for weeks) before you even think about starting a fan page. How will you know what fans want if you don't know how to use [Facebook](#)?
- It's more effective to engage members by sending out messages rather than posting news on your own wall.
- Be creative -- use the status message or find cool multimedia to draw people to your page.

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