

## Who are the top Tweeters? UCF grads created tracking site

May 26 2009, By Etan Horowitz

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When actor Ashton Kutcher and CNN were racing last month to see who could amass 1 million followers first on Twitter, many people tracked the race at Twitterholic.com, a site started as a joke by two Florida Web developers. Alex Rudloff of Satellite Beach and Gavin Hall of Orlando built the site in a couple of hours back in early 2007, when Twitter was new and the only people using it were the tech-savvy set. The two University of Central Florida graduates thought it would be funny to quantify just how addicted people were to the micro-blogging site.

"It adds a high-school mentality to Twitter," Hall (3,971 followers), 28, said of Twitterholic. "You take all these people that were geeks -- the early adopters were the geeks -- who weren't the most popular people in high school necessarily, and all of a sudden now we are ranking them."

But as Twitter's popularity surged and as celebrities such as Oprah (1,019,191 followers) started joining the service, Twitterholic became an easy way to keep track of the most popular users and a go-to source for publications including The New York Times and the Wall Street Journal to quantify popularity on Twitter.

"Somewhere in the process it became a great tool to find local people," Hall said.

Twitterholic includes a list of the top 1,000 users by followers as well as lists of the top users in a particular city. The service is not foolproof, however, because not all users indicate a city in their profile.

Orlando Magic Center Dwight Howard, a relative newcomer to Twitter, ranks as the champ locally, with more than 45,000 followers, according to Twitterholic.

Howard, who likes to use Twitter to rev fans up and promote his blog, is a good example of how easy it is for celebrities or other people with public profiles to amass followers simply by mentioning Twitter on TV or other public appearances.

Others amass large followers by finding lots of other people to follow, since many users will return the favor of following someone who starts following them.

"You can get a lot of followers by following a lot of people, but that doesn't necessarily mean you are interesting," said, Rudloff (6,042 followers), who is No. 12 on Twitterholic's list of top Orlando Twitter users.

For this reason, other sites, such as Twitter Grader ([twitter.grader.com](http://twitter.grader.com)), look at more than the number of followers to determine someone's ranking, including how often that person is quoted or "retweeted" by other users and how often people reply to that user.

The Magic's Howard, for example, isn't even in Twitter Grader's top 50 users in Orlando.

Other local users with lots of followers are the official accounts of businesses or organizations, such as Know Cancer, (7,347 followers) an Orlando-based Web site that provides support and information to those affected by cancer, which launched in the fall. Nicole LaTesta, the company's social-media director, said Twitter has helped Know Cancer easily find people who want to know more about the disease and other issues, such as healthy living.

"I'll come across a profile that says 'sitting in the chemo chair' or 'just got diagnosed' -- very personal things that you wouldn't see if it wasn't for Twitter," LaTesta said. "Then I'll send them an inspirational quote or a resource for more information, such as what question to ask if you are going through chemo."

Since Rudloff and Hall, who also run a resume-building site called emurse.com (which they recently sold to AOL), started Twitterholic as a joke, they never intended to make money off the service. It's free of advertising and they've turned down offers to buy it, though they are open to the possibility.

Now that athletes, politicians and celebrities have flocked to Twitter, Rudloff and Hall often get e-mails from people who want their stats on Twitterholic to be updated more often, such as representatives for rocker Lenny Kravitz (248,853 followers).

And although the top of Twitterholic instructs visitors to follow Rudloff and Hall on Twitter so they can make their own list of top users, that isn't the case anymore.

"We're not going to be able to compete against Britney (Spears) or [Oprah](#)," Rudloff said.

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What is it?

Twitter.com is a free micro-blogging service where users answer the question "What are you doing?" in 140 characters or less and send their updates on the Web for their network of "followers" to read. Updates can include descriptions of something they've just done, opinions on books or movies and links to interesting articles. Unlike other social-

networking sites, someone can choose to "follow" your [Twitter](#) updates without you having to follow them.

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