

Will Twitter boost users' taste for coffee brand?

May 20 2009, By Kevin Demarrais

The 150-year-old coffee brand has tapped into new technology to market itself.

It may seem like Big Brother is following you, but it's only the marketing folks at Eight O'Clock [Coffee](#).

After successfully using Facebook to reach out to potential customers, the Montvale, N.J.,-based coffee maker is hoping to perk up business with [Twitter](#), the communications fad of the day.

It's all the brainchild of S3, a marketing and advertising company based in Boonton, N.J.

Seeking to cash in on the social network's surge in popularity, the agency has set out to position Eight O'Clock as a cool, affordable, tweeting player in the coffee wars.

"Twitter is less proven in the marketing world than Facebook," said Denise McVey, president of S3. "But it has had such rapid growth in the last six to eight weeks, we figured we would test the waters out there to use Twitter to share the great taste of Eight O'Clock coffee."

Over the last month Eight O'Clock has signed on to "follow" 1,874 people whose profiles and lifestyles seem to "represent great taste," and 1,463 people are following the coffee company, McVey said.

To get started, the agency used various search engines to identify those people it wanted to follow, including a list of the top 100 Twitter users, gourmet chefs or wine lovers.

But the keyword search is just a jumping off point, McVey said. Once you start building, it's an organic process, much like a cocktail party where you meet people who introduce you to someone else.

The result is participants come from a wide variety of sources, she said. "It is the ultimate in superficial networking."

While it is difficult to measure what impact Twitter might have on sales, it does provide feedback to the company and a platform for the sharing of ideas among participants, she said.

That can include homemade recipes, clothing stores with good prices, restaurants that are cool and affordable, all relayed in 140 characters, the maximum length of each tweet.

With its use of Twitter, Eight O'Clock is part of a growing list of companies adapting new technologies to market their products, including JetBlue Airways, Southwest Airlines, Verizon, Zappos.com (an online shoe company) and Dunkin' Donuts.

Twitter is not the place for pushing active sales; that's frowned upon, McVey said. But it is perfect for sharing information quickly, such as to alert participants of some special promotion or sale that is brewing.

Still, it can be disconcerting for a neophyte twitterer to get a message like the one a colleague of mine recently received, that "Eight O'Clock Coffee is now following your updates on Twitter."

Worry not, McVey says. All that means is that the coffee company is

using one of the features of Twitter that allows participants to keep track of posts by others and inviting others to follow your posts. Tweets are displayed on the user's profile page and delivered to other users _ followers _ who have subscribed to them. Unless restricted by senders, they are accessible to anybody.

"People want to be part of other people's accounts," McVey said.

There's a certain irony to positioning Eight O'Clock as cool, hip and now, because the brand is 150 years old and until six years ago was primarily a house brand created by the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Co.

But A&P, needing cash to shore up its balance sheet, sold Eight O'Clock for \$127.5 million to private investors, and they, in turn, sold it in 2006 to Tata Coffee Ltd. of India for \$220 million.

Eight O'Clock has not only survived under new ownership, but it has also thrived, capped by its selection as the top-ranked Colombian brew in a taste test by Consumer Reports magazine.

Not only that, but it was also about half the price of its closest competitors.

"A complex blend of earthy and fruity, with a bright pleasing sourness," the magazine called it, the "best combination of taste and price."

I must admit that thoughts of earthy, fruity or sour coffee never set my taste-buds a-twittering. And it's never been the center of my social network.

But if it tastes good and wakes me in the morning, Eight O'Clock can follow me wherever it wants.

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