

Twitter marks fifth birthday (Update 2)

March 21 2011, by Glenn Chapman

Twitter marked its fifth birthday on Monday with a promotional video of celebrities talking up the world-changing micro-blogging service.

A video at discover.twitter.com featured billionaire entrepreneur Sir Richard Branson, tennis star Serena Williams, astronaut Paolo Nespoli, rapper Snoop Dogg and others explaining why they use Twitter.

Jack Dorsey fired off the first tweets on March 21, 2006 -- an automated "just setting up my twtr" message which he followed with the first "human" tweet -- "inviting coworkers."

It was Dorsey who proposed the idea for Twitter while working with Biz Stone and Evan Williams at podcasting company Odeo.

Since then, Twitter has been embraced as a forum for sharing anything from a favorite lunch spot to violations of civil rights and calls for revolution.

In a recent interview with AFP, Stone likened Twitter to a five-year-old child getting ready to go to kindergarten for the first time.

"It is just the beginning of a life full of potential and adventure, and I really do think that is where we are right now," Stone said.

"We are just about to go to school and just getting started," he said. "The last five years has really just been us getting our footing."

Twitter invited its more than 200 million users to join in the birthday spirit by sharing memorable tweets at the service by labeling them "#5yrs."

"Twitter has matured and made an impact in the areas of social responsibility, politics, sports, media, and more," Stone wrote in a message posted Monday at the Twitter blog.

"The people who use Twitter have made it what it is today, and on our fifth birthday, it's the people that make Twitter special who we are celebrating."

Twitter users fire off messages at a rate of about a billion every eight days. In comparison, it took slightly more than three years and two months for the first billion tweets to be sent at the service.

The San Francisco startup registers nearly a half million new accounts daily.

"All of this momentum and growth often pales in comparison to a single compassionate tweet by a caring person who wants to help someone in need," said Stone, who celebrated his 37th birthday this month.

"The people who use Twitter make it special because for any interest we might have, somebody is tweeting about it," he continued. "We're lucky to have so many people using Twitter in so many interesting and important ways."

Twitter got its start after Williams, Dorsey, and Stone thought it would be fun to build a service that lets people use text messaging to share thoughts, insights and news with the masses.

Initially scoffed at by some as a platform for telling the world what one

had for breakfast, Twitter has become respected as a lifeline during disasters such as the earthquake and tsunami in Japan and an organizing tool for champions of democracy.

"As much fun as we were having, there was always, I think, in the back of our heads the idea of the potential of something important coming from it," Stone said of the startup's formative days.

"Even if we didn't say it out loud and talk about it," the co-founder said in the interview with AFP. "Because we were just getting started and we really had no place saying anything like that."

Stone believed it vital for Twitter to remain a politically neutral technology platform focused on fostering open communication.

He saw the use of Twitter by those out to overthrow oppressive regimes in the Middle East as proof that given the right tools, people will stand for good.

"One of the things I told our team early on was that if Twitter is to be a triumph, it is not necessarily to be a triumph of technology but a triumph of humanity," Stone said.

"If we are successful it is not going to be because of our algorithms and our machines, it is going to be what people end up doing with this tool that defines us and makes us a success or not."

More than 140 million text messages of 140 characters or less are fired off daily at Twitter. The length limit was set to fit the maximum allowed in text messages sent using mobile phones.

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