

# A US ambassador and the art of Twitter diplomacy

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American diplomats around the world are embracing social media to better connect with people both at home and abroad.

One of them is US Ambassador to Thailand Kristie Kenney, a prolific Twitter user who now has more than 38,000 [followers](#). She bills her Twitter account @KristieKenney as "The real me. My work, my life, my thoughts."

In an exchange of emails with AFP, she explained why she believes [social engagement](#) is such a useful tool:

Question: When did you first launch your Twitter account, and what do you think it brings to your role as US ambassador to Thailand?

Kenney: "I joined Twitter early on, while I was US ambassador to the Philippines several years ago. Being on Twitter expands my reach—it allows me to connect with a wide variety of people. In this business, you never get to talk to as many people as you'd like. Twitter provides a way for me to connect directly with those I might otherwise miss. When we travel around Thailand to promote US interests, I often use Twitter to get advice from and to meet up with locals, as I did in Chiang Mai a few weeks ago. I share what I am doing—both officially and non-officially—on Twitter. I answer questions ranging from 'How is your day,' to 'What is US policy on X?' I try to nab photos of a variety of places I visit, things I am doing, and I especially enjoy tweeting from 'behind-the-scenes.' When President Obama visited Thailand last year,

for instance, I tweeted a photo planeside as he arrived, and then later a shot of the menu from the official dinner. Twitter is a great way to [share information](#)."

Question: Do you write all your own [tweets](#) and what guidelines have you given yourself?

"I do all my own tweets, I always have. I manage my [Facebook](#) and Instagram personally as well. I use common sense when I tweet about my daily activities. Twitter and other social [media tools](#) can be a great complement to diplomacy, but this profession still involves a good deal of discretion. If I'm meeting with people or groups that would prefer not to be publicized, I won't tweet about the meeting. And I don't usually find people would be interested in the exact time of day I might be leaving the office or getting on a plane."

Question: Have you been surprised that you now have more than 38,000 followers, and what has been the feedback?

"I am delighted to have connected with so many people on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. On the whole, the experience has been overwhelmingly positive. Sometimes, of course, passionate people promoting an array of causes offer up a very different point of view. But that can be very useful, too. Even if it might not be something I agree with, or if it's perhaps not a part of our current policy, for me, the point of connecting directly with people is to hear, and more importantly, to listen to what they have to say."

Question: And in general terms, could you explain why you think digital diplomacy is a useful tool for ambassadors around the world?

"Digital diplomacy is just the latest set of tools for us to get our jobs done. It's not for everyone, and that's fine. But I find the best part of my

job is the chance to forge these direct connections with people. Twitter and Facebook have become invaluable tools for me to dramatically increase the range and number of people I can connect with. And, to be honest, I feel it's a good use of my time when I'm stuck in traffic and have an iPhone at the ready. Beyond Twitter, I am always looking for new ways to reach out. Just recently, I joined up with Instagram. That service has really taken off in Thailand—I think the airport here in Bangkok is one of the most Instagrammed places in the world—and I love the simplicity of it. And while my [social media](#) use is a healthy mix of the "personal me" and the "official me," our embassy here in Bangkok (@USEmbassyBKK on [Twitter](#), facebook.com/USEmbassyBKK, USEmbassyBKK on Instagram) leverages social media to reach over 120,000 people, providing information about our programs and events, promoting American culture, business and other interests every day. Likewise, our American Citizen Services Unit (@ACSBKK) has had success connecting with and providing assistance to Americans traveling or residing in Thailand. So while I don't think digital [diplomacy](#) will replace face-to-face communication anytime soon, it certainly helps us connect quickly and easily across the globe."

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