

Twitter enables longer tweets as part of growth push

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Twitter will no longer factor certain add-ons including pictures into a message's length

Twitter announced Monday it was easing its 140-character limit on tweets, in the latest effort to broaden the appeal and boost the user base of the social network.

The new policy announced in May and now in effect no longer factors in

certain add-ons, including pictures, into a message's length.

"Say more about what's happening! Rolling out now," said an official tweet from San Francisco-based Twitter.

Media attachments such as photos, videos and polls are exempted from the character limit, as well as tweets that are quoted in a retweet.

The move comes as Twitter's efforts to increase its user base and engagement have been sputtering, raising questions about its growth trend as it seeks to keep pace in the fast-moving world of social media.

The latest move eases but does not eliminate the 140-character limit, which was put in place due to mobile phone text messaging constraints when Twitter launched in 2006.

Analysts have said Twitter needs to find new ways to boost its appeal beyond a core of celebrities, politicians and journalists, with its user base stagnant for the past year.

In its last quarterly update, Twitter said the number of monthly active users edged up to 313 million, up three percent from a year ago and only slightly more than the 310 million in the prior quarter.

Twitter has yet to post a profit, even as it has ramped up its efforts in advertising.

Amid reports that Twitter may be seeking ways to cut costs or even sell itself, the San Francisco-based service has been adding new features including live video.

Twitter drew more than two million people to its first broadcast of an NFL football game last week, part of a range of new sports content

available through the network.

It is also offering users live-streamed video programs on technology, media and business in partnership with the streaming platform Cheddar.

'Too little, too late'

Analysts remain cautious about Twitter's ability to break out of its rut and accelerate growth. It is far behind Facebook, which has an audience of over 1.7 billion, and Facebook-owned Instagram, with some 500 million.

"Anything that can make Twitter easier to use will be a benefit to both Twitter and its users," said Debra Aho Williamson, an analyst who follows social media at the research firm eMarketer.

"It might bring some people back who got frustrated with (tweet limitations). That said, I'm not sure how many people will use this as an opportunity to try Twitter if they haven't already started using it. Things like NFL streaming will be a much better draw for new users."

Last month, eMarketer said Twitter's share of US social network users will decline to 28.1 percent this year and will continue to drop through 2020, as it loses users to Snapchat, Instagram, and messaging apps.

Greg Sterling, a contributing editor to the Search Engine Land blog, called the new policy "a necessary and inevitable move" by Twitter to help revive growth.

But he added that Twitter "is in danger of being permanently obscured by Snapchat and rivals Facebook and Instagram—even messaging apps."

The relaxing of the tweet limit "may be too little, too late," said Roger

Kay of Endpoint Technologies Associates.

"All this would have been good five years ago. It's a good tactical adjustment but it doesn't change the dynamics of the industry or where Twitter is."

Analyst Youssef Squali at Cantor Fitzgerald said Twitter needs to prove itself soon or face pressure from shareholders.

In a research note last week, Squali said the NFL broadcast was positive but that "this may be management's last opportunity to reignite growth in users, engagement and monetization." He added that "failure to do so is likely to embolden shareholders to pressure the board to evaluate alternatives" which mean selling or finding a merger partner.

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