

Foodies flock to Twitter-savvy food trucks

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In this photo taken Wednesday, April 8, 2009 the Kogi BBQ truck is seen near the campus of UCLA in Los Angeles. (AP Photo/Matt Sayles)

(AP) -- For some foodies, Tweets lead to great eats.

Twitter recently became the communique of choice for the almost cultishly popular Kogi BBQ trucks, roving Korean-style taco vendors in Los Angeles that use the 140-character, cell phone-friendly missives to alert customers to their whereabouts and menu items.

And the trend is spreading to other wheel meals as more [food](#) trucks - a fast-growing food phenomenon in major cities, especially in the West - are using the social networking site to draw customers.

While it's not clear which truck Tweeted first, the Kogi folks have

shown themselves to be adept at turning those mini missives into a hugely successful marketing machine, says Jane Goldman, editor-in-chief of CHOW Magazine.

"Kogi special at the trucks and the Alibi! Grilled asparagus with Yellow Nectarines and Sesame Seeds!" read one recent Kogi Tweet.

The decision to Twitter was a practical one, says Kogi brand manager Mike Prasad. He says Kogi - which has become famous for its Korean-Mexican fusion - needed a way to inspire repeat business while solving "the problems of being a moveable venue."

"Then they find Twitter, something that's separate from the venue itself that creates a virtual home," says Prasad. "It was perfect."

Kogi's food is cheap and unique, but there's another payoff to securing this moving meal: the thrill of the chase.

Since Kogi's launch in November, hungry herds of have been following the pair of white trucks that rove the city selling tacos, burritos and other gourmet tidbits steeped in traditional Korean flavors.

In short order, the Kogi name has become recognizable to foodies around the country. No small accomplishment for a pair of taco trucks, says Kate Krader, restaurant editor for Food & Wine magazine. "That's 90 percent thanks to Twitter."

And she thinks the success of food truck Tweets likely will inspire a broader use of Twitter across the food world.

"Chefs will be Tweeting from the farmers market about the mushrooms they just picked up and will be part of their mushroom pasta that evening," she says.

For diners, there are benefits to the Tweets beyond just knowing where to find the eats.

Kogi is using the service to maintain the Californian tradition of restaurants having secret menus one must be in-the-know to order from (such as the hamburger joint In-N-Out). On the side of the truck, Kogi's menu lists a few items, including tacos and burritos stuffed with Korean short ribs, spicy pork, chicken and tofu. But keep up with Kogi's Twitter feed and the options multiply.

"We do that because it's fun to have something different and experimental available every day," says Prasad, adding that the truck wouldn't have as many followers if it didn't provide new options.

Some recent specials that weren't on the menu featured kimchee (a spicy pickled cabbage traditionally eaten as a condiment in Korean dining) stuffed into quesadillas and as a topping for Spam sliders.

"There's some really high end food coming out of food trucks," says Goldman, making them a natural place for Twitter to gain ground. "This type of immediate information and constant update is going to increase."

Last month, for example, a truck called Calbi BBQ announced its grand opening on the Web, and began Tweeting its way to roadside stops to hawk tacos and burritos with Korean flavors.

And a Web site featuring a Twitter feed of locations for the Yuri Truck, which peddles sushi rolls and rice bowls, posted its first entry.

And this month, DonChowTacos.com was launched (complete with Twitter feeds) for a truck that sells Chinese-Mexican fusion - such as "chimales," Chinese-Mexican tamales stuffed with kung pao chicken or Chinese barbecue pork.

Elsewhere, it's the diners who are Twittering about truck food. In Portland, Ore. - home to food carts offering dishes from Bosnia, Iraq, Peru, Thailand and many points between - fans use the high tech tool to track the low-tech vendors.

Portland [Twitter](#) users, such as PDXfoodcarts, track the arrival of new trucks, which have exploded from just a few in 2006 to more than 170 this year, representing 24 national cuisines.

"OK, Poompui, a new Thai cart on 8th and Couch is PHENOMENAL," read a recent Tweet by PDXfoodcarts. "Like Thai food in Thailand. GO, JUST GO."

On the Web:

<http://twitter.com/kogibbq>

<http://foodcartsportland.com/>

<http://twitter.com/PDXfoodcarts>

<http://www.donchowitzacos.com/>

<http://www.yurijapanesecafe.com/>

<http://calbibbq.com/>

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