



Twitter 101 for sports organizations: Your top 12 questions answered



While Twitter is the second most popular social media platform used by BC sports organizations, many struggle to use it correctly. For newcomers, Twitter can feel like an endless scrolling stream of hashtags and acronyms. When done properly, however, Twitter can both help you serve your existing members more effectively and also connect you with new opportunities.

That's why we've assembled the **ultimate guide to Twitter for sports organizations** that answers your top 12 questions about how to best use it.

Find answers to the following questions in Module 14:

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1. How can Twitter help sports organizations to achieve their goals?

 Knowing exactly what you want to achieve on Twitter is the first step to using it efficiently. The goals you have for Twitter will depend on: whether your members use it; how much time you have to devote to it; and what priorities you have set in your communications plan.

Here are some ways that sports organizations have successfully used Twitter:

- To converse with fans, other sports organizations, athletes and other members of your community. Like other social media platforms, Twitter is all about the conversation, not the monologue. The organizations with the most Twitter success are the ones engaging in meaningful dialogue, rather than just tweeting into the ether.
- To provide social media coverage of competitions. Twitter has a greater tolerance for multiple posts than Facebook and is the perfect platform to provide your fans with up-to-the-minute results at events. You can also designate a hashtag for your event to easily collect other people's tweets.
- To connect with journalists and other members of the media.
- To connect with partners. Tweet at other sports organizations, tournament venues, MLAs/MPs, high-performance athletes and other supporters to expand your message's reach and engage in interesting conversations.
- To recognize and interact with sponsors and granting organizations.
- To host contests and other giveaways.
- To respond to questions or concerns.
- To share social media content created for other platforms (Instagram, Facebook, etc.).
- To spread the word about upcoming events and programs.
- To allow your high-performance athletes to engage with the public via Q&As.

2. Give me the basics. What exactly can I do on Twitter?

Unlike Facebook, which is fairly straightforward, Twitter can take a little getting used to. Should you Retweet (RT) or Modify a tweet (MT)? Should you tweet or Direct Message (DM)?

Here are some of Twitter's many functions:

- Follow accounts of everyone from your membership to celebrities. Unlike Facebook, you can follow someone without them having to follow you back or approve you.
- Send out 140-character tweets to your followers (a space is a character)



- Send an account a direct message (DM), which can't be seen by other accounts and is located in your inbox. Both accounts must follow each other for a DM to be sent.
- Retweet (RT) someone else's tweet to your followers.



- Modify a tweet (MT) to send to your followers. For example, if someone tweeted at me @arley_mcneney what's your favourite food?" I could respond "Chocolate! MT @arley_mcneney what's your favourite food." I've modified the tweet to show my followers both the original tweet and my response.
- Reply to a tweet



- 'Favourite' a tweet. This is the Twitter equivalent of the Facebook 'like' button.



- Create lists of similar accounts (such as B.C. Sports Organizations or Figure Skating Olympians). Lists can be private or public. When you click on one of your lists, you will see all the tweets by accounts in the list, allowing you to turn down the 'noise' of all the Twitter accounts you follow and find relevant content
- Search for keywords or hashtags



3. How do I write tweets that people will actually respond to?

If you want to get noticed on Twitter, you need to create engaging or valuable content that adds to a conversation. If your followers feel that you are simply shouting your messages into a megaphone without listening to the people around you, they'll quickly tune out. As social media blogger Courtney Hunt says, try to "maintain a strong signal/noise ratio."

Do:

- Take part in conversations. Reply to tweets and try to actually engage with accounts rather than simply retweeting.
- Fit your whole message in less than 140 characters. Twitter's own research has shown that tweets under 100 characters have a 17% increased engagement.
- Include photos, videos and links (make sure to shorten the links with a URL shortener like [Ow.ly](#)). Studies have shown that including "rich media" like photos and video increases engagement. 
- Make sure to tag (@mention) relevant accounts in your tweets. When you @mention an account, the user will be guaranteed to see it and will be much more likely to respond. For example, instead of "Come out to the Richmond Oval to see the Canadian hockey national team tonight" try "Come out to the [@RichmondOval](#) to see the [@HockeyCanada](#) national team tonight."
- Use hashtags sparingly. Recent studies have shown that hashtags don't play a large role in increasing virality and that tweets with more than two hashtags got significantly less engagement. The sparing use of popular or trending hashtags, however, can help you take part in a wider conversation.
- Follow the 80/20 rule. According to many social media managers, 80% of your tweets

should be conversational content, (conversations with other users, comments on relevant news items, sharing others articles and photos etc.), and only 20% should be tweets that promote your organization. Too much marketing content makes it appear that you're not interested in what other people have to say and only want to push your own agenda.

- Schedule your posts at peak times to ensure maximum visibility. (See below to learn how to determine when these peak times occur).

- Tweet regularly. Some experts recommend tweeting between 3 to 5 times a day. Make sure, however, to emphasize quality over quantity.
- Tweet on a timely basis. One of the biggest draws of Twitter is how quickly information moves. That means, however, that you have to keep up. Your insights into an NHL game might be very engaging when the game is going on, but completely stale the next day.
- Stay "on message." The most popular Twitter accounts are the ones that are focused and contain quality content. You're an expert in your field, so play to your strengths.
- Some Twitter marketers believe that the most successful template for a tweet is Key Message à Link à Final thoughts. For example: "Bob Smith wins the MVP trophy <<link>> Congratulations!"

Try to avoid:

- Linking your Facebook page with your Twitter account. They're different platforms with different conventions. Since most Facebook posts are longer than 140 characters, you will also annoy your Twitter followers who must log into Facebook to see the rest of your message.
- Being overly stiff, structured or formal. While it's hard to show your personality in only 140 characters, the most popular tweets feel like a "real person."
- Retweeting excessively.
- Retweeting compliments. Some people see it as bragging. If you choose to retweet a compliment, show humility and give thanks.
- Taking big risks too early on. When you're building your Twitter fan base and learning the nuances of the platform, err on the side of caution.

4. How often should I tweet?

If you ask 10 different social media managers, you'll get 10 different responses on this subject. Research says that 58% of Twitter users think that you should tweet between 0 - 5 times a day, while only 21% said that 6 - 10 times a day was appropriate. Other experts recommend 3 - 5 times a day.

Remember: you should only tweet when you have something to say. Emphasize quality over quantity.

5. When should I tweet?



On Twitter, it's particularly important to tweet when your followers are online. Luckily, there are services like Tweriod (<http://www.tweriod.com/>) that will analyze your Twitter feed and tell you the ideal time for you to tweet.

Many social media researchers say that the afternoon is the best time to tweet. Others say that Twitter accounts tweeting to other businesses get the most engagement from Monday to Friday, while organizations tweeting at individuals get the most engagement on the weekend.

Remember: you can use tools like Hootsuite to schedule your tweets for peak times.

6. Should I use hashtags?

Some studies have found that hashtags play no role in increasing virality. Other studies found that tweets with just one or two hashtags got more shares, but that tweets with more than two hashtags got significantly less engagement. Using too many hashtags can also make you seem juvenile, so #don't #go #overboard.

That said, using **popular hashtags** can be a great way to get involved in a large conversation. You can also designate a hashtag for your event or campaign to easily collect other people's tweets. (Hint: Search your hashtag in the search bar before using it to see how often it gets used by other people. If not that often, try searching other options.)

7. How many accounts should I follow on Twitter?

Twitter takes three factors into account when determining whether someone is a spammer: the number of followers the user has, how many times they've tweeted, and how many accounts the user is following. If you follow a lot of accounts but aren't followed by many, Twitter may assume that you're a spammer and limit your exposure. If, however, you are followed by many accounts but don't follow many back, other Twitter users will assume you aren't trying to engage in conversation. For this reason, many marketers suggest that you keep a **followers:following** ratio of **1:0**.

While some Twitter marketers follow a large volume of accounts in the hopes of getting followed back, most social media managers recommend only following organizations whose content you care about. After all, though it looks good in your analytics report to claim that you have thousands of followers, if most of these followers don't care about your message, you'll have trouble achieving

your goals. Bottom line: focus on building a well-curated network rather than playing a numbers game.

8. Is it okay to share the same tweet more than once?

Yes, unlike Facebook, Twitter has a higher tolerance for tweeting the same message multiple times. If possible, vary the wording of your message.

9. Is it okay to ask for retweets?



Unlike on Facebook, where asking for likes can be off-putting, Twitter has a higher tolerance for people asking for retweets, as long as users only do it occasionally. Interestingly enough, research shows that those who spell out the word 'retweet' are retweeted 23 times more than the average tweet. Those who use the acronym 'RT' are retweeted at 10 times the average tweet. In short, it's okay to tell your Twitter followers what you want them to do.

10. What's the best way to live blog/live tweet?



Some experts believe that the tide is shifting against "live tweeting" or "live blogging" (releasing a lot of tweets about an event as it is happening) because, as Twitter culture evolves, people have less tolerance for spam. Luckily, the sports community still seems to embrace live blogging and it can be an important tool for providing timely updates at competitions that aren't webcast.

Here are some live blogging best practices:

- Use it sparingly. If your organization only hosts a few tournaments a year, your followers will forgive you for live blogging at these times.
- In some sports (especially team sports), you may have to adjust your tweeting volume based on the excitement of the match and how interested your followers are in it. If, for example, the point spread is uneven early in a game, you might choose to only post the final score. If, however, you're covering an overtime match between two great squads, you'll followers will

want to know about every play.

- Respond to questions and concerns in a timely fashion.
- Balance commentary with play-by-play. Providing analysis of the game allows for greater discussion between your followers.
- Always re-read your tweets. In the heat of the moment when your fingers are flying across the keyboard, it's easy to get overly excited and make a Twitter faux pas.

11. My member's aren't on Twitter. Should I still use it?



One of the greatest complaints that sports organizations have about Twitter is that their members don't use it. This, however, is not necessarily a deal breaker. As with any social media platform, it's important to balance the time invested with how effectively it helps you achieve your communications goals.

If you have a very limited amount of time to devote to social media, you may choose to focus solely on communicating well with existing members and decide that Twitter isn't for you. Many organizations, however, report that they've successfully carved out a niche for Twitter in their communications strategy by using it to connect with other organizations, the public and the media. Many other organizations have reported that, as Twitter grows, their members are joining up.

Bottom line: Twitter is such a far-reaching platform that it's worth trying out. Experiment with a few different goals for Twitter. If, however, you're not getting the return on investment that you expect, it's okay to drop it in favour of the social media platforms your members frequent.

12. What are Twitter lists and how can I use them?

 Unless you're on Twitter for hours a day, it's easy to miss important tweets. Thanks to lists, however, you can turn down the Twitter noise by grouping similar accounts together. You could, for example, create a list that only shows tweets from your sport's national team members. You could make another list for provincial sports organizations, members of the media or prominent sports bloggers. You can even follow other people's lists (if they make them public).

To learn how to make and maintain a list, check out Twitter's handy [how-to guide](#).

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