March 1, 2010

@alumnifutures
Alumni Networks and Twitter: An Update

af alumnifutures

By Andrew Shaindlin and Elizabeth Allen

Alumni Futures White Paper No. 3

Alumni Networks and Twitter: An Update

Tweet This White Paper

Authors
The following white paper was published on March 1, 2010.

The authors are Andrew Shaindlin and Elizabeth Allen.

Source
This white paper is available for free download in PDF format from

http://www.alumnifutures.com/whitepapers.html

Contact the authors…
…via email at

andy@alumnifutures.com
liz@adaptivateblog.com

…via Twitter at

@alumnifutures
@lizallen

Alumni Networks and Twitter: An Update
By Andrew Shaindlin and Elizabeth Allen
February 2010

> Twitter is the most minimal newspaper, and I'm the Editor-in-Chief. I'm pointing to other people and their information streams.
> - Tim O'Reilly at the 2009 CASE Summit

In January 2009 we published *Activating Alumni Networks with Twitter: An Alumni Futures Whitepaper*. We identified a number of characteristics and possible uses of Twitter for alumni relations, and made suggestions about the future. One year later, we now look at the changes in the twittersphere and provide links to several resources related to the topic.

10 Ways Twitter Has Changed in the Past Year

1. Explosion of Third-Party Applications

Third party applications now give users access to analytics about their tweets' popularity and other Twitter users' behaviors. Options include tools such as Hootsuite, which allow Twitter users to track the popularity of their tweets and the demographics of those who have folowed their links. Twitterfeed is a service that will pipe your blog's RSS feed into Twitter, then track the popularity of the feed in real time.

That describes two applications built around Twitter. But according to Twitter's blog, "there are more than 50,000 registered applications on the Twitter platform," and other data show that less than half of Twitter's audience uses the web to update their Twitter status (http://is.gd/8dlXg). Obviously, Twitter is no longer confined to its own web site.

Contents:

2. Twitter Lists

A year ago we wrote,

> As of this writing, Twitter offers no "groups" functionality, which would enable users to segment their contacts. This would allow users to message people of a certain type or tag ("friends," "co-workers," "book club members," etc.) and determine which groups could see which updates they choose to post.

In October 2009 Twitter added a new feature to its web interface: Twitter Lists. Lists were the long-awaited tool that would potentially allow users to group together subsets of followers. An obvious application for alumni relations would be for the alumni office to create a list of alumni known to be using Twitter.

Associations might try to create or identify subsets of users who share an affinity or special interest. For example, alumni who affiliate via sorority or fraternity life, athletics, performing arts, student government or other affinity groups make logical targets for group organization via lists. Similarly, alumni in a certain region or class year, or with volunteer leadership roles could be added to a list and could easily follow one another. However, each alumni office should determine whether creating such lists would further their goals; if not, then creating the lists would not be useful.

It is also important to remember that as microblogging and status updates become ubiquitous, emphasizing groups' exclusivity may eventually have an undesirable limiting effect. The challenge, as always, is to strike a balance between shared connections on the one hand, and network size on the other.

"...emphasizing groups' exclusivity may eventually have an undesirable limiting effect."

One additional idea for lists is the eventual possibility of sending targeted tweets to a list's membership. For example, an alumni association could send a tweet that would appear only in the Twitter feed of alumni list members. This would address the point we raised a year ago:

> Unlike email, tweets are not generally targeted to a subgroup of readers. The inevitable advent of group functionality for Twitter will change that, however.

Lists as currently implemented do not provide this feature, but they are nonetheless a step in the right direction.

3. Community Management

One critically important use for microblogging is Community Management. Because Twitter content is searchable, organizations such as universities or schools can find out what people at large are saying about them. Identifying issues of concern, audience members' complaints, or sometimes compliments and praise has short- and long-term value.

Responding to these kinds of remarks can sometimes solve individuals' problems, while demonstrating to the larger public that you are aware of the opportunity to listen, and prepared to act in ways that help. At the very least, this important community management role involves listening to constituents' views actively helping whenever possible.

For more about the role of community managers in higher education, see this Alumni Futures blog posting: What Does a Community Manager Look Like?

"One critically important use for microblogging is Community Management"

4. Integration Across Services

Tweets can now easily be repurposed to serve double- or triple-duty. Adding the hastag #fb to a tweet publishes that tweet as the user's status update in Facebook (if the user has configured Facebook's Selective Twitter Status application). Similarly, users of the popular business networking service LinkedIn can add their Twitter username to their LinkedIn profile. This allows them to publish their tweets as LinkedIn status updates, which are visible to their LinkedIn connections.

All this duplicate publishing can be a liability. If you are

following someone on Twitter, you will likely see their tweets; but if you are connected via other social sites, you may well see their tweets reappear on Facebook, LinkedIn and elsewhere. This can lead to "update fatigue" and cause followers, connections and friends to abandon their connections to those who use microblogging and status updates too relentlessly.

"'Update fatigue' can cause followers to abandon those who use microblogging and status updates too relentlessly."

5. Growth Trends

As we pointed out in 2009, Twitter grew at an astonishing rate in 2008. Its web site saw 500,000 unique visits in 2007, but that number jumped to 4.43 million in 2008. In December 2009 Twitter's year-over-year web traffic had increased 579%, but actually decreased from the prior month. This is partially due to the widespread use of applications that allow one to use Twitter without visiting the Twitter.com web site. But it also represents a plateau in the service's popularity (http://is.gd/8hEI8).

Even Twitter's most enthusiastic advocates knew that its continued growth was not sustainable – all services have a practical saturation point. What fueled Twitter's continued growth into 2009 was, in part, its accessibility by regular users (not just "geeks") and its popularity with celebrities. Actor Ashton Kutcher has more than 4.4 million followers, and television news anchor Anderson Cooper more than 424,000.

6. From "What Are You Doing Right Now?" to "What's Happening?"

The original question Twitter's web site asked users was "What are you doing right now?" During November 2009 the site changed this question to "What's happening?" This subtle change reflects what Twitter's own blog described as a shift away from "personal musings" toward descriptions of "things, people and events you care about." (http://blog.twitter.com/2009/11/whats-happening.html)

7. Retweets Are Now Integrated Into the Interface

Retweets began as a user-generated phenomenon: adding "RT" to the beginning of a tweet and listing the original poster's username showed that you were repeating their original message. It was broadcast to your followers with your user icon, and you as the retweeter could append additional commentary to the original tweet (within Twitter's

140 character limit).

Twitter has now integrated the RT into the Twitter interface on the web. By simply clicking a button, an indvidual can re-broadcast a tweet. However, that user's followers will see the user icon of the original sender, and the user cannot edit the tweet before it is rebroadcast.

Another example of Twitter's influence is Facebook's "Via" feature, by which Facebook users can republish other users' shared links. This is Facebook's version of a retweet, and a recent article describing this new function refers to the "twitterification of Facebook." (http://www.allfacebook.com/2010/01/facebook-retweets-via/)

So in 2010, Twitter continues to influence other services; or at the very least, Twitter's functionality continues to converge with the design and use of other social tools online.

Note: As of this writing, the Facebook Via feature works only for shared links (URLs), but not for individuals' personal Facebook status updates. See also the paper on Conversational Aspects of Retweeting in Twitter, listed in the Resources at the end of this whitepaper.

8. Data and Analytics

In the last year, our ability to gather data about Twitter activity, the activity of our followers, and the popularity of individual tweets has greatly increased. Several third-party applications offer tools that collect such information. Although these sites give us the ability to count actions and record data, they do not necessarily help us measure effectiveness. That is, they tell us whether someone clicked a link, but not how clicking that link affected the person's relationship with our institution.

We are still unable to assess directly the results of user engagement via Twitter, and to learn more about how users interact with one another. Also, it remains unclear how these interactions feed into and off of other communication tools, such as Facebook, traditional websites, printed publications and press releases.

9. The Rise of the Backchannel

A widely-documented incident in October 2009 illustrated Twitter's new role as a "backchannel" for communication during conferences. An ill-prepared speaker at a higher education technology conference met with audience hostility during his presentation. However,

"Although these sites give us the ability to count actions and record data, they do not necessarily help us measure effectiveness"

they did not express their disdain by challenging him from the floor or by walking out during his talk. Rather, several attendees criticized his materials and qualifications via Twitter during the presentation. Thanks to the conference's widely-known hashtag, a broadly dispersed virtual audience followed the negative commentary about his session.

Reactions varied. For some, this was simply a testament to Twitter's newfound importance in conference settings. They applauded the Twitter backchannel as a tool to help ensure that keynote speakers make every effort to be well-prepared, lest their failure be documented in real time, worldwide.

Others said that this wasn't a new phenomenon at all, and that even in the absence of Twitter, word about the speaker's inadequacy would spread all the same (albeit more slowly and perhaps not so widely).

Yet another group of commenters suggested that Twitter be banned from conferences to protect the presenters from this kind of backlash, and some meetings promoted specific Twitter etiquette to avoid a situation like this.

As we wrote last year, Twitter is merely "an additional layer on top of the existing framework we use for all our communications." As with blogs, email, and social network groups, compliments and criticism alike will find their way through the channels. Twitter, however, provides an immediacy not found in these other public channels, and therefore can convey negative comments that have not been tempered by the passage of time, which would allow for reconsideration, for editing, or even for retraction.

While the backchannel doesn't necessarily have direct implications for alumni relations, this aspect may be useful to consider in advance of public events and presentations.

10. Twitter and Real Time Search

Tweets are now showing up in "real time" search results, as Google and Twitter announced jointly in October 2009. The main impact of this development is that search results will display information about topics that can be influenced by real time observation. Weather, special events, traffic – all these are fair game. This shows yet another way in which microblogging is now integrated into more established platforms.

Revisiting Last Year's Claims about Twitter and Higher Education

Last year we made several modest predictions for Twitter's development during 2009. How did we do?

"We suggest that the short-term role of Twitter for advancement lies in two primary channels:
>   *1. News and information delivery; and*
>   *2. Network activation."*

Anecdotal information, casual observation, and data from our recent survey suggest that institutions have used Twitter mostly to repeat information published elsewhere, such as event announcements, faculty awards, and athletics results. 96.2% of organizations represented by the sample use Twitter to deliver "event announcements, save the dates, and campus updates." To this extent, item 1. above (about news and information delivery) is accurate. Because alumni offices and communication departments tweet mostly as organizations (and not as individuals), tweets tend to have an official air.

On the other hand, tweeting by individuals is frequently personal and un-official in nature, which makes traditional press release-type content less appropriate. This practice is still evolving and we do not know whether school officials will try to establish themselves as individuals instead of as organizations. So far, this has not happened.

The creation of Twitter Lists in recent months makes Twitter's network role more promising, but this kind of use is at odds with the news-like purpose it tends to serve. Regardless of how it's used, microblogging should be part of a comprehensive communication strategy. This will help ensure it is not merely a repeater for information already published via Facebook groups and pages, via LinkedIn groups, via alumni office web sites, or via press releases and email newsletters.

"In the coming months a number of enterprising college presidents and others in leadership roles will take advantage of the opportunity to shape the tool's use for leadership communication and engagement."

"Regardless of how it's used, microblogging should be part of a comprehensive communication strategy"

A more appropriate prediction might have been, "A small number of leaders will use Twitter..." RISD's dynamic president John Maeda has adapted his use of Twitter to account for its interactive nature (see Appendix I). However, the phenomenon has not caught on among many such leaders.

A short list of college presidents, university chancellors, and independent school heads using Twitter is available at:

http://twitter.com/alumnifutures/edleaders

"Alumni associations [can] use Twitter as an aggregator of alumni profiles, encouraging alumni to
- ***connect with one another,***
- ***follow one another's tweets and***
- ***communicate in an ongoing, continuous way that is unique to the so-called 'Twittersphere.'"***

Twitter Lists are a better aggregator of alumni profiles than the thumbnails of a year ago. Some alumni organizations state that they follow alumni, but the practice of aggregating those followers into an alumni list is not yet evident. We created such a list for the Caltech Alumni Association in January 2010:

http://twitter.com/caltechalumni/alumni

There is great potential in lists for associations that are already following alumni back, such as Purdue Alumni (@purduealumni), which follows more than 1,600 people. Scanning that many thumbnails and Twitter bios is untenable. Scanning a Twitter list is within the realm of possibility. However, creating such a list will require manual screening of each followee to determine whether each person is (or might be) an alumnus.

Finally, a list of alumni associations on Twitter provides an ever-changing glimpse of the content associations are publishing on Twitter at any time:

http://twitter.com/EtiquetteWise/alumni-associations

Interestingly, Alabama A&M University (@AAMUAlumniTweet) lists its hashtag in its Twitter Bio: #aamu.

We referenced "*10 ways Twitter Design Will Change Blog Design in 2009***." (http://mashable.com/2009/01/04/twitter-blog-design/)**

Rachel Cunliffe's predictions about Twitter's impact on blogging were thoughtful and creative, but ultimately failed to materialize during 2009. Her hypothesis that Twitter and blog design would be tightly integrated is still premature. She did identify the concept of "Tweetbacks," which is really another version of the "retweet" but it seems that 2010 is the year when Twitter will be more embedded across the Internet. In January 2010 Techcrunch blogger Michael Arrington wrote:

> Twitter is preparing to launch a new set of tools that will let third party websites easily integrate Twitter features directly into their web sites and services… (http://is.gd/8cbsf)

While such integration is already technically possible through the Twitter API (application programming interface), the implementation described by Arrington provides "slick Facebook Connect-like packaging and easy-to-use widgets" that don't yet exist.

Conclusion: Seven Unresolved Questions

Is Twitter a Brand or a Behavior?

Skeptics have pointed out that "Twitter has no business plan." Will the company thrive and survive, be bought, or fade away to leave behind only its name and its function: microblogging?

One observer has suggested that Twitter's greatest economic proposition is acquisition by a major news outlet, such as the New York Times, and that if Google buys Twitter, it will be "the end of newspapers as we know them" (see the Harvard Business Review, http://is.gd/88KA6). But it's very possible that even if Twitter had never become popular, we would still be seeing the end of newspapers as we know them.

If "Twitter the company" vanishes through dissolution or acquisition, it seems clear that the behavior it nourished – constant

public updating of one's activities and thoughts – is well-integrated enough into other popular services to last a long time. We have only seen the first phase of so-called microblogging, and it may well be Twitter that buys the New York *Times*, not the other way around (http://is.gd/88LgS).

As of February 2010 the advent of Google Buzz signalled the search giant's entry into the world of "ambient awareness" and constant public updates (http://buzz.google.com).

Competition or Integration?

If this behavior is embedded across different social networks, then how will microblogging compete or integrate with its cousins: LinkedIn status updates, Facebook updates, and Google Buzz? The more that popular social sites copy one another, the less differentiated they become. However, this coalescence may well be leading to another phase of online community, the so-called "open web" (http://is.gd/7szzt).

The social web, in its most basic form, would be an Internet where each user could interact with any other user (including individuals and companies) from anywhere online. The idea of "visiting a web site" would have no meaning; at the very least, every page would have social tools enabled, so that everything from banking to chatting to purchasing would take place regardless of one's "location" online.

In *Here Comes Everybody* (p. 102), Clay Shirky stated that "every webpge is a latent community." The open web is the logical end point of that idea, and reaching such a point would make it meaningless to talk about whether two social tools were converging or competing. The behavior itself will be the subject of interest, not the means by which the behavior will be enabled.

Organizational vs. Personal Identity

Will the pendulum swing further toward personal Twitter accounts, or will organizations maintain effectiveness by tweeting with institutional identity?

Simple choices about identity influence users' perceptions of others online. With Twitter, the username and the profile picture, as well as the short bio must be modeled after either an individual or an institution. It is beyond the scope of this paper to determine whether

"The social web, in its most basic form, would be an internet where each user could interact with any other user (including individuals and companies) from anywhere online."

a personal or an institutional identity is more effective, and how that determination might depend (for example) on the Twitter user's goals.

Creative melding of solo and group identities is possible, but this creativity carries some risk. The Association of Yale Alumni is represented online in part by Twitter account @yalealumni. This account's bio reads:

"I was founded in 1701, am quintessentially Ivy League, and have some powerful networking circles. In short, I'm kind of a big deal."

Name Yale Alumni
Location New Haven, CT
Web http://www.yale.edu
Bio I was founded in 1701, am quintessentially Ivy League, and have some powerful networking circles. In short, I'm kind of a big deal.

30	552	19
following	followers	listed

Tweets	19

The personification of the alumni network in these terms is unusual; whether it strikes alumni and others as meaningful is difficult to discern. As of this writing, the "powerful networking circle" was not characterized in this account's rare tweets, which included messages such as "I like bulldogs" and "Happy Easter!" Twitter's obvious role as a network facilitator is still in the future.

Will Lists Evolve Further?

Are Lists a solution to last year's question about Groups? If not, what remains to be addressed?

Lists do not provide the same benefits that groups would. Members of a list can have a verified layer of identity; in the case of alumni lists, for example, members have been vetted and are known

to be graduates of a particular institution. Other than this, lists are still rather limited in their utility. They are invite-only, and users cannot opt to join a list on their own. Lists also do not provide an easy way for individual users to discover and connect with one another, since there is no way to scan the profiles or bios of list members all at once. In short, a Twitter list is not to be confused with a searchable directory.

Twitter for Fundraising

As illustrated by world events such as the devastating Haitian earthquake in January 2010, Twitter-based fundraising is still focused on broadly shared causes, not traditional cyclical solicitation like that practiced by university annual funds, for example.

In this year's survey on Twitter usage, 10.6% of respondents indicated using Twitter for "Fundraising solicitation, e.g., annual giving asks." This was an increase from 2009's 3.8%. We think it is more likely that Twitter is used to create awareness for annual giving campaigns (e.g., by linking to an annual fund online giving page) than for direct solicitation.

Social Media Policies and Guidelines

Do we need social media guidelines that address (among other things) policy and procedure? Depending on the organization's size and its goals, this may be prudent, but policies should be customized to reflect an institution's mission and culture, as well as the extent to which it intends to use social tools. This white paper's Resource section includes a link to Social Media Governance's list of more than 115 sample social media policies. Though not specific to educational institutions, the wide array of sample policies provides a clear picture of how such documents can influence or guide any organization's social presence.

"...policies should be customized to reflect an institution's mission and culture, as well as the extent to which it intends to use social tools."

Verified Accounts and "Official" Voices

From whom do alumni wish to receive their alma mater's tweets? The alumni office? Volunteers? The central administration? The public relations staff?

Most likely, they don't care who sends the tweets, so long as the information itself is relevant and interesting. In some cases, it is not the institutional staff who are providing this service. While it is risky, in

some ways, to rely on volunteer-driven communications and content, several volunteer-based Twitter accounts have done an admirable job of keeping alumni informed and connected (for example, @johnshopkins). But the practice also raises the question of how, or whether, a reader can know the degree to which an account represents an institution or association.

Starting in June of 2009 Twitter beta-tested an account verification process designed to vouch for the authenticity of particular accounts. This was specifically aimed at public figures such as celebrities, professional athletes, public officials and organizations that would be likely targets for impersonation. Verified accounts have a badge just above the Twitter user's name, location, URL and bio. The service was offered to a select subset of users, but has never left the testing phase, and as of January 2010 it was not schedule for broader release.

Not offering this service to all Twitter uses may be symptomatic of Twitter's rapid growth: not enough time or staff to verify the authenticity of all accounts. Such a system, however, will have great value. For example, it would mitigate problems faced by universities, schools, alumni offices and other campus entities that wish to differentiate their identity from that of individuals who have not been asked to speak on the organization's behalf.

Alternatively, however, there is the reality of Web 2.0. The rise of user-generated content means that it is up to the consumer of

content, not the publisher alone, to determine what he deems valid or worthwhile. Being the "official" Internet presence of your institution's brand has less value than it used to. Being the most relevant and useful presence, on the other hand, is critically important.

Final Thoughts

The network of individuals and organizations that Twitter connects is wide and relatively shallow. But its breadth allows it to serve as a spontaneous clearinghouse for informal information sharing. It can drive traditional, face-to-face interactions (such as Twitter users convening for "tweetups") and can potentially add to the ways in which individuals and organizations interact across the Internet's identity layer. Therefore it is more important now than at any previous time for affinity-based organizations – such as alumni associations – to explore, experiment with, and embrace microblogging as a tool for activating their members' networks.

Resources

Articles, Blog Posts and Books
Activating Alumni Networks with Twitter: An Alumni Futures Whitepaper
Alumni Futures
http://www.alumnifutures.com/2009/01/white-paper-on-twitter.html

Alumni Relations and Fundraising: The View from Twitter
Alumni Futures
http://www.alumnifutures.com/2009/11/view-from-twitter.html

Conference Humiliation: They're Tweeting Behind Your Back
Chronicle of Higher Education
http://chronicle.com/article/Conference-Humiliation-/49185/

Conversational Aspects of Retweeting in Twitter (PDF)
http://www.danah.org/papers/TweetTweetRetweet.pdf

Future of the Internet IV
PEW Internet
http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Future-of-the-Internet-IV.aspx

Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations
Clay Shirky
http://isbn.nu/9781594201530

How To: Use Twitter Lists
Mashable
http://mashable.com/2009/11/02/twitter-lists-guide/

Social networks that matter: Twitter under the microscope
First Monday
http://is.gd/eJOA

Measuring Success: Qualitative and Quantitative
Adaptivate
http://www.adaptivateblog.com/2009/11/17/measuring-success-qualitative-and-quantitative/

Microsoft's Challenge: 91 Days to Beat Google
Mercury News
http://www.mercurynews.com/breaking-news/ci_14242473

My Recent Experience with the Backchannel
Adaptivate
http://www.adaptivateblog.com/2009/10/23/my-recent-experience-with-the-backchannel/

Overcoming the Backlash of the Backchannel
Scribbling on the Sky
http://zaanahoward.com/2009/12/22/overcoming-the-backlash-of-the-backchannel/

Portrait of a Twitter user: Status update demographics
PEW Internet
http://pewinternet.org/Infographics/Twitter-demographics--Fall-2009.aspx

Realtime List of Tweets by Alumni Associations Using Twitter
EtiquetteWise via Twitter
http://twitter.com/EtiquetteWise/alumni-associations

Sample Social Media Policies and Guidelines
Social Media Governanace
http://socialmediagovernance.com/policies.php

Social Media Analytics: Twitter: Quantitative & Qualitative Metrics
Occam's Razor
http://www.kaushik.net/avinash/2009/11/social-media-analytics-twitter-quantitative-qualitative-analysis.html

The Twitter Guide Book
Mashable
http://mashable.com/guidebook/twitter/

The Twitter Question:
PEW Internet
http://pewinternet.org/Commentary/2009/October/The-Twitter-Question.aspx

Trends and Challenges for Social Media in 2010
Digiphile
http://digiphile.wordpress.com/2010/01/24/trends-and-challenges-for-social-media-in-2010/

Tweets, and updates, and search, oh my!
Google Blog
http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2009/10/rt-google-tweets-and-updates-and-search.html

Twitter for Nonprofits and Fundraising
The Fundraising Coach
http://fundraisingcoach.com/articles/twitter-for-nonprofits-and-fundraising/

Twitter User Growth Slowed...
Hubspot
http://is.gd/6YLnS

Third Party Tools Mentioned In this Document
Hootsuite: http://www.hootsuite.com
Twitterfeed: http://www.twitterfeed.com

Third Party Tools for Mining Twitter
HiveMind: http://grou.pe/
FollowerWonk: http://FollowerWonk.com/
Twiangulate: http://www.twiangulate.com

Appendix I: Case Study Updates

In our 2009 paper we looked briefly at institutional leaders in higher education and their approaches to using Twitter. There were precious few such examples to choose from. But a notable one was Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) President John Maeda (@johnmaeda).

In January 2009, Maeda had 1,295 followers but was following nobody, an unusually one-way usage upon which we remarked. Now, a year later, his followers have increased more than 12.5 times, to 16,433. But more importantly, Maeda has embraced the two-way nature of Twitter, following more than 1,500 others:

Date	Following	Followers	Updates
1/2009	0	1,295	142
1/2010	1,585	16,433	960

Another change is how he uses the brief bio available to Twitter users. One year ago his bio read simply, "President of Rhode Island School of Design (RISD)." Today it says, "President, Rhode Island School of Design, RISD, College, Museum, USA, 1877, Laws of Simplicity, MIT, Design, Art, Business, Technology, Life."

This economical statement reflects his true self-identity, not just the label others have placed on him. This is a classic example of how users create desired identities online and then manage or "curate" them to create a certain impression. It also provides keywords that will allow others searching Twitter for any of these topics to find his Twitter profile and, most likely, become followers on Twitter.

In contrast, another university head we briefly profiled last year, Dr. Imma Tubelli (Rector of the Open University of Catalonia, Twitter username: @rectora) has not invested much additional effort in Twitter, and may find it an ineffective investment in communication from her leadership position.

Date	Following	Followers	Updates
1/2009	1	104	96
1/2010	21	217	120

Dr. Tubelli did not tweet at all between late May and late October 2009, but her ratio of followers:followees went from >100:1 down to about 10:1, which is identical to Maeda's. While there is no ideal ratio that fits all the ways of using Twitter, it is important to remember that quality is the ideal to pursue. Merely having a lot of followers is not in itself meaningful. Twitter can foster learning and understanding, but not if the channel is so cluttered with noise that the valuable messages are hidden in the tumult.

Organizations meanwhile pursue a wide variety of policies and approaches to following their

own followers. The Caltech Alumni Association follows a tiny number of campus individuals (students, faculty, and departments or centers), reserving the bulk of its following for alumni. Although one cannot always identify the individual behind a Twitter account, when the Association is reasonably certain that a new follower is an alumnus, it follows that person in return.

Here are the changes in the last year for the Caltech Alumni Association (@caltechalumni):

Date	Following	Followers	Updates
1/2009	53	85	34
1/2010	164	471	157

Appendix II: Survey of Twitter Usage in Educational Advancement

Twitter in Alumni Relations 2010: An Informal Survey

January 24 to February 1, 2010. This is not a scientific research survey; it is an informal poll of readers invited via Twitter, Facebook, e-mail, the Alumni Futures blog, and the Adaptivate blog. This was a repeat of the previous year's survey, with the addition of questions about the use of Twitter lists. Here are some findings that stood out, with comparisons to last year's data.

General Summary of Responses:

The survey consisted of 12 questions; depending on one's use of, and familiarity with Twitter, one could answer as few as three questions. 238 individuals answered at least the basic questions. 189 (or 79.4%) completed the entire survey. 186 (98.4%) provided their country.

The vast majority hailed from the United States (84%), followed by the United Kingdom (5%), Canada (3%) and 9 other nations (Germany, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, Singapore, Switzerland, Denmark, Ukraine and Estonia). In 2009, 85% were from the USA.

Chart 1: Institution Type


What type of institution do you represent?
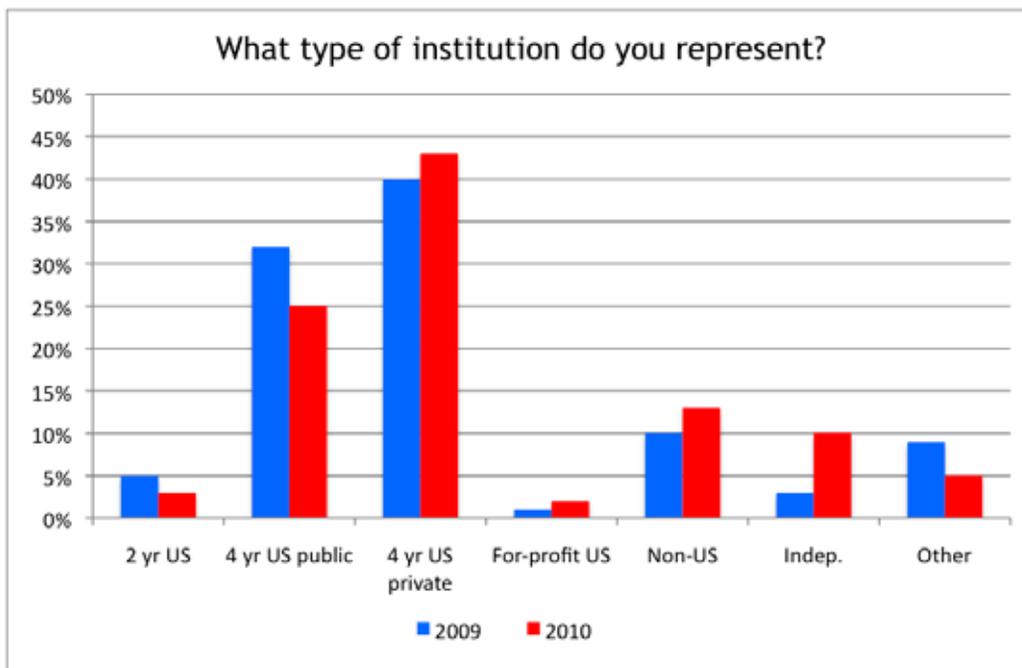
4-year U.S. private insitutions again made up the majority of responses (almost 45%), followed by 4-year U.S. publics (25%). As in 2009, non-U.S. institutions made up the next largest group at 13%.

Chart 2: Areas of Responsibility

What are your areas of responsibility?
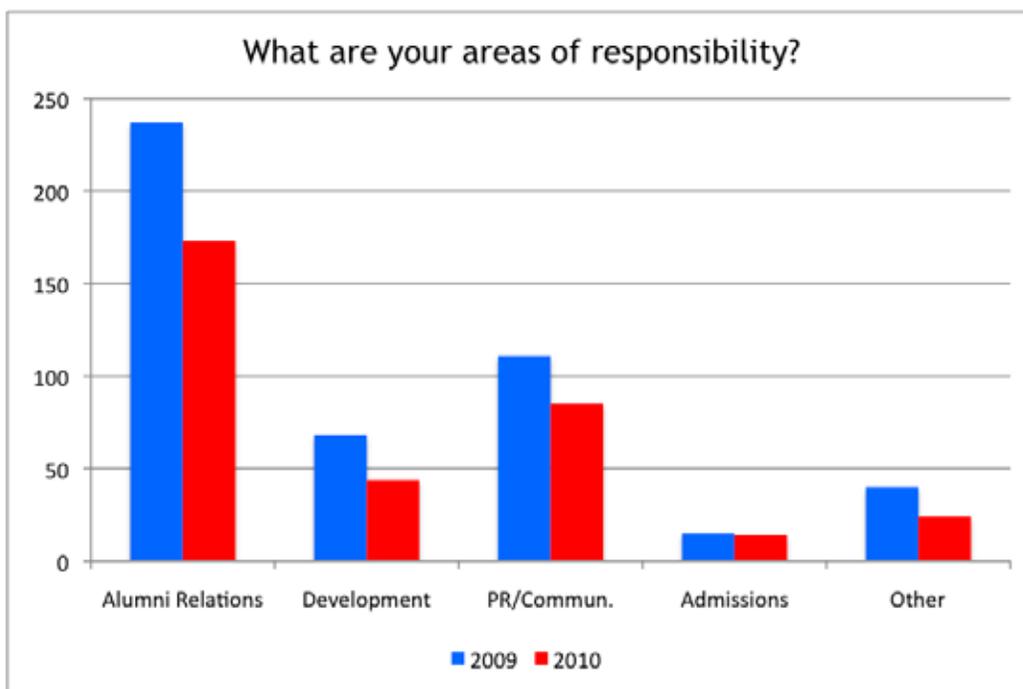
Respondents could choose more than one response. 76% identified Alumni Relations as their area of responsibility, 37% Public Relations or Communications, and 19% Development (fundraising). These numbers are similar to 2009's, although there were slight increases in the fraction of respondents in fundraising and in public relations and communications. (Absolute number of responses is shown above, not percentage.)

Chart 3: Familiarity with Twitter
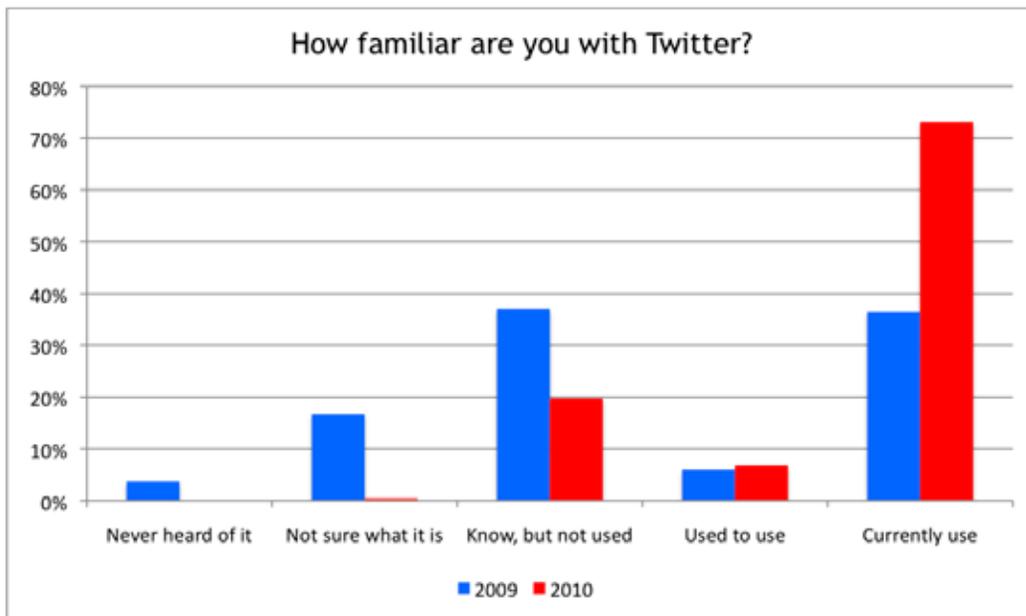
This year we see a dramatic increase in familiarity with Twitter. Whereas a year ago 4% of those surveyed had never heard of Twitter, not a single respondent this year had escaped hearing of the phenomenon. Similarly, in 2009 17% had heard of Twitter but did not know what it was; this year, one person gave this response (0.4%).

The percentage using Twitter doubled from 36% in 2009 to more than 73% this year. Interestingly, the percentage who had tried Twitter but who are no longer using it was consistent with last year's result, around 6%.

Chart 4: Organizational versus Personal Use of Twitter

Organizational vs. Personal Twitter Use
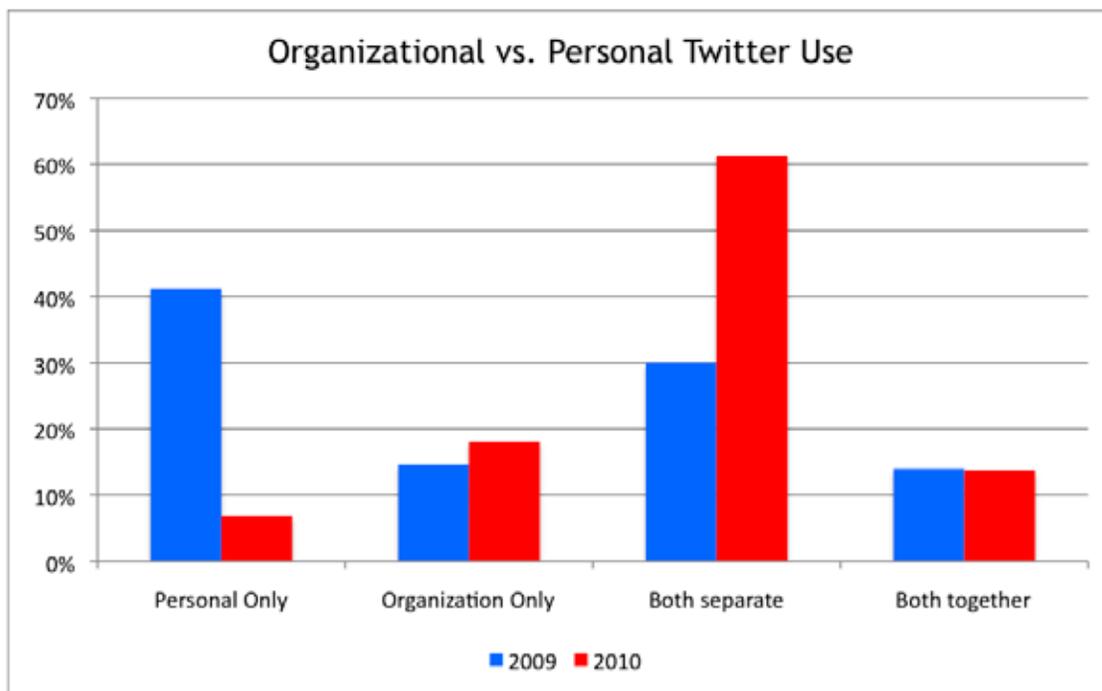
61% of users have separate personal and organizational Twitter accounts; this was just 30% last year. 18% are using it for their school or association only, versus 15% in 2009. Only 6.9% were maintaining personal accounts without any organizational tweeting, compared to a much larger cohort in 2009, 41%. This may suggest that after experimenting in one sphere with Twitter, some education professionals added separate accounts during the last 12 months; those who started out tweeting privately created organizational accounts, and vice versa.

Chart 5: Organizational Use: Type of Content
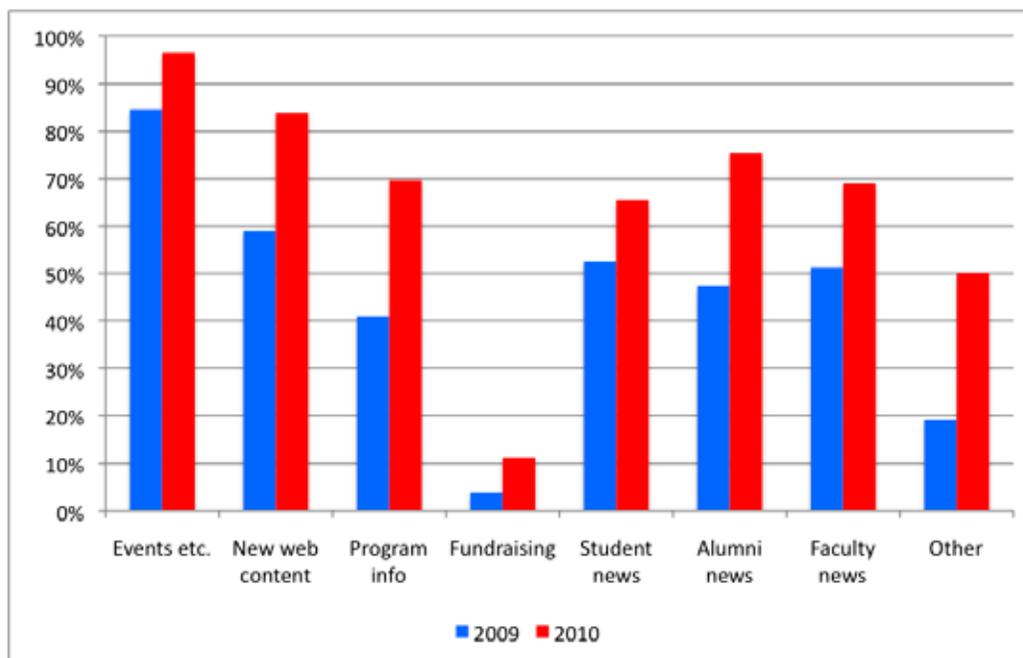
Event updates and announcements still comprised the greatest share of organizational content (tweeted by more than 96% of users). 83% sent links to new web content (versus 59% a year ago), and there was comparable popularity for the next four more popular types of content: alumni news (75% were sending this), alumni service and program information (70%), faculty news (69%), and student news (66%). This suggests that despite an increased likelihood of finding this kind of content on Twitter, it is still being used largely to republish information across multiple channels, as we assumed event information (for example) is being sent via postal mail, email, the web, and Facebook. Message redundancy remains.

The majority of survey respondents work in alumni relations, which helps explain the tendency to tweet about alumni-related news and programs.

New, specific uses mentioned included retweeting other accounts at one's own institution (to "encourage social media participation at [the] institution"); and replying to users' comments about content posted by the institution.

It is important to note that this year we added a content type to the answer choices: "Personal comments, observations, or opinions." 39% of respondents indicated including this kind of content in organizational tweets in 2010, and in the chart above we added that to the 11% who chose "Other." This explains the relatively large difference in "Other" between last year and this year (19% versus 50%). Future surveys should include "Other" as well as "Personal content" as separate data points.

Chart 6: Number of Accounts You Follow

The scale for counting followed accounts changed dramatically between surveys. In 2009, only 11% of respondents followed more than 100 other accounts. Almost 40% weren't following anyone else with their organizational account.

Number of Twitter Users Your Organization Follows (2009)
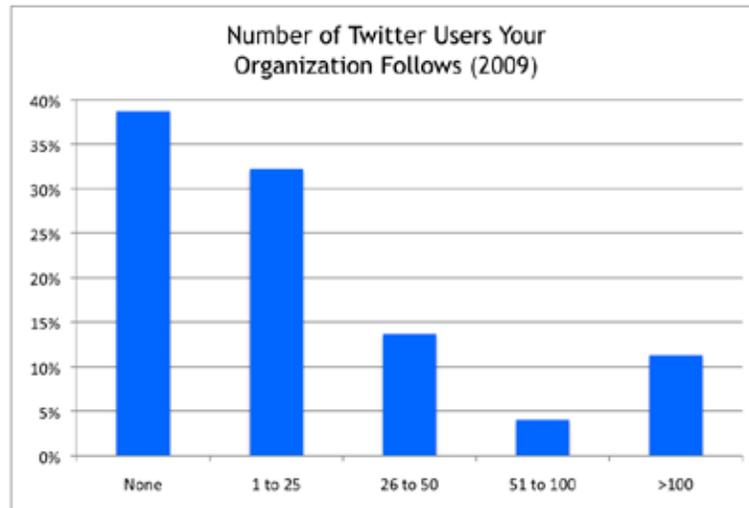
By early 2010 the percentage following more than 100 others had ballooned from 11% to 62%, with 9% of 2010 respondents following more than 1,000 other accounts. Only 1% followed nobody at all.

Number of Twitter Users Your Organization Follows (2010)
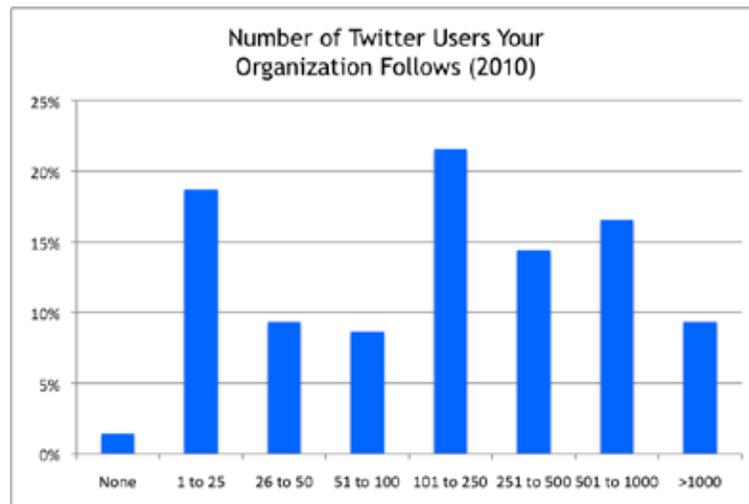
The largest percentage of 2010 respondents (22%) followed between 101 and 250 accounts. There is a large percentage (19%) who follow between 1 and 25 others, while 26% follow more than 501. It is not possible to determine from our survey whether those institutions following between 1 and 25 accounts have relatively low numbers because they are new to Twitter, or whether it is by design or policy.

**Chart 7: Number of Users Following Your Organization**

Number of Twitter Users Following Your Organization (2009)
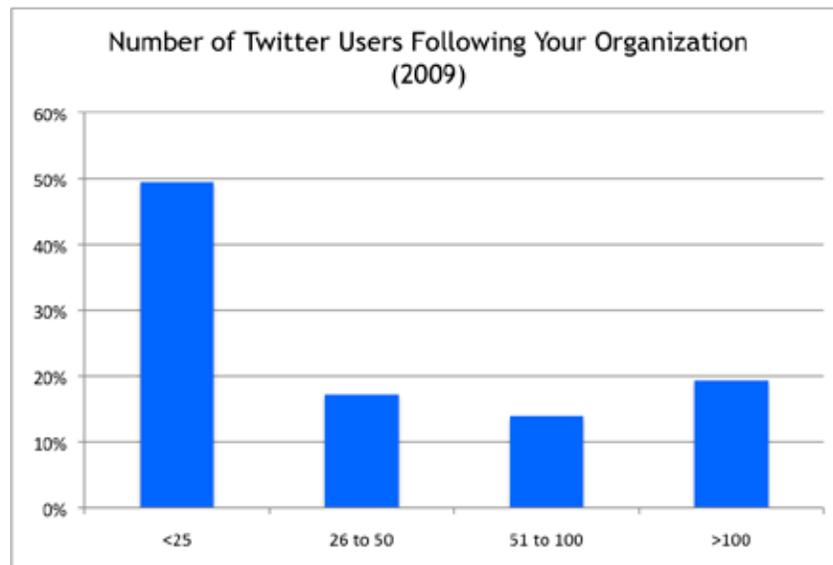
A year ago half the organizations in our poll using Twitter had fewer than 25 followers. 19% had more than 100 followers.

Number of Twitter Users Following Your Organization (2010)
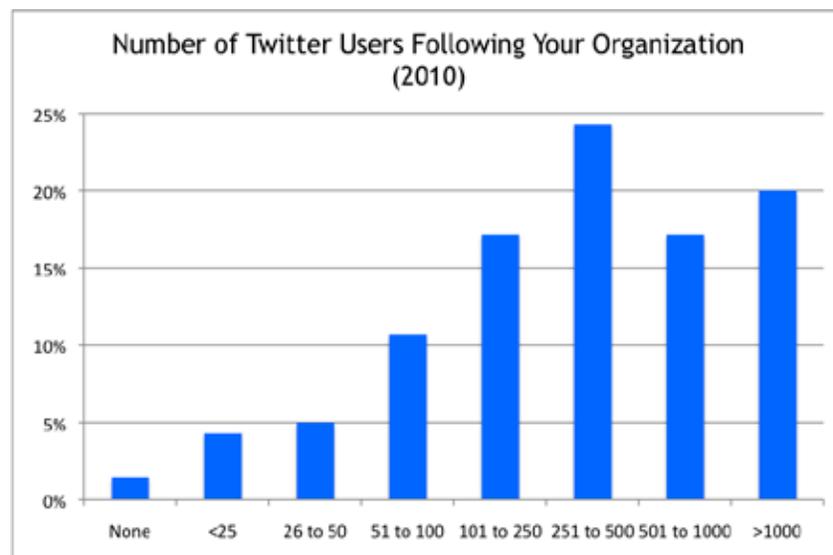
This year, 78% of organizations responding had more than 100 followers, and there were 28 organizations (20% of the total) with more than 1,000 followers. This is clearly a function of Twitter's growth among individuals, and those individuals' willingness to follow organizations with which they feel some personal tie.

Chart 8: Frequency of Use

In 2009 46% of responding organizations had not sent a single tweet in the 60 days preceding our survey.

Frequency of Use
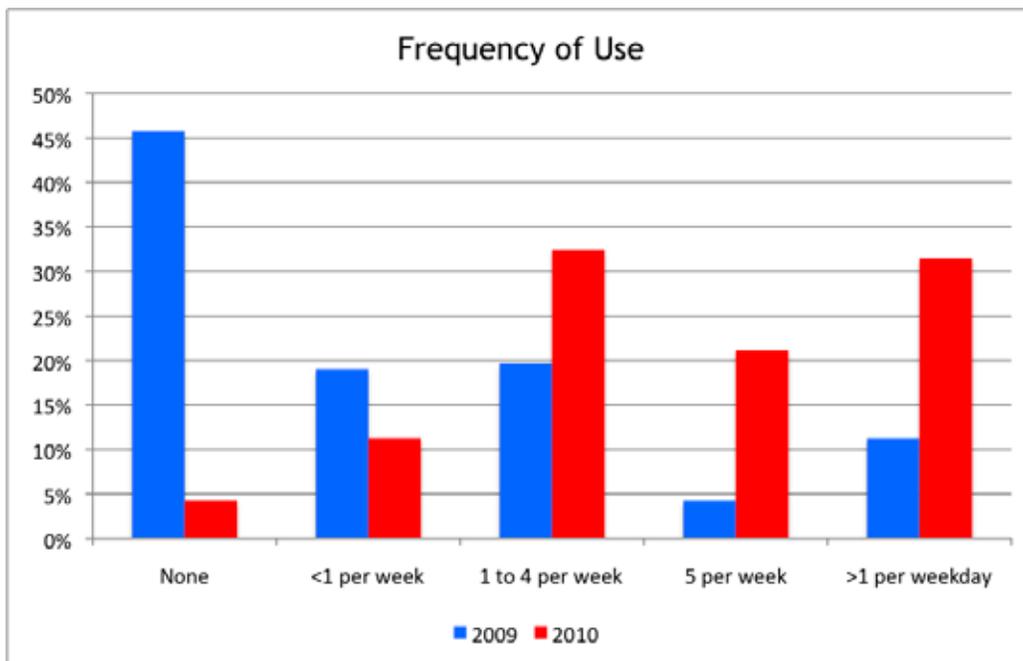
This year that number was just 4%, and 31% were tweeting more than once per weekday, which almost tripled the 2009 number (11%).

Chart 9: Twitter List Usage

Since last year's survey Twitter has created the ability to compile lists of users to follow as a group. We asked respondents in this year's survey, "Have you created any Twitter lists with your organizational Twitter accounts?"
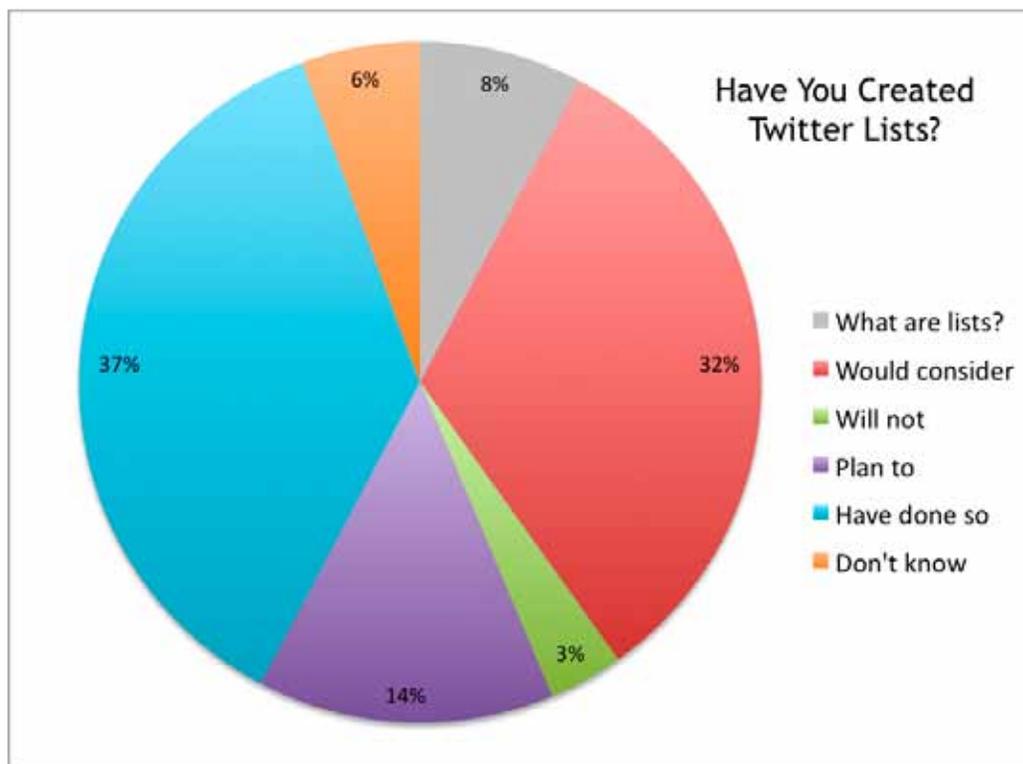
37% of respondents (84 responses) claim to have created at least one Twitter list and another 14% planned to. 32% had not yet done so, but said that they would consider creating lists, while a stubborn 3% had already made up their minds not to.

8% of respondents did not know what Twitter lists are.

Twitter lists can be shared publicly, or can be kept private and viewed or followed only by the account that created them. Not shown in the data above, but revealed in the replies to our final survey questions, 39% of the 84 respondents whose organization had created at least one list indicated that they were maintaining only public lists. Just 7% were using private lists only. Interestingly, 44% did not know whether their lists were public or private, most likely because the survey respondent was not the individual in charge of creating and managing her or her organization's lists. This suggests that the number of private lists is under-reported, since they would be visible only to the account holder who

created them; a survey respondent not handling her institution's Twitter output wouldn't know about private lists.

Our final question asked, "Have you created a Twitter list that consists of your followers who are alumni?" 21% (24 of 114 respondents) said "Yes," which suggests some willingness to use Twitter's list function to aggregate network members according to their alumni status. As we indicated in the paper above, lists will require further development (such as the ability to let users "opt in") before they become truly useful to alumni at large and to their associations.

A final comment about Twitter's role in organizational communication. A year ago we asked, "What does Twitter do?" Survey respondents were asked to identify at least one ("best") answer. The most common response was "Twitter is a tool for telling other people what I am/my organization is doing." The next most popular "best" answer was that Twitter may yet prove useful in some as-yet undetermined way.

A year later, "Telling other people what I am/my organization is doing" remained the most common first choice. But the number of people selecting "Twitter may yet prove useful" dropped dramatically (only 10% of respondents chose it at all, and of them, 3% picked it as the best answer). Rising to prominence was the response that "Twitter is a tool for reinforcing information followers will hear/see elsewhere." This supports the duplication of messages we identified in the paper, and shows that organizational users are not yet able to rely on Twitter as a primary or sole channel for important content.

The open-ended descriptions of Twitter's purpose provide a final, useful glimpse into microblogging's emerging role in communication. Among the replies were these individual comments:

"I use Twitter in dialogue, research, and conversation..."

"Twitter is about conversation and community."

"Research on how alumni...are talking about the institution..."

Twitter is "about getting the conversation started, getting Tweeters to interact."

Twitter is "a way to reinforce marketing messages for alumni programming...promote events...engage by conversation and retweets..."

"Dialogue, interaction, response to issues with University/services."

Finally, once again, there is awareness of the community management aspect of Twitter content. This user (from a public university in the United States) correctly idenitified the ability to search Twitter conversations as a key tool in helping position an institution to interact with its audience and identify their views and concerns:

> Twitter is a great barometer of what's happening. We can easily search what people are saying about our campus or association as an event or crisis is happening. It's the fastest feedback mechanism out there. People bluntly tell their followers what they're thinking about you and it's many times public and searchable feedback.

Finally, one British university respondent "didn't really like" any of the answer choices presented in the survey, and instead summarized her view of microblogging this way:

"In a higher education context I would say it is a tool for creating connections and conversations between the university and its varied stakeholders."