Chapter 3: Twitter Applications and Other Delights

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*Y*ou have a Twitter account, you've set up a Twitter strategy, and you're starting to attract a loyal band of followers. If you've been using the Twitter Web site for tweeting, you know that the page doesn't update in real time. When you navigate to the page, you see tweets from your followers up to the current moment. You have to refresh the page to see any newer tweets. Would you like to tweet from your desktop with an application that updates in real time? Or send tweets when you're on the road or at a convention? You can, thanks to some ingenious software designers.

In this chapter, we tell you about third-party Twitter applications that can do what we just described and more. We also show you how to tweak your Twitter page — say that three times, fast!

Customizing Your Twitter Page

When you set up your Twitter page, you have several options to create a unique-looking page. But the options are the same ones that everyone has at his disposal. You can take your Twitter page to the next level and create something cool, something unique that fits your personality or looks similar to your company's printed material or your Web site.

REMEMBER

If everything associated with your company has a similar look and feel, you give a sense of continuity to clients. After all, you wouldn't want your Twitter followers to go to your Web site and think they've landed on the wrong page, would you?

In the following sections, we show you how to customize your Twitter page and your Twitter avatar.

Creating a custom Twitter background

The standard Twitter themes are quite good, but you want something unique — something that no other Twitter user has. When that's your goal, the only option is to make it yourself or hire a designer to create a custom background.

You might think that creating a background for a Twitter page is easy. However, not everybody uses browsers of the same size to surf the Net. They range from the ridiculously small desktop measuring 800 x 600 pixels to the insanely humongous desktop size of 2560 x 1440, found on 27-inch iMacs. The best thing you can do is compromise and create a background that works on a 1024 x 768 desktop.

If you don't have an image editing application that gives you the option of working with layers, check out the later sidebar "Finding a premade Twitter background."

Creating a custom background is a wonderful thing. You don't have any limit on the amount of text you can put in. In fact, if you want to, you can create a document that is very tall and put lots of text in it. However, the user will have to scroll to see all of the text.

Your Twitter background should be 1600 pixels x 1200 pixels with a resolution of 72 pixels per inch, have a file size smaller than 800KB, and in one of the following formats: JPEG, GIF, or PNG. PNG seems to be the best if you have a combination of text and images for your background.

After you create the custom background, your next step is to get it into your Twitter page. To replace the standard background with your custom background:

1. **Log in to your Twitter account.**

2. **Click Settings.**

   The Settings page appears.

3. **Click Design.**

   The Select a Theme page appears (see Figure 3-1).

4. **Click Change Background Image.**

   The Browse button appears.

5. **Click the Browse button.**

   The File Upload dialog appears.

6. **Navigate to your background image and then click Open.**

   After the image uploads, it appears in the thumbnail window.

Figure 3-1:
Adding a custom background to your Twitter page.

7. Click Save Changes.

Your cool new background appears on your Twitter page. Figure 3-2 shows a custom background. The document was optimized for a desktop that is 1280 pixels wide.

Figure 3-2:
A custom background displayed on a Twitter page.

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Finding a premade Twitter background

Hmmm. You say that you have no image-editing application, and even if you did, you say that you aren't artistic. You can still include the essence of cool on your Twitter page. Check out just a few sources for custom Twitter backgrounds:

- ✔ **COLOURlovers:** www.colourlovers. com/themeleon/twitter

- ✔ **Limeshot Design:** http://limeshot. com/2008/twitter-backgrounds

- ✔ **TwitrBackgrounds.com:** www.twitr backgrounds.com

- ✔ **TwitBacks:** www.twitbacks.com

- ✔ **twitrounds:** http://twitrounds.com

Search for the term *free Twitter backgrounds* at your favorite search engine to find a wide variety of resources. If you decide to kick it up a notch, consider having a custom background designed for your Twitter page.

Creating a custom Twitter avatar

You can upload any old photo to Twitter and use it for your page. However, you should use the best possible shot of your smiling face. Does that mean you grab your trusty point-and-shoot camera and hold it in front of you? No, not unless you like red-eye, the disease that made on-camera flash infamous.

Spend a bit of money to have a professional shoot your portrait. You can use it for not only Twitter but also your other marketing efforts.

To be used as an avatar, your photo must have

- ✦ A JPEG or PNG format
- ✦ A measurement of no more than 200 x 200 pixels
- ✦ A file size no larger than 700K

After the image is on your computer, follow these steps to replace the standard Twitter avatar:

1. **Log on to Twitter.**

   Your lovely Twitter page appears.

2. **Click Settings and then click Profile.**

   The Web page changes and displays your profile settings.

3. **Next to the current avatar, click Change Image.**

   The Browse button appears.

4. **Click Browse, navigate to the image file, and follow the prompts to replace the image.**

5. **Click Save.**

   Your new avatar is on your Twitter page.

TIP

If you need a little photography assistance, check out *Digital Portrait Photography For Dummies*, by Doug Sahlin.

Tweeting from Your Desktop

The Twitter Web site is a wonderful thing. It's attractive in a Spartan kind of way and gets the job done. The site connects you to Twitter and enables you to connect with your twibe. The only problem diehard Tweeters have is that tweets don't update in real time. If you're communicating or following the tweets of your followers, you have to refresh the page to see the latest tweets. And, if it has been a while since you refreshed the page, several hundred tweets may slip offscreen when you refresh.

You have a solution for this dilemma. The powerful desktop application TweetDeck, at `www.tweetdeck.com`, updates in real time, as shown in Figure 3-3. When someone sends a tweet, it appears in TweetDeck almost instantaneously along with an alert.

Figure 3-3: Keep track of your followers with TweetDeck.

Using TweetDeck, you can

✦ **Create groups.** Monitor the tweets of your most important followers.

✦ **Create columns.** Display *mentions* (tweets containing @yourusername), direct messages, and searches.

✦ **Click a person's username.** See a person's profile. This information is the same as you find in the person's bio on her Twitter page. The links in a bio viewed in TweetDeck are fully functional, and you can also see the person's Twitter page by clicking the applicable link. In addition, you see all recent tweets in a profile viewed in TweetDeck.

✦ **Upload photos directly from TweetDeck.** After you upload a photo, you see a URL to the image in the message box, as shown in Figure 3-4. Flesh it out with information about the photo and send the tweet. Sweet.

✦ **Monitor multiple searches.** If you have more columns than you have desktop, a handy scrollbar appears at the bottom of the application.

Figure 3-4: The multifaceted TweetDeck application.

You can use many more applications to streamline your Twitter use. The rest of the chapter is devoted to applications that enable you to send tweets from mobile devices and much more.

Tweeting from Your Phone or iPod touch

If you use the iPhone to communicate while you're on the road, you can download a version of TweetDeck that enables you to tweet on the go from `www.tweetdeck.com/iphone` or the Apple App Store. The application also works on the iPod touch, which has access to a wireless network.

Of course, the iPhone isn't the only game in town. If you use a BlackBerry, you can send tweets using the ÜberTwitter application, at `www.uber twitter.com` or BlackBerry App World. If you purchase a subscription to the application for $4.99 per year, you're entitled to unlimited upgrades and no advertisements. The alternative is to download the free version, which has advertisements.

Twitter Browser Plug-Ins, Extensions, and Interesting Web Sites

Twitter has become one of the most popular social media sites. In addition to its Web site and its desktop and mobile phone applications, it has lots of browser plug-ins to enhance your Twitter experience or tweeting skills.

The following list describes a few Twitter browser plug-ins:

✦ **Birdpie:** Store as bookmarks the URLs you tweet. This capability can come in handy as a reference. (`www.birdpie.com`)

✦ **Blip.fm:** Sync this music-sharing Web site with a Twitter account. If you need to be an Internet deejay and entertain your followers, this is the place to go. (`http://blip.fm`)

✦ **FileSocial:** At this file-sharing Web site, you can share with your Twitter followers' photos, videos, PDF files, PowerPoint presentations, and more. (`http://filesocial.com`)

✦ **FileTWT:** Share files with your Twitter twibe. (`www.filetwt.com`)

✦ **FlashTweet:** Build your twibe by acquiring targeted followers. You can try the service free for 14 days. Then you pay $6.95 per month until you cancel the service. (`http://flashtweet.com`)

✦ **Friend or Follow:** See which Twitter users you're following aren't following you and vice versa. You can also use the application to create a list of your friends — people you're following who are following you back, which is an excellent way to streamline your twibe. (`www.friendorfollow.com`)

✦ **GeoChirp:** Search for specific conversations within a given radius of the area in which you live, as shown in Figure 3-5. Enter a topic in the Search text box and the site returns a list of tweets about the subject. (`www.geochirp.com`)

Figure 3-5:
Follow conversations near where you live.

✦ **twable:** Quickly find out who you're following that is or isn't following you and who's following you that you're not following. (`http://twable.net`)

✦ **Twitbin:** Manage Twitter using a browser side panel. You can use the application to send and receive tweets, send links, and more. This Mozilla Firefox plug-in works on Firefox 2.0 and newer for Mac and Windows users. (`www.twitbin.com`)

That's just the tip of the virtual iceberg for Twitter plug-ins and Web sites. We cover a few more in the next section, or use your favorite search engine to search for more information.

Exploring Other Twitter Applications

You've analyzed your Twitter account 27 ways to Sunday and you've experimented with all the cool stuff related to Twitter. You might think that what

we've already covered would be enough for one chapter. But, wait — there's more. This list describes some other useful Twitter applications you'll find on the World Wide Web:

✦ **digsby:** Receive e-mail alerts, perform instant messaging, and manage your social media accounts. This desktop application is available as a free download for the Mac, PC, and Linux. (`www.digsby.com`)

✦ **hellotxt:** You can use this Web-based app to manage your social media. Sign up for a free account to read, update, and organize your presence on multiple social media networks. (`http://hellotxt.com`)

✦ **Tweepler:** Make managing your Twitter followers a breeze by using this free service. (The developers include a PayPal button, in case you care to make a donation to show your support.) After you enter your Twitter username and password — which aren't recorded — a list of your followers appears. You can then post followers into these three buckets:

 • *Ignore:* Followers you don't want to follow back

 • *Unprocessed:* Followers you aren't following

 • *Follow:* Followers you're following

 Your goal is to review names in the Unprocessed bin and add them to either the Follow bin (and then you're automatically following them) or the Ignore bin. (`www.tweepler.com`)

✦ **twhirl:** Tweet without being on the Twitter Web site. You can also use this desktop application to simultaneously post Twitter updates to Facebook and LinkedIn. If you like to experiment with different desktop apps, <ahem> give twhirl a whirl. (`www.twhirl.org`)

✦ **Twitdom:** Check out this database from time to time to see what's new and exciting. It has every conceivable app for desktop and mobile devices. (`www.twitdom.com`)

✦ **TwitPic:** Upload your images to this picture-sharing service and then add the URL to a tweet to share them with your Twitter followers. You can also upload images to the site from TweetDeck. (`http://twitpic.com`)

✦ **Twitterfeed:** Feed your blog posts to Twitter and Facebook. (`http://twitterfeed.com`)

✦ **twittervision:** When you've tweeted so much that your fingers are about to fall off and you're convinced you have carpal tunnel syndrome, check out this Mercator projection map of the world. A flag pops up from a random area of the world where someone just sent a tweet. Read the message quickly because another one pops up quickly, as shown in Figure 3-6. (`www.twittervision.com`)

✦ **Twitt(url)y:** Track the URLs mentioned most often in tweets. (`http://twitturly.com`)

✦ **twtpoll:** Find information by creating polls for your Twitter followers. You can create a Twitter-only poll for no charge. You can also create Web polls for a fee, add branding to polls, and sponsor polls. (`http:// twtpoll.com`)
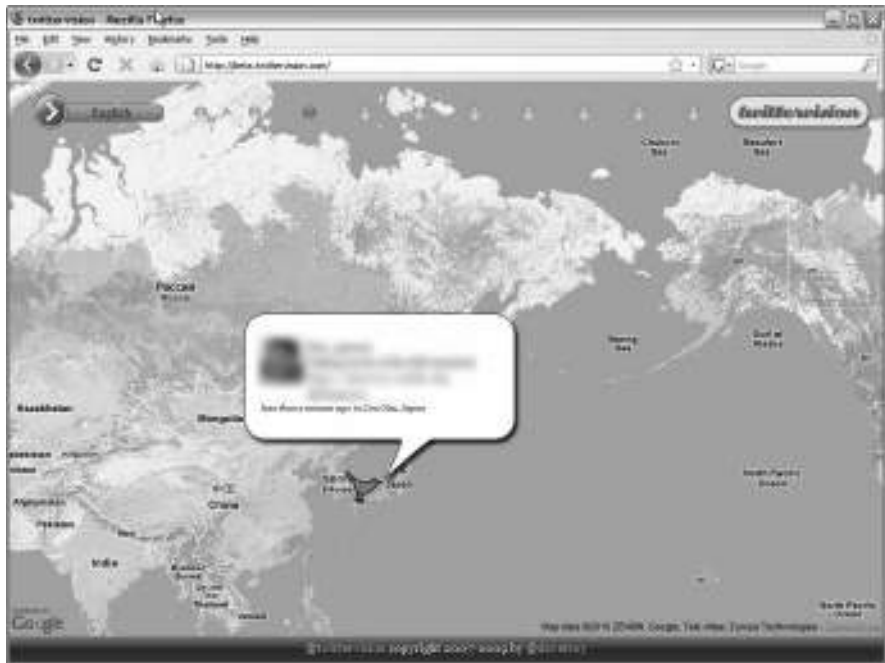

Figure 3-6: When you need a break from tweeting, visit twitter-vision.

As Twitter and other forms of social media are invented, you'll see more applications popping up. Always search for new ones that are on the horizon.

Marketing on Twitter via Peashoot

You can use the Web Twitter application Peashoot, at `www.peashootapp. com`, for marketing on Twitter.

Peashoot (see Figure 3-7) offers different plans and features a 21-day free trial to see whether the application is right for you.

Figure 3-7:
It's
Peashoot,
not
crapshoot.

At Peashoot, you can

✦ **Use the audience builder to find followers.** The Peashoot audience builder automatically finds Twitter users who are relevant to you, your service, or your company. Having more followers helps you spread the word about your company.

✦ **Track your Twitter return on investment (ROI).** Peashoot claims to track exactly how much of your Web site sales can be tracked to links you've posted on Twitter. You can then track which of your Twitter campaigns is the most successful.

✦ **Set goals and track your progress.** You can create Twitter campaigns with specific goals. Peashoot notifies you by e-mail when you reach them.

✦ **Track campaign activity.** Active Listening technology enables you to track Twitter activity directly related to your campaign.

✦ **Use real-time tracking.** When you create an account with Peashoot, you can see clicks and conversations regarding your campaign in real time.

Peashoot is totally browser based — no installation needed. You can customize your goals, create progress reports, export data to comma-separated value (CSV) format for use in spreadsheets, and integrate data with Google Analytics.

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