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In case you haven't heard, the League has jumped into the world of social media. Search for "North Dakota League of Cities" on Facebook and become a fan of ours. You'll receive real-time updates of what's happening with cities in ND. Meanwhile, if you're curious about Twitter, enjoy this article on how to make it work for you.



A business guide to Twitter

John Girard

A recent Sprint ad answered the question, "What's happening now?" The ad included a variety of intriguing statistics about how connected people are today. One mentioned that "233,000 people just twittered on Twitter," followed by the revelation that "26 percent of you viewing this have no idea what that means."

From a business standpoint this begs an important question: Should you and your business join the millions of tweeters around the globe?

Twitter is a micro-blog that facilitates concise communication between users. Each Twitter message, known as a tweet, is limited to only 140 characters. Although it may sound difficult to share much about you or your business in 140 characters, tweeters have come up with a number of ingenious shortcuts and protocols to enhance communication. Once you become accustomed to this shorthand, tweets can be incredibly rewarding.

Like many other social networking tools, Twitter is a 21st century development. In the last year, Twitter has experienced extraordinary growth. According to the

Web site ranking company Alexa.com, Twitter is now the 15th most popular global internet site. Compete.com suggests this translates to about 23 million unique users every month — an increase of more than 1,000 percent in the last year.

Twitter's presence on the national and international stage is also growing. President Barack Obama used Twitter very successfully during his presidential campaign. Actor Ashton Kutcher made headlines in his very public race against CNN to be the first to one million followers. The recent elections in Iran and resulting protests have highlighted how Twitter can be used to report on fast-moving events.

Twitter is also starting to catch on in the Northern Great Plains. During this spring's severe flooding, tweeters provided up-to-date reports on flood conditions, using prefixes like #flood09 and #fargoflood. North Dakota state Senator Tom Seymour (twitter.com/SenTomSeymour) used Twitter during the state legislative session and said he found it to be an excellent way to quickly share information with his constituents. South Dakota Senator John Thune (twitter.com/johnthune) recently used Twitter to encourage his followers to click on a link and sign an online petition opposing the confirmation of Sonia Sotomayor to the U.S. Supreme Court.

One of the advantages of Twitter is there are no direct costs to use the service but it will take some time and a little practice to learn how to write concisely.

If you are using other forms of social

media like Facebook, LinkedIn, or blogs, there are also ways to feed updates to all of them simultaneously. So it may not even cost you time to attract Twitter followers and begin reaping the benefits.

Twitter is extremely user friendly. You don't have to be a twentysomething tech geek to figure out how to do it.

The best way to learn the value of Twitter is to try it out for yourself. Just go to Twitter.com and sign up for a free account. You can take a few minutes to watch a how-to video to familiarize yourself with the service.

The best resource to learn the business value of Twitter is the recently launched Twitter 101 for Business (<http://business.twitter.com>). The site includes an overview of Twitter, a series of case studies highlighting how businesses are using Twitter to create value, a getting started guide and much more including a list of resources for those interested in learning more.

The time is right for you and your business to give Twitter a try. Join today and make sure to follow Prairie Business magazine (twitter.com/PrairieBiz) and yours truly (twitter.com/JohnGirard).

This article appeared in the September 2009 edition of Prairie Business. Girard is an associate professor at Minot State University and the founder and chief knowledge strategist at Sagology (www.sagology.com), a firm dedicated to connecting people with people with a view to facilitating collaboration and knowledge sharing. He can be reached at john@sagology.com.

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