

Twitter's Not Strictly Social. That's a Good Thing.

By Bill Sheridan

It's been a while since we talked about social media here, but I read something recently that convinced me it's time to revisit the subject.

It's about Twitter.

None of the social tools out there have been as unfairly maligned as Twitter. Think about it: We keep complaining about "information overload" these days. No less an expert than Clay Shirky says our problem isn't information overload, though – it's "filter failure."

And yet here's Twitter, a perfect little filter that lets us ignore all the crap out there and follow only the people who add value to our lives. Who can possibly complain about that? More folks than you think.

The naysayers have always been there, of course. They've dismissed Twitter as mindless 140-character drivel, doing so without following a soul, without sharing a thing, without a single clue about what they're saying. Talk about mindless drivel. That type of criticism is easy to dismiss.

Then, you've got a study released recently by Yahoo! Research. Researchers looked at 260 million tweets sent between July 28, 2009, and March 8, 2010, and came to this conclusion: Twitter isn't very social.



Three compelling findings point to that conclusion:

- 0.05 percent of Twitter users generate 50 percent of all content posted on Twitter. An overwhelming majority of users don't share a thing..
- Twitter users follow back far less than they're followed. They're more selective about who they choose to follow.
- Twitter's "networks" are fragmented. In other words, say the researchers, "Celebrities listen to celebrities, while bloggers listen to bloggers."

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I would argue that those things are actually good from a Twitter user's point of view.

- Few people post anything on Twitter? That makes it easy for us to figure out who's adding real value there
- Twitter users don't automatically follow back those who follow them? That means they seek value from their network — and will likely work hard to provide value in return.
- Twitter is fragmented? From a professional point of view, isn't that what we want? If celebrities listen to celebrities and bloggers listen to bloggers, doesn't it follow that CPAs listen to CPAs and those who directly impact the CPA profession? Won't that add value to your Twitter experience?

In Twitter's early days, everyone followed everyone else. Conventional wisdom said the more people you followed and the more people who followed you, the better your Twitter experience. Today, that trend is reversing itself. People are being extremely selective about who they follow.

From a professional point of view, that's when Twitter turns to gold.



About the Author

Bill Sheridan is the Maryland Association of CPAs' electronic communications manager, editor, and resident social media cheerleader. He speaks regularly to CPA and association groups on the strategic uses of social media and the future of communication, collaboration, and education. As editor, Bill oversees content for both the MACPA's Web site and its bimonthly member magazine, the Statement. His articles about the MACPA and the CPA profession have appeared in Association Management and SmartCEO magazines and have been distributed nationally by the American Institute of CPAs. He is a graduate of the State University of New York at Buffalo's communications program. In 2010, he earned the Certified Association Executive designation from the American Society of Association Executives. Bill lives in St. Louis, Mo.

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