

a10
MKT 541
Elizabeth Howe
May 25, 2009
Interview Project

William's Explains Twitter's Meteoric Rise and Future

1. Situational Analysis

Twitter finds itself at a crossroads. The main questions surrounding it by themselves seem so crucial, so serious, dire even, but the fact is this three year old startup is the reigning Internet darling. The two main questions are “What is it?” and “How does it make money?”. Two very serious questions. When discussing and analyzing Twitter, the good is the bad and vice versa.

The strength of Twitter is ubiquity, the first in field for “microblogging” as it is known. Microblogging is a method of posting short notices, in this case 140 characters, and answering the question “What are you doing?”, at least that is what it says at Twitter.com. But Twitter goes beyond Twitter.com. It goes to and from mobile devices like Blackberrys and iPhones, to desktop applications, to just about any website connected in some way with Social Media. It is increasing its presence just about anywhere the Internet exists. So how did this company achieve 1,000% growth in the past year, simply by asking that question, “What are you doing?” (Rushe) Do people, all 15 million of them, really care what others are doing?

The answer is not so much in what people are doing but in what people are sharing. With a Twitter account you can post information as well as read other's posts, both of which are data feeds. When a user updates their feed is updated. When a user is interested in what another user is doing they can “follow” another individual. That other's feed they are now following is now integrated into the original feed when they are logged in. It is completely voluntary whether one follows another or not. There are also applications like Tweetdeck, Twhirl, and Seesmic which

function as desktop applications that can filter all these followers, as it's not unlikely someone to be following 1,000s of individuals. A desktop application can allow you to pay attention to certain individuals.

With a Twitter account you get a page with your user information including a coveted link to your website. This means when you begin to “follow” someone, which always triggers a notification someone has started following, you have the chance someone may open your Twitter profile to see who you are and travel to your website. This has enormous social implications in terms of discovering unknown entities, not to say financial implications in the realm of click-through rates and page impressions.

And people share more than what they're doing. People share links and advice on any topic imaginable, only the human mind is the limit. The link could be one's blog entry, another's blog entry, or a really interesting article they just read. People can then respond and comment publicly or privately, a conversation ensues. In this conversation the web of users (twitterers) can expand and expand exponentially. A conversation can begin on Twitter, be taken to the real world, others hear about it and then they log onto Twitter to be a part of a conversation. So it spreads.

The cause of concern with Twitter is the fact it is an Internet start-up completely venture capital backed and has not produced a profit. At the moment there is no revenue model on the site. It is completely free to sign up and use. So large serious questions remain. It is in its freeness and ubiquity that has helped its exponential growth. Twitter has merged into the lexicon of our times. It is a verb and a noun. There are “tweeps” and “tweetups”. This ubiquity has rumored to spawn interest from major Internet players like Facebook and Google which have vastly more reach than Twitter. Facebook currently has 200 million users to Twitter's 15 million.

(Rushe)

Buyouts are just one of the opportunities that have risen from the rise of Twitter. There are advertising models possible, but unlikely, as Twitter founders Evan Williams and Biz Stone have said they are not interested in pursuing this. (Oreskovic) There are rumblings on the net Twitter is a “Google killer” due to its searchability. Everything that is posted on Twitter is searchable. It is quickly becoming common practice for companies to search on Twitter what people are saying about them. Savvy consumers can also search Twitter to see what others are saying about products. This searchability with potential analytical data has potential to be, not necessarily a “Google killer”, but another method of search and source of revenue.

Twitter also finds itself in the very competitive social media realm. At first glance the Facebook status update can seem very similar to the Twitter post. There are also enterprise wide Twitter-like applications like Yammer.com. Yammer.com allows companies to create a private password-protected space to correspond and keep one another up to date in the same way Twitter does. There is also the possibility something else will come along. Just as quickly as Twitter rose to the top, so could another with a different technology. One hypothetical is what if Youtube or the like was to create a lightening quick way to share and upload videos to the web as Twitter has done with text? The Internet realm, particularly social media, is highly competitive and highly saturated.

It is in this competition and questions of what Twitter is and how it will become profitable Evan Williams finds himself as he prepares for an interview by Charlie Rose.

2. Evaluating the Interviewer

Charlie Rose is a 67 year old reporter based in New York City who hosts his own show

bearing his very name on PBS. He has an undergraduate degree in history from Duke University and did some graduate business school work at New York University. He worked extensively in the 1970s on PBS's Bill Moyer's International Report. In the 1980s he worked with CBS. His background and interests are diverse. He originally began schooling for premed, switched to history, then pursued both law and business. He has over 30 years experience in broadcast journalism.

Data collected from Quantcast.com reveals the demographic data of people that visit CharlieRose.com are similar to the man himself. The CharlieRose.com website is a treasure of information that archives most of his interviews. According to Quantcast visitors of the website are white (88%), male (60%) between 35– 49 (38%) or over 50 (33%). 40% of the visitors also make over \$100,000 annually and 54% have a college degree and 20% with graduate school. It is predominantly viewed in the United States but also receives traffic from Canada and the UK. In the United States it's larger viewership is in New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles. Viewers of CharlieRose.com were also likely to view sites with a similar intellectual and political leaning like dailykos.com, huffintonpost.com, cspan.com and of course pbs.com. (Quantcast)

Going into this interview Evan Williams is aware he is going to be talking to people who are politically engaged and aware with intellectual leanings due to their college educations. Their intellect and wealth help them to be globally aware and on-top of the latest trends.

3. The Interview- **William's explains Twitter's Meteoric Rise and Future.**

Charlie Rose: So thank you for being here today. Twitter is the talk of the Internet now. It's everywhere, you were recently on Oprah and then Ashton Kutcher had a well publicized showdown with CNN to see who was more popular. So what exactly is Twitter? How come it is

so popular?

Evan Williams: Twitter is known as a microblogging platform. What this means is you can say something in a limited amount of characters, in this case 140 characters. So instead of writing a long entry in a blog post you are forced to be short. When you sign onto Twitter.com you are asked the question, “What are you doing?” but this question has morphed into almost “What do you want to share?”. You can post anything about anything but where it has become powerful is the ability to share links that can point elsewhere. People share articles and pictures that are pointed to by links posted on Twitter.

Charlie Rose: Why 140 characters, what is the magic of 140?

Evan Williams: It began with SMS texting for mobile phones. We first thought we were really going to be building an application geared toward mobile phones but it has become something else. It's surprising how Twitter has evolved. While people do use it on mobile devices it still is primarily used on desktop devices.

Charlie Rose: So is this a social network? I've heard the phrase “follow us on Twitter”. What exactly does that mean, to follow?

Evan Williams: To follow means you are following an individual's or company's or organization's posts on Twitter. It is different than other Social Networks like Facebook which is synchronous. Twitter is asynchronous. By this I mean you can go and follow who ever you want and those individuals don't necessarily have to grant permission to follow them, however they are notified someone has chosen to follow them, and they don't necessarily have to follow you back. The communication can go both ways, in others it might just go one way. When you log onto Twitter and look at a user's page you can see how many people one is following and how many are following them.

Charlie Rose: Sounds kind of stalkerish.

Evan Williams: I know and this is one of the major hurdles we have to cross with new users. People raise the point, “Why would I want to tell the world what I am doing and why would people I don't know want to know?” My response to them is that this is a new form of communication. As my cofounder Biz Stone said, “We created something we did not know we needed”. Others have referred to the phenomena of using Twitter as “ambient awareness”.

Charlie Rose: Whoa, ambient awareness, what do you mean by that?

Evan Williams: I look at it on two levels. For people you know in the real life, a friend or a relative for example, you begin to become aware of what is going on in their life via Twitter, maybe even how they perceive things. What I find myself doing is mentally making a picture of what they are doing even if it is only for a split second. That creates an enhanced awareness of that individual, say even the next time you see them face to face, you'll have known something about them, no matter how subtle. This is very similar to the relationship one finds in Facebook but it is much quicker and direct, and to use the term, more ambient.

The other level is at the intelligence level. You can ask Twitter questions and people respond. Say I'm in Pittsburgh for business and I've never been there before and want to go get a bite to eat at a nice restaurant. I can ask Twitter something like, “In Pittsburgh for the XYZ Conference and looking for a place to eat. Any recommendations?”

What can happen are a number of things. Someone could respond and let you know of a hidden and secret place to eat and you have a great culinary experience. What can also happen is perhaps someone who follows you is also at XYZ conference and you decide to meet one another at the conference. What happens can be the start of a friendship or an invaluable business contact.

Charlie Rose: Wow, so you are suggesting meeting up with total strangers?

Evan Williams: That is what has been fascinating about Twitter. It is making us examine and reevaluate our social customs. There is a potential by looking at social interaction in a new light that we can expand our contact spheres to be more expansive and rewarding. A new culture is developing, most notably the phenomena of the tweetup. This is where people get together in a public space, usually a bar, and meet in real life people they communicate with on Twitter. So while there is this global coming together with Twitter in the realm of news and events it also has strong local possibilities.

Charlie Rose: So I've been to Twitter user's pages and notice that sometimes people follow thousands of individuals in some cases it's three or four thousand. How is this possible, to follow and know what thousands of individuals are doing?

Evan Williams: What we've been adamant about doing with Twitter is keeping the API open.

Charlie Rose: API?

Evan Williams: The code. Basically our code is open source so a developer can go in and see how we post and query entries and then download the code themselves. This has allowed many companies to form and make applications that offshoot from Twitter. Some of these applications that have been made attempt to deal with this exact issue of following thousands of people. What they do is provide filters so, let's say out of the thousands of individuals you follow, you can filter out ten to twenty people who you always want to be notified about. That way you can keep track of these people and the remaining thousands of individuals, you can skim through those updates and see what interests you.

Charlie Rose: Sounds like a lot of information.

Evan Williams: (smiling) It is.

Charlie Rose: So how does this make money? Are these applications a possible source?

Evan Williams: That is one possibility by making and producing our own applications. And Twitter has proven to be quite an interesting search application because everything is searchable. This is quite powerful because you can search what exactly people are saying about something in real time at that moment. Right now the search feature is pretty simple. We are looking into ways to make it more powerful and more of a resource.

Charlie Rose: So how does an enhanced search feature produce a profit? It seems like that would be going for a buyout strategy from someone like Google or Facebook.

Evan Williams: That is a possibility and we have had companies really look at us and we have not taken up the opportunity because it hasn't made sense for Twitter.

We are very careful of where we are going or who we will partner with. Twitter has had such rapid growth, one that is hard for us to fathom, but we see that it is something new and special with regards to communication and we do not want to lose sight of it.

And also with regards to search there is the possibility we can look at revenue models for subscription based accounts with more advanced capabilities. If we were to rollout a more robust search feature that may make companies and organizations very interested.

Charlie Rose: So advertising is out of the question? The rumor is you refuse to work with advertising.

Evan Williams: I would not say out of the question, but a traditional and simple advertising strategy of banner ads is not a model we are interested in pursuing. We do not want to interrupt the experience our current users have been using and are happy with. Twitter is very simple and intuitive and to display a lot of advertising there could potentially make it very crude and unfriendly to the open communication taking place. There is a feeling of the very free range of

ideas being shared and advertising may hinder this feeling.

Charlie Rose: It's almost like you are thinking about this as a utility company.

Evan Williams: In a sense it is and that is a good comparison. There are a lot of implications to that statement but we think a typical user is always going to expect this service to be free. We have a delicate balance to tow if we begin charging for other features for power users or companies. One area we are looking at is the search previously mentioned but also analytic data similar to what Google Analytics does.

Charlie Rose: So a buyout is still on table?

Evan Williams: Everything is on the table.

Charlie Rose: What are other revenue models or where you see Twitter almost like a Utility company, that is very fascinating.

Evan Williams: We are continually surprised how our users incorporate Twitter. It's sort of a hot topic today about how we acquire news and the role of newspapers today. Twitter is a news feed in real time. There are countless stories from the attacks in Mumbai where victims and eyewitness were communicating to the world about the events, to the plane that landed in the Hudson River where eyewitnesses twitted about it before the networks were reporting on the story.

Again, the search feature is very interesting when you look at it from a journalistic perspective. This is another area we are looking into as a source of revenue.

We also see that major news corporations are using the service to communicate with their viewers. CNN's iReport is just one of the things that show how news media is changing. This issue goes way beyond Twitter but now that we get our news in realtime Twitter is a big part of this. We need to find ways that we can leverage this use.

Charlie Rose: Anything you would like to add?

Evan Williams: Thank you for having me here and I guess I want to stress the fact that Twitter is what you make of it and what you want it to be. It can be a social tool meant for sharing and finding gossip or it can be an intellectual tool for sharing and spreading ideas, not to mention help in business. It is also everything in-between. We are here to keep adding and enhancing what we have provided and by no means do we want to change up and cloud the user experience.

4. Plan for Media Relations

Twitter and Evan Williams have two main stakeholders they need to communicate to and are the recipients of the two questions mentioned in the Situational Analysis.

The first question asks- What is it? The recipients are potential stakeholders who have not signed on or do not use Twitter in their daily lives. The plan is for Twitter to educate the masses in order to highlight the application and demonstrate that it is a worthwhile tool to use. Twitter has had remarkable growth through the viral nature of the application and as it ultimately is a communication tool, that PR companies are even using, using Twitter to disseminate and push information is an advantageous tactic. A lot of companies and news organizations are even on Twitter. On any newscast there is always a call to action, “follow us on Twitter @Cnn or @FoxNews”. This is all great for the growth of Twitter but there needs to be more education to explain what it is.

The Media Plan is to use more “traditional” online media channels like blogs and newsfeeds (traditional not being Twitter) to educate and adhere to the mantra of show don't tell. The Media Plan is to show Twitter in action, in the trenches figuratively. Using the existing blog at <http://blog.twitter.com/> we will add another category “In the news”. This category can also

automatically feed onto the home page. Part of the aura to Twitter is the simple and minimal aesthetic which is primarily text based. We will follow this same aesthetic except for the home page. The home page will incorporate images and text from “in the news”. There are a lot of stories of how Twitter has been the part of amazing interactions between people. We will search out these stories, even appointing staff to do just that.

A sampling of the stories of how Twitter has been instrumental in daily lives include the following:

- Air Force refutes reports GPS technology is failing, turns to Twitter to get word out (Wagner)
- Israel hosts Twitter Q & A on the Gaza conflict (Wagner)
- George Stephanopoulos interviews Sen. John McCain on Twitter for 15 minutes (Wagner)
- Astronaut Tweets From Space (Horowitz)
- Demi Moore saves woman from suicide (Rushe)
- Photography Student rescued from Jail in Egypt (Rushe)

These stories will be broadcast on the Twitter home page and the text from the actual Twitter entries will be broadcast. For instance the story of the Photography student will say “ARRESTED”. A picture of them could then be placed alongside it. The goal is to be big and bold and highlight how Twitter is involved in real offline life. As more people see how Twitter is being used they potentially will be able to understand it more, see its value, and take the plunge into using it.

This “in the news” section can also be a resource for news agencies, even PR agencies to find stories and keep up to date on them. Some people talk about Twitter being a “Google killer”

which is a bit extreme but it is searchable. Companies and individuals are discovering it is worthwhile to search Twitter for what people are saying about a product or a service. The search has become a tool. The “in the news” section could become a tool along these lines as well as showcasing Twitter's value.

The next aspect of the Media Plan is communicating with prospective investors and even current employees as to the sustainability of Twitter, answering the question “How does it make money?” There is some crossover from the first part of the Media Plan in the scope and depth of Twitter, in the infiltration of it even into our language as a commonplace noun and verb. The power of these words like “tweeted” and “tweep” are immense. A product that has infiltrated into everyday vocabulary is priceless.

A media showcase like a video could be produced that takes screen shots from both the web and television where Twitter statuses and address handles are displayed. They are everywhere now, sporting events, talk shows, news channels, celebrity websites, anywhere where there is communication. In this video there can also be short clips in rapid fire montage of celebrities and talking heads using the word “twitter” or the word in any of its forms. This piece can function as the “Twitter press release”. It needs to be broadcast and put on all online media channels like Youtube, Vimeo, Facebook, Myspace, and of course Twitter itself. A piece such as this which is a testament to Twitter's ubiquity can inspire the employees by showcasing what they are working on as something important and special. It could also function as a recruiting tool. Potential investors will also be stimulated by a piece showing Twitter's ubiquity and emergence into our language and modes of communication.

These tools, the posted news feed and the media showcase will raise awareness of how to use Twitter as well as establish Twitter to be profitable and valuable.

Works Cited

“About Twitter.” *Twitter.com*, <http://twitter.com/about#idea> (accessed April 25, 2009)

Charlie Rose. *A conversation with Evan Williams, Co-founder of Twitter.com*; 22:00 Charlie Rose. FLV. <http://www.charlierose.com/view/interview/10118> (accessed April 25, 2009)

Dowd, Maureen. To Tweet or Not to Tweet. *New York Times*, April 21, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/22/opinion/22dowd.html_r=7&adxnnl=1&tsp=1&adxnnlx=1240686089-WtQ81YY8eUV/hLKfJxGSmQ (accessed April 25, 2009)

Oprah Winfrey Show. *Oprah show, King of Twitter Ashton Evan Williams 1 of 1*; 7:06. Youtube. FLV. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D5yiVccdtig> (accessed April 25, 2009)

Oreskovic, Alexei. Twitter Sees Tools, Not Ads, For Revenue. *Reuters Canada*, May 18, 2009, <http://ca.reuters.com/article/technologyNews/idCATRE54H5CP20090518?sp=true> (accessed May 20, 2009)

Quantcast. *CharlieRose.com*, *Quantcast* <http://www.quantcast.com/charlierose.com#summary> (accessed May 23, 2009)

Rushe, Dominic. Interview: The Men Who Made Twitter Tweet. *Times Online*, May 10, 2009, http://technology.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/tech_and_web/article6241650.ece (accessed May 20, 2009)

Wagner, Mitch. Air Force Calls in Twitter Strike. *Information Week*, May 22, 2009, http://www.informationweek.com/blog/main/archives/2009/05/air_force_calls.html;jsessionid=YWUVVGOOFQ42MQSNDLPCKH0CJUNN2JVN (accessed May 20, 2009)