

Twitter

As social networking site Facebook does a U-turn on privacy issues, is Twitter set to be the next big thing? Can it help businesses?

1 Have you heard of Twitter? Which statement (a–d) best reflects your answer? Compare your answer with a partner.

(a) "I use Twitter regularly!"

(b) "I've heard of it but I'm not sure what it is".

(c) "Yes – and it's a complete waste of time!"

(d) "I've never heard of it!"

Guess the correct options (a-b) to complete the information. Scan paragraphs one and two to check your answers.

- (a) % of Web users in Europe using social networks: 30% / 50% / 70%
- (b) Facebook - users worldwide: 75 million / 100 million / 175 million

- (c) Twitter was founded in: 2006 / 2007 / 2008
- (d) In the UK last year, the use of Twitter rose by: 100% / 500% / 1,000%

Twitter is the latest social networking phenomenon. It was founded in 2006, yet even last year it was something that only technology lovers and 'early-adopters' had heard about. Suddenly, the use of Twitter has rocketed - by 1,000% in the UK last year. It's now a buzz term, with the world following dramatic events like the recent terrorist attack in Mumbai in real time. The most followed person on Twitter is the new US president, and it's hardly surprising that celebrities love 'twittering' and we love following celebrities. So what is it? Twitter describes itself as a "service for people to stay connected through the exchange of quick, frequent messages" answering the question: *What are you doing?* These messages, known as 'tweets', are sent to all 'followers' and are 140 characters long or less. Users, or 'tweeters', can 'micro-blog' on their mobile phone, laptop or Blackberry.

It is believed that over 70% of web users in Europe now use social networks, with the highest level of usage in the UK, followed by Spain and Portugal. Despite the phenomenal growth of Twitter, Facebook is still the world's biggest social networking site, with 175 million users. Last month, the company changed its terms of service, claiming the right to use personal data even after people leave Facebook. The storm of criticism from consumer groups which followed

forced the CEO to change the terms back to their original form. At a recent conference, when he was given a hard time by a journalist, the event was relayed back to offices around the globe by attendees ... using Twitter!

Can social networking sites help develop e-commerce? Is there a role for such services in business? Some companies are experimenting with Twitter to see if they can improve customer relations. Others see it as a way businesses can increase their brand recognition. Twitter users point out that companies have hierarchies, and that it's easier to approach people higher up if they are on Twitter! "It's easier to start a conversation on a mobile phone than in real-life", they maintain. One wonders if such people have any social skills!

The downside to all the current hype is that people are being distracted from work. Aren't Twitter messages merely time-wasting? Maybe I'm missing the point. After all, the British government has just created the new post of 'Director of Digital engagement' with a starting salary of £120,000 a year. The job? "To raise the profile of the government through the use of social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook". Apparently, this is a good use of public money. Perhaps I should 'tweet' in my application!

2 Read the whole article. How would you describe the tone of the writer? What is your reaction to the article?

3 Decide if the following words are nouns (N), verbs (V) or both (B).

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|------------|------------|----------|--------------|----------|------|
| network | rocket | service | message | follower | user |
| experiment | hierarchy | approach | conversation | maintain | hype |
| distract | engagement | level | data | claim | blog |

4 Can you see a value for companies from using social networking sites? If so, what benefits are there? What are the drawbacks? Discuss these questions in small groups, using examples of social networking sites and services you are familiar with. Be ready to report back your findings to the class.