



Tweet Your Way to the Top

Keep your operation on the top of customers' minds with Twitter.

by **Christy Couch Lee** and **Julie White**

All of the celebrities are doing it: posting their latest coffee purchase or hotel check-in for the world to view. But, perhaps you haven't considered the business advantages of the latest trend in Internet technology: Twitter.

Twitter is a real-time information network, allowing members to share short (140 characters or less) bits of news or information with those in their network, according to the Twitter Web site.

Businesses and organizations may also find Twitter to be an effective tool to stay connected to their customers, the Web site says. It can be used to quickly share

information with people interested in the business, to gather real-time market intelligence and feedback, and to build relationships with customers and other industry members, the site says.

Erick Schmidt owns the Web design company ES Design Group. In addition, he, along with parents, Keith and Sara, and brother, Travis, own and manage Schmidt Cattle Co. in Gonzales, Texas. For the past year, they have utilized Twitter to promote their operation, in conjunction with their Facebook fan page and their Web site.

Schmidt says, although Twitter doesn't allow a person to provide

great detail, it does keep customers and potential customers interested in an operation.

"If they're following you, it's a great way to keep them involved with your company," he says. "It keeps them updated and interested."

He says the Schmidts most often utilize Twitter to provide short bits of information about customers' successes or new calves on the ground.

"I use Twitter most often during the show season," Schmidt says. "I post results from our show success or congratulate juniors during stock show events."

However, the greatest advantage to Twitter, Schmidt says, is its power to draw viewers to the ranch's Web site and Facebook fan page.

Stay connected

Schmidt says that before a producer begins a Twitter account, establishing a Web site is the No. 1 priority.

"With Twitter you try to keep things short and sweet," Schmidt says. "You want to provide little teases in order to cause them to check your Web site for more information."

Twitter allows space for a short biography and link to a Web page. In addition, either you or a Web design professional can create a background for your profile, featuring photos and a bit more detail on your operation.

Through tweets providing new and interesting news or updates, customers are likely to visit your Web site to view complete information on cow families, show success and herd photos, Schmidt says.

In fact, Schmidt says, when he evaluates where visitors to the ranch Web site originate, most often, they have arrived via Twitter or Facebook.

Interested in drawing more visitors to your ranch Web site? Perhaps acting as a celebrity and creating a Twitter account could take your business to the next level. **HW**

How to get started:



- Visit www.twitter.com
- Click the box, "Sign up now."
- Provide required information, including name, username and password.
- Choose categories of interest that appeal to you from the list provided on the "Sources" sign-up page. You will then see a list of potential people to follow. If they look interesting, click the "Follow" button next to their listing. Their "tweets" will then appear on your home page.
- Locate your friends currently using Twitter by allowing Twitter to search your Yahoo!, Gmail or AOL e-mail address book on the next sign-up page. Choose the e-mail of choice, and follow the instructions.
- Search for other friends on the final sign-up page by searching for friends' names or business names. When you locate a friend, click the "Follow" button next to his listing. His "tweet" will then appear on your home page.
- Click the "Next step: You're done!" button. You will be taken to your home page, where all tweets from those you follow will appear.
- To create a tweet, type 140 characters or fewer in the "What's happening?" box, and then click the "Update" button. **HW**