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## News

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### USE TWITTER TO FIND CUSTOMERS

**Most businesses think of Twitter as a promotional tool, but it can also be used to find sales leads.**

*By Minda Zetlin | Jul 24, 2009*

Boloco (<http://www.boloco.com>), a burrito restaurant chain with 16 locations often runs ads in a Boston newspaper. The ads contain coupons for the chain's popular burritos for a special price of \$3. It makes sense to advertise in Boston, since 13 of the chain's 16 restaurants are there, but CEO and co-founder John Pepper wished the ads could also bring customers to Boloco restaurants in New Hampshire and Vermont. So, when he ran one recent ad, Pepper also posted a photo of the coupon on Twitter, inviting diners to bring in any image of the coupon -- a photocopy, printout, or even an image on a mobile phone -- to get the discount.

"It was a way to bring people outside Boston in the print advertising, and a way to increase our visibility," says Pepper, whose Twitter ID is @boloco (<http://twitter.com/boloco>). The tactic proved wildly successful, he says. "Usually we get about 350 coupons on that kind of promotion. This time we got 900, including the mobile phones. About 25 percent of our transactions that day came from the coupon, which never happens." In effect, he says, posting the ad on Twitter decreased cost per reader by increasing circulation.

### Connecting with customers

Most business that use Twitter think of it mostly as a promotional tool, a way to announce new products, perhaps gain readers for a blog. But some smarter companies are actually using Twitter to sell products, such as Dell Corp., which recently acknowledged that it had made \$3 million in sales in two years over Twitter, primarily by posting coupon numbers for discounts of 10 percent or more on Dell Outlet items.

"There's no reason not to try Twitter," notes Stefanie Nelson, marketing manager for Dell, who created Dell Outlet's Twitter campaign. "There's no cost, and it's a limited time commitment, at least it was for me at the beginning. Before we built up the following and reach that we have now, it took me literally minutes a week." (Things have gotten a bit busier now that @DellOutlet has over 700,000 followers.)

According to Nelson, the most important first step is to know exactly what you want your tweets to accomplish. "Understand why you're on Twitter," she says. In her case, she adds, the objective was to quickly sell Dell Outlet items, which are usually excess inventory. And, she says, "If you know your objective, and who your target audience is, Twitter can be just as effective for a small company as a large one."

## Boost sales with Tweets

Using coupons to create boost sales is only one way to reach customers with tweets. Here are a few others:

1. Give your company a human face. Pepper uses TweetDeck to track mentions of “Boloco” on Twitter, and one day it flagged a tweet in which a woman bemoaned the cool, rainy weather this summer and pondered whether to spend the afternoon at Boloco or a different restaurant. “I’ll respond to that one, with something like, ‘I vote for Boloco!’” he says. Twitter users are usually pleasantly surprised, he adds. “They expect @Boloco to be like @DunkinDonuts. They don’t expect to hear from the head of the company.” There’s a delicate balance between making human contact, and sharing too many everyday details that may not interest your customers, Nelson says, a dilemma she partly addresses by using @StefanieatDell for more personal tweets. Whatever you do, she advises, avoid spamming followers with promotional direct messages not specifically written for them.
2. Find customers when they’re looking for your product or service. Searching Twitter can be a very effective way to find new customers. For instance, Rocky Mountain Ace Stores, an affiliation of Denver area Ace store owners, uses monitter to search Twitter for both keywords and locations of tweeters. One day, the group flagged a Denver man worrying about insects in his lawn. “So we tweeted to him about beneficial insects, such as ladybugs, which will eat bugs all summer, and which we sell,” says Andy Carlson, who owns an Ace store in Denver and is on the group’s board. “He wound up coming in to one of our stores and buying ladybugs.” Chris Savage, CEO of Wistia, a video-sharing site for business use, advises putting some thought into picking the terms you search on Twitter, just as you would for meta tags. “Research the most frequently searched terms in your market on Google and other search engines,” he says. “Then search or monitor those terms on Twitter.
3. Deal with disgruntled customers -- fast. One evening Ace customers posted an angry tweet because a tool he’d bought from a Denver area store broke after one use. “We got in touch, recommended which store he should go to to return the item, and alerted the manager at that store,” Carlson says. “He didn’t know that Ace hand tools all carry a lifetime guarantee.” The man was very impressed, and went from being angry at Ace to being a devoted Ace customer. The complaining tweet came through late at night, Carlson notes, well after the stores were closed. And, he says, it was especially important to intervene quickly. “You don’t know whether he’s going to go back to the store right away, or stew about it for three or four days and tell more people. The more time between the bad experience and the resolution, the more likely he is to tell his friends, so the quicker we can solve a problem, the better.”

And that’s the nice thing about Twitter, he says. “You can catch a problem when it happens, and do something about it.”

*Original article:* <http://www.inc.com/news/articles/2009/07/twitter.html>

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