

TEACHING WITH TWITTER AND GOOGLE WAVE



Real-time social media

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"So what's it all about, this Twitter? Is it signaling, like telegraphs? Is it Zen poetry? Is it jokes scribbled on the washroom wall? Is it John Hearts Mary carved on a tree? Let's just say it's communication, and communication is something human beings like to do"

Margaret Atwood¹

¹ <http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2010/mar/29/atwood-in-the-twittersphere/>

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Following vs. Followers

- **Following**
 - People you subscribe to (you see their messages)
- **Followers**
 - People who are subscribe to you (they see your messages)

Public vs. Protected

Hashtag

- Example: #DTL_2010
- Example: #MKT595-01
- Used to add context (grouping). Similar to blog tags



<http://hashtags.org>

@replies



- @username <message>

Introduction

Twitter burned a blazing path through the international consciousness. The term “social phenomenon” is bandied about loosely, but it definitely applies to microblogging. Twitter is one way to instantaneously share messages ranging from the profound to the trite, in 140 characters or fewer. Think of it as blogging on steroids. And as blogging has been demonstrated to aid learning, curious educators have looked at Twitter and other microblogging services as a new teaching tool to utilize.

E-mail is older than you might think. Electronic mail in some format has been around since 1971. E-mail has not changed too dramatically over the years; this simplicity may be one of the reasons for its ubiquity. However, this form of communication has inherent flaws. Google Wave grew out of the question “What would e-mail look like if it were invented today?” As such, it is a real-time collaborative tool that assembles the elements of IM (Instant Message), Wikis, Google Docs and e-mail into one interface. Google Wave has the potential to usurp the traditional Learning Management System.

Learn how both these real-time technologies work, and how they might be used to enhance the learning experience.

Overview

We live in a world of “continuous partial attention.” You are probably doing two other tasks as you read this. Educators can try to fight the constant distractions, ignore the constant distractions, or attempt to use these distracting media to communicate. Over the past year, I have attempted to use Twitter and Google Wave as teaching tools. Twitter and Google Wave are both free to use (traits that make it particularly enticing to educators), but knowing how to use a free tool does not dictate having to use the tool. I have encountered situations where Twitter and Google Wave are best left alone.

Twitter



Twitter is a microblogging service in which users post, or “tweet,” short (140-character) messages over the Internet. Twitter is a service used by millions but misunderstood by an even greater number. The service is free to use and has a published API (Application Programming Interface) that has allowed other individuals and companies to create complementary products and services. Whilst Twitter has been criticized for not making money—or publishing a business plan—it has created a platform for other companies to make money. Companies such as Dell Computers have generated significant revenue using Twitter as promotional tool. Other companies such as TweetDeck have created third-party applications that add functionality or ease of use to Twitter—either ad supported or for cost.

Twitter’s notable feature set includes real-time search and instant communication. This instant communication both provides value and attracts disdain. If you view blogs as being akin to three-minute pop songs, then tweets are the ring tones of the social media environment. However, if you aggregate the individual “notes” from Twitter, you can create a beautiful (or at least journeyman-like) symphony. Here are some of the ways I have used Twitter and have seen others use Twitter:

Every day I encounter scraps of relevant and timely knowledge that I want to share with my students. I could share this information by posting announcements on my blog or Learning Management System (LMS), or by composing an e-mail to send to the class. However, these individual acts take time—sometimes more time than I can spare—and so the knowledge goes unshared. Twitter’s brevity strips out the need to provide unnecessary social niceties, or redundant context, that encapsulates the items that I share. Twitter’s API has resulted in the ability to share items from within webpages and applications at the click of a button. The combination of these two features empowers me to communicate efficiently with my students. For example, I might read an article in the New York Times on my mobile telephone on the El ride to work and realize that this story ties in perfectly to the previous night’s discussion. I click on the “Tweet” button and add a line of commentary, and this is immediately shared with my followers. I don’t have to wait until I get to my laptop or to class to share the story. And, generally, if I wait to share something, life creates a new distraction or impediment.

In class, I have seen students use Twitter (on their laptops or smaller mobile devices) as a way of note taking. Each salient point in class creates a corresponding tweet. The brevity of Twitter results in less concern over how to elegantly rephrase or transcribe a teachable moment and instead focuses on capturing a snapshot of that

moment. Later, the students can review the "albums" of their Twitter feeds, and process this into something more substantial. In the same way that blogs create structure out of unorganized posts, Twitter assembles order from seemingly random notes.

I have configured my Keynote presentations on my Apple laptop to tweet preprogrammed messages as I advance to particular slides. I find this a good way to make my presentations and classes social media friendly (a key comment I share via Twitter may be retweeted to a larger audience), and also to draw students into the conversation. I find that this use provokes several replies or direct messages after class has "officially" ended (Young, 2009).

I have come across professors at other institutions who have used Twitter for backchannel communication during class, but I only think this works effectively if the room you are teaching in has an independent secondary display, where the tweets for a particular hashtag can be aggregated (Parry, 2008). This way, the Twitter conversation can be easily seen by all in the room, which focuses the discussion and reduces the chances of disruption. Typically this environment is harder to set up in the classroom, but is particularly useful if the class size is large (such as at conference). Backchannel communication can be accomplished by the use of either sharing a hashtag beforehand, or by establishing a Twitter list or group of users. If a secondary display is not available to me, I keep a mobile device (laptop, iPad or smart phone) within easy view—this way I can be aware of the Twitter dialogue as I teach.

Lastly, I teach Internet marketing classes, so knowledge of Twitter is integral to these courses. However, Twitter can be of great use in demonstrating popular sentiment. I use the search tools that Twitter and third-party providers make available to demonstrate to students what is being discussed and shared over the Internet. This simple use can spice up classroom discussion.

Personally, I prefer to separate aspects of my professional life from personal life, so I use multiple Twitter accounts. I have a "home" account and then individual class accounts. Others may have a different perspective, but I think this makes life simpler.

Google Wave



I had high hopes for Google Wave. Like many others, I fight on a daily basis with my inbox. I know that e-mail does not work well in supporting document sharing and collaboration. I thought that Google Wave might transform my teaching by amalgamating all the Web 2.0 tools that enhanced teaching.

E-mail has been around since 1971 when Ray Tomlinson developed a hack to transfer files over ARPANET, the network that evolved into what we now call the Internet (Gaudin, 2002). E-mail is a wonderfully powerful technology, but it has inherent flaws, such as:

- E-mail promotes the distribution of duplicate attachments, rather than sharing from a centralized repository.
- E-mail supports limited content types.
- E-mail does not scale well with multiple recipients and multiple messages.

Google Wave attempted to fix these problems by assembling the elements of IM (Instant Message), Wikis, Google Docs and e-mail into one interface. The inventors of Google Wave (Lars and Jens Rasmussen, who also created Google Maps) are science fiction geeks, and the Wave name was inspired by the television series “Firefly.” In Firefly’s universe, communication took place via “wave”—hence the name.

Wave is a protocol, in the same way the HTTP (Hypertext Transfer Protocol) is a protocol. Google is developing Wave, but this technology is not proprietary—others can develop the three elements of Google Wave. Last year, Google was the only realistic provider of the wave service, and there were two ways to get a Google Wave account (something that looks like jmoore.depaul@googlewave.com):

1. Request an invitation from <http://wave.google.com>
2. Ask someone you know on Google Wave for an invitation.

Option two was generally the quickest way to get an invitation. Typically, you might have had to wait a week for your invitation to come through. This was sent from the account wave-noreply@google.com. Spam filters had to be checked to ensure that the message arrived successfully. Now it is possible to sign right in and get an account.

Google moves rapidly in creating accounts, but the delay in setting up student accounts and then training students how to use the tool worked against me. What I discovered was that there was a significant learning curve that proved disruptive in the courses. If students knew that Google Wave was a tool that would be used in subsequent courses, then I think they might have been more receptive to using it. As it was, students found communication and collaboration to be initiated more rapidly over tools they were already comfortable with.

Some students contacted me with issues trying to run Wave on their netbooks, home computers and mobile devices. Wave requires a modern browser, and sometimes students only have access to older machines. This presented the occasional problem.

The openness of Google Wave posed potential issues as well. Participants in a Wave can add other applications and participants to that Wave. While this did not happen in my limited tests, it was a concern. I would not share grade information or significant feedback on this system because of those concerns.

In most courses, student interest in Wave subsided. I continued to use Wave as a redundant way to distribute class notes and some of my videos. Certain student groups found Wave to be a productive way to collaborate on independent projects, but these were students with a high familiarity with technology and social media.

Conclusion

I will continue to use Twitter in my in-class and online courses, but I think I will only promote Google Wave as an option for students groups to consider for collaboration.

Twitter has definitely helped me reach some of my students. Twitter complements the other methods of communication (discussion board, e-mail, LMS, etc.) that are available to me. While not every student will use Twitter, for those that do, this helps me teach better classes.

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Biographical Sketch



James Moore is the Director of Online Learning for DePaul University's College of Commerce. He teaches Internet Marketing classes in fully online, blended and face-to-face formats. He attempts to balance his love of technology and gadgets with the knowledge that quick and simple solutions are best. Unfortunately, creating quick and simple solutions often involves a long and complex process. He flits between four Twitter accounts and two Google Wave accounts.

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Google Wave

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