

Twitter: Is it twitty?

Are you on Twitter? And what could it do for your business? By LAWRENCE SMITH.

DID you hear the one about the Twitchhiker that twittered his way to New Zealand? Well, it's no joke actually. Earlier this year British journalist Paul Smith set himself a challenge: travel as far as possible from his home in the UK in 30 days, relying only on the goodwill of people using Twitter. He made it to NZ, Stewart Island in fact, courtesy of Kiwi Twitterers such as Air New Zealand, Explore More, and Stewart Island Experience, to name a few. He made it to his destination for free while they received global media exposure (both social and traditional).

So what is this Twitter and what's all the fuss? Twitter is a micro-blogging site that asks users one question, "What are you doing?" Users post messages (or micro-blog posts) which must be under 140 characters in length and can be sent via mobile texting, instant message or the web. These messages are called "tweets" and people sign up to receive them from other users.

OK then ... why would people do that? Twitter came from the founder's interest in the idea of being able to know what his friends were doing. So Twitter was created to provide a simple way of posting messages, as well as a very easy way to receive them. Essentially it is a social networking tool, and is similar to text messaging online to anyone who is interested.

Seems a bit twitty? Well you are not alone! Do I want a blow by blow account of what my friends are up to? Not really, as much as I love them. Do I need to know that Stephen Fry is "Watching proboscis monkeys feed. My dear, the noise ..." Well I am sure it's very nice but, again, not really. However, 379,152 people are fol-

lowing his tweets. He's one of the Twitterati.

Coming back to our Twitchhiker, you'll note that some Kiwi companies jumped on the Twitter bandwagon and they got some awesome international exposure from it.

And this is exactly the opportunity that social media, including Twitter, offers. It's cheap, connects directly with real people, and is very measurable and transparent. However, it takes time and commitment, a good strategy, and it turns your company's marketing philosophy on its head.

You are potentially marketing to segments of one, and if your company's mindset is 'trade, (traditional) media, newspaper/TV advertising' then social media is probably too hard. It may require organisational change, and that's possibly too "risky", but entirely necessary to move forward in this new media environment.

So, the big question ... is Twitter good for business? I'd say maybe ... it's new, it's free, and it's relatively unproven in the business environment. Think of it as text messaging online, but without the cost, to hundreds or potentially thousands of followers. Then think what if those people were travellers to NZ; they might be looking for deals, availability, schedule updates, or events?

You can check Twitter out at www.twitter.com and the Twitchhiker at <http://twitchhiker.wordpress.com>

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