

# Avoiding hashtag hijacking and other Twitter fouls

By Sandra Fathi

As Twitter has become ubiquitous in the business world, many PR and marketing executives are pushing their companies or clients to join.

While Twitter has proven to be an extremely valuable tool for building reputations and generating awareness, it can also create negative repercussions for a brand if it is misused. With one misguided tweet, a company can quickly tarnish its reputation, making its presence on Twitter counterproductive.

For companies aiming to use Twitter to leverage their PR and marketing initiatives, there are plenty of resources and guides that offer how-to advice.

However, it is just as important for Twitter users to know what practices to avoid, such as:

**1. Hashtag hijacking:** Many people view trending topics on Twitter as an opportunity to use a megaphone to

interrupt a conversation. When they see that a lot of folks are talking about #acorn, for instance, they write their own tweet, such as, “Buy incredible new lipstick #acorn” so that everyone following the hashtag will notice. While this may cause people to link to you, they will likely be annoyed and won’t take your product pitch seriously.

**2. False mentions:** This is a tactic that involves including someone’s username in a tweet to get his or her attention. The tweet will show up in the person’s “mentions” tab in an attempt to capture his or her interest. This is an “Ah! Made you look!” approach to marketing. People feel duped or tricked into paying attention to your tweet and it immediately turns them off.

**3. Misleading links:** This is essentially false advertising. If you get people to click on a link, view a picture or watch a video by giving them false information, then you will alienate your followers very quickly.

**4. Mass follow:** This tactic is usually used by folks who want to gain a lot of followers in hopes that most Twitter users will automatically follow almost anyone that follows them. However, it doesn’t bode well for most brands to follow or be followed by a person advocating illegal activity or something controversial. You should monitor who you follow and who follows you. It’s about quality, not quantity.

**5. Falsifying tweets:** There are many people who have ghost tweeters, which is acceptable if there is full disclosure. If you are a mega-star, like Britney Spears, then you may need some help when using Twitter. If you are a company spokesperson, executive or PR rep, then don’t let someone else tweet for you using your name. It’s OK to seek help when starting out, but if you want to build a following and gain credibility on Twitter, then you need to be the one operating the account.

**6. Twitterns:** Being in your teens or

early 20s does not qualify you to tweet on behalf of a professional organization. Hiring an intern to tweet for the company is like having him or her act as a spokesperson on behalf of your CEO.

If a person knows how to use a tool, then that doesn’t necessarily mean that the person has good judgment, understands your company messages, can provide strategic counsel or will represent you well to the public.

Although PR and marketing executives may be eager to take advantage of the tremendous benefits that Twitter has to offer their company’s brand, it is imperative that all users take a few minutes to think before they tweet. **T**



**Sandra Fathi**, founder and president of Affect Strategies, leverages Twitter to generate awareness for the company, share opinions and insights on public relations and promote safe tweeting. She can be found on Twitter as @sandrufathi.