

# To tweet or not to tweet

## Joining the forestry and timber community on Twitter



**Andrew Heald** is Confor's technical advisor and, together with Dougal Driver, the 'muscle' of our Twitter engagement. He has found his place in the Twitter community and tweets actively from the early morning hours, mainly about forest certification and global land use issues. Andrew does not have children.



**Stef Kaiser** has long used LinkedIn professionally within the forestry and land use sector. However, she had given up on Twitter, as it seemed too resource-intensive for an unclear benefit. As Confor's communications manager, she feels slightly embarrassed about not communicating woodlands in the 'twittersphere'. Will there be a place for Twitter in her life?

### Is it worth using Twitter?

**S: I communicate within the forestry and timber sector. I am very pleased about my LinkedIn network and I see the benefit of it. I sign up to groups around certain topics and the relevant people are all there, discussing issues,**

**making contacts. What could I use Twitter for and is it worth it? How would I get started?**

**A:** You feel comfortable with LinkedIn because you know it. Twitter is also a two-way communication, but it is much faster than LinkedIn and you can potentially connect with a much wider range of people. So it depends on your purpose, if you just want to exchange professional information and network – yes, LinkedIn is great. But if you want to 'spread the word' and also stay on top of what's going on in your sector and be able to react to it, wherever you are – then you should look into Twitter.

**S: I know, I don't really have an excuse. But exploring how to get started takes time. can you tell me step by step how to get started and reach or connect with the right people?**

**A:** Sure, try this quick start guide below.

**S: Sounds straightforward, similar to other social media. What do I do if I see a great tweet? I assume there is an equivalent to the Facebook 'like'?**

**A:** well, if you 'favourite' a tweet, it is like 'liking' a Facebook post, and it is visible to the tweeter and the readers of the tweet. You can also re-tweet, which corresponds to sharing a post on LinkedIn and Facebook.

### The difficult part – how to get followers

**S: When I tried to tap into the 'Twittersphere' years ago, I struggled to get followers. My aim was to tweet only occasionally, whenever I had relevant content; this strategy made it hard to build that important critical mass of followers to get the ball rolling.**

**A:** Be interesting, be consistent, have an opinion and use hashtags.

**S: Yes, but how do I build a critical mass? At the beginning, hardly anyone will read my interesting and consistent tweets.**

**A:** The first thing is to follow relevant people – if they see that you have something interesting to say, in particular if you tweet information relevant to their sector, they are likely to follow back. Secondly, comment on people's tweets and show that you are interested, knowledgeable, relevant and have an opinion. You can also tweet someone directly, if you have something interesting to share, eg "Hi @andyheald, any interesting discussions around the FSC Online Claims Platform in Seville?" This will be seen not only by your followers but also by Andrew's followers. If the tweet is relevant to them, they will follow you.

### Go beyond broadcasting, start a dialogue

**S: One day you mentioned to me that in our sector, a lot of companies don't use Twitter beyond broadcasting. I myself struggled in the past to make the step from broadcasting news to starting a dialogue.**

**A:** It's true that it requires persistence, and/or some luck to get an interesting topic that attracts a lot of discussion. Also interesting, eye-catching or cute photos encourage people to re-tweet.

**S: What frequency of tweeting do you suggest for someone who wants to start using twitter efficiently and become part of the Twittersphere of our industry?**

**A:** At least once or twice a day – every day – if you want to build up followers and seem interested. You need to reply to a question or comment on twitter quickly - a few days later is no good. It's like a conversation in a pub or cafe - if someone asks a question then they expect an answer - otherwise they won't ask again.

**S: This is the reason I have been putting off my engagement with Twitter - because I see it is a powerful tool BUT to use it professionally and for campaigning it requires a strategy, a sufficient amount of relevant content and the necessary time resource.**

**A:** Yes, you are right there, but there are tools to

## Quick start guide

### STEP 1

#### Find a name and create an account

It can be your name, nickname or company name. If you or your organisation are not well known in the sector, you might want to choose a Twitter name that says something about the topic you will be tweeting about, eg @woodfuelUK. Many good names are likely to be taken already!

### STEP 2

#### Follow other people.

Follow someone you already know and how is likely to tweet about things that interest you. Or, follow some of the individuals I suggest in the box (see next page). You will grow your network by seeing who these people follow. You can search Twitter for people you know, and after a while, Twitter will also suggest you people you might be interested in! There is always a clear "follow" button on people's profiles, similar to "add friend" on Facebook.

### STEP 3

#### Read tweets you get from the people you follow,

like on the Facebook timeline! You will be able to see your stream of tweets either when you log on to your account on the Twitter website or via the Twitter app on your mobile device. If you follow too many people and you want to filter out what tweets you see, you can create lists of the most interesting people you are following and decide when you want Twitter to notify you of tweets (eg only if certain people tweet). I follow over 1000 people but I only get notified of tweets of about 50 people I find most relevant. I have also saved some searches for hashtags, eg if anyone tweets UKWAS in a tweet I can see it easily.



## The expert says

“Social media is a revolutionary connector, making the world smaller and bringing your community straight to your desktop/mobile/tablet/everything. Twitter is the best platform for connecting and communicating because of the speed of information, and the nature of the platform helps people and organisations find each other (unlike Facebook or LinkedIn, which are restricted to those you are already connected with). With Twitter you can share stories, trade information, and build a network that is relevant to you. As a tool, Twitter is a game-changer for those in rural settings, who can now share and receive information and conversations with local and global audiences. This is especially relevant to the forestry sector, where members are often geographically remote or based outside of urban areas where a lot of exchange is happening. (Jennifer Tough, *Social Stampede*, @SocialStampeder, [www.social-stampede.com](http://www.social-stampede.com))



Tell us how YOU are using Twitter in the forestry sector and how it can help others – write to [Stefanie.kaiser@confor.org.uk](mailto:Stefanie.kaiser@confor.org.uk)

## Join the UK forestry community on Twitter – something to get started

### 1. Some key people to follow and what they tweet about

**@forestsandwood**  
Confor's Twitter communications

**@andyheald**  
general forestry issues, particularly certification and UK productive forestry

**@johnweirFC**  
great for UK forestry resilience, alternative commercial species and climate change

**@woodlandsteward**  
Martin Jones forestry consultant based in Shropshire

### 2. Follow UK forestry organisations – get instant news

Institute of Chartered Foresters  
**@theICF**

The Royal Forestry Society  
**@royal\_forestry**

Grown in Britain **@growninbritain**

### 3. Interested in international forestry as well? Have a look here

**@FSC\_IC**  
main twitter feed from the FSC head quarters in Bonn

**@CIFOR**  
great for keep up to date on international forest research

**@MxdWood**  
for the latest on certification issues; great blog

### 4. Search for topics, using hashtags # In general these tend to be mainly used during a conference or event - e.g. #FSCGA or #APF2014.

However it is also worth searching for **#fscuk**  
**#saveourwoods**  
**#forestersuk**  
**#sitkaspice** etc



In this example, Confor aims to start a dialogue, rather than broadcast news. The tweet includes @naturesintrouble and @GrowninBritain, whose followers will also read this tweet. This is a way of reaching out to other stakeholder groups which are relevant for the discussion topic.



In this case, Confor has retweeted a post by Andrew Heald. It includes #FSCGA, so people searching for tweets on the General Assembly will read this. Andrew has reached his followers, those of Grown in Britain and Confor.

help and, again, it's about following the right people and searching for relevant topics (see boxes).

### S: I will give it another try – but last but not least please shed some light on the meaning and use of hashtags.

A: It is just an easy way to tag a discussion. Think of a pub with lots of tables and people sitting around them, discussing different topics. You would like to join one group but don't know which discussion would interest you most. Each group has told the barkeeper what they are talking about, these are the hashtags: Group one talks about FSC, at table two the discussion is hot on Ash dieback. Table one also includes your friend Andrew Heald who always has interesting things to tell! You tell the bartender that you would like to join a table where people like you, worried about Ash dieback, exchange information and discuss the topic.

On Twitter, you search for #ashdieback. You will get lots of tweets from people like the ones who are at table two and have tagged their conversation. A lot of them will include links to interesting new documents, guides or videos:



### Stef Kaiser: My verdict

I see that it is all about making the most efficient use of the 140 words my tweets are limited to. I want to be concise and interesting, identify great discussions and find or reach the people that are relevant to me. In particular in the forestry and timber sector, many people work in rural areas and mostly deal with people within their subsector. Twitter allows us all to become aware of issues that concern us, such as tree diseases or regulations, but are often discussed somewhere else. We can actively take part in these discussions, make our voice heard, be part of the wider forestry community. We can suddenly reach out to the industries that use our timber and the people influencing the policies and regulations that affect our businesses.

If we want to use Twitter professionally, we should have a clear strategy or goal and work towards it. We have to consider whether we will be able to create a sufficient flow of relevant content and whether we will have enough time to build our position within the Twitter community. We can also take it easy – connect to some relevant people and listen in; we can grow into Twitter, see if there is a topic or group of people where we can naturally express our virtual self. Give it a try – but don't get obsessed, there is no need to trade your family for a glamorous life in the Twittersphere!

If you need more information, visit the Twitter Help Center (<https://support.twitter.com>) and search for “using hashtags on Twitter”.