



## **Social Media Monday: Is Twitter worthless?**

BY ROB HOPWOOD,  
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*Social Media Monday is a weekly feature that helps businesses and consumers understand how to use social media tools to their best advantage. This week, the [San Diego Union-Tribune's](#) social media specialist Rob Hopwood ([@sdutHopwood](#)) looks at ways Twitter can be useful.*

Not everyone likes the microblogging website Twitter, and that's OK.

On Oct. 13, three colleagues and I interviewed Twitter co-founder Biz Stone ([@biz](#)) at the [W Hotel](#) in downtown San Diego. Stone, 36, the [San Francisco](#) company's creative officer, shared plans for making money, addressing privacy issues and cutting through information overload. **(CLICK HERE TO READ THE STORY, TWITTER FEED OF INTERVIEW AND TO SEE VIDEO OF BIZ STONE)**

After posting the first version of our story about the interview online, a reader wrote, "most worthless website ever conceived." Other people posted similar opinions.

But a website that helped inform the world about the Iranian government's crackdown on dissidents shouldn't be seen as worthless. It's simply another communication tool. Its value is determined by how it is used.

The U-T uses Twitter to distribute stories and interact with readers. For example, reporter Lily Leung ([@LilyShumLeung](#)) says Twitter helps her connect with people. She uses Twitter not only to develop stories but also to get ideas by listening to what people are talking about.

Teresa Siles, ([@tsiles](#)) the director of social media at Nuffer, Smith, Tucker, a local public relations firm that also handles PR for the U-T, uses Twitter to help clients learn what people are saying about their companies and brands.

"By listening to the dialogue on Twitter, a company can monitor for mentions of a particular brand and provide resolutions to any issues they see," she says. "Likewise, businesses can use the

platform to identify a brand's biggest fans, reach out to them directly and amplify their word-of-mouth."

Rachel Laing, ([@RachellLaing](#)) the communications director for the San Diego Yes on D Campaign, says she finds Twitter "incredibly useful." (Laing is on hiatus from her position as San Diego Mayor Jerry Sanders' deputy press secretary.)

"It allows me to keep up with the conversation about issues I'm working on," she says. "I know what the journalists, community members and officials I work with are doing — what articles they're reading, which public meetings they're attending, whom they're interacting with, what they think about an issue — even sometimes what misconceptions they're harboring that I might be able to clear up."

Should everyone use Twitter? No. Laing admits Twitter can be "an enormous time-suck."

"It's important that companies approach Twitter — and all social media platforms — strategically to determine whether or not it makes sense for their business," Siles advises.

People shouldn't dismiss Twitter just because they don't understand it. Take time and learn more about. Start by listening. Then, if you want, join in the conversation when you're ready. Don't get sidetracked by how many followers someone — including yourself — has. What matters is the quality of the content being shared, and the interaction between people.

During the next week, open a free Twitter account at [twitter.com](#) and start following people.

Choose a few to start. If you find their tweets, or messages, useful, then follow some of the people they mention in their tweets. If you don't like someone's tweets, stop following them. If you don't know anyone on Twitter, that's OK. Go to [@sdut](#)'s Twitter profile, where we have a list of our reporters. Start by following them.

Join the conversation: Are you a social media professional in San Diego County? We're looking for tips and advice. Contact Money Editor Diana McCabe on Twitter [@mcdiana](#) or the U-T's social media specialist Rob Hopwood [@sdutHopwood](#).

Online: <http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/2010/oct/24/social-media-monday-twitter-worthless/>