

# How Tweet It Is

## LIONS FLOCK TO SOCIAL NETWORKING SITE

by Anne Ford

When Carolyn Schriber, president of her Lions club in Germantown, Tennessee, recently posted a quick message on the social networking site Twitter—“Distributing pecans for Lions holiday sale”—she thought she was just making an offhand remark, sort of the online equivalent of “Hot enough for ya?”

What she was doing, it turned out, was some low-key but effective marketing. Within one day, “I got messages from people on Twitter saying, ‘How can I get some pecans? Can you send them to me?’” Schriber says, surprised. “These were non-Lions—just people on Twitter who had seen it.”

Her experience wasn’t a fluke, as Hugh Donagher can attest. “This past year, our club was having a corned beef dinner, and just as a lark, I posted [on Twitter] that we were having a dinner and mentioned the price and time,” says Donagher, president of the Silicon Valley Lions, Mountain View, California. “I got responses from my neighbors saying, ‘Is it too late to come?’ That blew my mind.”

The profits from those pecan and corned beef sales are helping the Germantown and Silicon Valley Lions provide much-needed vision services. And Twitter, it happens, is helping Lions clubs across the country gain publicity, connect with current and potential members and even advance fundraising efforts.

## Tips for Twitterers

- Follow other Lions and Leos on Twitter including Lions Clubs International (LCI). Just search for “Lions Clubs” in Twitter’s “Find People” search box. “There are new Lions coming on all the time,” says Web Editor Eileen O’Connor, who manages LCI’s Twitter account.
- If your club already has a Facebook page, consider having its status updates feed automatically into Twitter. There are several ways to do this, but the easiest is to go to <http://apps.facebook.com/twitter/> and install the Twitter application on your club’s Facebook page.
- Think you don’t have time to tweet regularly? “Twitter has applications that allow you to schedule your tweets,” says Wendy Richardson, board member of the Eastpointe Lions Club in Michigan. “I sit down once a week and schedule tweets out in advance.” Those applications include Twuffer (<http://twuffer.com/>) and TwitResponse (<http://twitresponse.com/>).
- Remember that the best way to establish an online presence for your club is with an easy-to-navigate, up-to-date Web site. “It’s about driving users back to your Web site, because that’s where the bulk of your content is,” says Hugh Donagher, president of the Silicon Valley Lions, Mountain View, California. LCI’s free e-Clubhouse service makes it easy to create and maintain a club site; visit <http://lionwap.org/eclub> to learn more. Then when you set up your club’s Twitter account, be sure to include the Web site address in your profile.
- Don’t expect all your members to embrace Twitter—and don’t expect that your older members will necessarily be the holdouts. “Some of our oldest members are some of our most active online members,” Donagher says. He recommends offering training sessions as needed, as well as reminding yourself that “change is incremental.”
- Don’t be intimidated. “You don’t have to be a master of these things,” Donagher says. “Just sign up, follow other Lions clubs, and just sit there and read. At some point, you’ll be inspired to jump in.”

## Foolproof Tweets

Twitter is still such a novelty that it works even when it doesn't.

The Mid-Valley Lions in Oregon put out a message on Twitter on its annual chocolate sale. Three days before Christmas, the club was saddled with 8,000 worth of Sees chocolates. Friends of Skip Volkmann, club president, placed a notice on Twitter for him ("I don't Twitter," says Volkmann.)

It was "not effective at all," he says. But "the use of Twitter caught the attention of a newspaper reporter," says Volkmann, a former journalist. "We're in a community where people still read the local news. People who bought the chocolate didn't say they found out about us through Twitter. They mentioned the newspaper article."

The brief story in the *Gazette Times* enabled the club to sell \$3,000 worth of chocolate just during six hours on Christmas Eve. "That's \$1,000 per column inch," says Volkmann. All together, the club sold all but \$800 of its chocolates by Christmas.

## Lions App for iPhone

You can stay in touch with Lions Clubs International (LCI) with your iPhone by downloading the new Lions Clubs App. The App accesses daily news updates from LCI on Twitter, videos from LCI and Lions worldwide on YouTube, LCI's Facebook page, photos from clubs on Flickr, Lions Quarterly Video Magazine podcasts and the LCI Web site. To download the App from iTunes, go to [www.lionsclubs.org](http://www.lionsclubs.org) and search for iPhone.

Launched in 2006, Twitter is a free online service that allows users to send and receive short messages known as "tweets." Subscribing to a user's tweets means that you are "following" him or her. Users can read tweets on a computer or a Web-enabled phone. It's also possible to post links to photos, as well as to other Web sites.

When Twitter made its debut, many dismissed it as merely a way for users to blather on about boring personal minutiae—"I'm eating a ham sandwich!" and the like. And it's true that some Twitterers use it that way.

But the technology's potential for spreading information to thousands of users in real time has been realized as well. For example, witnesses to tragedies such as the 2008 bombings in Mumbai, India, have used Twitter to get out information about the disasters as they were happening. More recently, public health departments have begun using Twitter to spread alerts about the availability of flu vaccines.

So how are Lions using this powerful technology? In a bouquet of ways: sending out information about fundraisers, as Scriber and Donagher have done, reminding members of upcoming meetings, publicizing service opportunities, networking with other service organizations, announcing birthdays or awards, sending out inspirational quotes and reposting (or "retweeting," as it's known) items from the Twitter updates of other clubs and of Lions Clubs International.

Jen Cordio, president of the Ayer-Shirley Lions Club in Ayer, Massachusetts, opened a Twitter account for her club in July as part of her efforts to increase Lions' visibility in the community. "It seemed like a good, easy way to put our name out there and generate more interest, and to get some people to come to our events who are different than the people we'd maybe reach through a newspaper [ad], because so many people don't read newspapers anymore," she says. And, unlike a traditional print ad, Twitter is free, she points out. "It's hard to turn down an opportunity that's just sitting there," she says.

In addition to being free, Twitter, which limits messages to 140 characters, offers the advantage of conveying information in quick, to-the-point sound bites that are easily digestible by busy people. Or, as Scriber puts it: "It makes you get your point across and shut up."

Can Twitter help Lions attract new members to their clubs? Sort of. "Twitter is a nice first introduction to the Lions," says Wendy Richardson, board member of the Eastpointe Lions Club in Michigan. "It's very noninvasive."

But, she cautions, don't expect to set up a Twitter account, tweet a few times and expect the new members to beat down your clubhouse door. "You still have to have that one-on-one attention to people," she says. "People are going to come to a dinner because they've been asked personally. But at least this way you have people who have already shown an interest in what you're doing. When they come to a meeting, it's not 'I don't know what you guys do.' It's 'I already understand what you do, and I want to be involved.'" ■