

USING Twitter for live event coverage

From the State of the Union address to the Grammys, Twitter—and how news organizations use it—continues to amaze me.

We're still figuring it out ourselves here at Whitney Update, but we're getting the hang of it, so I put together this resource for other staffs hoping to do more with their Twitter presence.

A few notes:

This assumes you already have a Twitter account and know the basics. If you want to learn more about Twitter, go back to <http://jeadigitalmedia.org> and check out some great posts from last spring to get your staff started.

For students who have a Twitter app on their phones and use it for personal accounts:

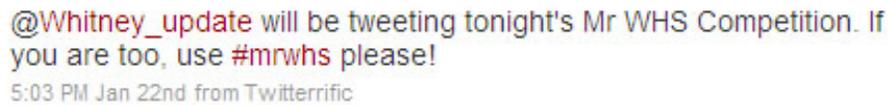
It's easy to add an account. Just make sure users know which account they're tweeting from to avoid sticky situations (like personal posts intended for a different audience).

Tweet by text if you don't have a device equipped with apps.

If you don't feel as comfortable with the technology, tweet from the Web using a laptop with Internet connection, or a reporter at the event can text updates to someone at home or school with computer/Internet access who can update Twitter from there.

If possible, announce ahead of time that you'll be tweeting and establish your own hashtag. This enables others attending to include your hashtag and join in the conversation, adding multiple perspectives and making things easier to find later.

Keep hashtags short and easy to remember. As you know, every character counts.



@Whitney_update will be tweeting tonight's Mr WHS Competition. If you are too, use #mrwhs please!
5:03 PM Jan 22nd from Twitterrific

One way to spread coverage and increase followers is to have your staff members use their own Twitter accounts to spread the word that the staff will be tweeting. The benefit? When we tried it, some who saw the personal tweets started following @whitney_update, and a few people tweeted from the event using our hashtag.

If you have multiple users tweeting an event from your account, devise a way to indicate which person is tweeting, such as a slash and the reporter's initials. This might be helpful for a large event in which different reporters are scattered throughout a large area. It also holds staffers accountable and is helpful for discussion later.

Tweet immediately before the event or just as it starts to signal to your followers that coverage is live.



Whitney Update Sold out theatre for third annual Competition. #mrwhs
7:46 PM Jan 22nd from Twitterrific

Remember to use sensory details and description. You're bringing followers to the scene even though they aren't physically present. On the other hand, you're still a reporter—not a "regular" audience member—so be careful to avoid editorializing and reporter opinion. Try to include details that bring the event to life, and make sure these aren't the same exact details used later in a full story. (Analyze these examples for pros/cons.)



Whitney Update Fredo De Ollas rocked the house as the only freshman in the competition. The walls are vibrating. #mrwhs
8:09 PM Jan 22nd from Twitterrific



Whitney Update Nobody seems to understand Mark Riley's Ronald Reagan impersonation but everyone is cracking up. He just took off layer of clothing. #mrwhs
7:59 PM Jan 22nd from Twitterrific



Whitney Update Senior William Kellogg starts with Hot Cross Buns, then busts out in amazing viola concerto. #mrwhs
7:52 PM Jan 22nd from Twitterrific



Whitney Update Host Leigh Leonard has everyone laughing after Jason Scriabin drops the mike twice in talent competition. Everyone in good spirits. #mrwhs
7:48 PM Jan 22nd from Twitterrific

Crowdsourcing:

After the event, as you're looking for additional sources to interview, you can search using your hashtag to see who else tweeted during the event. Many professional news organizations, including CNN, use those tweets in news stories. (It depends on your staff's policies about social media, but at the very least, you'll have a ready-made list of people to contact, and you can message them via Twitter to set up the interviews.)

Do more with Twitter:

- If you operate on a beat system, assign each staff member to tweet about his/her beat once every two weeks.

- Set up a texting chain for varsity sports so that an athlete or coach texts the sports editor at away games, and tweet instant results. Followers will know the result of the game before the bus even makes it back to your school.

- Consider the news value of helpfulness, and assign a staff member each week to tweet reminders and announcements that benefit the general school population. "AP fees due to the counseling office by 3 p.m. tomorrow." "Tomorrow's spirit week dress-up day is pajama day." "Auditions for the spring musical, 'The Wedding Singer,' begin Friday at 3 p.m." and so on.

- And of course, if you aren't already, make sure to tweet on distribution day for your print edition as well as offer regular opportunities for followers to submit story ideas or feedback.



whitney_update Host Leonard stalling during set change and the crowd is begging her to sing. Shoutout to WHS alum in the crowd too. #mrwhs

8:10 PM Jan 22nd from Twitterrific

Establish your own style guidelines. With these tweets from the same event, the students tweeting followed our "last name after first reference" rule rather than spelling the host's first and last name in consecutive tweets. Saved characters for better details. (See tweet above for example.)

Try to maintain balance between steady coverage (say, tweeting every 10 minutes for example) and tweet overkill. In print, you have to decide what gets used in your story and what doesn't. Same with tweeting, so think ahead of time about the pace you plan to establish and how you'll cover the various stages of the event in sequence. You're likely to lose followers if you tweet too much at once.

Two interesting notes about the tweet below: First, notice that a student's name has been abbreviated to initials, completely ignoring what I mentioned above about the last name method. It's safe to assume that your Twitter followers will understand your simple shortcuts if they've been following the conversation. Regulars in the Twitterverse know to expect this; just don't go overboard.



whitney_update Back from intermission. Time for the style part. #mrwhs (PS for home audience, WK got first ever PERFECT score in talent from all judges)

8:36 PM Jan 22nd from Twitterrific

The other interesting idea from this tweet is sharing something with followers that the physical audience wouldn't know. For example, in this case, the reporter obtained a score at intermission and tweeted about it even though those attending the event didn't know any of the scores yet. (Great discussion topic about who gets information when, and by what method, and the impact of these decisions on your reporting in general.)

Consider forming a tweet team: two staff members attend an event with a planned sequence of tweets, dividing the responsibilities so that each reporter has time to observe, think, compose carefully. For larger events where you're sending a team of reporters and photographers, a quick meeting among all key players is all you need to determine who will tweet when.

Best case scenario, you're tweeting an event and later can refer followers to full coverage at your Web site.



whitney_update Check out the full Mr. WHS story online! /rp about 5 hours ago from web

But as well all know, it's hard to hit "best case scenario" on a regular basis, so establish some practices that will enhance your coverage at whatever level is possible. The more you tweet, the easier it gets. **With a good system in place, you can focus on the next step: reaching a wider audience by building your list of followers.**