How Top Brand Marketers Use Twitter

A Simply Measured Network Study - Q4 2013
INTRODUCTION | 01
KEY FINDINGS | 02
METHODOLOGY | 03
ACCOUNT COMPARISONS | 04
BRAND ACTIVITY | 04

58% of Top Brands Have Over 100,000 Followers on Twitter
78% of Top Brands Post Less Than 4 Tweets per Day

ENGAGEMENT | 07
Top Brands Average 43.1 Thousand Engagements per Month
Audience Size Significantly Affects Engagement
Engagement per Tweet by Tweet Frequency
Visual Content Is Key on Twitter
Links in Tweets Drive Engagement
Favorites and Retweets Make Up 91% of All Post Engagement
Trended Brand Activity Over Q4
The Top 10 Brands Account for 60% of Engagement

FOLLOWER GROWTH | 13
Average Follower Growth
Quarterly Follower Growth by Tweet Frequency
Quarterly Follower Growth by Average Engagement per Tweet
Two Retail Brands Account for More Twitter Engagement Than Any Other Industry

RESPONSES TO INBOUND TWEETS | 16
CONCLUSION | 16
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES | 17
ABOUT SIMPLY MEASURED
HOW TOP BRAND MARKETERS USE TWITTER:
A SIMPLY MEASURED NETWORK STUDY - Q4 2013

Twitter’s 230 million monthly active users post over 500 million Tweets per day. This is the draw of the network known for its “real-time” action; a draw for both users and advertisers alike. Twitter keeps a massive user base engaged, and keeps them engaged regularly.

The network’s success – which has been forefront since their IPO in November – is widely due to their focus on, and enablement of, mobile activity. Over 76% of users on Twitter are active on mobile devices, and these users are 79% more likely than desktop users to be active on Twitter more than once a day.

We took a look at the top brands in the world, as well as some of the fastest-growing brands, and examined the tactics they’ve employed on the network. This study looks at what these leading brands are doing to reach engaged users, whether or not they’re finding success, and what we can learn from their strategy on the network.
• **92%** of top brands Tweet at least once daily as audiences grow.

• Study shows Twitter’s maturity as a marketing and engagement platform. Top brands average **43,100** engagements per month.

• Over **36%** of all brand Tweets contain links. As content marketing becomes increasingly important, and top brands are behaving more and more like media companies, Twitter is proving to be a critical distribution and engagement channel.

• Audiences this quarter grew by **20%**. More and more consumers are opting into receiving brand messages.

• **98%** of all top brands are active on Twitter. The social network has matured into a valuable and necessary channel for marketing organizations.

• The average Interbrand company Tweets **12 times per day**. Top brands are all in when it comes to creating content, making a big investment in daily resources.

• Tweets that include photos and links receive **150%** more engagement than brand averages. Visual content is effective on Twitter, driving more engagement on the content that brands post.

• **54%** of Interbrand companies send less than one @reply per day. While top brands are dedicating resources to brand promotion, many aren’t engaging with users in a one-on-one capacity.

• **58%** of these top brands have an audience of 100,000 or more. With audience sizes growing by an average of 20 percent throughout the quarter, these brands continue to reach new users.

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**KEY FINDINGS**

129,300 *brand tweets*

12.7 *million engagements*

47,600 *links*

52,700 *hashtags*
This study analyzed the Twitter activity of two different sets of companies: The Interbrand 2013 Top 100 Brands and The Forbes 100 Best Small Companies in America.

The Interbrand 2013 Top 100 Brands ranks the world’s most valuable brands based on market, brand recognition, competitive, and financial data. The Forbes 100 Best Small Companies in America includes publicly-traded companies that are evaluated based on strong sales and earnings growth, and have an annual revenue of $5 million to $1 billion with a stock price of no lower than $5 a share.

We chose to analyze the Interbrand 100 list because these are the best companies in the world at building and maintaining a brand and therefore we believe also exhibit a strong social media strategy and execution. This list is our report standard and has been the basis for our multiple studies analyzing their activity.

For this study, we added the Forbes 100 Best Small Companies in America as a way to compare and contrast the findings from the analysis of the Interbrand 100 list. While learning from the very best has its benefits, we realize that most companies don’t have the resources, audience size or expertise that the Interbrand 100 companies have. We wanted to learn what companies that have less resources – but perhaps similar ambitions – are doing on Twitter.

We used Simply Measured to track the Twitter activity of these 200 companies during the fourth quarter of 2013 (October 1st – December 31st). Overall, we collected and analyzed 129.3 thousand brand tweets, 12.7 million engagements (@replies, mentions, Retweets, and favorites), 47.6 thousand links, and 52.7 thousand hashtags. Brand Tweets and engagement averages exclude brands that were inactive during the study period.

Data used in this study comes from Simply Measured’s industry-leading social media analytics and reporting platform. The findings from this study are designed to better inform marketers on Twitter by highlighting successful tactics from the most engaging brands on the network.
58% of Top Brands Have Over 100,000 Followers on Twitter

Of the Interbrand 100 Companies on Twitter, 58% have an audience that exceeds 100,000+ followers. 17% of top brands cater to a Twitter audience of over 1 million followers. What's most surprising about this is that 40% of these top brands still haven't leveraged their recognizable brand to crack 100,000 followers. As you'll see below, these low volume accounts see exponentially less engagement.

![Follower Distribution of Top Brands](image)

Although 40% of top brands have less than 100K followers, the average followers for all accounts is just over 870K.
Twitter’s not just for giant international corporations. While top brands find a unique connection with their audience, growing companies of all sizes have found ways to interact, engage, and grow their presence on the social network.

17% of these small companies have 5,000 or more followers. While not overly impressive next to the Interbrand audience (which is 85.3 million in total), these numbers demonstrate a dedication to social – and Twitter specifically – that we haven’t seen to date. In fact, 3% of these up-and-coming companies have already connected with over 50,000 followers.
78% of Top Brands Post Less Than 15 Tweets per Day

Regardless of industry, brand marketers see the value in Twitter. Of the Interbrand Top 100 Brands, 98% have Tweeted at least once during the last quarter. That’s an impressive figure, but even more so is the fact that 92% of those companies Tweeted more than once a day during Q4 2013.

The majority of brands (42%) Tweet 1-5 times per day. This number includes all Retweets and @replies. Only 7% of the brands on the Interbrand list Tweet more than 25 times per day.

**Forbes List Comparison**

56% of Companies Don’t Tweet on a Daily Basis.

For Forbes 100 Best Small Companies Tweets on a Daily Basis:

- 64% Tweet at least once a quarter from their account
- 56% Average less than one Tweet per day
- 44% Average more than one Tweet per day
- 4% Average more than ten Tweets per day

**Lesson for Marketers:** It’s important to note that the majority of the high-volume Interbrand accounts are Tweeting @replies and engaging with their audience on a 1-on-1 basis. Smaller brands with less inbound activity don’t have a need for that volume of outbound Tweets, but can certainly be more responsive to mentions and retweets.
Top Brands Average 43.1 Thousand Engagements per Month

Engagement on Twitter is calculated by adding the total number of:

@Replies: Direct responses to Tweets. A direct response begins with the Twitter handle of the account being replied to (example: “@SimplyMeasured Thanks for the information!”).

Mentions: Responses that include the brand’s Twitter handle, but don’t begin with the @handle, making it public for the user’s audience (example: Just read the new @SimplyMeasured report. Really interesting!)

Retweets: An action involving Twitter’s built-in “Retweet” button which allows a user to share someone else’s Tweet with their own followers.

Favorites: A passive form of engagement similar to “liking” a Facebook post. Tweets that a user has “favorited” are available to view in a tab on the user’s profile.

For the entire collection of Interbrand companies, there were over 12.7 million total engagements during Q4 2014, and brands averaged 43.1 thousand engagements each month. This average, however, is deceiving: The top 20% of brands (by size) accounted for over 2.3 million monthly engagements, while the other 80% accounted for just over 1.8 million, meaning that the top 20% drive 56% of all engagement.

Brands with under 100 thousand followers average only 6,243 engagements per month.
We calculate “Engagement per Tweet” by excluding direct @replies and Retweets that the brand posts, to ensure that we’re calculating these figures based on their own content.

The 40% of brands with under 100k followers average only 16 engagements per Tweet, while the top performing brands have between 750-999k followers, and average 289 engagements per tweet.

**Engagement per Tweet by Tweet Frequency**

It would appear that posting under two Brand Tweets (Tweets that aren’t @replies or Retweets) a day is the key to higher engagement per Tweet, but engagement per Tweet isn’t the goal of interaction on Twitter. If it was, we’d see more brands posting one killer give-away each month, and then ignoring the network for the remainder of the month.

Example: If posting 1-2 Tweets per day averages 212 engagements per Tweet, a brand’s daily average engagement on brand Tweets is only 424 a day. On the flip side, brands who post 5-6 times per day average 105 engagements per Tweet, which results in 525-630 engagements on brand Tweets each day.

**Lesson for Marketers:** Grow your audience. Since engagement per tweet as well as total engagement are highly affected by audience size, you should focus at least some of your time and budget on growing your audience.
Visual Content Is Key on Twitter

Twitter is known for content sharing, and top brands are no exception. Looking at some of the top link types, it’s no surprise that the highest performing links are pic.twitter.com links, which is Twitter’s image service, and allows photos to display directly in a user’s Twitter feed.

Pic.twitter.com links average 210 engagements per Tweet. The next highest performing types are Tumblr.com and Pinterest.com, followed by another Twitter property, Vine.co.

Visual content performs well on any network, and with Tumblr, certain types of images are supported by Twitter cards and are natively displayed. Pinterest, on the other hand, is a surprising leader, considering the visual assets don’t display directly in Tweets.

Bit.ly links are one of the most common link types, and a default option with Twitter management software like Tweetdeck. The links however, which show no indication of what to expect, are some of the lowest performing links we see large brands using.
For brands, Tweeting with links seems to pay off, while Tweets without links underperform the brand's average engagement (excluding @Replies and Retweets). Tweeting with one link is the most common practice for brands, and therefore sets a brand's per-post engagement average.

Why? This ties back into the pic.twitter.com engagement rate we saw above. On Twitter, brand marketers have started posting pictures with links in the Tweet copy. This allows them to capitalize with space and catch more eyes, but still drive viewers to their off-Twitter content. Since these pictures also show a link, the Tweet copy has two links in it.

There were over 3,900 Tweets with two or more links during our study period, and 73% of these contained pic.twitter.com images.

Many brands Tweet almost exclusively with links. eBay, Amazon, Google, and Disney are brands among the Top 10 who post Tweets with links over 95% of the time.

It's no surprise that the majority of posts contain links, as Twitter is a network known for content syndication.

Tweets containing two or more links saw 150% of the brand's average engagement. This is why Tweets without links underperform; users don't get what they expect from a brand that they follow.

Lesson for Marketers: Tweeting with pictures can help your brand see more exposure, and if you include a link alongside the image, your potential visibility is much higher than average.
Favorites and Retweets Make Up 91% of All Post Engagement

Among Interbrand companies, @replies make up 61% of all Sent Tweets (Tweets posted from the brand handle). Brand Tweets (Tweets posted from the brand handle that are neither replies or Retweets) make up nearly 1/3 of brand activity, and Retweets account for only 7% of activity. Top brands @replied to 68,000 mentions during the 3-month period, but this was less than 1% of their inbound Tweets, which add up to over 93 million mentions. Half of those @replies are from Pizza Hut, so the percentage of replied Tweet from remaining brands is even lower.

Engagement on branded Tweets comes mainly in the form of favorites and Retweets.

Since Favorites are a “passive” form of engagement (meaning they don’t amplify your message or create a conversation with a user), let’s exclude those for a second. Without Favorites, 84% of engagement on Brand Tweets comes in the form of Retweets.

Lesson for Marketers: This is one of the biggest draws of Twitter. Retweets amplify company’s message in a way that other forms of engagement don’t. During our study of the Interbrand 100 on Facebook, we found that nearly 90% of engagement came in the form of “likes” and that shares accounted for less than 10%. The even split between Retweets and favorites should be appealing to marketers.
Trended Brand Activity Over Q4

A driving factor in the high level of engagement that retail brands saw is the time of year this study was conducted. The fourth quarter is an internet retailer's dream, with Black Friday, Cyber Monday, and Christmas driving more and more shoppers to interact, mainly with retailers like Amazon and eBay, but other top brands are quick to get involved and capitalize on the consumer traffic that is heavier during those peak times.

The Top 10 Brands Account for 60% of Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Account Name</th>
<th>Total Engagement</th>
<th>Total Followers</th>
<th>Total Tweets</th>
<th>@Replies Tweeted</th>
<th>Tweets w/Links</th>
<th>Industry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>@eBay</td>
<td>1,651,877</td>
<td>295,596</td>
<td>1,652</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>Retail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@MTV</td>
<td>1,392,274</td>
<td>10,284,879</td>
<td>3,981</td>
<td>1,269</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@amazon</td>
<td>1,161,673</td>
<td>882,550</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>Retail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@Starbucks</td>
<td>985,500</td>
<td>5,527,769</td>
<td>1,179</td>
<td>1,014</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Restaurants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@McDonalds</td>
<td>493,488</td>
<td>2,077,556</td>
<td>2,087</td>
<td>1,137</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>Restaurants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@NintendoAmerica</td>
<td>387,894</td>
<td>562,532</td>
<td>608</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>Electronics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@pizzahut</td>
<td>383,985</td>
<td>673,808</td>
<td>34,029</td>
<td>33,659</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>Restaurants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@google</td>
<td>369,384</td>
<td>7,798,946</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@Disney</td>
<td>365,896</td>
<td>3,427,949</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@nokia</td>
<td>300,862</td>
<td>1,164,052</td>
<td>2,515</td>
<td>1,782</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>Electronics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The top 10 brands (by engagement) from the Interbrand 100 companies account for 60% of the list's engagement, even though they only account for 38% of the total audience.

These top ten brands averaged 1562 Tweets each month, over 4x as many as the average of 380 for the entire list.
Lesson for Marketers: While there may be an inclination to do the bare minimum on Twitter – and your audience may not rival that of a McDonalds or Starbucks – it should be noted that aside from Disney and Amazon, every company on the list Tweets more than the list average. Pizza Hut sent 33,659 @replies during the three month period. This level of involvement has helped them become one of the most engaged brands on the list.

**FOLLOWER GROWTH**

*Data for Interbrand 100 Brand accounts during Q4 2013*

Overall, the average brand follower growth is 20%. The average follower growth varies by size of company, but not by much. This is promising for companies planning a long-term Twitter initiative. Not only are new, growth-stage companies seeing strong growth rates. Established brands are as well.

For brands with under 1 million followers, the expected quarterly growth rate is between 18-23%. Brands with over 1 million followers only see – understandably – a 14% growth rate during a quarter.
Quarterly Follower Growth by Tweet Frequency

Brands who Tweet between 7-10 times per day saw a higher follower growth rate than most other brands, but this isn’t necessarily indicative of a “sweet spot”. The sporadic distribution of follower growth suggests a low correlation between Tweet frequency and follower growth.

Quarterly Follower Growth by Average Engagement per Tweet

Not surprisingly, the brands who average the highest engagement-per-Tweet, also average the highest growth rate, at 26%. These brands also generally have an audience of 750k+.
Two Retail Brands Account for More Twitter Engagement Than Any Other Industry

While only two retail brands are included in the Interbrand collection, it’s not surprising that they account for such a high level of engagement. eBay and Amazon, who are already internet giants, tallied 1,651,877 and 1,161,673 engagements respectively during Q4 2013.

Restaurants, media, and technology companies were other top performing industries among Interbrand companies.

Lesson for Marketers: An interesting facet of this list is the diversity of top industries on the network. For contrast, our study of the Interbrand companies on Instagram revealed that automotive, media, and luxury brands proved to be the most successful, taking advantage of the opportunity to showcase their visually focused ad collateral. On Twitter, this visual focus isn’t necessary, and any brand with something to say can find the right audience to say it to.
Only 9% of Interbrand companies on Twitter ignore user Tweets. While 54% reply to less than one Tweet a day, 89% of these companies do reply to Tweets, however sparse their replies may be.

**CONCLUSION**

As Twitter continues to grow, and see record activity, brand marketers are focusing more and more attention on their audience engagement across the network. While 98% of Interbrand companies have invested in the network, several of the growing brands from the Forbes list haven’t.

While growing an audience on Twitter and regularly engaging requires time, patience, and work; there’s an established value to doing so. The example from the successful Interbrand companies speaks to the importance of a dedicated presence. While over-Tweeting has a diminishing return on audience growth and engagement, there is a happy minimum for each brand, and an opportunity to make a big splash in a big pond.
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

http://www.forbes.com/best-small-companies
https://about.twitter.com/company
https://blog.twitter.com/2013/new-compete-study-primary-mobile-users-on-twitter
http://simplymeasured.com/
http://simplymeasured.com/blog/category/studies/
http://simplymeasured.com/blog/2013/07/23/facebook-study/
ABOUT SIMPLY MEASURED

Simply Measured is a fast-growing team of data geeks dedicated to making the world of analytics and reporting a better, more beautiful place.

Our goal is to put the tools to understand business data in the hands of business users. We think reporting should be simple, beautiful, and accessible for everyone — not just data scientists. Our software streamlines the process from data to deliverables and eliminates the countless hours spent on everyday reporting tasks. We do this by putting cloud data sources at your fingertips, providing a marketplace of best practice reports, and generating beautiful deliverables on the web, in Excel, and in PowerPoint with a couple of clicks.

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Request a Free 14 Day Trial

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