

## How to present with Twitter (and other backchannels)

By Olivia Mitchell



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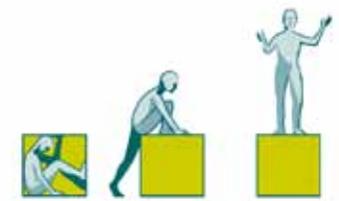
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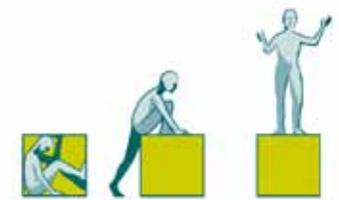
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## How Twitter changes presentations

If you're going to present to a tech-savvy audience you need to know how the presentation landscape has changed with the advent of Twitter and other backchannels.

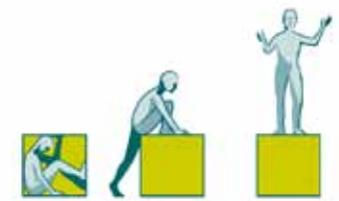
Twitter was not the first tool to be used as a backchannel, but it is the one that has had the most impact on conference presentations so far. Twitter first grabbed the attention of mainstream presentation bloggers and commentators during an interview at the [2008 SXSW conference](#). The interviewer wasn't asking the questions the audience wanted answered. In the past, audience members would have grumbled internally or maybe whispered to their neighbour. But this was a tech-savvy, Twitter-enabled audience and they started tweeting their discontent. The grumbling accelerated. And knowing they had backing, members of the audience started taking over the interview.

And so started the shift of power from speaker to audience. Now, just about every week a new story of a presenter getting [roasted on Twitter](#) or other backchannel surfaces. The fact that this might happen to you could be scary. Presenting at conferences is hard enough without the added complication of Twitter.

In this eBook, I'll show you how you can survive presenting with Twitter. Audience revolts on Twitter and other backchannels get the attention in the

### Definition

The term [backchannel](#) refers to an online conversation taking place at the same time as people are talking live. Twitter is not the only backchannel being used at conferences, but it is the most common at the moment.



Twittersphere and blogosphere, but if you upgrade your presentations to meet the demands of the Twitter era, it won't happen to you.

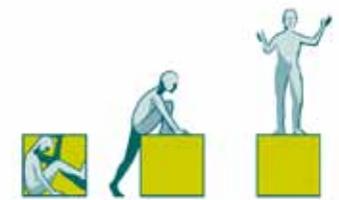
This eBook is not only about helping you avoid problems – it's also about how to make the most of the opportunities presented by the backchannel. Proactive conference organizers and presenters are adapting to the shift in power and seeing the value that a presentation backchannel can bring.

I've written this eBook to be a practical resource that can help you immediately. For a more in-depth exploration of how the world of presentations is changing, I recommend Cliff Atkinson's new book [The Backchannel: How audiences are using Twitter and Social Media and changing presentations forever](#). If you buy the book through this link I'll earn a few cents (thank you in advance).

I mention a lot of Twitter applications and tools in this eBook. New features and new tools are constantly being introduced, so I've created a webpage where I'll post [updates](#). Check that out if you want to see what's new.

**A note on terminology:** In this eBook, I will be talking mainly about Twitter, because it's currently the most commonly used presentation backchannel. It's not the only backchannel, but it would be very clumsy if I had to say "Twitter and other backchannels" every time – so I'll just say "Twitter". However, in the

"I'd argue that some power has shifted to the audience – and with that comes responsibility of the speaker to respond to the power shift. As a speaker I feel empathy and at the same time am scared this doesn't happen to me. The best way for speakers to avoid this revolt is to make sure that they be aware of the changes in power shifts and develop a plan to integrate social."  
[Jeremiah Owyang](#)



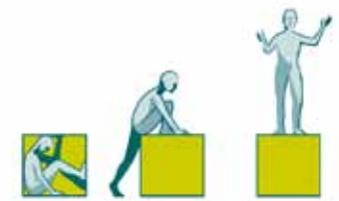
last chapter, I'll be recommending alternative backchannel tools that you can use to make the most of audience participation.

I've written this eBook so that it can be read and understood by people not familiar with Twitter. If you're an experienced Twitter user you'll be able to skip certain sections like "Starting with Twitter".

Where you see a  $\Delta$  symbol in the main text, it means there's an explanation or links to further information in the sidebar.

## **The benefits of presenting with Twitter**

In the past few years there has been a lot of debate amongst tech people about whether tweeting during a presentation is rude. Most tech people have now moved on. At technology-related conferences, tweeting during presentations is considered both an acceptable and effective way of engaging with the content of the presentation. The same shift is likely to happen at mainstream conferences, as people come to terms with the shifting landscape of presenting and acknowledge the benefits for both the audience and the presenter.



## Audience benefits

### **Focus**

Many people report that tweeting during a presentation helps them to concentrate. It's like note-taking during a lecture. It provides a way for people to engage actively with your content, rather than just listening passively.

### **More content**

A backchannel gives audience members an opportunity to add explanations, elaborations, and useful links related to the content of a presentation.

### **Clarity**

In the past, people had to wait until the presenter was ready to take questions before they could clarify things they didn't understand. Now, they can tweet their question and another audience member may tweet back the answer.

### **Encouragement to speak up**

Many people are not comfortable asking questions out loud. But they can ask questions on Twitter without the same level of risk. If other people indicate that they're wondering about the same issue, they may get the courage to speak up.

### **Innovation**

As your presentation sparks ideas, audience members can tweet them and build on each others' thoughts.



### **Virtual participation**

People who aren't able to physically attend your presentation can follow the backchannel and tweet with the physically present participants.

### **Collaborative note-taking**

If a number of people are using Twitter to take notes of the presentation, the archive of the backchannel becomes a valuable resource.

### **Connection**

Being at a conference where you don't know many people can be intimidating. Participating in the backchannel is a way that people can get to know each other, and then arrange to meet at the next break.

### **Productivity**

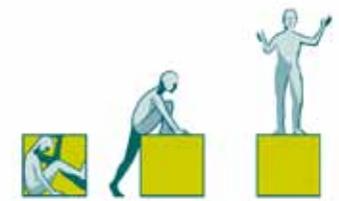
If the speaker is tedious you can do something productive with your time.

### **Quality of presentations**

Over time the quality of presentations will increase. Knowing that a backchannel-equipped audience will not suffer in silence, speakers will prepare more diligently, tailor their presentations and work on improving their delivery skills.

"Multitasking is an exertion of people power. I'll do what I want when I want. If you can grab my attention and hold it then good for you. If not, then there's plenty more I can be doing with my time."

Clive Shepherd



## Presenter benefits

### Audience analysis

If you're presenting to a Twitter-savvy audience, you can chat to them on Twitter before your presentation. You can start to get to know them and find out what they're most interested in from your presentation.

### Real-time feedback

The backchannel is a way to monitor how your presentation is being received as you're delivering it. This can be scary, but if, during your presentation you know that members of the audience have concerns, then you have an opportunity to address those concerns in real-time.

The feedback might also be encouraging. Imagine seeing the tweet "Presentation in Room 221 is rocking!" while you're still speaking.

### Viral spread

The backchannel allows your ideas to spread far beyond the physical auditorium. People will be tweeting your messages to their followers. They, in turn, may retweet  $\Delta$  those tweets (remember that  $\Delta$  is to alert you that there's a definition in the sidebar). You can have an impact far beyond the people seated in front of you.

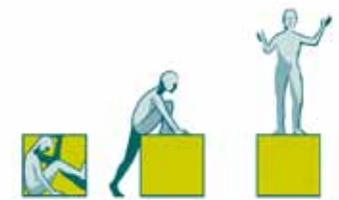
### Detailed evaluation

In the past you might get a conference evaluation sheet a few weeks after the presentation. If your audience is twittering you can read the Twitterstream

"It's like a new set of antennae."  
Nancy White quoted in "The art of the backchannel at conferences: tips, reflections and resources"

#### Definition

A retweet (often abbreviated to RT) is when a tweet gets copied and posted again by another person.



immediately after the presentation. You can discover which of your ideas had resonance with your audience by seeing which tweets got retweeted the most. You can also discover where people got confused. You've got a blow-by-blow account of what went on in people's minds during your presentation.

### **Ongoing relationships**

Twitter allows you to continue the conversation with your audience after the presentation has ended. It's an easy way of staying in touch with your audience so the interaction can continue long after the physical meeting.

### **Presenter control**

You may not be persuaded by this long list of benefits. However, if you're speaking at an external conference, it doesn't really matter what you think about tweeting. People will be doing it whether you like it or not.

So let go of controlling everything that happens in your presentation. Learn how to survive and make the most of the new environment.

"No computers or handhelds during my presentation," barks a presenter. For the next hour, all eyes up here, on me!" I ignore this insane outburst, of course. I'm an adult. So is the rest of the audience. I take notes on my notebook PC. If the guy has something pithy to say, I might even rock it out on Twitter, give him credit, and spread his idea further."  
[Laura Bergells](#)



## **The three stages of presenting with the backchannel**

Presenting with the backchannel has the following stages:

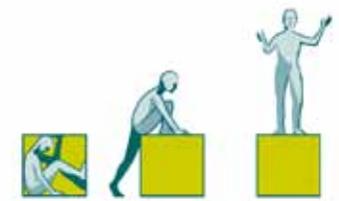
Stage One: Survive the experience

Stage Two: Respond to audience needs

Stage Three: Engage your audience with the backchannel.

If you're already familiar with Twitter you should be able to combine Stages One and Two during your first presentation to a tweeting audience. But if you've never used Twitter and your presentation is in the next few days, focus on Stage One. Then get onto Twitter, get familiar with it and you can move to Stage Two in your subsequent presentations.

Once you're comfortable at Stage Two, move on to Stage Three – engaging your audience with the backchannel.



## Stage One – Survive the experience

First, find out how likely it is that your audience will be tweeting. Unfortunately this is not that easy – it may require a little bit of detective work. Start with:

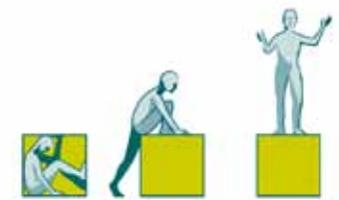
### 1. The Conference website

Check out the conference website and see what provisions they're making for the backchannel. Look for mention of a conference hashtag. A hashtag is a combination of letters preceded by a # symbol. For example the conference hashtag for the TED conference is #TED2009. People on Twitter use hashtags to identify tweets about the same topic, as it allows for easy searching and grouping of tweets. If the conference organizer is on the ball, they'll have created a unique hashtag for the conference. You may also find that the conference has a Twitter account – that's an indicator that they're expecting at least some of the audience to be on Twitter. If there's nothing on the website, get in touch with the conference organizer and ask what they're expecting.

If the conference organizer says they're not expecting a backchannel, don't take their word for it. Just because there was no backchannel last year, doesn't mean there won't be one this year. So do some more research.

#### Note

I did an informal survey of the official websites of recent conferences where I know there was an active backchannel. The conference websites often didn't mention the backchannel at all.



2. Check out the websites of recent conferences in the same industry for signs of a backchannel. Use Google blog search to search for blog posts about the conference – they will normally mention or reference the backchannel. You'll probably find the conference hashtag. Go to <http://search.twitter.com>:



As you can see it looks just like the Google search page. Enter the conference hashtag into the search box and click Search. You'll see all the tweets with that hashtag.

Denise Graveline of the [Eloquent Woman](#) blog says, "You'll be able to see the types of things that audiences are tweeting (everything from room temperature to links from the presos) and to become more comfortable and knowledgeable about what audiences are thinking."

For example, here's a sample of tweets from the Engage your Community conference:



#### Tip

Denise Graveline also suggests that you can use audience tweets to improve your speaking: "When I'm watching Twitter, what I see are useful tips and feedback from the audience." For example tweets, see her post [Tweet your way to better speaking](#).



Once you've determined that there may be a backchannel, there are two things to do:

1. Audit your presentation
2. Prepare yourself for the psychological impact of a tweeting audience.

### **Audit your presentation**

Twitter-enabled audiences will no longer suffer quietly through bad presentations. At the Higher Education Web conference in October 2009, a [keynote speaker](#) was roasted on Twitter. Here are some of the tweets:

"Can anyone hear this guy? Or read his slides?"

"Anyone else confused by that video."

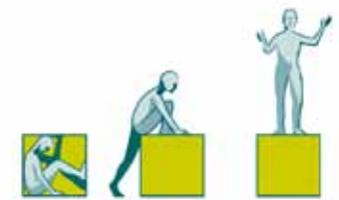
"OK. Slides with paragraphs of information make me turn around and tweet about how such things are bad."

"Did we go back in time 4 years? Knew all this already. Something new please!"

As you can see, he broke just about every rule in the presentation handbook.

#### **Resource**

For help in planning your presentation, download my [Presentation Planning Guide](#).



At the Web 2.0 Expo in November 2009, a speaker got a hard time for being too academic, reading her presentation and going too fast. Her paper is available to read online. It requires concentration to read in your own time, so I imagine that it was hard to take in as a live presentation.

So you do need to thoughtfully prepare your presentation and tailor it to the specific needs of your audience. Then audit your presentation for the hot buttons that will have even the kindest audience member tap out a negative tweet. This is vital if you've been rehashing the same presentation for a few years. There are two things to audit:

### 1. **Your content**

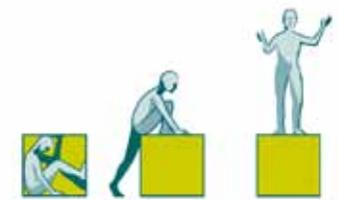
People will no longer suffer silently through substandard content. Here are specific things to avoid:

- § Examples or case studies that are out of date
- § Passing off other people's stories as your own
- § Urban myths
- § Fudging figures and statistics
- § Over interpreting scientific evidence
- § Overusing clichés, buzzwords and jargon
- § Thinly-veiled sales pitches (see sidebar for example).

"This morning, however, Mark Victor Hansen and Robert G. Allen took the stage. The 10-minute session began modestly with the two men announcing they were Twittering their entire new book, Cash in a Flash, 140 characters at a time. Mild interest from the crowd.

And then it began. A barrage of the word "monetizing," vague overpromises of making us all rich and sound-bite tidbits worthy of Fox News. The #140conf Twitter backchannel exploded with criticism, calling the presenters everything from spammers to snake oil salesmen to infomercial hosts."

Heidi Miller from "The Backchannel Blues: What to do when you're on stage and the backchannel is blasting you."



## 2. Your slides

Slide design is undergoing a visual revolution. Audiences that tweet are likely to be aware of the changing standards. They're likely to comment on:

- § Slide after slide of bullet-points
- § Font sizes which are too small
- § Too many different fonts
- § Garish color schemes
- § Lack of contrast between text and background
- § Whizz-bang animations Δ.

Most audiences start off kindly – they want you to succeed if only because it makes their experience more enjoyable. If you prepare thoughtfully, are respectful of your audience's needs and do your best, they will not roast you.

But if you take your audience for granted, presenting “reheated” content, they will make their objections known.

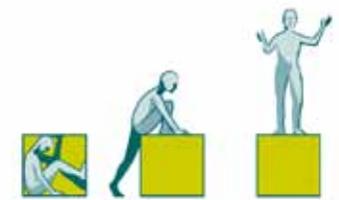
### **Prepare psychologically**

One of the disconcerting things about presenting to a tweeting audience is that they may look as if they're not engaged. Someone who is tweeting about the awesomeness of your presentation, looks the same as someone playing Solitaire.

#### **Resource**

Useful posts on slide design:

- [New evidence that bullet-points don't work](#)
- [Here's quick way to make-over a bullet-point slide](#)
- [The Top 7 PowerPoint slide designs](#)



We tend to rely on the physical signs of engagement that audience members give us – making eye contact, nodding, smiling – to let us know that we’re doing a good job.

But many of these traditional signs may be absent when you’re presenting to a tweeting audience. It’s very easy to interpret the lack of feedback to mean that you’re not doing a good job.

There are two ways to prepare yourself for this:

### 1. **Manage your thoughts**

Seeing all those heads buried in laptops may set off an avalanche of panicky thoughts in your head:

“They’re checking their emails – they must be bored – I’m so boring.”

“OMG! They’re saying horrible things about me on Twitter.”

These are not useful thoughts to have scurrying around your head while you’re presenting. So come up with alternative thoughts to use instead. For example:

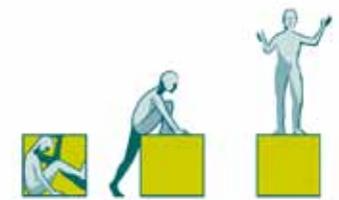
“They’re on their laptops (or texting on phones). That’s normal these days. It doesn’t mean anything’s wrong with my presentation.”

#### **Background**

The thought processes I’ve shown here are based on the principles of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). CBT is not the same as positive thinking. The thoughts are not necessarily positive – they are rational and believable.

Here’s more reading from my blog on using CBT to reduce your nervousness about presenting:

[There’s no such thing as the perfect presentation](#)  
[The Seven Thinking Sins of Public Speaking](#)



Note that this thought is believable and rational  $\Delta$ .

During your presentation you don't know which thought is true. So why not choose the thought that makes you feel good!

## 2. Desensitization

Psychologists use desensitization to help people overcome phobias  $\Delta$ . It works by getting used to the thing you fear – in this case, presenting to a roomful of people engaged with their laptops, rather than you.

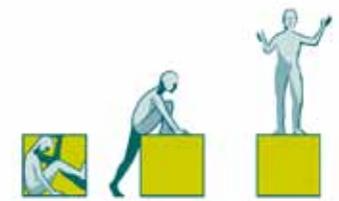
Desensitization works by exposing yourself to what you fear, in small steps. So before going to speak to an audience of 100 twittering people, practice speaking to a small group of twittering people.

You can set this up for yourself. Gather together a group of colleagues with their laptops/phones. To begin with, ask them to pay attention to you with an occasional glance down to their phone or laptop. Once you cope with that ask them to:

- § alternate between looking at you and their device, then
- § look down at their device with an occasional glance at you, then
- § look down at their device all of the time.

### Resource

For more on desensitization see:  
[15 baby steps to overcoming the fear of public speaking](#)



At first, you may find yourself unable to continue talking or you may start laughing. This is normal when you're getting used to the situation. Gather yourself together and start again.

This practice session will help you cope with a real tweeting audience. But be aware that you may still be slightly thrown when you experience the real thing.

If you can't practise this in real life, visualize yourself giving your presentation to a tweeting audience Δ.

### **Ask for what you need**

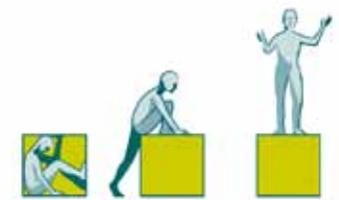
If you're speaking at an external conference, it's no longer an option to ban laptops and phones (the situation may be different in an educational setting or in internal company presentations).

However, there's no reason why you shouldn't ask the audience to make things easier for you. For instance you could say:

"I see that many of you will be tweeting and blogging during my presentation and I'm fine with that. But I'd also like something from you. I like to speak to people and to be able to see how you're reacting to my presentation. So when you're not using your laptop, I'd love it if you can engage with me."

#### **Resource**

For more on visualization to help you with speaking see: [The truth about visualization for public speaking success](#)



Having received permission to use their laptops and phones, most people will respond to your request to engage.

Although you can't tell people not to tweet, you don't have to accept the live display of the backchannel on the stage. Talk to the conference organizers and have it switched off. When you get more comfortable with the backchannel you may decide to incorporate it into your presentation (more on this [later](#)) and display it at certain times, but that should be under your control.

### **Connect with your audience**

Presenting to an audience with their heads down may make you feel like you're talking to a brick wall – or worse! There's a risk that the absence of tangible engagement, will cause you to go into "lecture" mode or to start "speechifying"  $\Delta$ . When that happens it's more likely that people will tune out.

It's best to retain a warm, engaging and conversational tone that makes you compelling to listen to.

You do that by staying connected with people. There will always be some people looking at you. Talk to them. If there's only one person, talk to that person. Make a connection with them. It will help you stay conversational.

Scan the rest of the audience occasionally and when someone does look up, speak to them for a few seconds so they feel acknowledged.

#### **Definition**

Speechify means to "hold forth, or harangue with a certain degree of formality"  
[WordNet, Princeton University](#)

"I want to see faces. There is something very psychologically powerful about looking around a room, and seeing people looking back. When there's a laptop, people tend to be looking at the screen. And in a room with a bit of a slant, you can barely see the faces at all, and it becomes like lecturing to a series of bricks."

Zen Faulkes, [Neurodojo](#)



## Read the Twitterstream

After your presentation, you can read the Twitterstream to see what people were tweeting (I'll be looking at how to [monitor the Twitterstream](#) during your presentation later on).

The people who were tweeting were probably using a hashtag to identify their tweets. Normally, the conference organizer will have created a hashtag for the conference and the tweeters will simply have used that hashtag.

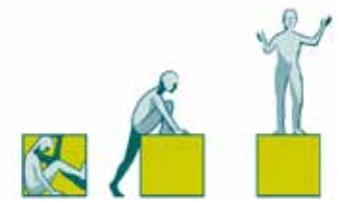
Remember that if it's the hashtag for the conference as a whole, rather than specifically for your presentation, there'll probably be a whole lot of tweets which are not relevant to your presentation. You'll have to do some filtering.

If you're new to Twitter, get help reading the Twitterstream from a Twitter-savvy friend who was at the presentation. If you don't have a friend to help you, don't panic – generally Twitter users don't abbreviate too much (it's not like reading a text message from a teenager). If you do come across unfamiliar terms check out these Twitter glossaries:

[The Twitter glossary: what do all those terms mean](#)

[The Twitter glossary: Twitter terms defined and explained](#)

If you're keen to learn as much as you can from the Twitterstream then skip forward to [Learning from the Twitterstream](#).



## Stage Two – Respond to the audience’s needs

The beauty of the Twitter backchannel is that it's real-time feedback – it's like being able to read the minds of people in your audience while you're presenting. This means you can find out if you need to change course during the presentation, rather than after.

Responding to your audience’s needs *during* your presentation is challenging. But it's what all presenters should aspire to.

To be able to respond in this way you need to start preparing well before your presentation.

### Getting started on Twitter

If you haven't yet used Twitter, it's time to start. This is important so that you start to develop a feel for the culture and etiquette of tweeting in your particular industry.

Here's the basic process to follow:

- 1. Sign up and fill out your profile**

You'll have the opportunity to write a 160 character "Bio". Use your Bio to establish your credibility amongst the audiences you'll be talking to (if you have space left over then add some personal stuff if you want to).



## 2. Write a few tweets

Write a few tweets before you start following other people  $\Delta$ . Then when they look at your Twitter profile there will be something for them to look at to help them decide whether to follow you back. Your first tweets could be insights related to your specialty or links to interesting resources.

## 3. Start following a few people

There are websites which act as Twitter directories ([wefollow.com](http://wefollow.com), [twibes.com](http://twibes.com)) where you can find people in your industry to follow  $\Delta$ . The [Twitter Lists](#) feature can also help you find suitable people. Don't follow too many people to begin with – you're likely to find it overwhelming.

## 4. Some people will follow you back

## 5. Tweet some more

As well as tweeting your thoughts and links to resources, also look for ways you can initiate or join a conversation. Twitter is best used as a conversation medium, rather than a broadcast medium.

If somebody says something that you have a point of view on, reply to them. If they tweet something that you think is particularly well put or

### Resource

Here are some useful posts when you're just starting out on Twitter:

§ [Getting started on Twitter](#)

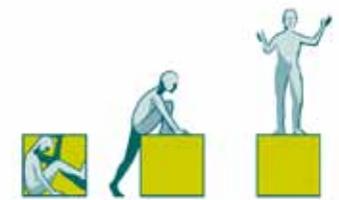
§ [What I'd liked to have known when I first started using Twitter](#)

§ [Advice for new Twitter users: 5 tips](#)

§ [How to start communicating on Twitter](#)

### Definition

To "follow" someone means that you their tweets will appear on your Twitter homepage.



they link to a useful resource, “retweet” their tweet (retweet is abbreviated to RT on Twitter).

Twitter is not the place to shamelessly self-promote. [Chris Brogan](#) advises that you tweet about other people’s interesting, useful resources at about a 12:1 ratio to your own.

## 6. Follow some more people

As well as the directories, the tweets you’re reading will mention interesting people to follow. For example, someone you’re following will RT  $\Delta$  someone else’s tweet –you can click on that person’s username and follow them back.

## 7. Carry on

Tweet some, follow some more. You’ll gradually build up a network of like-minded people.

## Create a hashtag

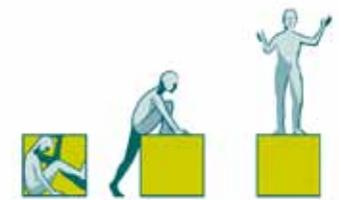
Create a hashtag specifically for your presentation and encourage people to use it. That will allow you and others to easily identify the Twitterstream related to your presentation.

If you’re speaking at a conference, the conference organizers will probably already have created a hashtag for the conference as a whole. They may also

In [Stage 3 – Engage](#), I’ll be covering more ways that you can connect with your audience before your presentation.

### Definition

A retweet (often abbreviated to RT) is when a tweet gets copied and posted again by another person.



have a system for an extra hashtag for each presentation  $\Delta$ . If not, simply make up your own using your initials – for example, I would use #om. Ask people to tweet using *both* the conference hashtag and your hashtag. Although this is a little more complex, evidence from the [IWMW conference](#) is that it works fine. (In my first experiments with presenting with Twitter, I added my first initial to the conference hashtag. The problem with this approach is that I was splintering the conference hashtag and making it more difficult for people trying to follow the conference backchannel.)

### **Advertise your hashtag**

Let your audience know your twitter username and your presentation's hashtag before your presentation if possible. Tweet it and include it in any pre-presentation material that is sent out to the attendees.



[Cliff Atkinson](#) (see Chapter 7, “Joining the Backchannel in Conversation”) suggests that you display your Twitter username and presentation hashtag on an introductory slide “This provides a visual cue that you welcome the backchannel from the start.”

### **Monitor the Twitterstream**

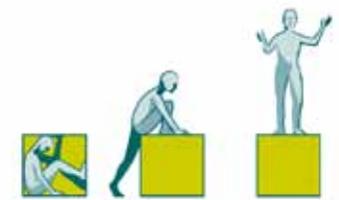
The level of effort you put into monitoring the Twitterstream during your presentation will depend on how many people are tweeting. At the start of your presentation, ask the audience how many of them are planning to tweet.

#### **Example**

The Institutional Web Management Workshop 2009 developed a system; “If you wish to refer to a specific plenary talk or workshop session, we have defined a hashtag for each of the plenary talks (#p1 to #p9) and workshop session (#a1-#a9, #b1-#b4 and #c1 to #c5).”

“If only 10% raise their hand, I recommend that you present to the rest of the audience and adjust your presentation based on their reactions.”

[Cece Salomon-Lee](#) Director of Marketing, InXpo from comment on Jeremiah Owyang’s post [How speakers should integrate social into presentations](#)



If it's less than 10%, it's not critical to monitor the backchannel in real-time. However, as the percentage grows the more useful it will be to monitor the backchannel.

Unless you're a practiced multi-tasker or supremely-skilled presenter, get some help with this task. When you're presenting you need to be 100% focused on living your words and connecting with your audience. I've tried and I know that I can't present effectively and scan the Twitterstream at the same time.

The solution is to create a Twitter team consisting of two people. The first is your Twitter moderator – someone who can monitor the Twitterstream and let you know when something needs your attention. The second is your Twitter partner – a colleague to answer questions, add additional resources and so on.

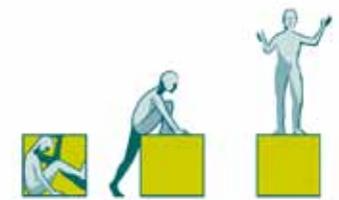
### **Twitter moderator**

Ask a Twitter-savvy friend or colleague to be your Twitter moderator. If you don't have anyone who can play this role, ask for a tweeting volunteer from the audience.

Their task is to monitor the Twitterstream and let you know if there are any tweets you should address. Let the audience know at the start that you have a Twitter moderator and what their role is. The Twitter moderator will need to use their judgement as to what to let you know about and the number of tweets

I like to find two people to help: one to serve as Google Jockey (a/k/a Link dropper) and another to serve as a moderator -- posing questions to me when I take a breath and ask.

[Vicki Davis](#)



on any one issue that warrants interrupting you. But as a guide, ask your Twitter moderator to let you know about:

1. One-off tweets such as questions that go unanswered or people saying they're confused or can't follow.
2. A pattern of tweets that indicates that people in the audience might not be happy with the direction of the presentation (eg: content not relevant, content too elementary or too advanced).

If the Twitterstream is particularly voluminous, the Twitter moderator may also need to filter the Twitterstream and highlight the most popular comments and questions according to how many times they are retweeted (more sophisticated [tools](#) will be coming soon).

In order to see only retweeted tweets, the moderator can set up a search for both your hashtag and "RT". This can be done on [search.twitter.com](http://search.twitter.com), many of the general Twitter applications ([Tweetdeck](#), [Seismic](#) or [Hootsuite](#)) or the [display applications](#).

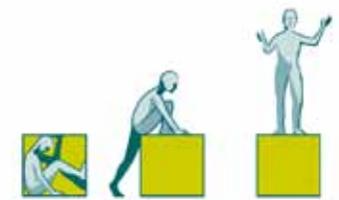
The moderator could also invite people to text or use a Direct Message on Twitter if they want to raise issues more privately Δ.

#### Note

At times you may get so many tweets that it will be hard to keep up. I led a session on presenting with Twitter to a group of only 8 people. We generated 80 tweets in 40 minutes. Don't expect that you can address every comment or question during the presentation itself. You can follow up with the ones you didn't address afterwards.

#### Definition

A direct message is a way of sending a tweet to someone so that only they can see it. It's often abbreviated as DM.



Choose the way the moderator communicates with you depending on your trust in their judgement and your ability to cope with interruptions. Passing you a note is the least obtrusive and gives you time to consider how to react.

### **Twitter partner**

Assign a colleague (who's also an expert in the topic of your presentation) to be your partner on Twitter during your presentation. They can resolve confusions, answer questions and point to additional resources directly without referring to you. This takes a lot of pressure off you and provides huge value to your participants. Your colleague doesn't have to be physically present to play this role.

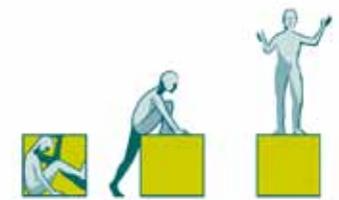
### **Twitter breaks**

As well as having a Twitter moderator and Twitter partner, take a few Twitter breaks. At appropriate moments, take a short break from your presentation so that you can confer with your Twitter team, have a look at the Twitterstream if necessary and provide answers to audience questions.

You may be concerned that this will interrupt the "flow" of the presentation, but this is more of a problem for you, than for your audience. If you've got great momentum and you're "in the zone", then the short break may interrupt *your* flow. But that's not important to the audience. In fact the audience is best served by frequent breaks. They will take in more information if you present in spaced chunks, than if you deliver a long, continuous flow.

"I knew some of my colleagues who'd helped with the presentation were following the event but what I couldn't imagine was how powerful a force having your co-workers liveblogging whilst you were talking could be."

David Harrison



### **Monitoring the backchannel live**

Be wary of monitoring the backchannel while presenting. I've found I can't do this and be fully communicating with my audience.

However, if you want to keep an eye on the backchannel and you have no-one who can help, set up a laptop screen or monitor where you can easily see it. This will most likely be in front of you on the stage (so the audience will see the back of the monitor). Ensure the display is large enough that you can read it from where you'll be standing (on a Windows laptop, go to the Control Panel to adjust the screen resolution to "low").

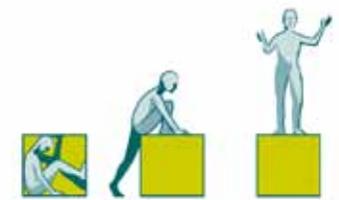
This is a more professional solution than having a phone or PDA in your hand and glancing at it while you're presenting.

But resist the temptation to keep glancing at the monitor as you're talking – you'll come across as disinterested in your audience. When you want to look at the monitor – stop talking, look at the monitor – then look up before you start talking again.

#### **Tool**

[SlideSix](#) is an online alternative to PowerPoint and Keynote developed by Todd Sharp. He is developing a [desktop slide application](#) which will enable you to monitor tweets from within the "Presenter View" of the application.

"[I provide] one or two monitors on the floor facing the speaker that shows the back channel. That way the speaker does not have to turn around, carry a cell phone or turn to their lap top to see the stream."  
[Jeff Hurt](#) – from comment on [Jeremiah Oywang's post How speakers should integrate social into their presentations](#)



## Types of tweets to respond to

There are a variety of tweets you might encounter. Here's how to handle each type:

### Positive contributions

The backchannel can contain incredibly useful information. It will likely shatter the illusion that you're the only expert on your topic (see an example from my own experience in the sidebar). Acknowledge useful tweets and thank people for their contributions.

### Points of disagreement

These tweets may be a bit confrontational, but they do show your audience is engaging and participating in your presentation. See these tweets as an opportunity to engage deeper.

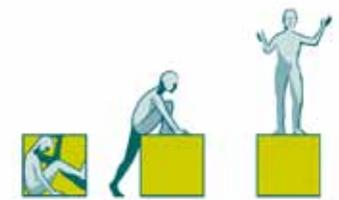
Read out the tweets or display them on the screen (more on this [later](#)) and ask the tweeter to elaborate. This is important because it can be quite tricky to make a complex point in 140 characters. Then respond in the same way that you would if this were a traditional Q&A session.

### Environmental issues

Sound problems and other distractions are all things that people may tweet about. Ask your moderator, conference host or a volunteer to get the issue fixed as soon as possible.

In my first presentation on Twitter and presenting I had set up a search at [search.twitter.com](http://search.twitter.com) to show the Twitterstream. We used a Firefox plug-in called Reload Every to refresh the page every 10 seconds. Within a couple of minutes of starting [@Jeffhurt](#) (who participated remotely from Texas) suggested we use [www.tweetchat.com](http://www.tweetchat.com). Wow! That was so much better.

For more of what I learned in that presentation see my post: [8 things I learnt about using Twitter as a participation tool](#).



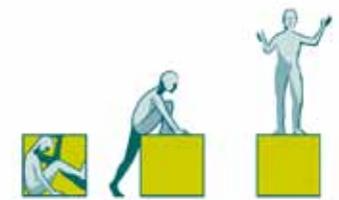
## **Content discontent**

If your content is not meeting the needs of the audience you'll get to hear about it. Here's where you need to exercise some judgement. If there is only one discontented tweet you can probably disregard it – but if it is retweeted or others reply in agreement, then you should probably take some action. This may be disconcerting for you as a presenter, but my attitude is that it's better to know now and attempt to put things right, than to find out later that you bombed when you can no longer do anything about it.

In responding to dissatisfied tweets be aware of the “Twitter-divide” in your audience. Unless everyone in the audience is on Twitter some audience members won't be aware of the issue. So manage the situation using traditional facilitation techniques. Here's a possible process:

1. Summarize the gist of the dissatisfied tweets.
2. Ask the audience as a whole to respond by show of hands whether this is a problem for them too.
3. If there are a significant number (30% upwards) who indicate they're dissatisfied, facilitate a discussion to find out what the audience would like from you.
4. Ask people to form pairs or small groups and to discuss what they would like you to address (this works well because people have a chance to discuss their ideas in a small group before calling out in the large group).

“One thing I learned many years ago, is that as an instructor you have to be in the moment, focus on your learners more than yourself, and don't be afraid to flush your lesson plan down the toilet if it isn't working. What Twitter or other back channels do is leave the guesswork out.”  
Beth Kanter [“The art of the backchannel at conferences: tips, reflections and resources”](#) from [Beth's Blog: How Non-profits can use Social Media.](#)



5. Gather the items on a flipchart or whiteboard (do not number them at this stage).
6. Chunk similar items together (you can do this by marking similar items with a coloured pen or a letter).
7. List the order in which you will address the items.
8. Start addressing the first item in the list.

### **Non-specific negative tweets**

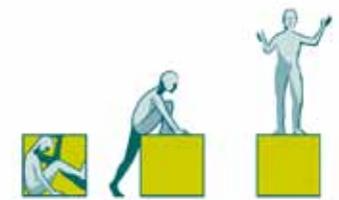
Tweets such as “This presentation sucks” are difficult to respond to intelligently. In many cases, you can ignore these types of tweets. If it's a silly comment without any substance, others will recognise it as such and there's no need to draw attention to it.

However, if you want to respond to it, first ask the tweeter to identify themselves. If they do identify themselves, ask them to elaborate. What they say out loud and directly to you may be substantially toned down compared to their tweet. They may have tweeted in the heat of the moment and instantly regretted it. It can be difficult to make a point and be respectful in 140 characters, so respond to what they've said out loud, rather than their tweet.

### **Personal comments**

The thought that people might make negative personal comments about you can be scary. But just as our perception of the frequency of violent crime is often higher than the reality – so it is with negative personal comments in the backchannel. When there is a backchannel blow-up it tends to get a lot of

“I heard of one panel at a recent SXSW in which there were a number of tweets complaining about the format, urging the moderator to move on to audience Q&A during the opening remarks by panelists. The moderator was monitoring the tweetstream, and interrupted to ask the audience – in the frontchannel – whether they would prefer to skip to Q&A, and they overwhelmingly expressed support for continuing on with the planned format.”  
Comment by [Joe McCarthy](#) on Jeremiah Owyang's post [How speakers should integrate social into their presentations](#)



attention in the blogosphere and so seems to be a frequent occurrence. But there are many conferences where the backchannel remains respectful and constructive.

If you're concerned that personal comments will upset you, work out your psychological strategy for how you'll deal with them. The most important thing is to stay focused on your presentation and audience while you're speaking. If you allow yourself to get distracted, that may impact on your presentation. Discipline yourself and deal with it emotionally after the presentation.

### **Backchannel scenario training**

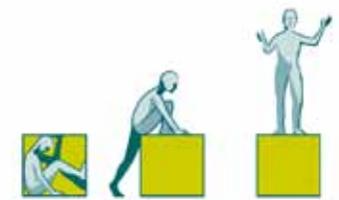


Cliff Atkinson (see Chapter 8, "Handling Instant Feedback from the Backchannel") suggests thinking through possible backchannel comments and how you might react to them:

"Since so much about presenting to a backchannel is new, set aside time to practice scenarios that put you in a range of difficult backchannel situations. The worst thing you can do is wait until a live presentation to decide what you'll do – instead, spend up front time rehearsing scenarios in which you deal with a range of comments."

### **Follow-up**

Are there any substantive issues which you weren't able to address during the presentation? Write a follow-up on those issues and then make that available



to your audience. If you have a website or blog, post it there and tweet a link to it. If you don't have a website, create a PDF and have the conference organizer email it to the attendees.

It's useful for your audience to have a copy of the Twitterstream. Do a search on your hashtag with [search.twitter.com](https://search.twitter.com) and then convert the result to a PDF. Or you can use [wthashtag.com](https://wthashtag.com) to generate a printer-friendly html page of the Twitterstream.

Another idea for post-presentation follow-up is to hold an online-only Q&A just after you come off the stage. Thank you to Cece Salomon-Lee for this idea (see sidebar).

### **Learning from the Twitterstream**

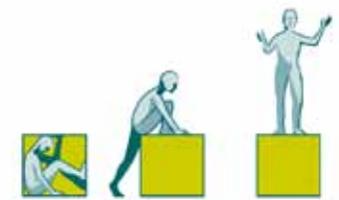
You've now got access to a level of feedback that you've never had before:

#### **Number of tweets**

The number of tweets doesn't necessarily indicate anything about the quality of your presentation. A low number of tweets could mean either that you were so engaging that they forgot to tweet or that you were so boring that they checked their emails instead. So don't make any meaning out of this.

"For example, many of my company's customers hold hybrid events (a mix of in-person with a virtual component). With one customer, they had speakers hold Q&A sessions with the virtual attendees after they walked off the podium at the in-person event. In many ways, the person was able to answer MORE questions in a shorter period of time than possible in-person."

[Cece Salomon-Lee](#), Director of Marketing, InXpo from comment on Jeremiah Owyang's post [How speakers should integrate social into presentations](#)



### **Improving your presentation**

Review the Twitterstream to see where you could improve your presentation. Depending on the tweet activity, you have access to a blow-by-blow account of how your presentation was received by the audience.

1. Look for times when people got confused or lost the flow. That indicates a section of your presentation where you could work to make your explanations easier to follow.
2. Notice the way that people communicated your main messages in their tweets. You may find that they expressed your points in a more succinct and effective way than you. Capture that.
3. Take note of the tweets about issues that you didn't put much emphasis on. Maybe that's an indication that people were interested in those issues and you should elaborate on them next time.

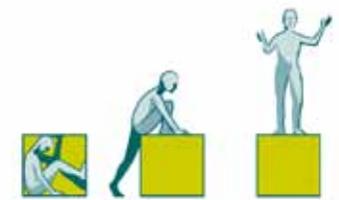
"As a trainer, it can be scary to come face to face with some real time genuine feedback. That feedback can be invaluable, and if I remove my ego from the equation, it can make me better at my job."

[Mollybob](#)

"It was also great to go back over the tweets sent during my presentation. I could see where I confused people, where people got excited, and which phrases were the most retweetable. Priceless feedback!"

[Simon Young](#)

[@audaciousgloop](#) Comment on Jeremiah Owyang's post [How speakers should integrate social into their presentations](#)



## Stage Three – Engage with the backchannel

The third stage of presenting with Twitter is not just to survive and respond, but to use the backchannel proactively to engage your audience.

Many of the ideas in this section rely on effective wireless internet connectivity at the presentation venue. Judging from reports from the blogosphere, this is not yet a given. Even when the venue advertises internet access, technical issues may mean it's not working well. So just as you should be able to give your presentation without slides, you should be able to give your presentation without a backchannel!

### Build relationships pre-presentation

Use Twitter to build a relationship with audience members before the presentation. [Laura Bergells](#), an experienced backchannel presenter, says:

“It's harder to snark at a presenter when you've previously created an online relationship! Connecting with an audience on Twitter first can turn an anonymous audience into a more friendly, interactive audience. Warm up the audience before you meet them – on Twitter!”

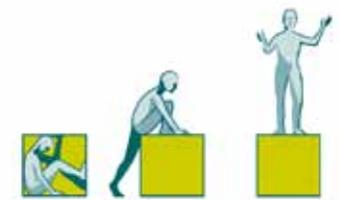
The description of your presentation in the conference programme, should include your Twitter username, your presentation hashtag and invite people to follow you. Ask them to send you a @reply Δ message (with the hashtag) so that

#### Definition: @

When you want to reply to someone on Twitter you start the tweet with a “@” and then that person's Twitter username.

#### Definition: Autofollow

You can choose to automatically follow anyone who follows you. This is called Autofollow.



you can identify them as an audience member and follow them back (if you don't use autofollow  $\Delta$ ).

The Twitter Lists feature makes this easier. Conference organisers can now ask for people's Twitter usernames on registration forms and then make Lists of speakers and attendees (thank you to [Crowdvine](#) for this suggestion).

Just as you have discussions with people that you follow on Twitter, do so with your audience members. One way of doing this is to carry out an "audience analysis" on Twitter.

### **Audience analysis on Twitter**

Use Twitter to find out more about your audience. You'll probably find that people other than your actual audience will also join in, but that doesn't matter as long as they're reasonably similar to your audience (you can check this out by looking at their bios).

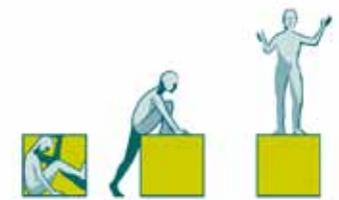
Tweet a series of questions. Make them open questions rather than closed questions  $\Delta$ . For example, in relation to your presentation topic:

- § What's their current level of knowledge?
- § What issues are they most interested in?
- § What challenges do they have?

#### **Definition: Closed/open questions**

A **closed question** can be answered with "Yes" or "No" or a single word answer eg: "How old are you?"

An **open question** allows people to give a longer, more descriptive answer.



Precede these question-tweets with a tweet explaining what you're doing to your normal followers. Include your hashtag in these tweets so that you can easily identify them.

### **Make your presentation tweetable**

Help your ideas spread further by making it easy for people to tweet or retweet your key points. Craft your key points into "tweetbites" – short sentences ready-made for tweeting. To make sure they are the right length, count the number of characters in:

- RT plus one space (3 characters)
- your username + the @ sign + one space
- the conference hashtag + one space
- the presentation hashtag + one space.

Subtract this total from 140. Your tweetbites should be no longer than that number. For example, if I was preparing a presentation for the SXSW conference, I would allow for:

RT @OliviaMitchell #sxswi #om = 30 characters  
140-30 = 110 allowable characters

So I can create tweetbites of 110 characters or shorter to help spread my ideas through retweets.

#### **Example**

In Scott Berkun's keynote at Web 2.0 Expo, these phrases got retweeted many times:

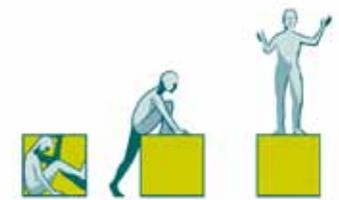
"Three timeless technologies: speaking, writing, drinking."

"All good communication is storytelling."

"You can be authentic in any medium."

"You must transcend your technology."

They are great examples of tweetbites.



Cliff Atkinson (see Chapter 6, “Making Your Ideas Twitter Friendly”) includes a worksheet for working out your four most important ideas you’d like your audience members to tweet to their followers (he calls them the Four Tweets). Cliff says:

“When you write the Four Tweets you crystallize in your own mind what you want your audiences to learn. This improves the changes they’ll actually learn it because you’ll be able to explain and emphasize what makes these points important”.

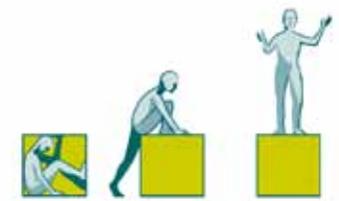
There are three ways to use these tweets in your presentation:

### **1. Say them**

If you want people to tweet your key points make them stand out. If your presentation was a written document, you’d use formatting to provide emphasis – bold text, bigger font, white space around it. Here’s how to add “verbal formatting” while you’re speaking:

- a. “Flag” a key point with a phrase like “Here’s the most important point I want you to get”.
- b. Stop speaking (white space) both before and after the key point. Think of this not so much as pausing, but of waiting – waiting until the audience is ready to pay full attention to what you have to say, and then waiting while they absorb your point.

**Definition: Flag**  
A sentence to draw attention to what you’re about to say



- c. Say your point deliberately and with intensity.
- d. Use chunking  $\Delta$  – speaking in a rhythm with short breaks – to separate the phrases.
- e. Repeat your point. This adds emphasis and gives the person who wants to tweet it, more time.

## 2. Put them on your slides

If you're using slides, they can be used for displaying your tweetbites. Here are two examples: on the left, the sentence stands starkly alone – on the right the image adds a human perspective (photo credit: [Kiva](#)).

### Resource

For more information on chunking see this post [You don't have to slow down to be an effective presenter](#)



Figure 2: PowerPoint slide showing tweetbite on plain background

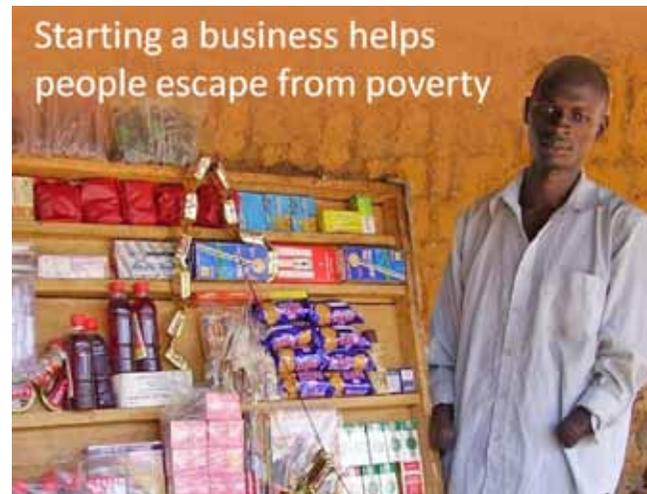
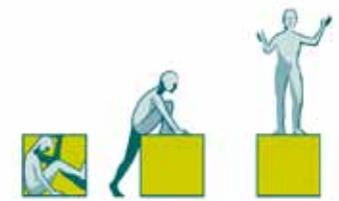


Figure 1: PowerPoint slide showing tweetbites teamed with an image



### 3. **Tweet them during your presentation**

It's impressive for you to tweet your most important points during your presentation.

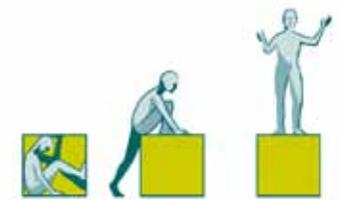
You can do this automatically if you are presenting with slides. Add-ins have been developed by Timo Elliot of SAPWeb2.0 for [PowerPoint](#) and by Ideo Labs for [Keynote](#). All you do is write your tweet in the Notes pane of the slide. Enclose it in these tags: [twitter] at the beginning and [/twitter] at the end. When you click to that slide (in slideshow mode) the tweet will be automatically posted.

Once you've finalized your slides, make two copies of the slideshow and put the tweets into one copy. Then you can rehearse with the other copy without inadvertently posting the tweets.

If you're presenting without slides there are two ways of posting tweets:

#### a. Medium-tech

Estimate the time when you'll be delivering each of your tweet bites. Use a tweet-scheduling site to schedule them to be posted at that time. I use [Social Oomph](#) (formerly called TweetLater) but there are many other services. The important thing is to choose one that will allow you to



schedule by the minute (I've seen some that only let you schedule by the hour).

b. Low-tech

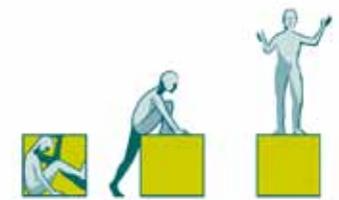
Write the tweets in a program like Notepad and then ask your Twitter moderator to cut-and-paste them into your Twitter account and post them at the appropriate time during your presentation.

### Set-up a home-page for your presentation



Cliff Atkinson (see Chapter 5, "Preparing for the Backchannel") suggests creating a simple web page for your presentation. It's a single location where you can bring together all the material related to your presentation – including the backchannel. Cliff says:

"A shortcoming of the way backchannels are usually set up is that audiences create temporary community areas that are not integrated into the actual presentation experience in a meaningful way. ...When you create a simple web page and offer it to your audience before, during and after your presentation, you create a place for people to go."



## Which backchannel should you use?

Twitter is not the only backchannel tool available. If you plan to use a backchannel proactively in your presentation, it can be helpful to use an additional backchannel tool. This is because:

- § It allows everyone who has access to a web-enabled phone or laptop to take part. They don't have to be registered with Twitter.
- § Twitter users won't have to be concerned about overwhelming or confusing their followers with a series of presentation-specific tweets.

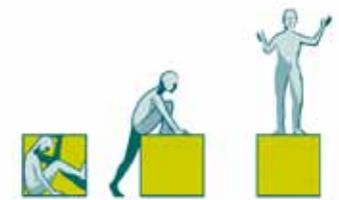
There are currently two applications which have been developed with live meetings in mind. They are [TodaysMeet](#) and [BackNoise](#).

TodaysMeet	BackNoise
Very easy to use	Easy to use
Twitter integration	Twitter integration
140 character limit	400 character limit
	Has "Buzzkill" function Δ
Have to put in a name (but you could put in an alias)	Can remain anonymous
	Can mute specific people from your own screen (other people will still see them)
Has a fullscreen display function	No display function but working on it
No archiving of content – but working on it	No archiving of content

### Explanation of Buzzkill

"Buzzkill allows a segment of the conversation to fade away. Repeated buzzkills by others fades the text further and further, until it vanishes. Each viewer gets a limited number of times they can buzzkill a conversation. This limits abuse by an individual. Collectively, however, the community of the conversation can fully mute portions."

Keith McGregor, developer of [BackNoise](#) via a Backnoise conversation (note that this is different from what it said on the website at the time of writing).



Nina Simon of [Museum 2.0](#) has written a great account of using both Twitter and TodaysMeet at the WebWise 2009 conference:

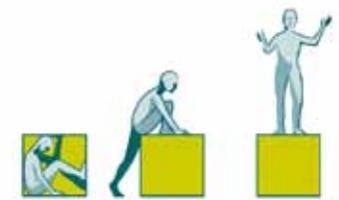
“TodaysMeet, ... was primarily used as a conversational medium among people actually at the conference. When a speaker would mention a project, someone would immediately post the relevant URL to TodaysMeet. People asked general questions to the group and replied directly to each other. It was sort of like passing notes in class—but the notes were highly on-topic extensions of what was being said real-time onstage. Some session leaders also deliberately watched the back channel for questions and integrated them real time into the onstage discussion. Whereas Twitter provided the conference highlights to a wider audience, TodaysMeet allowed attendees to delve deeper into individual moments and questions.

After the conference, a friend reflected on the positive experience with TodaysMeet, saying, “At first I didn’t understand why you didn’t just rely on Twitter for the back channel. But I liked how TodaysMeet was less formal, how you could be anonymous or use any username you wanted.”

Both TodaysMeet and BackNoise will pull in tweets with a hashtag that you specify. You no longer have to choose whether to use Twitter or a different backchannel – you’ll be using both.

### **Anonymity**

Both these backchannel tools allow users to remain anonymous (on TodaysMeet you do enter a username, but you can choose a different one for each conversation you take part in). This has pros and cons. On the one hand,



some people who are concerned about being negative may be more likely to say the things that need to be said. On the other, the lack of accountability can lead people to post snarky comments that they wouldn't normally under a more traceable username.

### **GoogleWave**

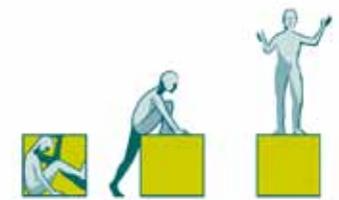
The most recent alternative to Twitter as a backchannel is [GoogleWave](#). Charlie Osmond has written an excellent [blog post](#) of its use at the eComm 2009 conference in Amsterdam.

### **Introduce the backchannel**

Let your audience know how you're going to be using the backchannel in your presentation:

- § Display your Twitter username and the hashtag on a slide.
- § Tell them that you welcome their participation by tweeting.
- § Invite them to contribute their expertise through Twitter.
- § Encourage people to tweet their questions as soon as they occur to them.
- § Explain how you'll be monitoring the Twitterstream. Introduce your Twitter team (Twitter moderator and Twitter partner) if you have one.
- § If you're going to use a backchannel tool other than Twitter, introduce the tool and demonstrate how to use it.

If somebody else is introducing you, ask them to run through these explanations as part of their introduction. That means that you can start cleanly without having to go into these practical details. If they're not up to it, have



one of your Twitter team do it. If that's not possible, open your presentation first, then cover these logistics before you get into the body of your presentation.

Don't forget your audience outside the room – those who are attending virtually, through Twitter. Just before your presentation post a tweet, or ask your moderator to do it, alerting people that you're speaking soon. Include the hashtag and a Twitter-sized bio (thank you to Denise Graveline of the [Eloquent Woman](#) blog for that tip).

### Displaying the backchannel

Yes, displaying the backchannel has the potential to be highly distracting. However, the benefit of displaying the screen is that it allows everyone to get a feel for the Twitter experience, not just those who are already on Twitter. It builds a sense of community amongst the audience as they all get to see a flow of useful information being co-created.

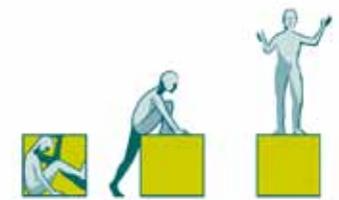
However, to balance that with the distraction factor, you need to be selective. Only display the backchannel when it is the focus of *your* attention. For example:

- § During your Twitter breaks
- § When you ask for questions via Twitter
- § When you have asked for responses via Twitter.

At the New Media Atlanta conference in September 2009, participants were using BackNoise. The conference was not meeting the needs of the audience and the backchannel descended into an unpleasant snarkfest. Chris Brogan was the last speaker of the day:

“He put the live BackNoise conversation feed up on the screen behind him as he spoke. The tone improved, partly because Chris was really good and there wasn't much for people to criticize. I'm sure having the comments be so very public made people behave a bit better as well. ”

[Stacey Williams](#)



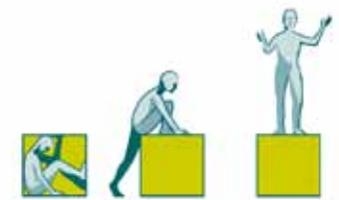
Then, when you answer questions from the stream, go to the screen and point to the question you're answering. When you've asked for responses and they're flooding in via Twitter, go up to the screen and highlight and summarize what you and the audience are seeing. When you're no longer discussing the backchannel, remove it from the screen.

### **Highlighting tweets**

Earlier I mentioned using retweets to highlight the most popular comments and questions. If the rush of tweets is so large that the stream is moving too fast to follow, you can set up the display to show only retweeted tweets, simply by adding "RT" to the search terms. Let your audience know what you're doing and they can choose which tweets make it to the screen by judicious use of retweeting.

Using RTs to highlight popular tweets may soon be outmoded by more sophisticated filters. Developers at Purdue University have created a clever tool [Need4Feed](#) that ranks tweets. Steve Talley (via email) says:

"Need4Feed uses an algorithm that looks at the number of times a tweet has been retweeted, as well as whether it is marked as a favorite, whether it generates replies, and whether it begins a conversation of related tweets. It's more sophisticated than looking at just one data point, and richer because of it."

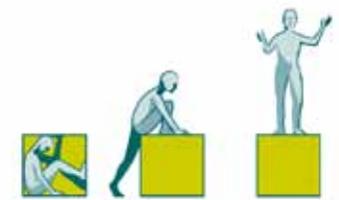


Need4feed is currently available only on request, but the developers plan to make it available to a broader audience.

### **Moderation**

Many people are worried about displaying the Twitterstream on a large screen because of the possibility of people tweeting snarky, offensive or off-topic comments. With popular conferences there is also a risk of spam. If the hashtag becomes so popular that it is one of the top hashtags on Twitter at that time it's called a "trending hashtag". Unfortunately, spammers have developed ways of spamming trending hashtags. But to manage any risk you can moderate the stream. There are two types of moderation:

1. Simple filtering – either including or excluding certain words. The advantage of this is that you can set up some basic filtering before your presentation. However, if a particular user becomes a problem you may want to adjust the filtering during your presentation.
2. Tweet-by-tweet approval. With this system as each tweet comes through, a decision is made whether or not to approve it. Have your Twitter moderator do this for you. You could also use tweet-by-tweet approval to highlight the most useful tweets. For example, if you're asking people to submit their questions via Twitter and there are far more questions than you can handle, you could pick out the questions you want to answer and just display those.



Remember that although you may be moderating what gets seen on the screen, people reading the stream through their laptops or phones will see the unmoderated stream. If you block tough comments, they'll know.

## Simple filtering screen displays

### Tweetchat

Tweetchat is very presentation friendly – it has simple controls and they're the ones you need as a presenter. Here are some of its really useful features:

- § You can pause the stream. That's great if you want to discuss a particular comment without it disappearing.
- § It's easy to manage how often you want the screen to refresh. If tweets are coming in too fast to catch them all you can slow down the refresh rate so that you can read them.
- § You can either block certain users, or include only particular people. That means if a person is tweeting inappropriately using your hashtag, you can exclude their tweets from the stream (remember this might not be anyone in your physical audience, it could be anyone on Twitter).

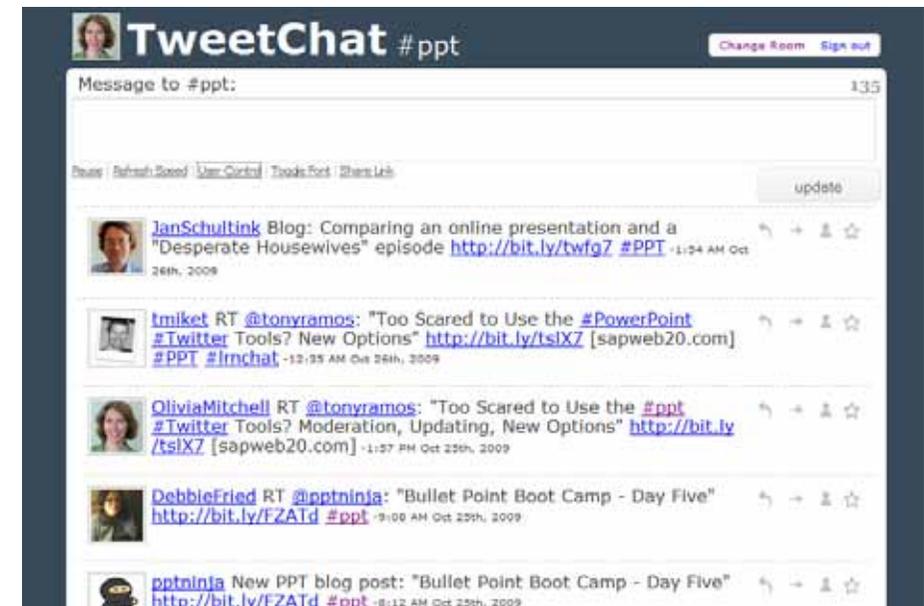
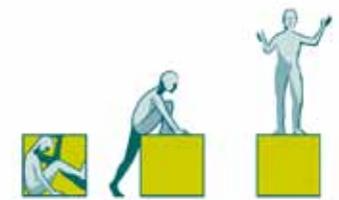


Figure 3: Screenshot of Tweetchat



## Twitterfall

Twitterfall has a number of settings that you can use to customize the display. The settings I recommend are shown in the screenshot in the sidebar. The Presentation theme removes the sidebars and allows the Twitterstream to be displayed fullscreen.

You can specify terms to be excluded, such as a username, if you want to block somebody. It has a pause function, but frustratingly this disappears when using the Presentation theme.

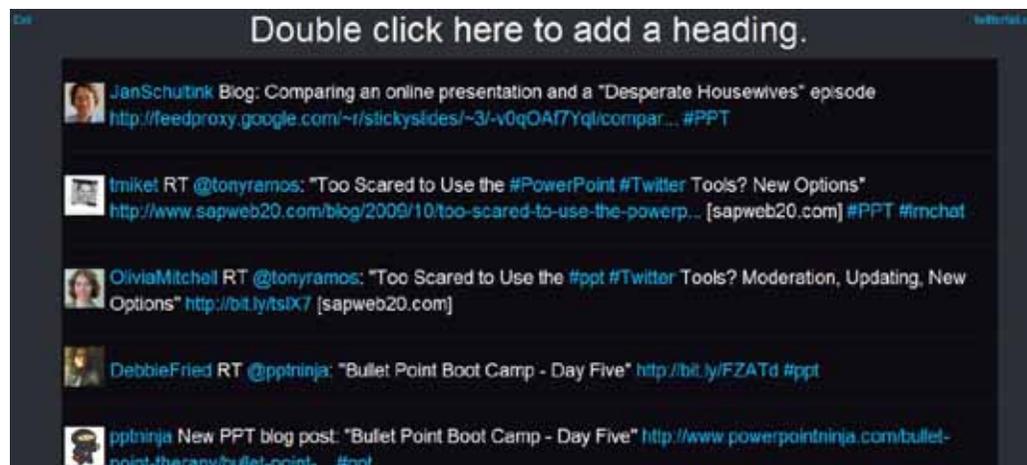


Figure 4: Screenshot of Twitterfall

## **Integration with PowerPoint**

There are currently two tools that allow you to display tweets on a PowerPoint slide. This means that you don't have to switch between two applications on your laptop – you can do everything from within PowerPoint.

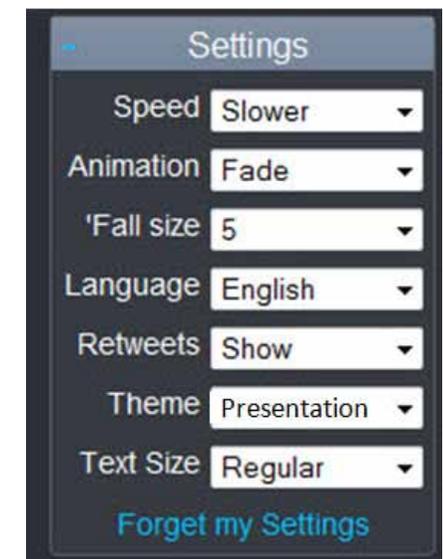
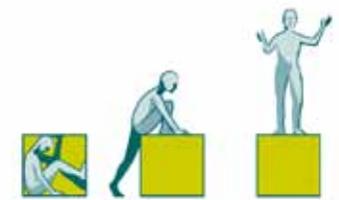


Figure 5: Recommended settings for Twitterfall



## 1. Poll Everywhere

This application has evolved from a traditional Audience Response System. As a result, the process for pulling tweets into a PowerPoint slide is a little complicated – Tweeters have to use the reply function to @pollxxxxx, where the “xxxxx” represents a number given to you by the Poll Everywhere software. The advantage of this is that the tweets only show up on the Poll Everywhere slide – they’re not seen by followers.

Poll Everywhere allows you to change basic formatting – color of the background and color and size of the text. To do this either click anywhere on the slide or mouse-over the lower left corner, and click “Chart Options.” A dialog box with the attributes you can control will appear (see sidebar). Once you have the slide looking the way you want it, click “Download slide” to use it in your own slideshow.

The advantage of Poll Everywhere is that it allows people to contribute who are not on Twitter. They can comment via text message (not available in all countries) or via the Poll Everywhere website.

Poll Everywhere has a free version and several paid plans. In the free version, the tweets are anonymous. You can use it with audiences of up to 30 people.



Figure 6: Screenshot of Poll Everywhere slide

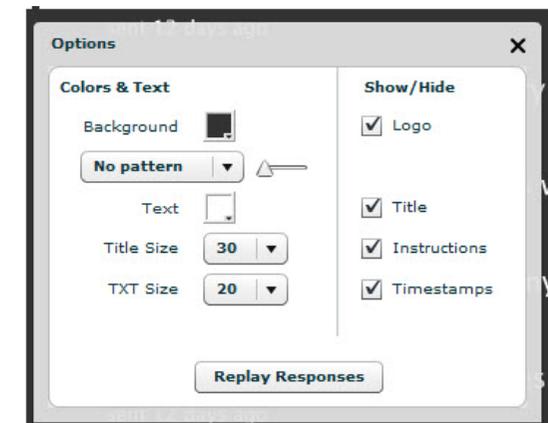
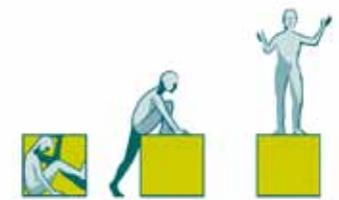


Figure 7: Screenshot of dialog box



The \$15 a month plan allows you to use with audiences of up to 50 people. You can remove the Poll Everywhere logo from the slide and people's usernames will be attached to their tweets. The \$65 a month plan allows you to moderate tweets one-by-one. You can use it for up to 250 people.

## 2. SAPWeb 2.0

The Poll Everywhere option is completely trumped by the SAPWeb2.0 tool developed by Timo Elliot.



Figure 8: Screenshot of SAPWeb2.0 Twitter slide



This tool is simple to set up. To create your version of the slide I've created above here's what to do:

1. Download the zip file from the SAPWeb2.0 site.
2. Unzip the file.
3. Open the Powerpoint file.
4. Go to slide 4.
5. Press Shift+ F5 to go to Slideshow mode with slide 4 showing.
6. Enter a search term or hashtag into the search box at the bottom left of the slide and press Enter. Almost instantly your slide will be populated with tweets.
7. Now you need to make this work on your own slides. Cut and paste the large blank area bounded by the selection points into your own slide.

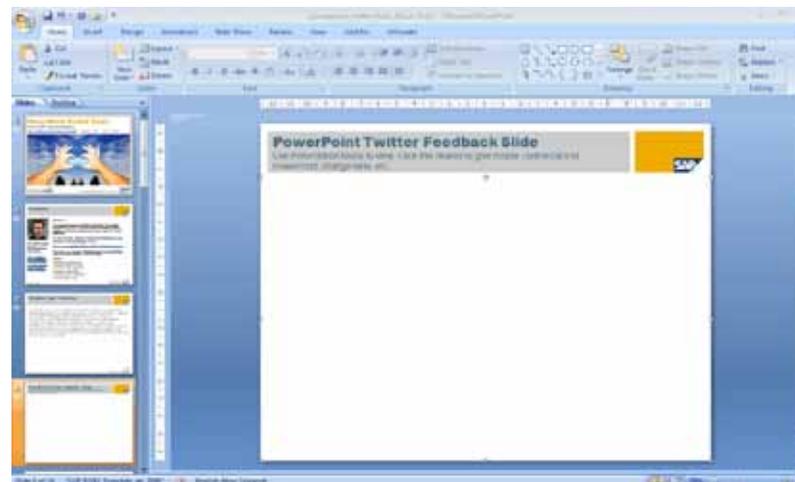
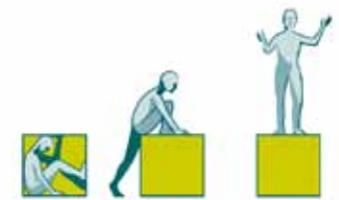


Figure 9: Screenshot of edit mode of Twitter feedback slide



- Cut and paste the header (where it says “PowerPoint Twitter Feedback Slide”) into your slide. You can replace the text with your own heading but keep the placeholder because it contains the code that allows you to click onto the next slide.

There’s a tiny SAP logo at the bottom-right of the screen but I don’t begrudge showing that given the functionality they’re providing for free.

Timo Elliot has teamed up with [TidyTweets](#) to allow moderation. You first have to set up an account (free for personal use and \$10 a month for business use). There are three stages:

- Set up your “feed”. Your feed is the series of tweets with your search terms or hashtag.
- Set up the automatic filtering options.
- Approve or reject tweets as they come in.

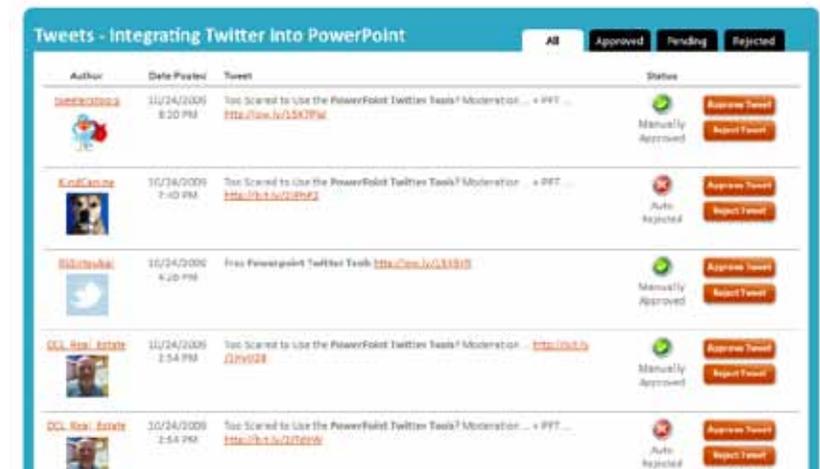


Figure 10: Screenshot of TidyTweets approval process

[SAPWeb2.0](#) has a second method for pulling tweets into a PowerPoint slideshow. It’s a Twitter ticker bar that runs along the bottom of your slides:

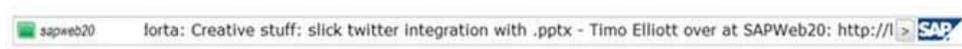
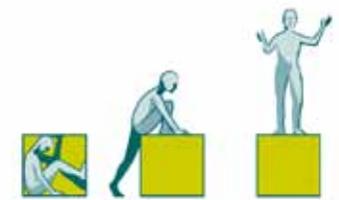


Figure 11: Screenshot of ticker bar



The process for inserting the ticker bar into your slide is a little more complicated than for the feedback slide above. It's designed to appear seamlessly as you click from slide to slide and so you need to paste it into the slide master. Timo Elliot has provided [step by step instructions](#) on how to do this.

Generally, I wouldn't recommend using the ticker bar as it's likely to distract your audience. But there are times when it could be a fun addition.

### Other display tools

[ParaTweet](#) has both free and paid versions. It requires a download to your computer to be able to use. I found the interface and terminology confusing and wasn't immediately able to get it to work.

The free version has auto-filtering. It automatically filters out profanities, but it doesn't allow you to set particular filters. For \$80 an event, you can have tweet-by-tweet moderation.

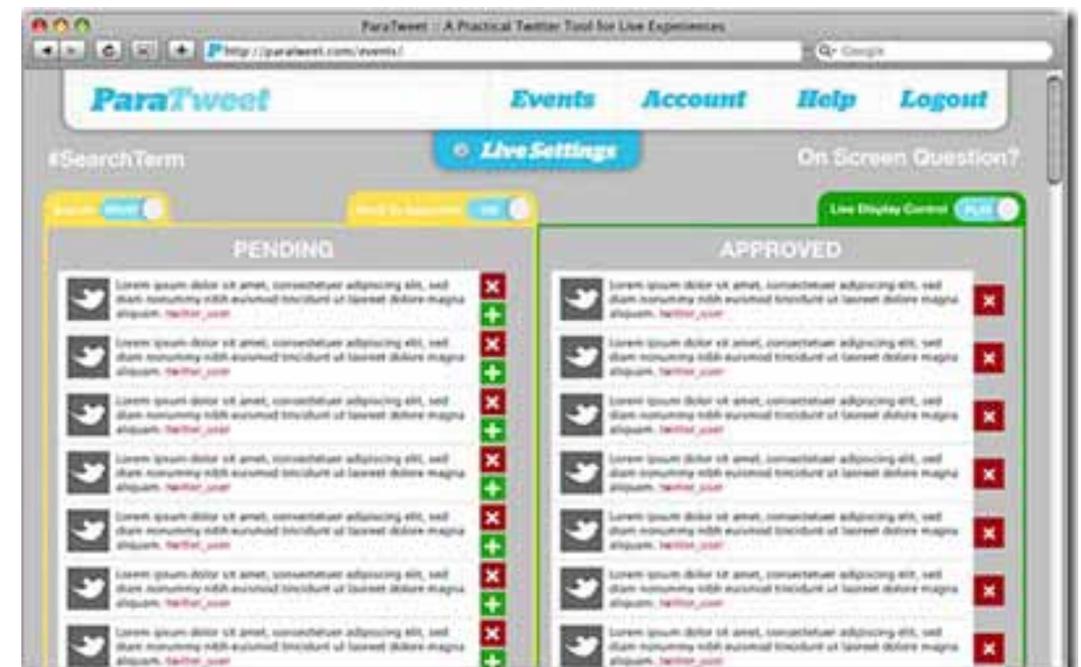
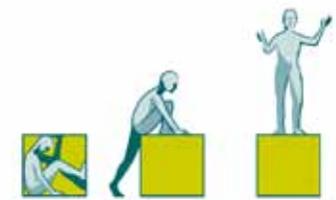


Figure 12: Screenshot of Paratweet approval process



Twubs is free while still in beta. It has an easy method of approving tweets for display and lots of sophisticated functionality. For example, you can create a queue of tweets (not necessarily in the order they were posted) and have them appear every 60 seconds. You could use this to organize a Q&A session and use the appearance of the next question-tweet as the signal to move onto answering that question.

Twubs does many other things, including integration with livestreaming video and displaying other media.

Wiffiti also does a lot more than just display tweets. It's primary use is to create "digital signs". The site says that it allows moderation, although it doesn't show how it's done. Here's a screen that I created for the #pptlive hashtag.

A neat feature is that you can upload your own background to the display.

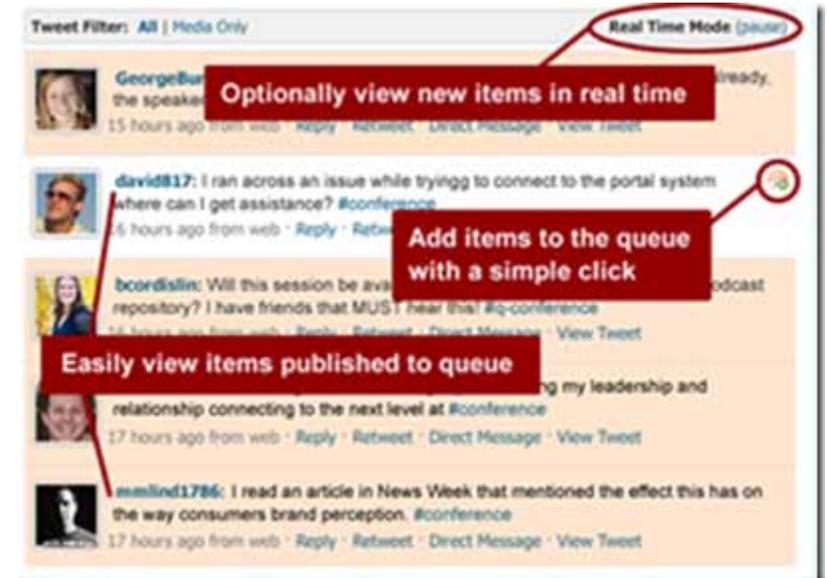


Figure 13: Screenshot from the Twubs website showing approval process

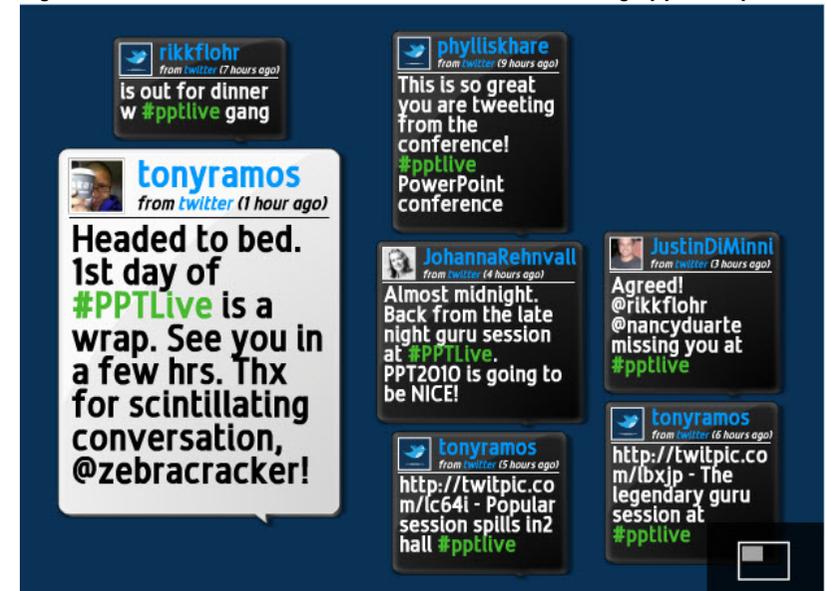
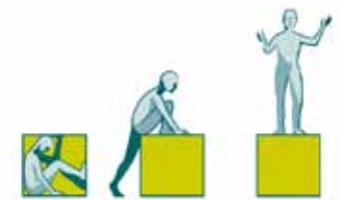


Figure 14: Screenshot of Wiffiti display



Here's a comparison of the options for displaying the Twitterstream:

Tool	Cost	Ease of use	Integrated with PPT	Filtering	Tweet approval	Text msg
<b>Tweetchat</b>	Free	Very easy	No	Yes	No	No
<b>Twitterfall</b>	Free	Easy	No	Yes	No	No
<b>Poll Everywhere</b>	Free	Hard	Yes	No	No	Yes
<b>Poll Everywhere</b>	\$65	Hard	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
<b>SAPWeb2.0</b>	Free	Moderate	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
<b>ParaTweet</b>	Free	Hard	No	Yes (auto)	No	No
<b>ParaTweet</b>	\$80	Hard	No	Yes	Yes	No
<b>Twubs</b>	Free	Moderate	No	Yes	Yes	Email
<b>Wiffiti</b>	Free	Easy	No	Yes (auto)	No	Yes



## Audience participation with the backchannel

This is where the backchannel becomes a real game-changer. Audience participation didn't use to scale easily beyond a small group. As the group got larger, audience participation got more and more time-consuming and laborious. Now, whatever the size of the group, the backchannel allows every audience member to be an active participant.

### Why use audience participation?

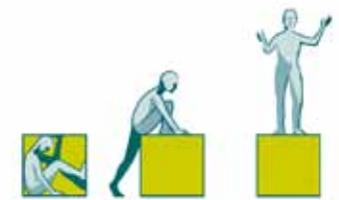
Human beings are not that good at listening passively for long periods of time. With the advent of the backchannel, people are even less willing to be passive. Your audience wants to be actively involved in your presentation – so make use of that urge.

Audience participation is also an effective persuasive strategy. Josh Gordon, author of [Presentations that Change Minds](#), asked business presenters about their persuasive techniques. Audience involvement was one of the top three [persuasive strategies](#) cited.

One caveat about using the backchannel for audience participation – ensure no-one is excluded. If not everyone is on Twitter, use an alternative backchannel tool. If not everyone has access to a laptop or web-friendly mobile, then also provide more traditional means of participating.

#### Resource

For more guidance on audience participation see my post [Why most attempts at audience participation fail](#)



Here are some ways to use audience participation:

### **Introductions**

With a small to medium-sized group, use a backchannel tool as an alternative to each person introducing themselves out loud. This is much quicker and less painful than the traditional round-robin introduction. Display the results on a large screen so that everyone can see them.

### **Find out your audience's most important questions**

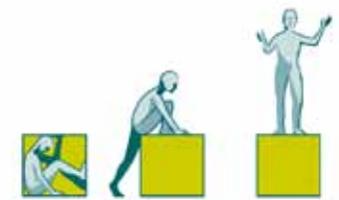
If you haven't been able to find out about your audience before the presentation (which I do recommend), then you can quickly find out what your audience is most interested in. Ask in the frontchannel, but get the responses via the backchannel. Instant recorded input!

### **Develop backchannel exercises**

Backchannel exercises can help your audience to put your ideas into practice. Creating these might require some creativity depending on your particular topic. Traditional generic exercises that can be adapted to the backchannel include asking how people could apply what they've learnt to their own projects, or what's the first action they will take to implement your suggestions.

If not everyone has access to the web, you can also adapt the traditional buzz-group exercise. This is where people form small groups of three or four people to discuss particular issues and then report back. Organise each group so that there's at least one person in the group with a laptop or phone. That person

"What I love about the backchannel is that it changes the entire dynamic. It's not about me, presenter, speaking at you, audience. It's about all of us learning together. My job isn't to be a high-and-mighty expert with all the answers. My job is to spark interest, facilitate conversation, and connect the dots. The backchannel not only democratizes the actual talk, acknowledging the expertise and interest you bring, but it also extends our reach and starts bigger conversations."  
[Sacha Chua](#)



will then post the group's report to the backchannel. Display the results on the screen.

### **Poll your audience**

There are Twitter tools which allow you to ask your audience to vote on options that you specify. You'll find them at [Poll Everywhere](#) and [SAPWeb2.0](#). The results are displayed on a PowerPoint slide, replacing the traditional show of hands. It's quite fun used once or twice in a presentation where it makes sense. But be cautious about overusing a tool like this – it could become a bit gimmicky.

### **Final word**

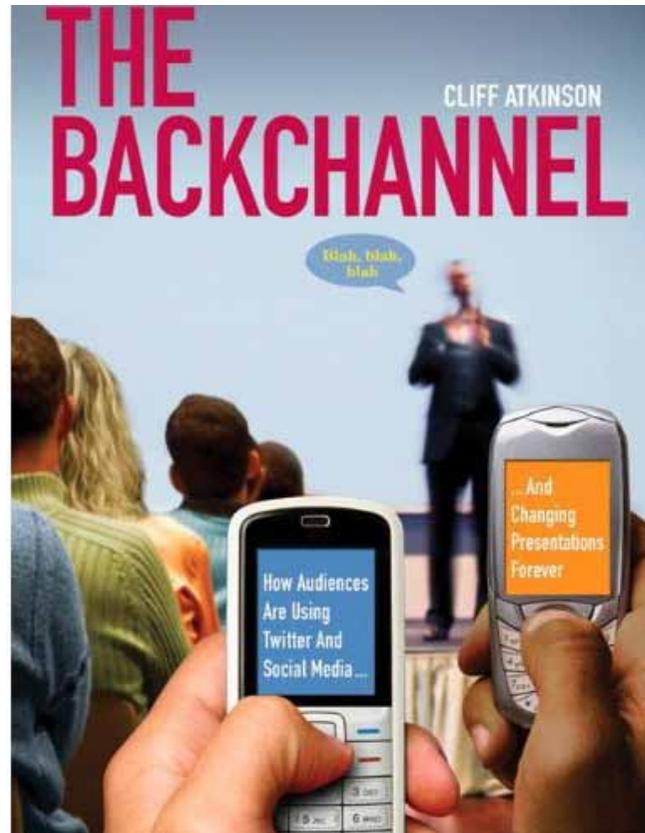
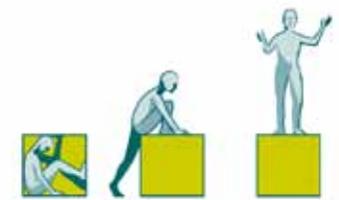
The presentation world is changing. I see this as not just a new challenge, but also an opportunity to engage more deeply with our audiences.

However, whatever technological changes take place, one thing will stay the same. The content of your presentation – what you have to say — remains the most important thing.

"I used PollEverywhere in class earlier this week -- it took me only a few minutes to craft a few cheeky surveys using the service.

Downloading the poll as a PowerPoint slide (ppt or pptx) was a smooth, one-click operation. When students took the poll, results weren't exactly immediate -- I estimated a 15-20 second lag time before the graph started moving and changing before our eyes. Not bad at all."

[Laura Bergells](#)



The companion to this eBook is Cliff Atkinson's new book:

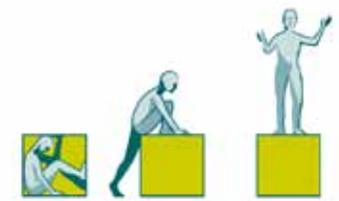
"The Backchannel: How audiences are using Twitter and social media and changing presentations forever."



The book's [website](#) goes live on 20 November 2009 and you can download Chapter 1 and two free Web appendices (Negotiating a Backchannel Agreement" and "How Open Space Transforms Meetings.")

Visit: [www.backchannelbook.com](http://www.backchannelbook.com)

If you buy the book through the Amazon link above, I'll earn a few cents. (If you don't want to buy Cliff's book, but you would like to show me some appreciation, go to the next page).



## About Olivia Mitchell

I'm a presentation trainer and blogger based in New Zealand.

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Presentation training website: [Effective Speaking](#)

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