BEST PRACTICE GUIDE
ON TWITTER

"Using twitter to gain momentum"

An introduction to Twitter

There are many social media platforms available and each of them has its specificities. Twitter seems to have less features and less audience than Facebook but it may be more appropriate for political campaigning. This article wishes to help you start with Twitter or to provide ideas to use it more efficiently.

1. Twitter: the basics

Here is what a "tweet" on the JEF-Europe twitter account could possibly look like:

> **Absolutely! RT @JEF_Europe: one thing we all agree today at #UEF_FC14. @EUCouncil has to #respectmyvote | Support us http://ow.ly/y10CB**

This example uses many typical Twitter features:

@JEF_Europe is a user name (here for the JEF-Europe account). Make your user name explicit so that readers instantly recognize which organisation you represent. When a tweet includes a user name, its owner can see your message. It is therefore a way to communicate with this person or organisation. Make your user name short as possible as it is included in the 140 characters limit.

RT: to retweet means to publish another user's message on your own account. You will find a retweet icon (two arrows forming a square). You can also copy and paste a message and add the letters RT before the name of the user. You are not supposed to modify the message. RT does not necessarily mean endorsement, but many of your readers will believe it does, so be aware of that. To RT helps to provide interesting content to those who follow your account but also to build a relationship with the original author who usually likes the visibility you provide. In the above example, @jefsupporter, perhaps a former JEF activist, has added a word before the RT text to comment on its content
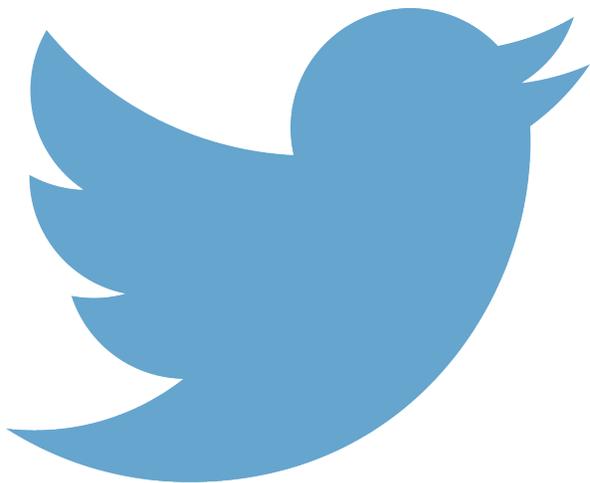
Getting followers:

Unless you are a well known VIP the best way to gather followers is to publish interesting content that is relevant to them. Your tweets may be:

- **a comment about ongoing events (with the relevant #hashtag)**

- **a link to an article or a website: provide a quote or a comment to show why it is interesting**

- **a photo or a video**

Twitter is also a social media so your content will also include RT of interesting messages from others and answers to other users.

140 characters: you can publish only very short messages. This limit includes whitespace and links. That means that one will write more straight-to-the point messages than on other media. No tl;dr. Adapt your style. If necessary, remove articles and use less punctuation. Think of a tweet as a newspaper headline. If possible, use less than the allowed 140 characters to allow retweets.

#hashtags: a word with a hash symbol #. Use them to define your content. It tells readers what the main theme is. It also helps Twitter users to search for related content. In the example all people interested in the UEF federal committee may subscribe or search the hashtag #UEF_FC14 and read the messages published by participants about the event. #respectmyvote will mark all messages related to that campaign theme. A hash tag is both a tool and a brand. Do not include more than two in a tweet as it becomes meaningless otherwise. Avoid the non-English letters that may not be recognised on some Twitter client software. Of course, make it short.

2. Provide relevant content to your followers

Twitter's messages are public (and may be found in some search engines). Keep that in mind when you publish. The main asset of Twitter is to gather information on an issue or a field of knowledge. This is done by following users. When you connect to Twitter you will see the latest messages of users you follow. The more users follow your account the more people will potentially see your messages, and maybe retweet them.

Try to provide value to your followers, to reward them for following you with content that is relevant to them. That means that you may want to focus your Twitter content on a few specific themes only rather than Life, The Universe, and Everything. You can advertise what you usually tweet about in your profile. However do not tweet only about politics or European federalism or you will only be followed by users already interested by those issues. That is all right if you use Twitter for your section but as an individual you may want to attract a wider range of followers. This will make your political messages more powerful when you tweet them as they will reach a more diverse audience than the usual suspects. Also, your Twitter account is a part of your own "e-reputation". You may want to make sure to tweet on your own areas of interest that is usually not only being a federalist activist.

As a new Twitter user what you publish will be seen by few people only. Get more followers by informing your friends on Twitter that you created an account; by following users in the relevant area of interest; and by interacting with other users.

For that purpose, do not hesitate to follow a lot of users when you start using Twitter. However, your timeline may soon become messy. That is why you should organize and sort the information you get through Twitter by using the list feature.

3. Use the lists

Twitter allows you to add users to lists without following them. That allows you to see the tweets published by members of those lists in a separate page. This is great to monitor specific themes by following users who tweet in a specific field of knowledge.

Lists may be public or private. If you choose to keep your list public its members will be able to know that you added them to the list and people who check your Twitter profile will be able to see your lists and subscribe to them.

You may also subscribe to other user's lists: that means that you will see their list among your own lists. Check accounts you follow to see them. As an example @JEF_Europe provides the list of all JEF sections: https://twitter.com/JEF_Europe/lists
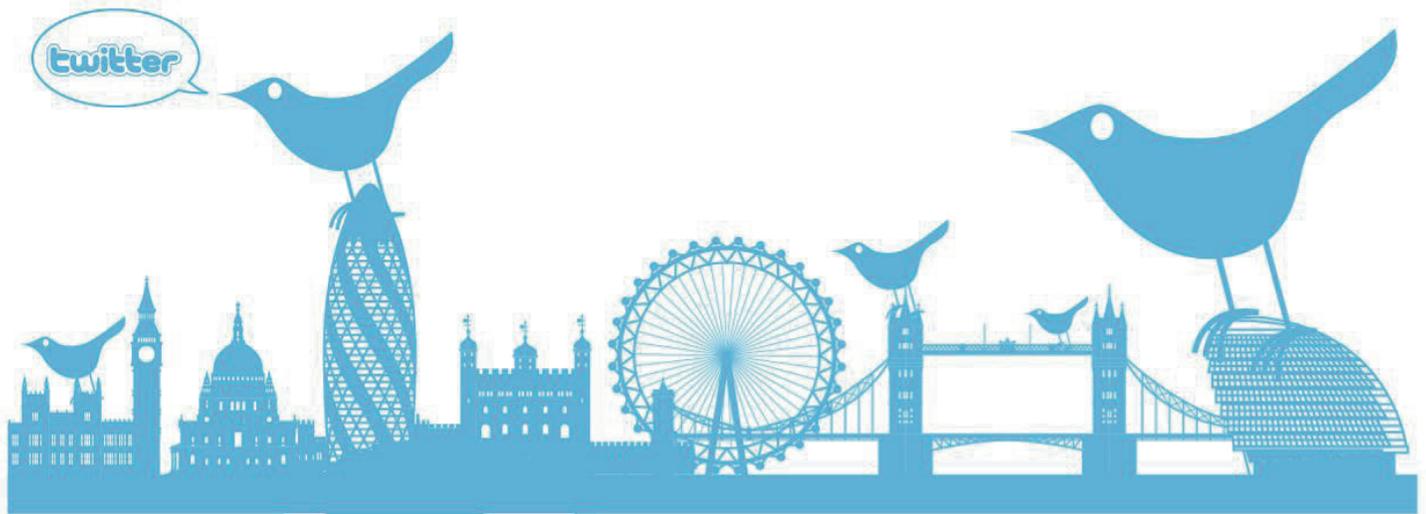
4. Use a Twitter client

The Twitter website is not enough. To sort out the flow of information you will soon need a specialized application. Twitter provides its own: Tweetdeck.

The main assets of such an application are:
1. Better monitoring by creating several columns that display tweets from your followers but also from lists or even a specific user or hashtag. They also help to monitor tweets mentioning you.

2. Use several accounts: if you have both a personal account and are also in charge of the account of your JEF-section Tweetdeck will make your life much simpler. But pay attention to which account you are publishing.

As an alternative to Tweetdeck, you may wish to use a third-party client as they may provide more features and include other social media such as Facebook or Google+. I use Hootsuite myself but there are several others.

5. How to use Twitter for campaigning?

As an individual activist here is how you can start:

1. follow the Twitter accounts @JEF_Europe and @federalists, but also your local and national sections' accounts as you will need content in your own language

2. Retweet those accounts and help give visibility to the message and the organizations involved. Focus on a few important messages though as not to bore your followers. For important campaigns, however, you may retweet the same message or the same idea several times. Twitter is about the last five minutes so most of your followers will not see all your tweets especially if they follow a lot of people. Try to tweet at different times of the day (you can program your tweets with a Twitter client).

3. Use the #hastags proposed by @JEF_Europe and @federalists for their campaigns to help their themes gain visibility. You can contribute to make those campaign truly European by publishing relevant content in your own language related to those themes.

4. debate with other Twitter users who publish on the campaign themes and let them know about it. If they like the idea they may also tweet about it and spread our ideas to their own followers.

Read more
Former JEF-president @jonworth blogs often about using Twitter for politics.

http://www.jonworth.eu/tag/twitter/

You should read in particular the following articles:

* If I were to start from scratch on Twitter, this is what I'd do : http://goo.gl/us3fJK
* If you want Twitter your way, use a third-party Twitter client : http://goo.gl/X5nZYR
* Why you should use the Twitter lists : http://goo.gl/yb0NCk

@JEF_Europe

CLOSING WORDS

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Valérie-Xavier Lentz
Secretary General
UEF France

Layout: Espen Berg-Larsen