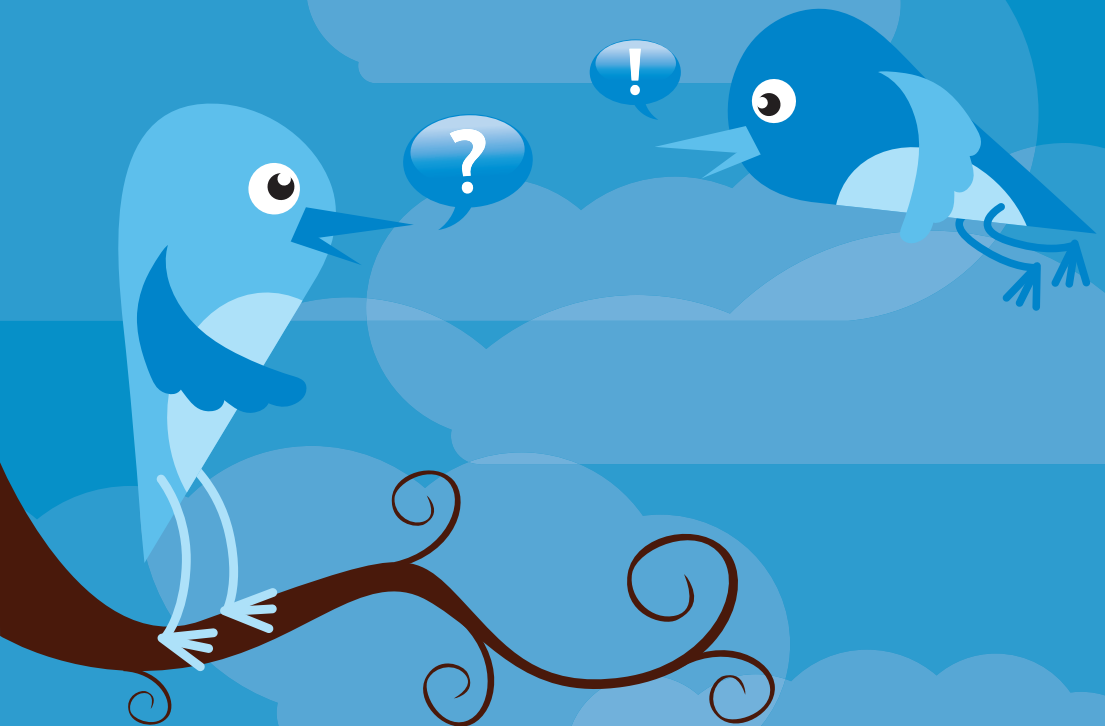


2nd Edition

# twitter

tips, tricks, and

# tweets



Paul McFedries

Foreword by Pete Cashmore, Founder & CEO of Mashable.com





**twitter**

tips, tricks, and

**tweets**

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**Paul McFedries**



WILEY

Wiley Publishing, Inc.



Twitter Tips, Tricks, and Tweets, 2nd Edition

Published by  
Wiley Publishing, Inc.  
10475 Crosspoint Blvd.  
Indianapolis, IN 46256  
[www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com)

Copyright © 2010 by Wiley Publishing, Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana

Published simultaneously in Canada

ISBN: 978-0-470-62466-1

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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**Library of Congress CIP Data:** 2010926842

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# About the Author

**Paul McFedries** is a technical writer who has been authoring computer books since 1991. He has more than 70 books to his credit, which together have sold more than three million copies worldwide. His current titles include the Wiley books *Internet Simplified*, *iPhone 3G S Portable Genius*, *Teach Yourself VISUALLY Macs*, and *Teach Yourself VISUALLY Windows 7*. Paul is also the proprietor of Word Spy, a Web site devoted to new words and phrases (see [www.wordspy.com](http://www.wordspy.com)). Paul lives in Toronto with his wonderful wife, Karen, and their silly dog, Gypsy. Please visit Paul's personal website at [www.mcfedries.com](http://www.mcfedries.com), or follow him on Twitter using his Twitter accounts @paulmcf and @wordspy.



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***To Karen, who follows my offline tweets.***



# Acknowledgments

Many writers believe that the essence of good writing is rewriting. Not me. I believe that the essence of good writing is good *editing*. I don't care how talented you are as a writer and how many times you rewrite each sentence, a good editor will make your writing better, period. Of course, there's a lot riding on that little word "good." Fortunately, the editorial team at Wiley is one of the best in the business. The book's Project Editor was Cricket Krengel, who easily qualifies as a *great* editor, and I send along a thousand, nay a *million* thank-yous to her for bringing this book up to a level beyond its author. I had the distinct pleasure of working with Kristin Vorce, the book's Development Editor, who was bubbling over with great ideas and suggestions. As you read this book, you'll notice that every i is dotted and every t is crossed, and for that I extend heartfelt thanks to this book's Copy Editor, the sharp-eyed Kim Heusel. Technical writing must be technically accurate, of course, or there's just no point to it. So for the often thankless tasking of taking all my techniques for a test drive, I thank this book's Technical Editor, Jim Lefevere. Finally, I would be remiss if I didn't also shout "Thank you!" at the top of my lungs to this book's Acquisitions Editor, Jody Lefevere, for asking me to write the book. I can't tell you how much fun I had writing it.

# foreword

Social media is a phenomenon that's turning everyone into a publisher and distributor of media: from YouTube videos to blog posts to Twitter messages and even comments on the articles we read around the web, we're all becoming content creators. As the CEO and founder of Mashable.com, an online guide to social media, I've seen this trend evolve from the clunky old blogging software of years ago — for which you needed to understand web hosting and basic programming to even get started — to the effortless simplicity of a 140-character Twitter message (or Tweet).

Twitter is perhaps the simplest and most addictive social media tool of them all, and its unprecedented success has been both unexpected and inspirational. I've been fortunate to be part of that journey, tracking Twitter's growth on behalf of Mashable and posting updates about Twitter and social media to the @mashable Twitter account.

As you'll learn in this book, once the basic principles of Twitter are understood, the possibilities are almost limitless. In fact, much of the service's appeal comes from its simplicity: write anything you wish in 140-characters or less, and then share it with the world. Is it a chat room? Is it a way to send text messages to a group of friends? Is it a new technology for reading news headlines? Is it the world's simplest social network, a barebones version of MySpace and Facebook? It's all of those things and more: Twitter is whatever you make it.

Twitter is only four years old, but the service has been put to some inspirational, innovative and quirky uses already. Surgeons have Tweeted live from the operating room. A worldwide fundraising event was organized, garnering more than \$250,000 for charity. More than one marriage proposal has been made (and accepted!). A British man traveled around the world to New Zealand, getting by thanks to the kindness of Twitter users. And in thousands of cities, Twitter fans have come together in real life Tweetups, making their virtual connections real.

Twitter's users are exceptionally inventive and resourceful, too. An expectant father created a device for his pregnant wife to wear: it sends a Twitter message every time their baby kicks. A software developer created a system that turns the lights on or off in his home by sending out a Tweet. You can even buy a kit for your plants that posts a Tweet when they need watering; a similar kit allows you to track your power consumption via Twitter.

Tweeting plants aren't the only non-human Twitter members. Both the Space Shuttle Endeavour and Mars Phoenix Lander posted Tweets during their missions for NASA, while London's Tower Bridge posts a Tweet when it opens or closes. There are Tweets from a whale on the ceiling of the Natural History Museum in New York City. And one of Twitter's most popular users is a cat in Waltham, Massachusetts.

All this innovation and creativity is part of Twitter's culture, it seems: a wealth of Tweet-powered services have sprung up, creating a flourishing ecosystem of so-called Twitter applications. There are tools to find Twitter users near you; Web sites that list the funniest Tweets (or the most insightful); services that rank Twitter users by their influence; and three-dimensional maps that show Tweets being posted around the world, every minute of the day.

More remarkable than all of these developments, however, is Twitter's profound effect on society: from news coverage to politics to customer relations and the nature of celebrity, this seemingly simple service is transforming entire industries.

Newspapers use Twitter as both a source of stories and a way to distribute their own headlines. Many of the top Twitter users are news agencies, and Twitter members have been known to Tweet about breaking news hours before its coverage on television. The effect on the media has been so dramatic; in fact, that one UK newspaper posted an April's Fool's joke claiming that it would cease publication of the paper and publish stories solely in Tweeted form.

News and politics go hand in hand, and politicians are equally cognizant of Twitter's power: US President Barack Obama has an enormous Twitter following, and his team posts occasional updates that request feedback from the American public. Obama is the most prominent among hundreds of Twittering politicians from numerous countries and political persuasions; of course, Twitter is non-partisan and international in its scope.

If Twitter can influence our political opinions, could it also determine what we buy? Some of the world's biggest brands hope so, and many have jumped into Twitterland with both feet. Some use the service for product announcements, while others post responses to questions and complaints from customers; some even host contests to win free products and services.

What about personal branding and celebrity? From Hollywood stars to sporting heroes to the world's most famous musicians, Twitter provides a connection between celebrities and their fans that is more direct than ever before. Some of the world's most recognizable names are using Twitter, giving us unprecedented insights into their everyday lives.

That's just a sampling of what you'll find on Twitter; it's inspiration, information, news, gossip, humor and remarkable personal stories. Twitter is all that we are, from our most exalted moments to our most mundane — and everything in between.

*~ Pete Cashmore, CEO and founder of Mashable.com*