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White Paper

Seven surprising statistics about Twitter
by Jason Baer

Ah Twitter, we thought we knew you.

A comprehensive survey (1,753 respondents) released recently by Edison Research (a division of Arbitron), paints a fascinating picture of Twitter and its role in America's social media ecosystem.

The 49-page study is full of interesting graphs and morsels, but here are seven findings that you may not have anticipated:

1. Twitter is ubiquitous

Like Terrell Owens, Carrie Underwood, and Coke Zero, Twitter is almost universally on the radar of Americans: 87 percent of respondents had heard of Twitter, compared to 88 percent who had heard of Facebook. (Note that the survey population was 12 and up, including a representative portion of seniors). Thus, we can safely assume that with the exception of Amish, prisoners, and sea creatures, the entirety of the country knows about Twitter.

2. Twitter is falls short at converting awareness to usage

Known by 87 percent, just seven percent of Americans use Twitter. Thus, fewer than one in 13 Americans who know about Twitter, actually use Twitter. Compare that ratio to Facebook, where 88 percent have heard of it, and 41 percent have a profile – a conversion rate approaching 50 percent.

3. Twitter is the important, vocal minority

While only seven percent of Americans are using it, the Twitter population is still 17 million people, which is roughly equivalent to the combined populations of Connecticut, Oregon, Kentucky, Kansas and Oklahoma. And while substantially smaller than the Facebook brigade, the Twitter crew is tuned in to brands like nowhere else on the social web.

To that point, 49 percent of monthly Twitter users follow brands or companies, compared to just 16 percent of social network users overall. Put another way, Twitter users are three times more likely to follow brands than Facebook users. Combined with their above-average income and above-average education, their propensity to interact with brands make Twitter users a huge potential source for mass influencers.

4. Brand interaction is a major part of life on Twitter

Twitter users talking about marketing and brands far exceeds the usage on the other social networks. In addition to following brands, Twitter users research and engage with companies:

- 42 percent learn about products and services via Twitter
- 41 percent provide opinions about products/services
- 19 percent seek customer support

As Facebook continues to tie together the real-time web with the open graph, Twitter usage will inexorably shift from person-to-person connectivity to customer-to-company connectivity. Ultimately, Twitter may be the way that we interact with brands, and certainly could power the social CRM movement.

5. Twitter is disproportionately popular with African Americans

A recently published report shows Hispanic usage of Facebook and other social networks far outpacing usage by non-Hispanic White Americans.

Additional research indicates that for Black Americans, the social network of choice may very well be Twitter, as 25 percent of Twitter users are African American (approximately double the U.S. population).

This may be due to Twitter's functional similarity to text messaging. As several studies have shown, Black Americans use the mobile web at rates roughly double that to non-Hispanic Whites.

6. Twitter on the Go

Certainly, the tie between Twitter and mobile is strong – 63 percent of Twitter users access social networks via mobile phone, compared to 34 percent of social networkers as a whole. Also, 73 percent of Twitter users send SMS text messages multiple times per day. Also, 49 percent of Twitter users have an iPod, compared to 28 percent of the total U.S. population.

7. Speak No Evil

What's the point of Twitter if you're not engaged and interacting. According to recent findings, 53 percent of Twitter users never post any updates. This reemphasizes the need to be keyword smart in your Tweets and to not dip into the pool of banality. Even though half of your customers may not be tweeting or retweeting, they ARE watching, reading and clicking.

