

Getting a Handle on Twitter Chats

Organizing a Twitter chat

Twitter chats are effective ways to inform your audiences about an issue or give them **an opportunity to converse** with a prominent official or thought leader.

Chats will also help to grow your following as tweeters see your organization communicating about its work. Twitter chats are planned conversations organized between a few handles and their followers, all using the same hashtag. They are held at a specific time, about a particular topic and promoted in advance. Typically chats are moderated by a host who poses questions to the invited “panelists”. The following guide provides best practices for how to prepare for, promote and carry out a chat.



Before the Chat

Think strategically. Consider what you are trying to accomplish with the chat. Who do you want to engage and what do you want them to learn? What time are they most active on Twitter? Who can help you reach your target audience?



Select the right person for the job. The person who is selected to participate in or moderate the chat should be able to respond to tweets quickly and accurately. He or she should also be comfortable with the content of the event and know which messages your organization wants to emphasize. You may want to team up and pair a Twitter-savvy staffer with an issue expert.



Pick a hashtag for the chat. When selecting a hashtag for the event, choose a word or phrase that describes what you will be discussing. Steer away from long hashtags that take up too many characters. Avoid abbreviations and acronyms that might confuse Twitter users or leave them to guess what the conversation is about.



Invite and confirm priority participants. While the chat will be open to anyone interested in joining the conversation on Twitter, it's useful to line up some priority participants in advance. Think about influencers with whom you have relationships, those active on Twitter who have large followings and individuals that can reach your target audience and are knowledgeable about the topic. Spitfire's “Beyond a Following” guide can help you identify these influencers. These may be prominent leaders in your community, issue experts or legal experts, media partners or others with whom Twitter users will want to interact.



Prepare a Q&A in advance. If you are hosting the chat, circulate a draft Q&A template for the confirmed participants and identify who will be best suited to answer each question. You may want to organize a conference call in advance of the chat to walk through the Q&A, address any inquiries from participants and identify possible tough questions that could surface. Be sure to draft answers to any questions you will be on tap to answer and include links to relevant content to drive traffic to your website. Begin each question with a number (e.g. Q1) and ask participants to respond by including the corresponding number (e.g. A1).

Make a list of relevant hashtags and Twitter handles. In addition to the chat hashtag, compile popular hashtags relevant to the content of the event so that you can easily reference them. Similarly, list the handles of any partner organizations or participants in the chat so you can easily create tweets on the fly.

Set up your [Hootsuite](#) account. Before the chat begins, make sure you have the following streams set up for monitoring during the event:



- **Your sent tweets:** allows you to easily see what you have tweeted from your handle.
- **Your panelist's handles:** allows you to see which questions they have answered.
- **A search stream for the chat hashtag:** allows you to review what everyone using the chat hashtag is tweeting, re-direct any good questions to one of the panelists, and reply to or retweet any good tweets.
- **A search stream for mentions of your handle:** allows you to see anyone who mentions you on Twitter or tweets something at you during the chat.
- **A feed of any direct messages sent to your organization's handle.**

Promoting the Chat

Strong promotion of the chat will ensure a more successful event. Promotional tactics include:



- Create a sharable image with the date and time, hashtag, confirmed panelists and subject of the chat. Feature it on your website immediately. A few days before the chat, email the image to your network inviting them to participate and share it on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.
- Ask media partners and your confirmed participants to share the image with their networks via email, websites and social media channels. Retweet their promotional tweets.
- Ask allied organizations to share it with their networks and to participate on the day of, even if they aren't panelists.
- Tweet the image again and send out additional tweets asking folks to participate on the morning of the chat. Mention the handles of those confirmed panelists and encourage them to do the same.



During the Event

At the beginning of the event, send a tweet letting your followers know that the chat has begun and how to participate. This will give them context about the streams of tweets that they will see coming from your handle. Also, welcome your panelists to the chat. Sample tweets include:



- It's time to kick off the #HASHTAG chat [INSERT THE PURPOSE OF THE CHAT].
- Welcome to @PANELIST1, @PANELIST2 and @PANELIST3. Excited to have you join the #HASHTAG chat today!
- We welcome your participation in the chat by using #HASHTAG or you can DM questions to @YOURHANDLE.

Once the event begins, consider the following tips for the chat.

- Include the chat hashtag in all your tweets.
- Use the Q&A template and tweet out each question to the panelists identified to answer them. Be sure to give them a chance to respond before sending out the next question.
- Monitor the chat hashtag search to see if any related tweets warrant a response.
- Keep the previously created list of hashtags and handles easily accessible.
- Monitor any mentions of your handle and retweet or reply as necessary.



When the chat is complete, let your followers know and thank them for participating.

After the Event

A few hours after the chat is over and traffic has slowed, it's important to measure your reach and engagement. One easy and affordable way to measure is through a [TweetReach](#) report. TweetReach runs reports on Twitter handles and hashtags, and it will trace back to the last 1,500 tweets. To measure the reach of the full conversation, Spitfire recommends running a hashtag report on the chat hashtag. One report costs \$20 and will tell you who tweeted using your hashtag, what their reach was, which handles were the most engaged and how many impressions your hashtag created on Twitter.