

# 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 grow your following as Twitter users see your organization communicating about its work and weighing in on interesting conversations. Twitter chats – also known as TweetChats – are planned conversations organized among a few handles, 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.” Participating in a Twitter chat before you host one is a good idea. A Google search for Twitter chats about your area of interest should provide you with a few options, along with online resources like TweetChat and TweetReports, which allow you to search for Twitter chats by topic.

## Before the Chat

Think strategically. Consider what you are trying to accomplish with the chat. Who are the people 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 force 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, lining up priority participants in advance is useful. Think about influencers with whom you have relationships, those active on Twitter who have large followings and individuals who can reach your target audience and are knowledgeable about the topic. Spitfire’s “Beyond a Following” guide helps you identify these influencers, who may be prominent leaders in your community, issue experts, 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 tough questions that could surface. Be sure to draft answers to any questions that 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 reference them easily. Similarly, list the handles of any partner organizations or participants in the chat so that you can easily create tweets on the fly.

Set up your [Hootsuite](#) account. Before the chat begins, make sure that 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 panelists’ handles:** allows you to see which questions specific panelists have answered.
- **A search stream for the chat hashtag:** allows you to review what everyone using the chat hashtag is tweeting, redirect 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

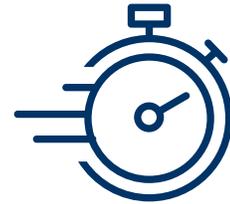
Strong promotion of the chat will ensure a more successful event. Promotional tactics include:

- 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 weeks before the chat, email the image to your network, inviting folks to participate and share the social image 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 the promotional tweets.
- Ask allied organizations to share it with their networks and to participate in the chat, even if nobody from those organizations are panelists.
- Tweet the image again and send additional tweets on the morning of the chat asking folks to participate. Mention the handles of those confirmed panelists and encourage people 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 they can participate. This note 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].
- Welcometo@PANELIST1, @PANELIST2 and @PANELIST3. Excited to discuss [ISSUE] at the #HASHTAG chat today!
- We welcome your participation in the chat by using #HASHTAG or by DM'ing 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 each question to the panelists identified to answer. Be sure to give them a chance to respond before sending 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, 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 its free snapshots include reach, impressions and top influencers in the conversation.