

Microblogging for the enterprise



By [Derek Abdinor](#)

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A microblog is a smaller version of a blog, usually limiting posts to 140 characters. Woo-hoo, so it's a variation on the blogging theme, but less space to make an idiot of yourself. Why then is it one of the fastest-growing applications in the history of the Internet? Is there a place for it in your digital strategy?

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The size comparison is not sufficient to explain the power of having a smaller, pithy blog, so here's the rest of the product list:

- You can view posts online, get SMS, email, RSS or Instant Message (IM) notifications of new posts
- You can SMS, email or IM posts
- You can phone in an update or leave a micro-podcast (these new developments occurred during the writing of this article)
- Many people can join a group or channel and add their updates and receive updates
- You can integrate microblog feeds into blogs, other websites or even into each other.

This looks like information if not acronym overload, but its actually information aggregation and simplification. Consider these three continuum (Continuae?)

1. Publishing: catalogues and reports >> website >> blog >> rss >> **microblog**
2. Written communication: letters >> memos & fax >> email >> IM >> **microblog**
3. Telephonic communication: telephone >> mobile >> VOIP and iPhone >> **microblog**

Microblogging is at the nexus of publishing and communication! A post is published, users are notified five different ways, and they respond to you in five different ways. At the same time, they are part of your social network and are subscribing for the news that you wish to send them. This is keeping US marketers up at night.

You could believe we're in the nascent stage of aggregating our content together and tying up all the loose ends. A related application is when mobile phones serve up RSS feeds. Getting all your news headlines on your mobile phone (not Blackberry or PDA) as a feed (not SMS) has been widely available for some months now. Unlike the built-in camera, but like text messaging (SMS), RSS on your phone is the real killer app.

Technologies

The main microblog providers are Twitter (www.twitter.com), Jaiku (www.jaiku.com) and Pownce (www.pownce.com). I believe they're currently fighting it out to be the standard and therefore are trying to be the microblog for all systems. Twitter has market share and a vocabulary (vb. to tweet), Jaiku allows users to setup and join a channel and some moderation of posts while Pownce is exclusive and about uploading music and video to your profile. Enterprises could wait for one of them to create an off-the-shelf package, or you can build your own. The technology is alarmingly simple.

Lawyer, social media consultant, blogger and *The Times* bloggumist Paul Jacobson uses Jaiku a lot. "The channel isn't just a one way flow of links to posts and sites, it is also a forum for members of the channel to jump in and participate in conversations sparked by items posted to the channel or topics they may want to raise themselves. A Jaiku channel is a great way to let customers know what is going on in your space in a convenient and user friendly format." His Jaiku channel at <http://jaiku.com/channel/JacobsonLaw> is such an example.

A similar paradigm is Tumblelogging, which for all intents and purposes has now become a feature of microblogging. It describes a stream of consciousness where multiple users add their one-liners (tumbling) either as posts, observations or breaking updates. Great for a teenage gang, you may snort into your Horlicks, but what about co-ordinating a team in disparate locations who are not all behind desktops? The Los Angeles Fire Department uses tumbling for their dispatchers: <http://twitter.com/LAFD>.

A social service

Will microblogging take off? Well, if you've heard of MXiT you either come to know it through your kid's school principal threatening to ban it or your occupational therapist trying to wean you off it. Your FaceBook status that you update six times a day: you are "lifestreaming", or communicating brief asides that sum up your feeling, outlook, personality and location in around 10 words or less. On the other hand, our mobile phones have prepped us into this "always on" culture where we can describe complex concepts using just a few glyphs.

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The instant information retrieval nature of microblogs mean that companies can bypass traditional wire services. As Dominic Jones recently blogged:

In essence, [microblogs] can be a notification system and an editorial system. It can tell someone news is available and provide a link to it. For example: "**Sun reports Results for Fourth Quarter and Full Fiscal Year 2007**" <http://tinyurl.com/2h5osq>"

It can also be an information system by delivering the news in a concise format: "**Sun Beats Profit Target Q4 Revenues \$3.835 billion, EPS \$0.09 vs consensus \$0.05**" <http://tinyurl.com/2h5osq>"

Sun's recent decision to [bypass PR wire services](#) for its earnings releases is but a baby step in what is coming.

Imagine a presentation where you release run a microblog and make this available. Users can post to it through all the media mentioned above; they can even link to video feeds, picture slideshows and pull other content into the feed.

A global distribution concern, based in South Africa, had the problem of sharing information amongst its executives who were scattered over multiple continents. They hit on the idea of each member logging into a secure site, submitting business intelligence or a link to a related article. SMS notifications were the next step. This successful application was produced by us in 2006 when microblogging wasn't even a Wikipedia entry.

Keeping touch

Some of the US presidential candidates have microblogs. I subscribed to Barack Obama's as a follower of his posts, and get woken up at 2am to read this on my mobile phone: "BarackObama: In New York - heading to the Daily Show with Jon Stewart. Be sure to watch it tonight."

You get the point? If I needed to follow breaking information, I can have it delivered to phone, IM, email, RSS or go to the website. If I need to post breaking information, I do exactly the same. There is clearly application for intranets, collaborative groups, rapid dissemination of information. If email was instant, then microblogging is inst.

Like it or not, we (ourselves, groups and organisations) are being coached by our technologies into having a "persistent presence" online; a form of branding ourselves through all channels available. Maybe instead of the 15 minutes of fame we were promised in the TV era we'll only be allocated 140 words and a thumbnail on our microblogs.

Go ahead, tweet yourself.

ABOUT DEREK ABDINOR

Derek runs AQME, South Africa's network for independent publishers and consults to established companies in optimising their digital businesses. He would like to see a healthy media ecosystem where media, brands and advertisers can thrive; where foreign and corporate control of our digital media is limited; where free speech allows us to build the society we believe in; and the introduction of a new ethic that will portray our industry as one of virtue and value.

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