

A Look At The True Twitter Audience

Contributed by eMarketer
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Not as large as many optimistic estimates

Reports of Twitter usage can vary widely. The company itself reported that as of September 2010, 175 million accounts had been created. Firms that track unique visitors to Twitter.com tallied between approximately 20 million and 26 million per month last year.

But because of duplicate accounts, international users, "Twitter quitters" and the fact that many visitors to Twitter.com are simply reading public tweets and not truly using the service, those numbers are nearly all higher than survey data that asks internet users about their online and mobile habits.

"Twitter users are a sizeable and growing bunch, but their numbers are considerably smaller than those disseminated by many media outlets and Twitter itself," said Paul Verna, eMarketer senior analyst and author of the new report, "Twitter Users: A Vocal Minority." "In the US, this means tens of millions of users, as opposed to hundreds of millions."

eMarketer estimates that 20.6 million US adults will access a Twitter account at least monthly this year, up 26.3% from 16.4 million last year. Growth will continue in the double digits through 2013, when nearly 28 million adults will be Twitter users.

This estimate is primarily based on a meta-analysis of surveys that polled people on their actual use of Twitter, regardless of platform.

A demographic profile of Twitter users from the Pew Internet & American Life Project found that 10% of US female internet users and 7% of US male internet users used Twitter.

The service was decidedly more popular among younger adults, a result supported by other research.

Mobile is a large and growing platform for Twitter users. comScore noted that in January 2011, 7.8 million US mobile device subscribers used Twitter on their phones—a steep 66% increase over the previous January.

"Brands should consider the demographics and usage habits of the Twitter audience as they plan marketing initiatives and ad buys on Twitter," said Verna. "Setting realistic expectations based on a thorough data analysis will yield better results than getting swept up in overhyped estimates."

The full report, "Twitter Users: A Vocal Minority" also answers these key questions:

* How many adults are using Twitter?

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* Which metric is the most reliable indicator of Twitter usage?

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* What is the demographic mix of the Twitter user base?

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* What should marketers keep in mind as they consider using Twitter's ad vehicles?

22 March 2011