



# Self Storage Guide to Twitter

**4 Ways to Use Twitter to Build Occupancy in  
Only Minutes a Day**

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in this document should take you to the right page in your  
browser.**



## What's up with Twitter?

Many self storage operators have heard the hype about Twitter.com and are wondering what they should do about it. I hope to help you figure out whether you should experiment with Twitter, and if you do, how you can best leverage the time spent using Twitter.

Specifically, here's what I'm trying to accomplish for you with this guide:

1. Outline four strategies for using Twitter to build your occupancy and income. Maybe one or more of these strategies will fit nicely with your marketing programs.
2. If you think one or more of these strategies is worth pursuing you'll want to set up an account. I'll walk you through some best practices on how to set up your account effectively and how to get started on the right foot.
3. If you make it past 1 and 2, then I want to show you what you can do in only 20 minutes per day (and no more) to start leveraging Twitter for generating new business.

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## Because you are wondering... Who is this guy anyway?

I'm Kenny Pratt, and I wrote this because I'm not shy and I want to see my ideas make an impact.

I have been acquiring and operating self storage properties since 2003. In my day job I help acquire and oversee the property management of the StorageKings properties. You can find them here <http://storagekings.com>.

I registered my account and began experimenting with Twitter in 2007, long before Oprah and many "social media consultants". I really started using Twitter in earnest in early 2009. This guide and my instructional series on selling storage are a side project for me that I put together in my spare time after my kids were in bed. I hope you find them helpful.

My other project, which I hope you'll check out, is a website dedicated to helping self storage managers be more effective on the phone so they convert more shoppers to paying customers. Right now there is a bunch of free info on the site, but eventually there will be a revenue-boosting sales training product that will actually cost money. You can find it here: [www.SellingStorage.com](http://www.SellingStorage.com).

If you're not ready to spend, and want free tips on how to sell storage more effectively, how to create a sales culture that helps rather than hinders sales effectiveness, as well as other bits of marketing goodness you'll want to sign up for my [free email newsletter](#). No spam, promise.

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## ***The good news, the good news, and the bad news***

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The good news is that Twitter can help you boost your occupancy and connect with your local market. The other good news is that it is relatively new and few of your competitors are using it effectively. The bad news is that like Facebook or MySpace, if abused it can also be a waste of time. Stick with me and hopefully I can help you accentuate the good and avoid the bad.

Like I mentioned above, before we get into the specifics on how to set up Twitter effectively, let's explore how you might use it to grow the occupancy at one of your stores. Then you won't waste time reading about how to get set up if you determine Twitter is not for you.

### ***CASE 1: You have units that need filling***

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All by itself, it is unlikely that Twitter will be a huge source of new leads. It can, however help you get a few additional rentals, and sometimes snag customers you would have never had otherwise.

A traditional method of capturing additional rentals is to offer low prices or aggressive move-in discounts. There are two problems with this strategy. First, you are likely to give discounts to people who would have moved in without them. When this happens you are cannibalizing your own revenue. Second, once your competitors find out what you are offering and begin to match your offer, they hurt your effectiveness by eliminating your relative price advantage. This is especially true if you are actively promoting or advertising your discounts on your website, lead generation services like USStorageSearch.com, on Craigslist, or at your property with a banner.

What Twitter allows you to do is to speak directly, in a one-to-one manner, with people who already store or are expressing a need for storage.

#### **Talking to people who already use storage**

Because you can find and talk to people who are in your market and already store, you may be able to steal some of your competitors' customers. This works best if you have a fair amount of vacancy in a particular size and are willing to let some of these abundant spaces go for a deep discount. In this case, some revenue is better than no revenue, and this works because you are renting the space to someone you would have never paid you full price anyway. Their storage space need is already being met somewhere else.

*Here's how it works.*

People over-share about their personal life on Twitter. You can use this to your advantage by using Twitter's [advanced search](#) or other search tools like <http://tweetzi.com> to search for people talking about their "storage unit", "storage space", "self storage", "storage facility", "mini storage", "storage", "getting ready to move", or "packing" in your general geography.

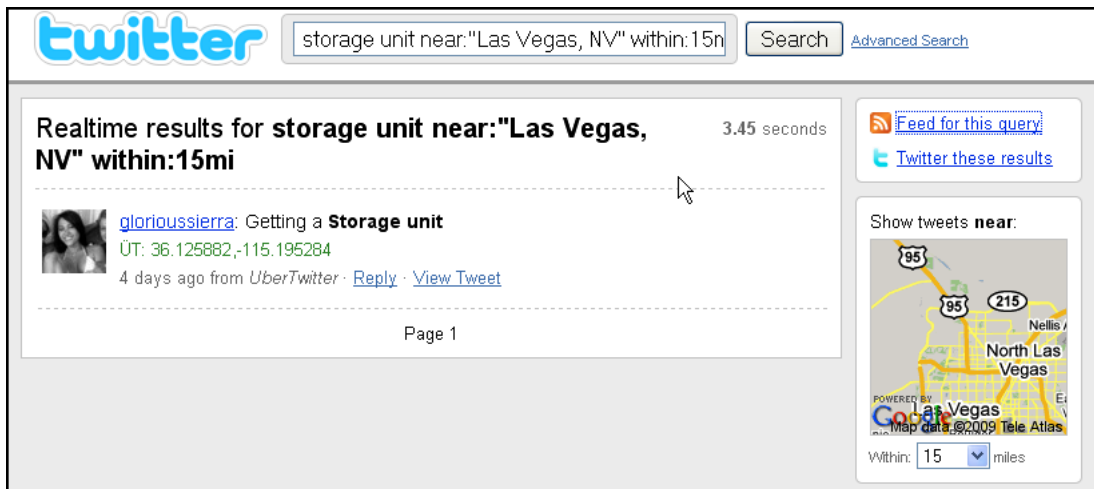
(Yes, you can specify the geography of your search. That is why this works!)

Once you find someone in your target geography who mentions their storage space in their twitter stream you can send a message through Twitter directly to them, offering a healthy incentive to relocate to your location.

By targeting storage users and trying to steal their business you win in two ways. First, those most interested in going through the hassle of moving in exchange for a discount will be those customers who believe they will be using storage for more than a couple of months. This bias toward longer stays ensures that you are able to get a decent amount of revenue from them over the life of their stay with you. Second, any business you are able to snag will be business you wouldn't have had otherwise. These are people who have already solved their need for storage by renting with one of your competitors. Lastly, any discount you offer as an incentive to move will be individualized and not an offer meant for the whole world.

**People who intend to use storage**

Here's an example of a search I did on 09-22-09.



The permalink to this tweet is here if you want to verify this for yourself:  
<http://twitter.com/gloroussierra/statuses/4090807172>

In the search above we have a woman who is intending to rent a storage unit, or is possibly in the middle of renting a storage unit. If she has already rented, then you are back to the scenario above. If you are fast enough and she hasn't moved in maybe she can ask for a refund from the place she was visiting if your offer is worthwhile.

In other instances you may find someone who says something like "I really need to get a storage unit." Or, "Packing up for my move". In either case you would have a wonderful opportunity to reach out directly to these people with a discount. Alternatively, maybe you have written a helpful guide that will make their storage experience safer or more hassle-free and you can send them a link.

The mantra here is to be human and helpful. Reach out to them like a friend would, not like overzealous salesperson.

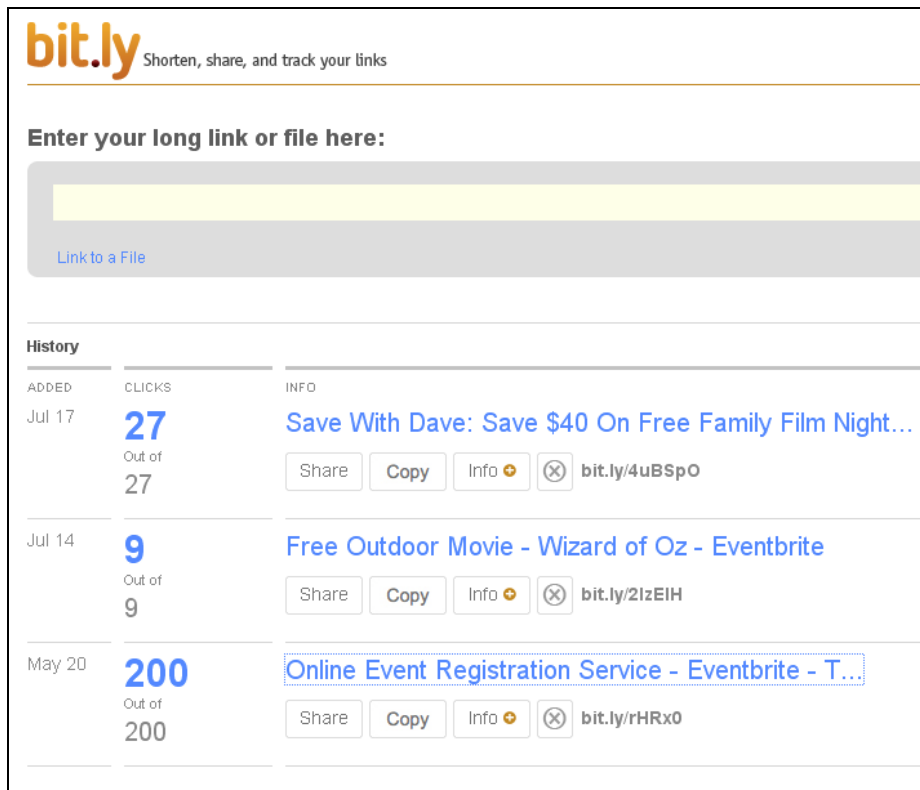
## ***CASE 2: You do special events (like yard sales, community events, or outdoor movies) and you wish more people would show up.***

Twitter is great at getting the word out, especially for community events. Not only will normal users pick up on your event and pass along the details if it is interesting enough, but because of Twitter’s popularity mainstream news editors, bloggers, magazine publishers, etc. are on twitter and may pick up your story.

How does this work?

Since Twitter is a social communication platform, it is easy for people to share the details of your event. Make something remarkable and your event can go viral. Even if it doesn’t go viral, a mention or two can’t hurt, right?

For example, this last summer one of my stores experimented with offering monthly outdoor movies. We posted the event details on <http://calmovie.eventbrite.com/> then tweeted about it, linking to the full details on eventbrite. A few times our tweets were re-tweeted (similar to an email being forwarded) which means that although we only have a small group of people following me ( [@kennypratt](#) ) and the store we were marketing ( [@calvinestorage](#) ) a small group of people were able to rebroadcast our info to their hundreds or thousands of followers. By using a link tracking service called <http://bit.ly> you can see that one of the links we tweeted with event details was clicked 200 times.



The screenshot shows the bit.ly interface with a header "Shorten, share, and track your links". Below the header is a form to "Enter your long link or file here:" with a "Link to a File" button. The main section is titled "History" and contains a table of link tracking data.

ADDED	CLICKS	INFO
Jul 17	27 Out of 27	Save With Dave: Save \$40 On Free Family Film Night... Share Copy Info bit.ly/4uBSpO
Jul 14	9 Out of 9	Free Outdoor Movie - Wizard of Oz - Eventbrite Share Copy Info bit.ly/2IzEIH
May 20	200 Out of 200	Online Event Registration Service - Eventbrite - T... Share Copy Info bit.ly/rHRx0



Not only did we get retweeted on Twitter, but Sacramento Parent magazine published our event details on their website. Unfortunately they don't have past event calendars up online, but you can find their current event calendar here: <http://www.sacramentoparent.com/calendar.htm>

Eventually, we were picked up by our local CBS affiliate KOVR 13 and they did a brief segment on the prime-time news about our outdoor movies. You can see the segment online here: <http://cbs13.com/savewithdave/Save.With.Dave.2.1089303.html> The video player is in the right column, to the right of the transcript.

During our movie events I would mingle and talk with the audience while we waited for the sun to go down. What I found was that the majority of people learned about our movies because of the fliers we had distributed door-to-door in the community and our temporary signage. A small percentage came because of our news coverage or twitter activity. The lesson here is that there is still no substitute for some old-fashioned hard work when promoting your special events. However, relative to the time we invested in handing out fliers (many hours) the time we spent tweeting (several minutes) delivered a big bang for our buck. Spreading the word online is not going away. It's only going to get bigger and better year after year.

### ***Case 3: You would like to amplify your current customer referrals.***

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This is an idea I swiped from my friend Derek Naylor at Storage Marketing Solutions when he hosted a round-table discussion at the SSA conference in Vegas. Rather than relying solely on old fashioned printed referral cards, you can tap into the power of social media to amplify your message.

The biggest problem with old fashioned referral cards, in my opinion, is that they are difficult to share. People are not regularly talking to their neighbors or coworkers about their storage space. When done the old fashioned way, people really have to put in some effort and go out of their way to refer you.

The power of Twitter and Facebook and other social media is that they are communication platforms that have made it exceedingly easy to share ideas with your friends and acquaintances.

A simple way to leverage this for referrals is to ask your current customers to post a blurb about storing at your facility on Twitter or Facebook.

Simply offer to give your customer's followers (on Twitter) or friends (on Facebook) a discount if they come and store at your facility. You can further sweeten the deal by offering an incentive to your customer in the form of an immediate credit to their account or an entry to win a prize if they will simply send you a link to the blurb they published about you.

I would recommend you invite your customers to refer you via Twitter or Facebook at the time of move-in and that you give them a slip of paper that has a pre-written blurb that is 140 characters or less so they don't have to think about what they are going to write. (140 characters is Twitter's maximum message length.) The goal is to make it as easy as possible for them to follow through on your request. You can also follow up with your customer base by sending them the same information via email a week after they move in, and again a month after they move in.

An example of a suggested tweet might look like this: “Get a \$100 Visa cash card when you rent at xyz self storage <http://bit.ly/GiTry> - they are nice too! Pls RT”

#### ***Case 4: You would like to start building relationships with people in your target market in ways that are more time efficient than in-person networking events.***

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The purpose of this strategy is to leverage technology to get as many people as possible in your target market to like you and be familiar with you so that when the time comes that they need to use storage, you become the obvious choice.

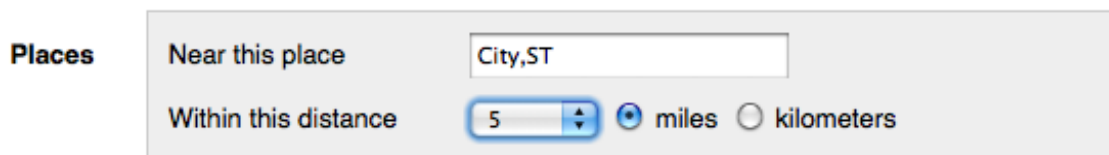
Twitter lets you create relationships by investing small amounts of time over weeks and months. Because Twitter is both a broadcasting medium and a conversational medium it allows you to have loose relationships with many more people than you can build with in-person networking. Especially in the self storage industry, where in person networking for on-site managers is generally limited to Chamber of Commerce mixers or visits to the local apartment complexes, Twitter can really broaden your reach.

You may be wondering how you can attract a following of people in your local area. Twitter provides a search feature that allows you to find people based on their location which, along with other strategies outlined below, helps you target your local market area.

Here are the best tools for finding local people to follow:

- <http://www.twellow.com/twellowhood/> The site is very simple to use, just click on the map to zoom into your area and browse the list of local tweeters. The site even lets you view recent tweets and follow new users directly from their Twellow listing page.
- <http://twitterholic.com/> Simply navigate to your own Twitterholic page, then find the line about how you rank in your location and click on the link to your metro area. Twitterholic will then load up a list of the most popular Twitter users in your town or city.
- <http://search.twitter.com/advanced>

You only need to fill in this part of the form with your City and State and the Within this distance field. The search results will be the most recent tweets from people in the geography you indicated.

A screenshot of a search form with the following elements:

- Places** label on the left.
- Near this place** label above a text input field containing "City,ST".
- Within this distance** label above a dropdown menu showing "5" and a radio button selection for "miles" (selected) and "kilometers".

If your profile and the content of your tweets combine to say “I’m a real human who is interested in you” it is likely that many of the people you follow will choose to follow you back.

It is also important to realize that Twitter is not just a broadcast medium, but rather a communication platform. On twitter it is commonplace for unknown people to reply to the tweets

they find interesting. This opens the door for you or your on-site manager to reach out to people in the community whenever they see something they can relate with and it is perfectly ok.

By joining the conversation in your local community people will begin to know and trust you and follow you.

## ***Do you dare to continue?***

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Now that you've read about the four strategies, did you find anything worth pursuing?

Up next are my recommendations on how to get your account set up for maximum effectiveness. After that you'll find some guidance on how to make it all work in 20 minutes a day (or less).

## ***Getting going without looking like an idiot***

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Here are 7 actionable steps you can take to get started on the right foot.

### **1. Sign Up**

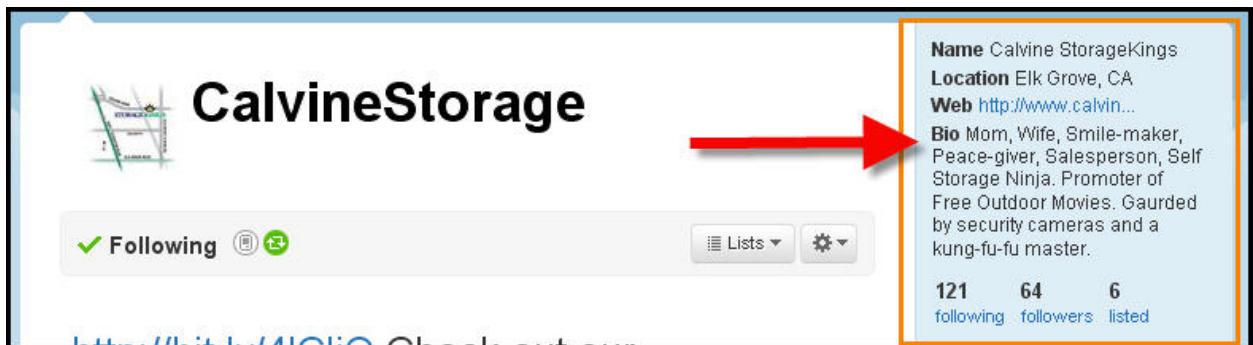
Go to Twitter.com and sign up for an account for one of your stores.

### **2. Be a person first and a business second**

Twitter is a social platform. When was the last time you socialized with a business entity? I'll bet you never have. People connect with other people, and so you want your Twitter presence to have a human feel. Here are several recommendations to help you accomplish this objective.

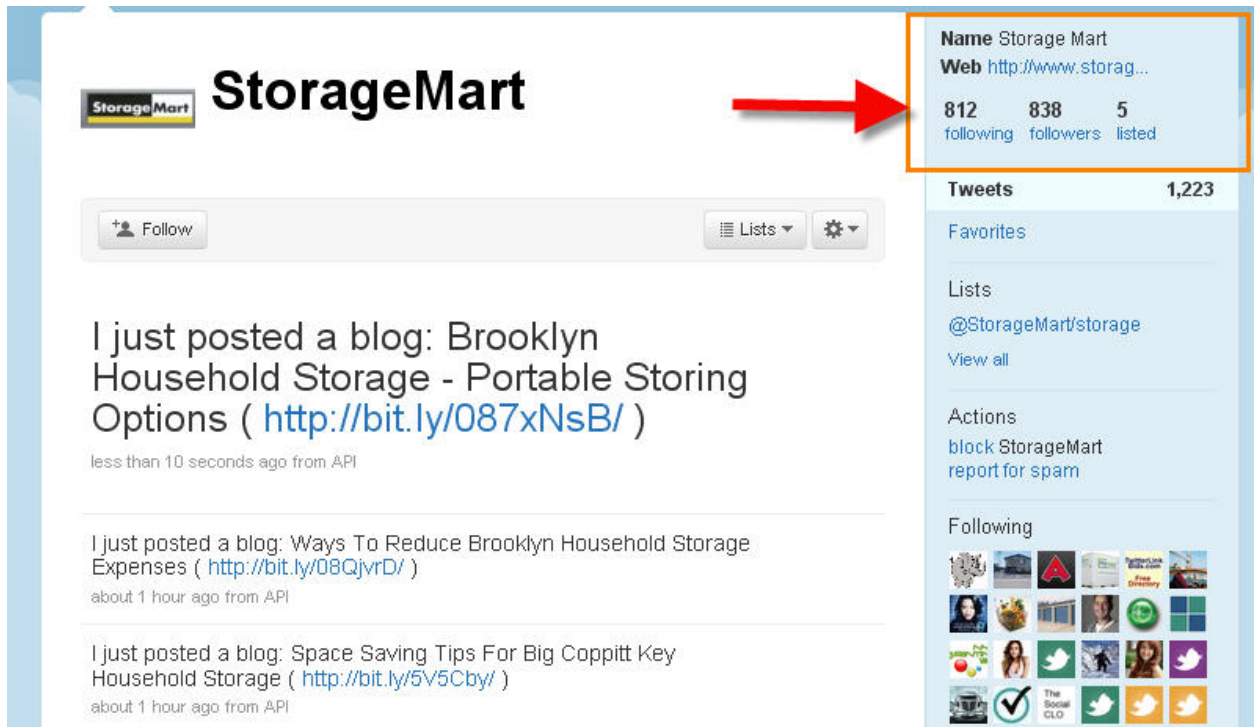
Your profile description should clearly indicate that there is a human at the controls. You want people who consider following your account to realize immediately through the content of your bio and the content of your tweets that your account is not some sort of automated spam-bot that is going to put out a stream of inanity.

Here's what we did at one of our stores, Calvine StorageKings.



Contrast this with what you see with another, well-know storage operator.





I captured a bit more of the StorageMart Twitter feed because I want to point out a few things that make them look less human. First, you'll notice they didn't bother to fill in a bio, only a link to their website. Their tweet stream is the same thing over and over, "I just posted a blog:", "I just posted a blog:," etc. Rather than looking human, they are making in obvious that there is no person or even a persona behind this account. There are some great people at StorageMart, but this Twitter account doesn't give you any warm fuzzies, does it?

You might also notice that StorageMart has far more followers than Calvin Storage and therefore conclude that what they are doing must be right. If you doubt my guidance, click on their follower's link and you will see that the list is completely scattered and not targeted. You have a mix of storage operators, multi-level marketers, automated bots, and other miscellaneous, non-targeted people. Whatever their objective is with their Twitter presence, it is not optimized to connect them with their target market.

Aside from your bio, you also want to be a human in the stuff you tweet about. If you want people to follow you AND not ignore you (with the many free filtering tools available it is very easy to both follow and ignore a Twitter user) you need to tweet about things that appeal to your target market. Let me reassure you of the obvious: talking about storage in all of your tweets is not going to appeal to your target market.

### 3. Put Down Roots

People (your target market) won't take you seriously or pay attention to you until you have earned their trust. David Meerman Scott, the guy who keynoted the Self Storage Association's 2009 fall conference and author of *New Rules of Marketing and PR*, calls this relationship building "Putting Down Roots." In order to effectively put down roots in the Twitter community I recommend you do two things: first, keep the majority of your tweets

non-marketing, and non-product related, and second, interact with the other users in your target market.

So what should you tweet about? Here are three suggestions.

1. I recommend you tweet some about yourself (I.e. the person actually doing the tweeting). I recommend this because I believe it helps humanize you and your business-oriented account.
2. I also recommend that you tweet some about your community and the stuff that would be interesting to the other people there. An easy way to do this is to follow other local people and local news services and “re-tweet” what others in your community have already discovered.
3. Lastly, I also recommend you interact. Reply or comment on other people’s tweets and let them know you are there, listening, and find what they said interesting.

You wouldn’t barge up to a group at a Chamber Mixer and right away start handing out brochures and coupons before you had some small talk and got to know the people at least a little, would you? Don’t make the mistake of doing the same thing online by only talking about your products and services and ignoring the social aspect of the encounter.


Twitter is a little like a party online. Sometimes the discussion is serious and people are linking to stuff that is helpful. Other times its just people chit-chatting because it’s a bunch of humans interacting online, and that’s just what humans do.

Here’s a perfect example of what I mean.

I tweeted this...

My neighbor mowed his lawn while I was gone over the weekend.  
Now he's making me look bad. Oh the peer pressure.  
2:40 PM Oct 18th from Tweetie

Here’s the reply...

 [goodlaura](#) [@kennypratt](#) Just get a goat---then you don't have to mow the lawn.  
2:44 PM Oct 18th from TweetDeck in reply to kennypratt

And my response

[@goodlaura](#) That would be awesome! I worry that my neighbors would dislike the goat more than my overgrown lawn!  
about 10 hours ago from Seismic in reply to goodlaura

It’s not earth shattering. It is simple stuff like this that makes the twitter world go ‘round.

So, does that mean you can never tweet about your product or service or any specials that you offer? No, not at all. I’m just saying you want to be human first. A good rule of

thumb is to keep product and promotional tweets to about one in every ten to twenty tweets.

It's a typical case of slow and steady wins the race.

**4. Link to the page you want people to land on – not your homepage**

When setting up your account you are able to insert a link to a webpage. Since you are targeting a local market in the same geography as one of your stores, I recommend that you link directly to a page with information about your store in that geography rather than linking to the home page of your website. Make it easy for your target market to get information that is relevant to them.

**5. Upload an Avatar or Photo**

Another commonly asked question is about what to use as the image/avatar for your Twitter account. I recommend using your facility's logo, a picture of your store, or a map showing the location of your store. Although I talked a lot about being human, these recommendations are just more practical than using the picture of an employee who may or may not be the face of your organization in a year or two.

**6. Unprotect your Tweets.**

Go to your Twitter account settings and make sure the "protect my tweets" box is not checked. You want people to find your tweets, read your tweets, and follow you. If they have to ask special permission to see your content they won't bother.

**7. Tweet 10 times before you start following people**

Many people in your target area will discover you because you follow them. My recommendation to tweet 10 times ties back to the basic premise of humanizing your account. It also makes sense because many people don't want to follow business accounts if all they post is promotional material. You need some tweets in your tweet stream to reassure people that you aren't going to put up a bunch of senseless tweets like the StorageMart example above.

## ***Making this work in 20 minutes a day***

### ***Or...How to get this done without it becoming a black-hole time-wasting machine***

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I've said this before, slow and steady wins this race. I recommend you spend no more than 20 minutes a day messing around with your Twitter account. You should spend your time doing one or more of the following.

1. Follow my instructions above and get your account set up. If it takes you more than one 20 minute session – no big deal.
2. Use <http://search.twitter.com/advanced> to search for people who are tweeting about storage in your area. Some search terms to use are:
  - Self Storage
  - Storage
  - Mini Storage

- Storage Unit
  - Moving
  - Packing
  - Renting a truck
  - Loading a truck
  - Uhaul
  - Budget Truck
  - Moving to (your city name)
3. Take the RSS feed of your search results and put it into your feed reader. If you have no idea what I'm talking about, no fear, I created a short video that show you exactly how to set this up. The video is less than 5 minutes because the process is so easy. So if you want help watch – [Twitter Searches Made Easy](#).
  4. Check your feeds for any new tweets that have met your search criteria and reach out to them.

To make it as easy as possible, here are some templates to get you started.

- I saw you mentioned a storage unit. Can I tempt you to come store with us? I could deeply discount a storage space for you. PhoneNum.
  - Good luck with your move. If you need a storage space, I could discount one for you. PhoneNum
  - Will you need to store anything you are putting in the moving truck? I could discount a storage space for you. PhoneNum
  - I'd love to woo you away from our competitor. Would a sweet discount tempt you? PhoneNum
  - Would you like a copy of our guide to storing safely? You can download it here. (Include the URL to the page on your site where they can download it.)
5. Find people in your area that you can follow. Here are the best tools for finding local people:
    - <http://www.twellow.com/twellowhood/> The site is very simple to use, just click on the map to zoom into your area and browse the list of local tweeters. The site even lets you view recent tweets and follow new users directly from their Twellow listing page.
    - <http://twitterholic.com/> Simply navigate to your own Twitterholic page, then find the line about how you rank in your location and click on the link to your metro area. Twitterholic will then load up a list of the most popular Twitter users in your town or city.
    - <http://search.twitter.com/advanced>

You only need to fill in this part of the form with you City and State and the Within this distance field. The search results will be the most recent tweets from people in the geography you indicated.

**Places**

Near this place

Within this distance   miles  kilometers

6. Scan the tweets of the people you follow looking for one to retweet and one to reply to.
7. Special Instructions if you are promoting a special event
  - a. Post the details of your event for free on [www.eventbrite.com](http://www.eventbrite.com). Here's an example of what I did. <http://calmovie.eventbrite.com>
  - b. Set up an account at <http://bit.ly> to shorten the url of your event details page and use Twitter to tweet about the event. Link to the details on Eventbrite.
  - c. If you have loosely connected with anyone in your target market through twitter because you have re-tweeted their tweets or in some other way engaged with them, ask them specifically to help you spread the word by re-tweeting your event details.
  - d. For more detailed instructions on using social media to promote your events check out this article: <http://mashable.com/2009/04/29/events-social-media/>
8. Put a sign on your counter announcing you are on twitter and indicating your twitter handle. Something like "Find us on Twitter @CalvineStorage"
9. Get the word out to your existing customers through email or a note you're your invoices or other mailing inviting customers to connect with you on Twitter.

Sample Email:

Dear Soandso,

Thanks for your business, we love you.

Just in case you have already jumped in on the Twitter or Facebook bandwagon, we want to let you know about a promotion we are doing here at BigMama Storage. If you'll tweet the following or post it on Facebook we'll give you an instant \$6.00 credit to your account as well as give the \$100 to any of your followers or friends who come rent with us. Just send us a link to the tweet or fan us on Facebook so we can see the post and BAM, the credit will hit your account.

"Get a \$100 Visa cash card when you rent 10x10 or larger at Calvine StorageKings <http://bit.ly/GiTry> - they are nice too!"

You can follow us on twitter here: [www.twitter.com/CalvineStorage](http://www.twitter.com/CalvineStorage) or you can become a fan on our Facebook page here: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Calvine-Storage-Kings/78558922337>

## ***Thank You***

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Well there you have it. A big bunch of Twitter goodness all for you. I hope it helps.

If you have questions, email me [kenny@sellingstorage.com](mailto:kenny@sellingstorage.com) and I'll do my best to give you the help you need.



If you want the more tasty goodness you can read my blog at [www.sellingstorage.com](http://www.sellingstorage.com) or [sign up for my free email newsletter](#).

*I hate spam too. I will never share, rent, barter, or trade your email... even if they tell me I look like I've lost weight.*

**P.S.**

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**Please share this.** I'm giving it to you as a gift because I think there are some pretty nifty ideas here and I'd love to see them get spread around.

You are welcome to send this to anyone you like.