

TWITTER FOR YOUR LOCAL UNION

How to start a Twitter account for your local union.

INTRODUCTION

This is the Introduction to Twitter training presented by the Communications Department of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees. We originally conducted this training as part of the New York City Central Labor Council digital training series in Fall 2014.

OVERVIEW

Here's the agenda for our training.

First, we'll provide a general explanation of what Twitter is. Then, we'll discuss how Twitter can be helpful for unions using examples from other unions. Third, we will show you how to set up an account and give you a tour of the menu and home page. After, we will go over creating content for Twitter and how to use hashtags.

WHAT IS TWITTER?

Twitter is an online social networking service that allows you to write short, 140-character posts, share pictures and links, and keep millions of people connected.

A user with an account – a registered user – can write and send tweets and read others' tweets. A user without an account can read and search for tweets, but cannot write tweets or reply to others.

You can use Twitter through the internet, or via an app on your mobile device. We're going to stick to the internet for this training.

WHY USE TWITTER?

Twitter is incredibly useful for disseminating information, keeping in contact, building relationships, and updating events in real time.

It's instrumental in quickly organizing mass amounts of people. Twitter has over 270 million active users, posting over 500 million tweets a day.

Twitter and other social networking websites – what we refer to as “digital” tools – are NOT meant to substitute on-the-ground organizing or any other traditional means of activism. Digital tools amplify everything you're already doing, broadcasting it to a wider audience.

For example, many of you already attend or organize rallies and actions – why not supplement them with tweets and pictures? You'll reach the people who can't attend.



Similarly, if you're already working to turn out members to meetings, why not use Twitter to reach them as well?

It also makes it easier to drive tons of people to complete an action, like calling a senator or signing a letter.

It is useful for organizing and negotiation campaigns, as we'll go over later in the training.

If you're only using one way to communicate with people when there are other ways that are just as effective, you're missing out on a huge audience.

We will go over specific examples of Twitter amplifying traditional organizing during the presentation.

If you keep your eyes peeled, you'll start to notice the Twitter icon – a little bird – and hashtags all over the place, especially on advertisements. It's useful to think about why companies use Twitter for advertising, and apply that to how your union or local can use it.

Many organizations or unions are already on Twitter, and if you visit their website you'll often see the icon displayed prominently on the homepage. Search for politicians or other public figures and see how they're using Twitter.

We also want to touch upon a few differences between Facebook and Twitter. Perhaps the biggest difference is that the information on Twitter is generally timelier than on Facebook because of the nature of it: Facebook lifts up popular content, Twitter always shows you the most recent tweet things that were tweeted.

Additionally, Twitter is generally easier for reaching individuals – if I wanted to connect with a journalist, they're easier to reach on Twitter.

For us, we've found that political content tends to perform much better on Twitter – more people share it and respond to it. On Facebook, political content does well when it specifically features IATSE members (at the voting booth, canvassing, and so on).

On Facebook, you're trying to combat the fact that Facebook uses algorithms that prevent users from seeing in their newsfeed every piece of content that a Page posts. Twitter is generally equal ground – and although you can have sponsored tweets, they aren't as rampant.

HOW IATSE USES TWITTER

What you're looking at on this slide are four tweets, and I will use them to illustrate a few reasons why the IATSE uses Twitter. Since we have members across the United States and Canada, it's important for us to make sure communication is easy.



We use our Twitter account for a few primary reasons:

- To share IATSE-related news and education and training opportunities, as you can see by the top left-hand tweet where we share a link to a page that provides information about the Young Workers Conference; and the tweet below it, where we congratulate the Motion Picture Editors Guild, Local 700, after a big win organizing the Shahs of Sunset show. These tweets make it easy for you to see what your sisters and brothers are doing.
- To share photos and videos from members, as you can see by the tweet on the right where a member sent us a photo of a cute letter they received at their theatre in Seattle.

That picture got retweeted a lot, so that kind of thing creates a nice sense of community.

- To answer questions, as you can see by the bottom left-hand image where we answered a member's question about logo use.
- We also use Twitter to interact with other labor unions and organizations, politicians, journalists, and reporters.
- It's a good way for us to stay on top of what's happening in entertainment and labor.

HOW OTHER UNIONS USE TWITTER

Other unions use Twitter for very similar reasons. This slide shows tweets from National Nurses United, the AFL-CIO, and the Ohio AFL-CIO.

The nurse's union used Twitter as a way to draw attention to the labor that nurses were performing during the Ebola scare. Many nurses found that they were not equipped to take proper care of Ebola patients and they fought to get better training and equipment. This tweet was a simple way of introducing that fight. Personally, it was through the Nurses Union's Twitter account that I realized what they were up against during that time.

You can also see the main AFL-CIO account tweeted a link to one of their blog posts as a way of promoting their work.

And the Ohio AFL-CIO chapter is using Twitter here to share a photo of a worker phone banking for the 2014 election. It is engaging content, and it amplifies a traditional means of organizing that we already do.

WAL-MART CAMPAIGN

Here's a great example of a union using Twitter to support a campaign. The WalMart campaign already does an excellent job of placing workers' stories at the center of the fight, and here they supplement that traditional organizing tool by using photos and a widely-used hashtag to get a lot of retweets.



HOW TO MAKE AN ACCOUNT

Now that you know how Twitter can be used, getting set up on Twitter is pretty straightforward. You will need an email address.

Go to [Twitter.com](https://twitter.com) and fill out the bottom box, “New to Twitter? Sign up.”

Make sure your Twitter username (also referred to as a “handle”) is short and easy to remember - for example, Local 764’s Twitter handle is @IATSELocal764.

If it’s a personal account, you can use your name or nickname, if it’s appropriate.

Your Twitter handle will show up with the @ symbol in front - the @ symbol is how you “tag” users. We’ll go over that more in a few minutes.

Here’s something to consider if you’ve been tasked with making an account for your local: many IATSE locals have Twitter accounts that are run by the local president, vice president, or business agent. In some cases, they opt to have the username be “@PresidentMarySmith” or “@JaneDoeVP”, and they’ll just tweet on behalf of the local. That’s fine, too.

However, please keep in mind that you should not start a Twitter account on behalf of your local without the consent of your local’s leadership.

MENU BAR

Twitter has a generally straightforward layout, so this is a quick tour of the menu bar that stays at the top of the page.

Home: Brings you to your Twitter feed. It’s where you’ll see all tweets from everyone you follow. The word “feed” just refers to the stream of updates in real time.

Notifications: This is where you see if folks mentioned you in their tweets, followed you, retweeted you, or “favorited” your tweet (kind of similar to “liking” a picture or status update on Facebook).

Messages: This is where followers can send you a “Direct Message” (referred to as a “DM”). These private messages are useful for exchanging phone numbers or email addresses.

For example, if a local reporter is interested in covering your local’s food drive, he/she can send you a direct message asking for your phone number so you can chat on the phone.

Discover: Shows tweets that are popular at the moment – they may have gotten a lot of retweets, for example. I don’t use this function very much.

Search: You can search for users and hashtags here. It’s an important part of Twitter.

Feather pen icon: You can click that to compose a tweet.



Square icon: That's your "Profile picture" – when you click it, a menu drops down, giving you some options.

Now, this button isn't on the menu bar but it's important to point out:

"Edit profile": you'll be able to change the cover photo, profile photo, color scheme, description, website, location, and name. We'll go over this more in a bit.

FOLLOW OTHER ACCOUNTS

This is why Twitter exists – to connect and interact with people and organizations. If you don't follow anyone on Twitter, then you don't get updates. Once you follow someone, their tweets will show up in your Twitter feed, and vice versa.

Use the search bar to find accounts.

Here are some ideas for who to follow:

Do any other local unions use Twitter? Following other unions and locals is a great way to connect with other workers.

Follow your area's newspapers, reporters, and TV stations. For example, if you are a New York-area stagecraft local, you could follow Playbill or BroadwayWorld. Go to the search bar and search "Playbill" and their account will pop up in the drop-down list.

Local news outlets will often do human-interest stories, and many of our sisters and brothers have been interviewed about their interesting work – it's a nice way to expose your local to your community.

Local businesses you support – to use the stagecraft example again, you could check to see if any fabric shops or wardrobe supply shops have accounts!

Does your local endorse/support politicians? Follow them!

Follow labor journalists and reporters! You never know what they might be wanting to cover, and it could be a way for your local to get some coverage.

FOLLOW OTHER ACCOUNTS (CONTINUED)

As we mentioned, once you click "Follow," that user will get a notification that you've done so. On Twitter, you'll see boxes that suggest people to follow – Twitter bases that on who you're already following using an algorithm.

It's a pretty helpful feature, so keep an eye on it.



For the international IATSE account, we'll generally see other unions and entertainment-related accounts as suggestions.

SPRUCE UP YOUR TWITTER

It's important to make your account look up-to-date – there are numerous “spam” accounts on Twitter, and putting effort into making your account look nice helps differentiate.

Once you've created your account, you should upload clear, good-quality profile picture and cover photo. If you're making the account for your local, using your local's logo is generally the best option. If you're an individual, use a photo of yourself... that actually looks like you.

You can change this stuff any time you want. We change up the cover photo every few months to reflect the different crafts within the union – this photo was taken by one of our members in the broadcast trailer in Times Square on Super Bowl Boulevard in February 2014.

Take a look at other unions on Twitter to see what they have.

WRITING A TWEET

A tweet is a 140-character message that you post. On your home page, you'll notice a box that says “Compose new Tweet...” and that's where you write! Here are components of a tweet:

ANATOMY OF A TWEET

@ symbol: the @ symbol, directly followed by a username, “tags” that user in your tweet.

If you plan to mention a person, organization, place, etc in your tweet, check to see if they have a Twitter account first! It's a really easy way to engage with people on Twitter, because if you mention them in your tweet, they'll see it. This is really good, because you're communicating!

One of the reasons why Twitter is so helpful is because it makes communication and interaction easier.

For example, we had been tweeting photos of IATSE members engaging in GOTV efforts, and often times they were at a union hall. We'd write a tweet and mention that local – if they were on Twitter – and they can retweet, thus giving us more exposure, because people who follow them will see it!

: the hashtag is Twitter's way of categorizing things. In a few minutes, we'll go over using them. This example uses “1u”, which is a hashtag used by the labor movement. It means “one union” and is meant as a solidarity message.

RT: A retweet is when someone shares your tweet. If we, the IATSE, retweets the AFL-CIO, and you follow us on Twitter, you'll see that tweet from the AFL-CIO even if you don't follow the AFL.



To retweet someone, just click the two small arrows on the bottom of a tweet.

You'll also notice a camera icon when you start to type a tweet. If you want, you can add photos to tweets, which is an easy way to grab people's attention and generate great content. The location marker right next to the camera icon lets you add locations to your tweets, something that I personally don't do, but can be useful if you're tweeting from an event.

CONTENT

We tweet all sorts of stuff.

We showed some examples in the beginning – we tweet entertainment news that pertains to our members, we had been tweeting a lot of photos with our members voting or phone banking. We tweet pictures that sisters and brothers send us when they take part in workshops and trainings – it's showing people that our union is comprised of highly skilled and educated individuals.

We also tweet to alert members of classes or upcoming events.

You should try to be concise and specific. Data shows that tweets under 100 characters get higher interaction rates – meaning more retweets and favorites. High interaction rates mean that things can go viral!

Include links and hashtags when appropriate – but not too many, as it gets confusing.

CONTEXT

When tweeting, it's important to include context – for example, don't just tweet a link to an event.

When this training was originally created for a New York City Central Labor Council program, we advertised on Twitter. If we had just advertised the course on Twitter by tweeting a link to the event page on the CLC's website, it wouldn't get many clicks because there isn't context.

Instead, we wrote a tweet describing the class, the date, we tagged the New York City Central Labor Council in the tweet – because they're on Twitter – and inserted the link to the event page.

It's tempting to exclude information since you only have 140 characters, but ultimately, excluding too much is not helpful for anyone.

CONTENT: WHAT'S APPROPRIATE?

You and your Twitter account (and Facebook/Instagram accounts!) are a reflection on your local's image. Remember the content that you post on online should be professional. Here are some examples of inappropriate content:



Because social media is a public-facing tool, email, mail, or a face-to-face conversation is more appropriate for discussing union business with members.

Similarly, don't post confidential information – if you're unsure about it, you can check with your union officers – or just don't post it.

Since we're an entertainment union, we should always be careful that we aren't tweeting anything that could violate a nondisclosure agreement – so be careful about what you tweet from behind the scenes.

Just because you're not face-to-face doesn't give you a free pass to write rude comments, make fun of people, the union, or union leadership, spread false information, share obscene pictures, and so on. If you think it's a bad idea to do off-line, it's just as bad to do it online.

Don't use social media when you're under the influence. You might say some things you regret!

Don't argue or engage in arguments. Body language and tone of voice are lost when communicating on the Internet. Assume best intentions. We can't say this enough: treat others online as you'd like to be treated.

Deleting tweets doesn't mean no one saw them. There's always a chance that someone took a "screenshot" (a picture of the display on a computer screen) of your tweet – so if it was bad, there could still be proof you said it.

For example – as entertainment industry workers, we shouldn't make fun of shows and movies. Imagine you saw another IATSE member in a different local making fun of a show you recently worked on – put a lot of time into – it would probably make you feel crummy.

Here are examples of some really insensitive tweets:

INSENSITIVE TWEETS

Kenneth Cole has come under fire a few times for insensitive tweets. First, Cole tweeted about the Cairo protests in February 2011, but not about his hot political take – it was to suggest that people were uprising because of his shoe collection. Completely wrong, and completely inappropriate. He got called out and had to issue an apology.

Apparently he didn't learn from his mistake because two years later, he wrote this "Boots on the ground" tweet referencing the possibility of sending troops to Syria in 2013 – "boots on the ground" was a quote from Secretary of State John Kerry.

GAP's Hurricane Sandy shopping tweet in 2012 – totally inappropriate! GAP didn't know the serious level of destruction that the hurricane was levelling on the northeast and they made a seriously cringe-worthy, upbeat suggestion in poor taste.



And as you can see, these tweets prove that tweets can still exist, even after deleting – which they all were.

HASHTAGS

Now that we've gone over the basics of why and how we can use Twitter, it's time to talk about what, exactly, a hashtag is.

Since there's so much happening on Twitter – millions and millions of tweets are sent per day – we need a way to keep track of things.

That's where the hashtag comes in. The hashtag makes a word, or group of words, into a searchable link.

A hashtag does three main things:

- Organizes and groups tweets
- Helps users participate in conversations
- Promotes events and campaigns

We will look at specific examples in few minutes.

ORGANIZE/CATEGORIZE

Over the past few years, the \$15 minimum wage fight has picked up. The organizers behind the fight came up with #Fightfor15. We'll use this hashtag for the following few examples.

It categorizes tweets about the living wage fights across the country – note how these two tweets are about totally different campaigns, but are categorized as tweets relating to the fight for \$15 movement.

This is a really important detail:

Notice how #FightFor15 is a different color, as is the username. That means it's a link – and you can click it. Once you do that, you're brought to a page that will show you all of the other tweets that contain that hashtag.

ORGANIZE/CATEGORIZE (CONTINUED)

You can see in the upper right-hand corner, in the search box, it says #FightFor15. That's because we clicked the #FightFor15 in one of the tweets, and were brought to this page – all tweets that contain that hashtag.



PARTICIPATE IN CONVERSATION

If you want to participate in the Twitter conversation that's happening about the fight, you can mark your tweets with that hashtag.

Here, you can see how diverse the fight for 15 movement is – the top tweet, from Unite Here, tells the story of a fired housekeeper from Rhode Island.

The bottom tweet, from a labor organization in Washington state, shares a USA Today link about their new \$15 minimum wage victory.

If you click on #Fightfor15, you're once again brought to this page...

PARTICIPATE IN CONVERSATION (CONTINUED)

...it's all of the people talking about the fight for a \$15 minimum wage – tweets from across the country.

You can see just how far-reaching this fight is, and get tons of links to news stories, photos, campaigns, and more.

Imagine being a journalist who was asked to cover the campaign – most journalists now will use social media to learn more about their subject. They could search the hashtag, which is a widely-known one at this point, and find all of these articles, photos, and videos, as well as people who are connected to the movement.

PROMOTE AN EVENT/CAMPAIGN

Many people use hashtags specifically to promote an event or campaign. In the example of #FightFor15, it's promoting a campaign.

In October, we ran a Young Workers Conference in Portland, Oregon. We knew that many of the folks coming used Twitter, and rather than try to follow all of them on Twitter – so that their tweets about the conference would show up in our Twitter feed – we asked them to use hashtag #IAYWC14 so that we could easily search and read tweets, and share photos and quotes.

Here you can see a few examples of hashtags being used to promote an event, and when you click #iaywc14 ...

PROMOTE AN EVENT/CAMPAIGN (CONTINUED)

Folks talking about the conference!

AN EFFECTIVE HASHTAG



An effective hashtag has a few characteristics that are important to think about when you're coming up with one.

First, it should be specific. If you want your tweets to stand out amongst millions of tweets, you should use a hashtag that is unique to your campaign.

For example, the WalMart campaign we looked at earlier uses #WalmartStrikers – simply using #walmart means the tweet would get lost in the sea of people tweeting about things they just bought at Walmart, and so on.

Second, it needs to be an appropriate length. Since you only have 140 characters to get your message across on Twitter, your hashtag shouldn't take up half of that!

Similarly, it shouldn't be so short that it's vague and difficult to understand.

Third, it should be easy to remember – and logical. A long, confusing acronym probably isn't the best hashtag to use.

Finally, make sure it's original. This is important because if other people are using the hashtag you want to use – but for an entirely different reason – you won't get the visibility you need.

For example, the Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education is also abbreviated to IATSE. A handful of times, they have tried to use #IATSE in their tweets, but it ends up getting lost because our members use it much, much more frequently.

You can check to see if anyone has used your idea by navigating to the "Search" box on the top right, typing in your hashtag, and searching. If nothing comes up, it's probably good to use!

#SAVETHEMET

The Save the Met Opera campaign was launched in spring 2014 to raise awareness of how valuable the backstage artists are to putting on high quality shows at the Met Opera, just as the locals were gearing up for potentially contentious negotiations. There was a website, Facebook page, and Twitter account, and much of the content was photo-driven.

So, let's consider the four guidelines we just discussed in terms of that hashtag that we came up with, #SaveTheMet. On this slide, you can see how we promote it, and a few things that show up when it's searched.

The #SaveTheMet hashtag is specific and original – no one had been using it before, it clearly illustrates the fight, and it's a good rallying cry – thus easy to remember. It's also short enough to fit in tweets – we could have used #SaveTheMetropolitanOpera, but that's too long, and "The Met" is a commonly used abbreviation.



It wouldn't have been useful for us to just use #opera or #MetOpera, since the tweets would get lost in the mix of people tweeting about opera, and not our specific fight.

You can also see how many other accounts started using the hashtag, too – SEIU 32BJ, Met Orchestra musicians, our sister union in the UK – it created a unifying message that was really helpful.

#SAVETHEMET (CONTINUED)

When we click on #SaveTheMet or search in the search bar, we're again brought to this page that shows results.

HOW TO WRITE A HASHTAG

Once you've come up with a good idea, it's time to put in place the mechanics.

First, you can only use letters and number characters in order to make it a hashtag. Any other characters – like percentage signs, asterisks, ampersands, and so on, will not work.

Second, don't add spaces. The group of characters immediately following the hashtag constitutes the link, so if we added spaces, the hashtag would only be #Save. "The Met" would get cut off. Use spaces between multiple hashtags, too.

Third, remember that uppercase and lowercase letters yields the same results when you're searching for your hashtag on twitter. #SaveTheMet and #savethemet will return the same tweets after searching.

Finally, it's important to remember that if your Twitter account is private, your tweets using a hashtag will not show up in search results.

TRACKING RESULTS

Once you've created your hashtag and started to use it, you can use the search bar to check out how it's doing.

This is what your screen looks like. Navigate to the top right-hand corner – remember, where the search bar is, from when we went over the menu bar – and type in your hashtag. Click the magnifying glass to search, and this is what your screen will look like – you'll notice it's the same screen that pops up when you click directly on the hashtag in a tweet, like we looked at before.

The green box shows an option of choosing between "Top" and "All" tweets.

Choosing "Top" will give you the results of a Twitter algorithm that determines which tweets are most relevant. Generally, it's a tweet that's been retweeted multiple times, a tweet from an "influential" – someone with a lot of followers – or it's a promoted tweet, meaning that the tweet was paid for to increase visibility.



Choosing “All” would give you just that – all tweets, filtered by most recent at the top.

The red box is another way to filter your results. While the options are pretty self-explanatory, it’s good to know why you might want to choose one over another.

For example, if you’re providing online support to an on-the-ground action, and you specifically asked attendees to take photos and use a certain hashtag, you can filter by using “Photos” and see all photos taken at the action!

Sometimes a hashtag campaign can get flooded with spam – or people not using the hashtag for its intended purpose. If that’s the case, it could be helpful to use the “People you follow” filter, so you know you’re getting results from people you trust.

Similarly, you can see how people in your area are using that specific hashtag by narrowing it down there – that’s good to use when a hashtag has national coverage.

Finally, the yellow box shows “trending hashtags” – again, that’s the result of a Twitter algorithm. If enough people are using a certain hashtag, at a certain time and maybe in a certain place, it could cause the hashtag to trend.

For example, “Superbowl” – or some variation of that – will always trend while it’s airing. It’s not necessarily the best tool, since if enough people are talking about Justin Bieber, that could trend.

INFORMAL HASHTAGS

Speaking of Justin Bieber, all sorts of people use Twitter – not just activists. Because of that, it’s important to remember that hashtags also hold a very informal space on the internet.

In a great “New Yorker” piece, writer Susan Orlean came up with some great examples to illustrate other ways that people use hashtags.

Here’s the idea that we’ll work off of: I would rather have a moose for President than Mitt Romney!

“Categorizing” is how we’ve talked about hashtags throughout this presentation, so this should look pretty normal to everyone. This tweet would get grouped-in with all other tweets about #MittRomney.

“Side-commentary” is what you imagine you might say to a friend in conversation – so, in this case, “I would rather have a moose!” is a comment about what you just said. No one would really ever search for the hashtag #Iwouldratherhaveamoose.

Finally, a “disclaimer” is just that – a sort of an internet asterisk. The writer notes that it’s a verbal, more sophisticated version of a winking emoticon, which is shown on this slide.



INFORMAL HASHTAGS (CONTINUED)

Finally, there are fun trends like #tbt that you can take part in. #tbt means “Throwback Thursday” – so on Thursdays, Tweeters post a “throwback”, like an old photo, along with a description.

We have a great photo archive, so we’ve been posting pictures like this – which got over 30 retweets. It was really funny to see people responding to the photo – even coming up with their own fake captions – and we also posted it on Facebook where it did equally as well.

Many theatre crew members use #stageshotsunday to take a photo of what they’re up to that day because Sundays are a common work day for theatre crews. It's a nice way to share your workspace among the theater community, so we'll sometimes retweet what IATSE members are up to.

CONCLUSION

Those are the basics of using Twitter! Remember, you do not need to use Twitter. If you’re interested, give it a try. If it doesn’t work out, and you don’t feel as though your local has benefitted, that’s fine. Here are some resources for you to learn more about using social media for your local. Please feel free to send us feedback so we can improve our training: comms@iatse.net.

