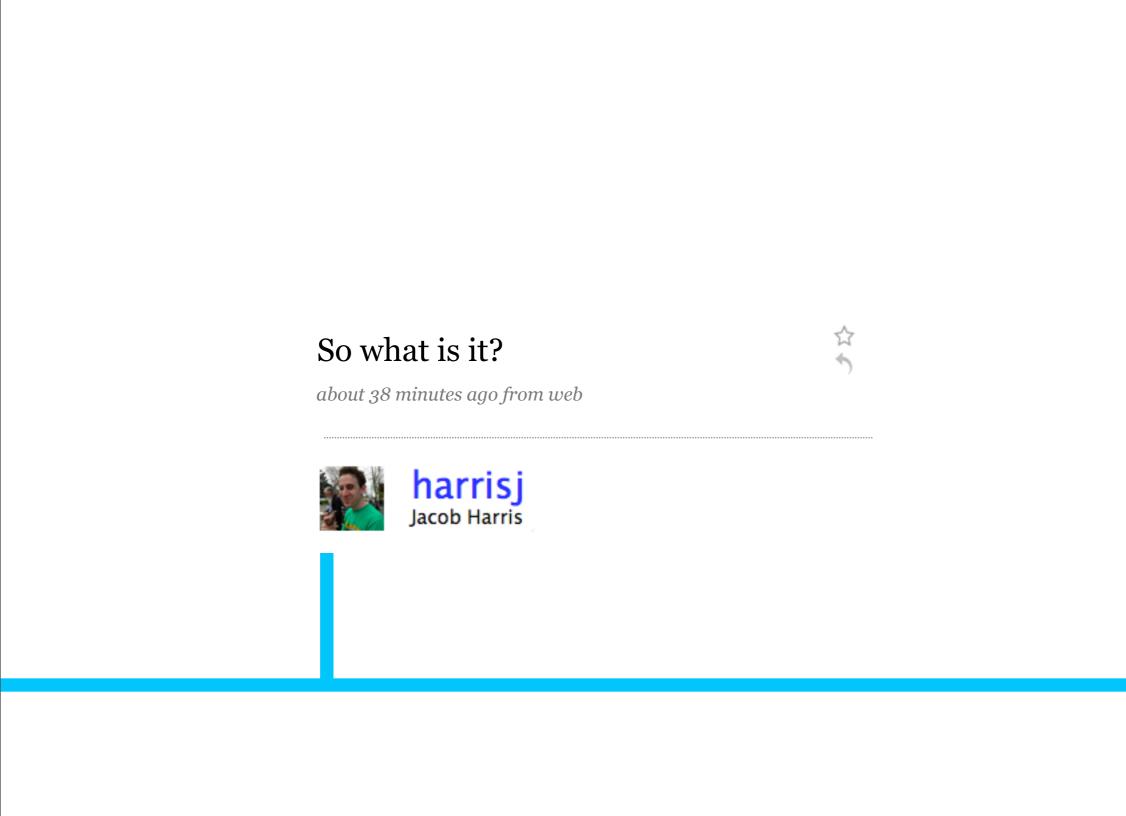


In this talk, I'm going to tell you what twitter is, look at some of the ways people use it, and finally tell you about how we're using it here at the Times.



The atom of twitter is a single message or "tweet". Here's an example of one from me. All messages include the same sort of information:

A brief amount of text A speaker often with an avatar A time it was made (often presented in relative terms)

Those little icons on the right allow other users to recommend my tweet or reply to it (more on that later)

### In a word: microblogging







Short dispatches that are pushed out to (but not necessarily read by) all of your friends. Emphasis on "what are you doing now?"

about 32 minutes ago from web



harrisj Jacob Harris

But what kind of messages?

Twitter only allows very basic communication, of 140 characters or less. So, speaking directly and succinctly is a necessary virtue, although most people stick to written English instead of SMS-style abbreviations.

Which seems surprising, since twitter was originally a SMS service.

How short? Messages must be limited to 140 characters or less. Brevity is a virtue. Whether this is annoying or liberating depends on who yo

about 34 minutes ago from web



Twitter was launched as a service that could send and receive messages via the website, IM, an API, or SMS messages. SMS proved very popular at SXSW in 2007 until people received their next phone bill. Still, the constraint remains even as SMS usage has waned, much to the consternation of some users, but most embrace it.

Here's what some of my friends say...

@harrisj It's a line in the sand. Is this thought short enough to tweet, or does it deserve a blog post? (Sadly: most of my ideas are #1.)

about 22 minutes ago from bfdr in reply to harrisj



dsandler
Daniel Sandler

@harrisj none of the above. it's refreshing. "liberating" is telling your evil family where they can stick it or quitting your job.

 $about\ 20\ minutes\ ago\ from\ web\ in\ reply\ to\ harrisj$ 



amyhoy Amy Hoy

@harrisj: If you can't answer, "What are you doing?" in 140 characters or less, you're doing it wrong.

about 18 minutes ago from web in reply to harrisj



robbyrussell Robby Russell

- 1. Each tweet is an independent statement and are not necessarily organized into threads or attached to posts like blog comments
- 2. People like to reply to their friends though, so the common convention for replying to people is to affix an @ to the username of who you are replying to. This reply is seen by all their friends however. Think less an email reply and more like using a CB radio (twitter does have a direct message capability too)
- 3. These are replies from the friends who happened to see my message at 9 am on a Sunday. Although all my friends can potentially see my messages, there is no guarantee that they will necessarily read them nor will they necessarily reply. If one pal sleeps in until noon, he might miss my message entirely. There is no inbox...

the snow is still coming down at Vail. off to grab breakfast and get a few hours of riding in before heading back to Boulder

about 35 minutes ago from twitterific



Retweeting @nessence: check out <a href="http://tweetcongress.org">http://tweetcongress.org</a> (Re: NPR + Twitter)

 $about\ 24\ minutes\ ago\ from\ web$ 



@harrisj 140 Char is the glue that makes twitter work. Wouldn't work with higher limits. Sometimes annoying, 99% liberating, both ways.

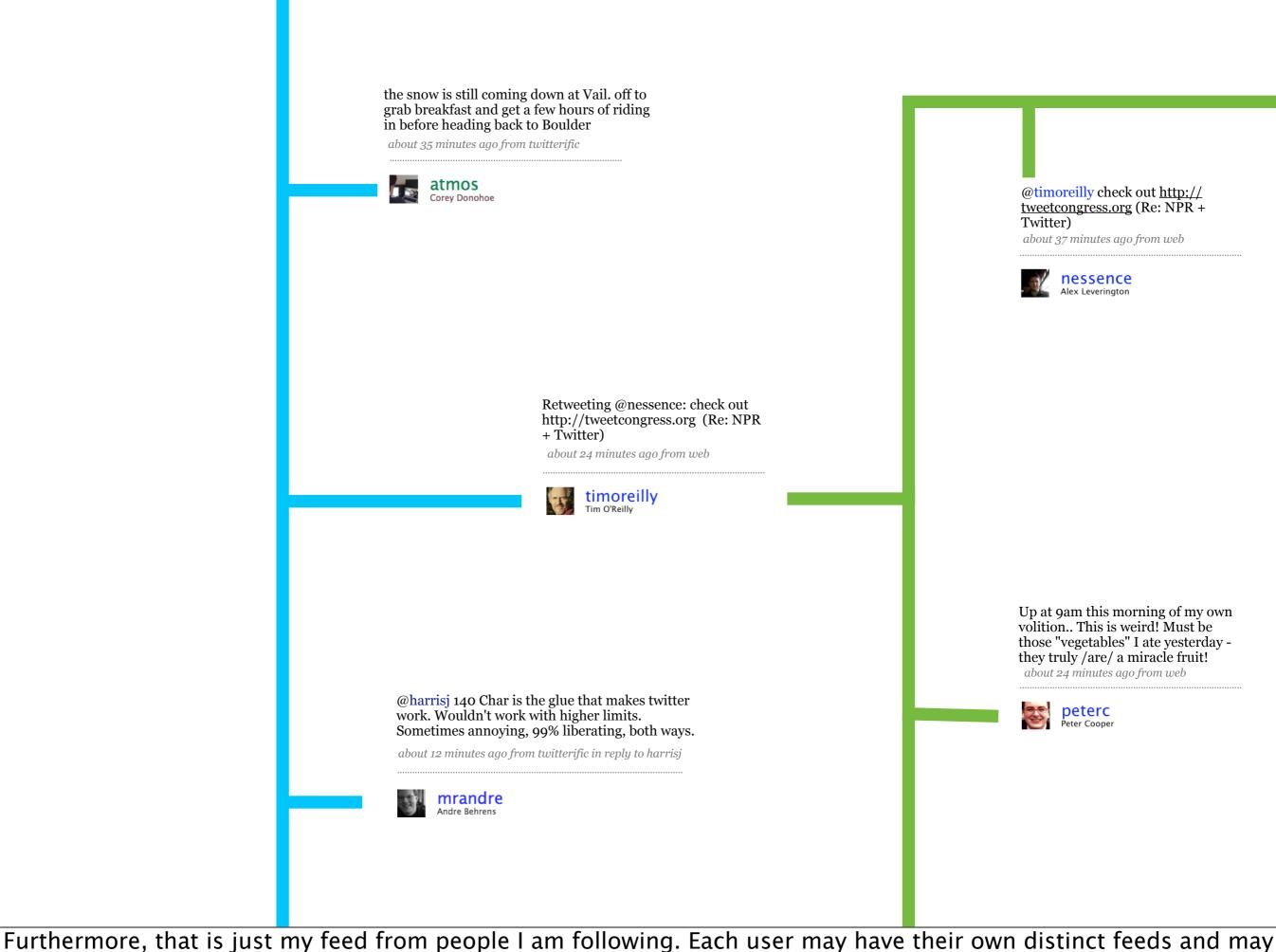
about 12 minutes ago from twitterific in reply to harrisj



mrandre Andre Behrens

And of course, my friends are having their own conversations as well. Put a sequence of messages and you have a feed of messages from people I'm following. Here are 3 more messages from around the same time... Note that these messages do not necessarily have to occur within a particular context, like comments in response to to a blog post or answers below a question....

Also, not all these people are my friends, but I'll get into that in a little bit...



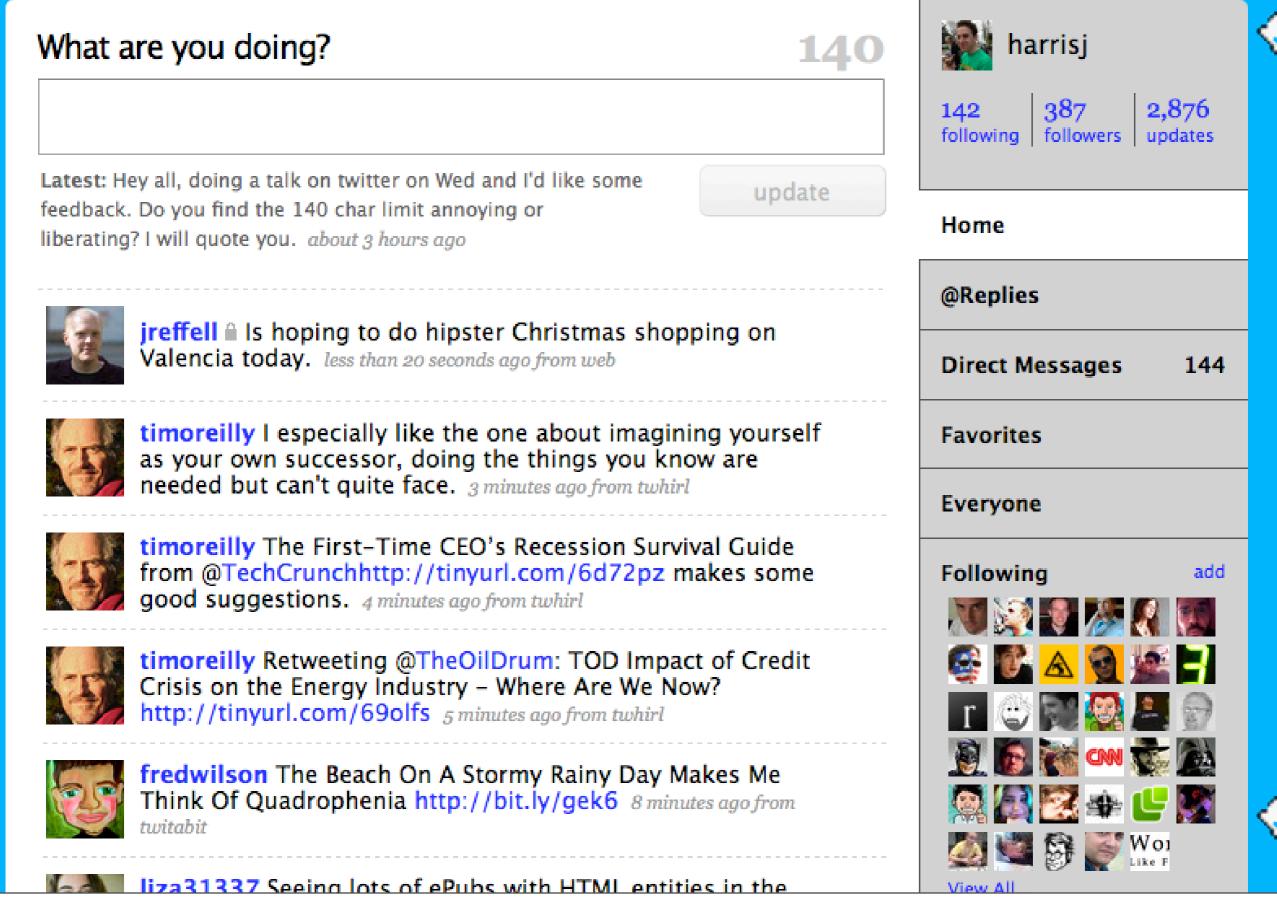
Furthermore, that is just my feed from people I am following. Each user may have their own distinct feeds and may see messages from people they are following that I don't see (because I'm not following them).

You could think of us as truckers on a long highway with CB radios. People who are following me are within range and hear me, but I may have a buddy way down the road who is listening to other truckers too far away for me to hear. The upshot is I may only see one side of a conversation if it's unfolding (although I can often navigate through to the pages of people I'm not following to see the other side).

Back to Tim though, if he hears something he'd like to share with people following him he could repeat it or "retweet" it, propagating it to his network of followers. This is what timoreilly is doing here.

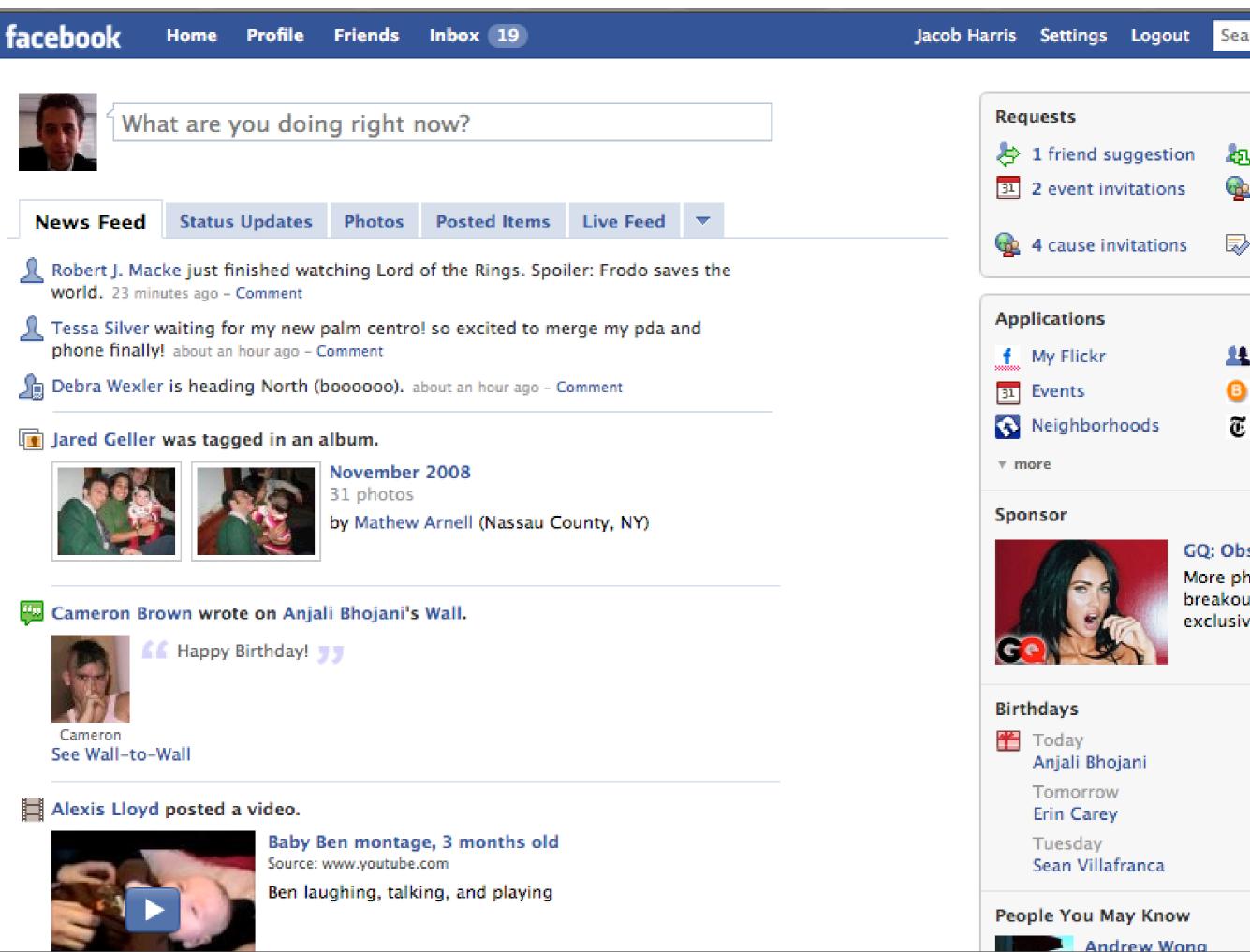
But what does Twitter actually look like?



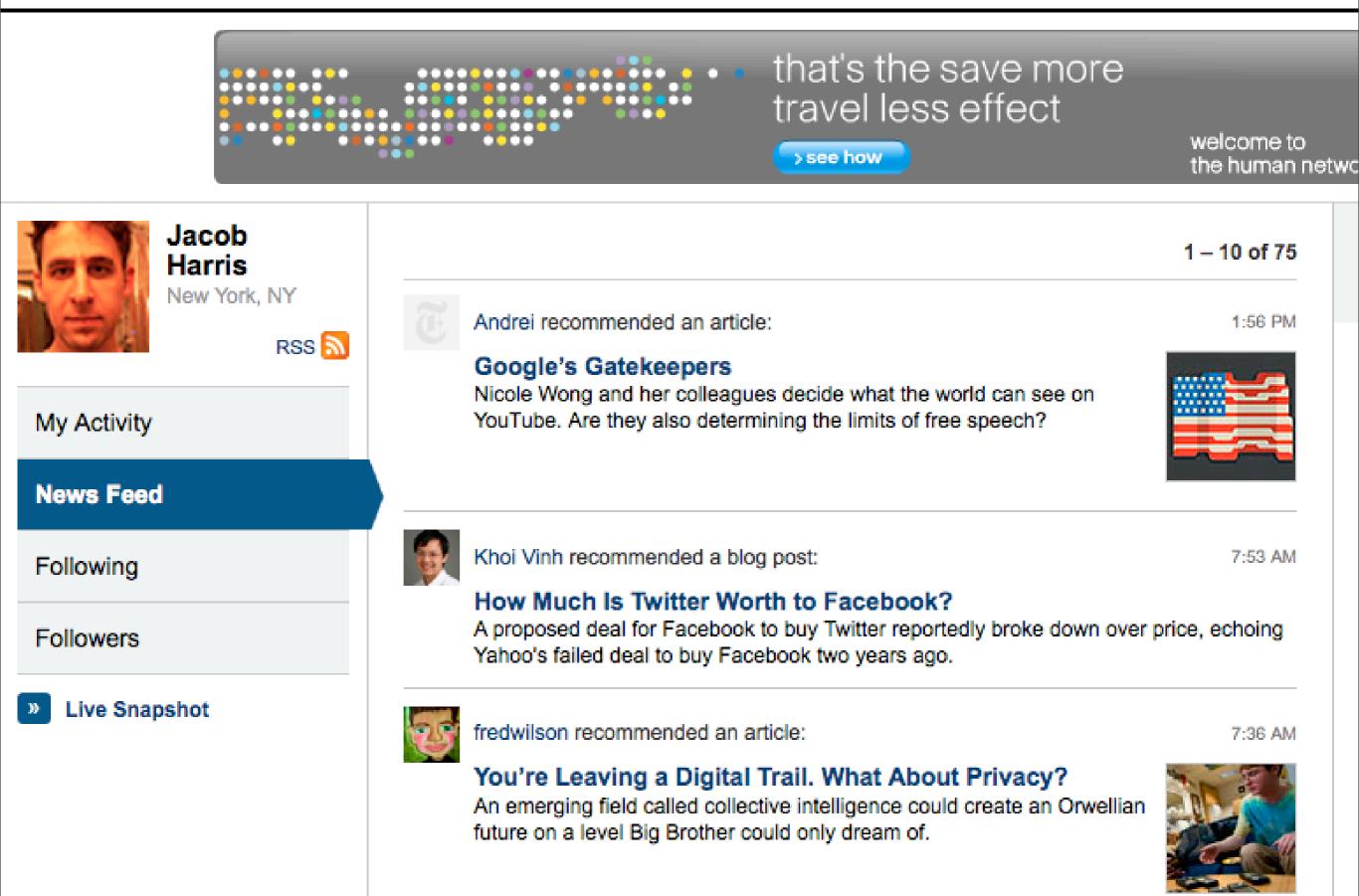


There are a few things to note here:

- 1. This is a feed, not an inbox. While I can scroll back and read old tweets if I have the time and inclination, twitter does not have something like an inbox with unread items. Instead, the model is passive notification.
- 2. When you have a lot of friends online, twitter creates a mental state commonly called "ambient intimacy". Basically, what this means is I have a very rough superficial idea of what all my friends are thinking and doing, even if I haven't talked to them in depth.
- 3. Notice the lock icon next to jreffell's tweet at the top. One common misconception about twitter is that everything is out in the open and public. If you want to keep your tweets private, you can specify that so only friends you can read can see them.



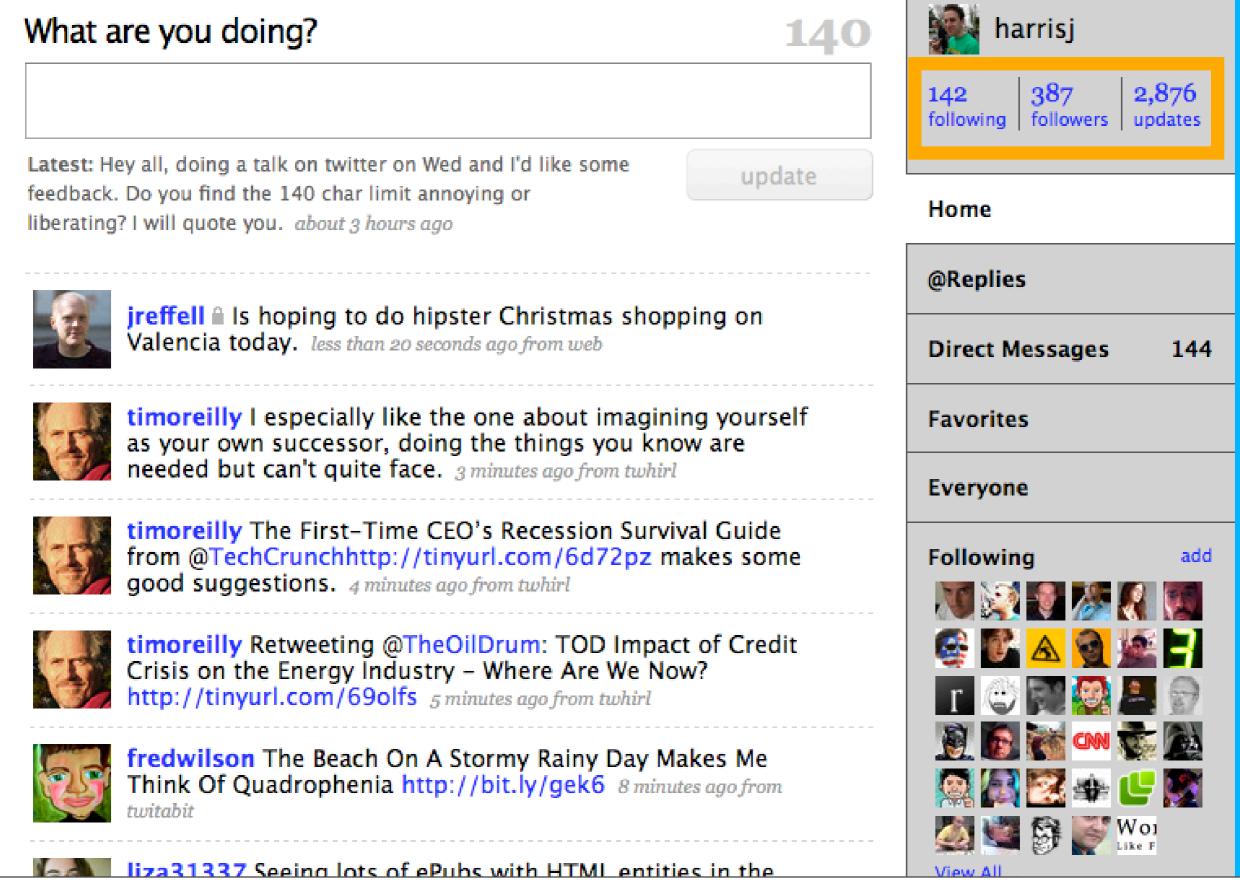
Of course, status updates are not unique to twitter. Facebook allows you to make status updates and they recently made the dialog box more prominent up there to emphasize that functionality. But I've never really liked it. Mainly because it seems ancillary to the main purpose of Facebook, which is annotating and browsing your social network. Status updates are an add-on to the social network. Twitter's raison d'etre is the status update: the social network merely allows you to control what messages you want to see.



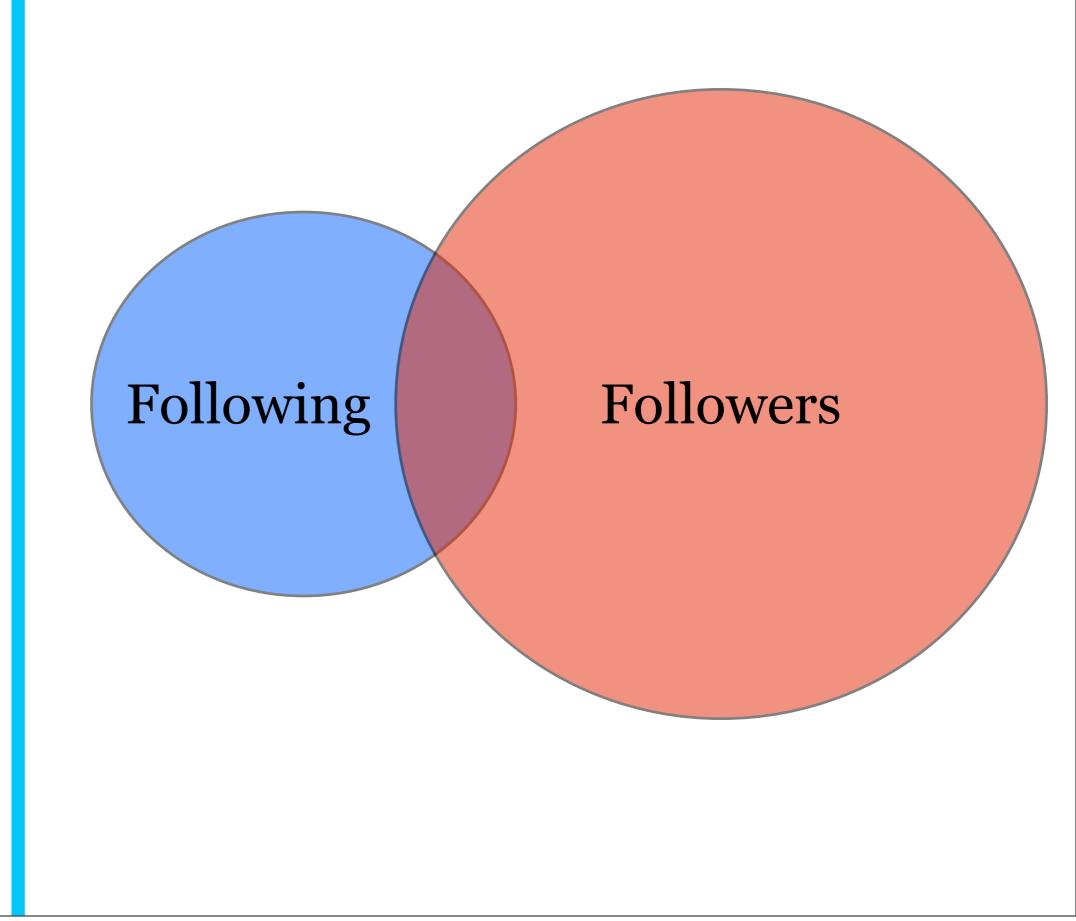
Closer to spirit in Twitter is the new TimesPeople social network, although instead of messages I'm seeing what Times articles my friends are reading. TimesPeople and Twitter are also unlike Facebook in that they allow for assymetrical friendships. What do I mean?

In Facebook, you can only see messages from a person if both you and him and her agree you are friends. You see their messages, they see yours. It's symmetrical. Twitter is different in that it breaks down your relationships into followers (people who read your messages) and people you follow, with no real requirement that you vouch for people to be your friends.





As you see here, I have many more people following my dispatches than are following me... What's that about?



This does seem really strange if you are thinking in social networking terms like Facebook. How can I be someone's friend and he's not mine? But remember, it's not about friendship, it's about communication. It makes sense if there are people whose dispatches I want to read and they are not my friends, and indeed there are some influential people like Tim O'Reilly who doesn't have an inkling who I am... Or to phrase it another way, imagine you could only read Krugman's Op Eds only if he agreed you were a personal friend of his.

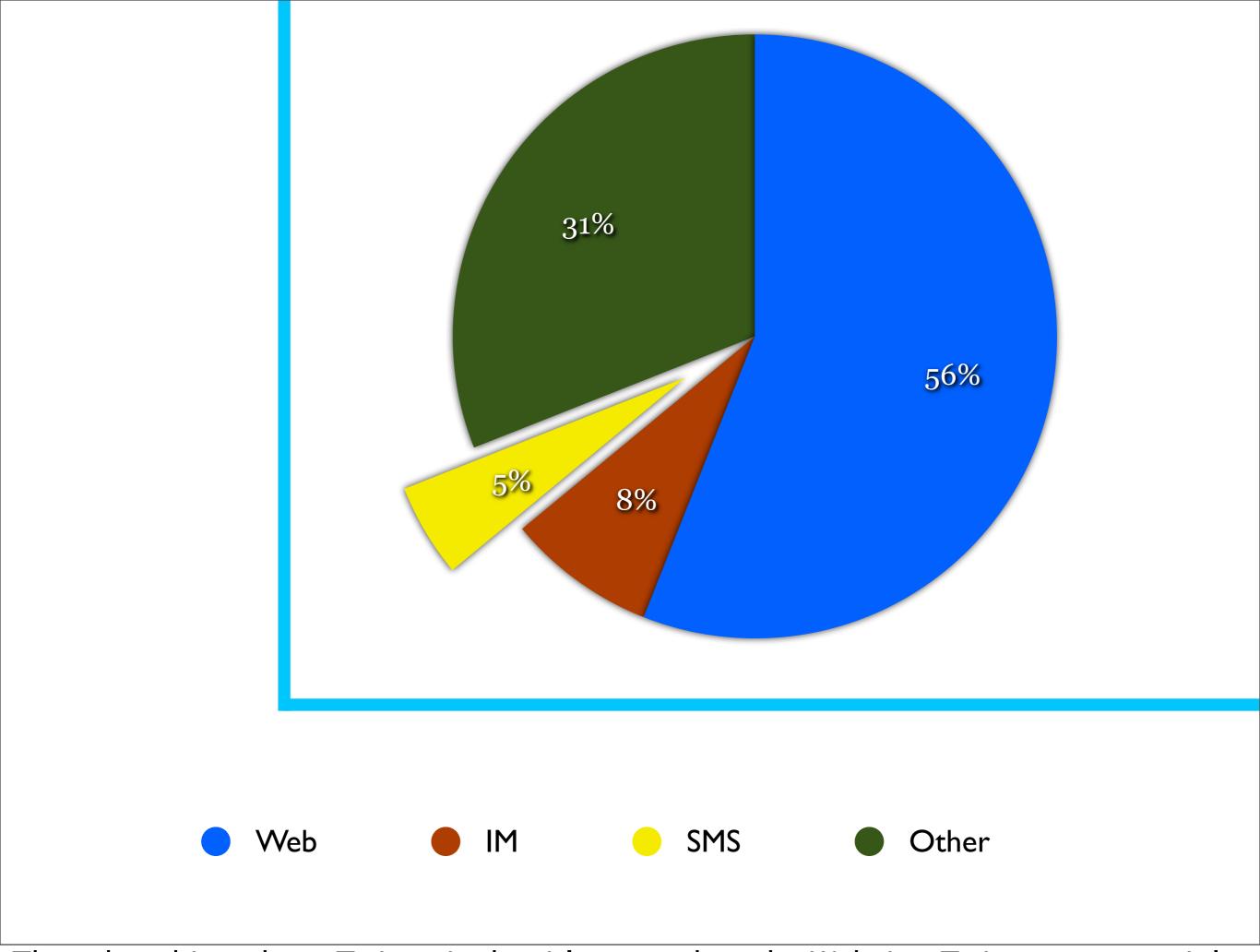
Winner of @copyblogger haiku contest: "I'm following you" / A compliment on Twitter / Not so in real life



01:12 PM November 24, 2008 from twhirl



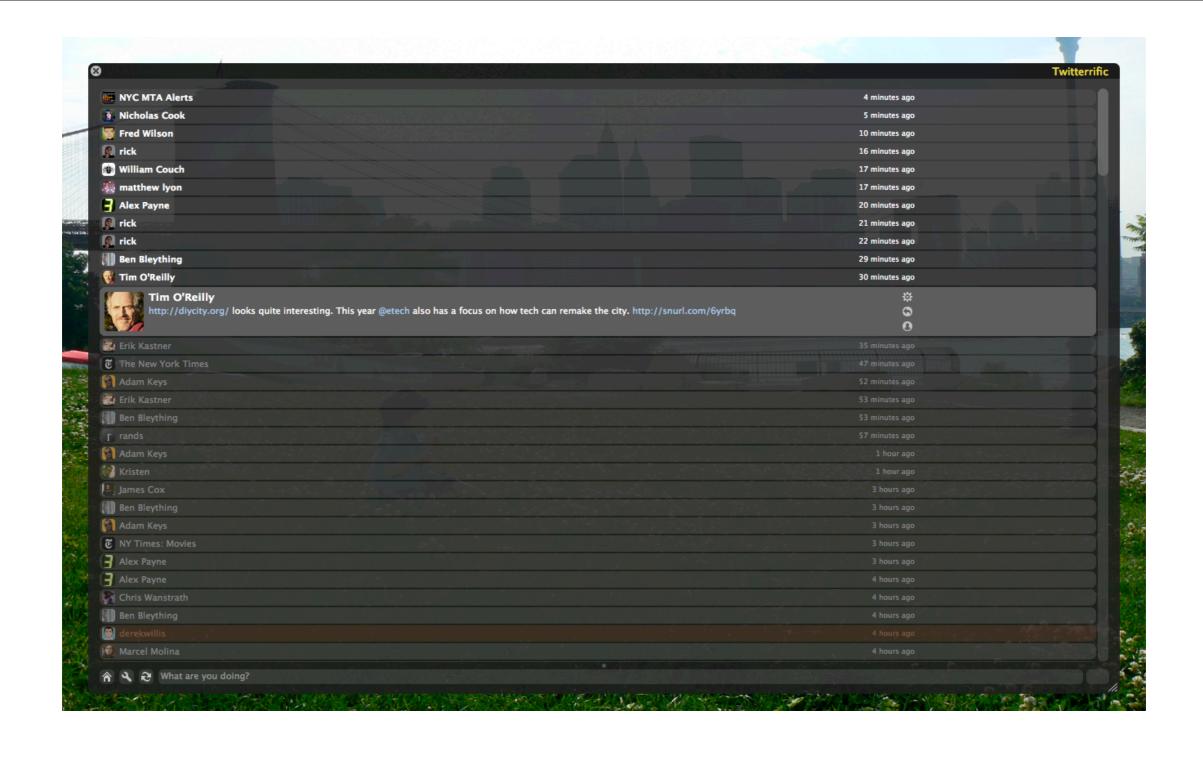
Still, the term "follower" does sound a little creepy sometimes.



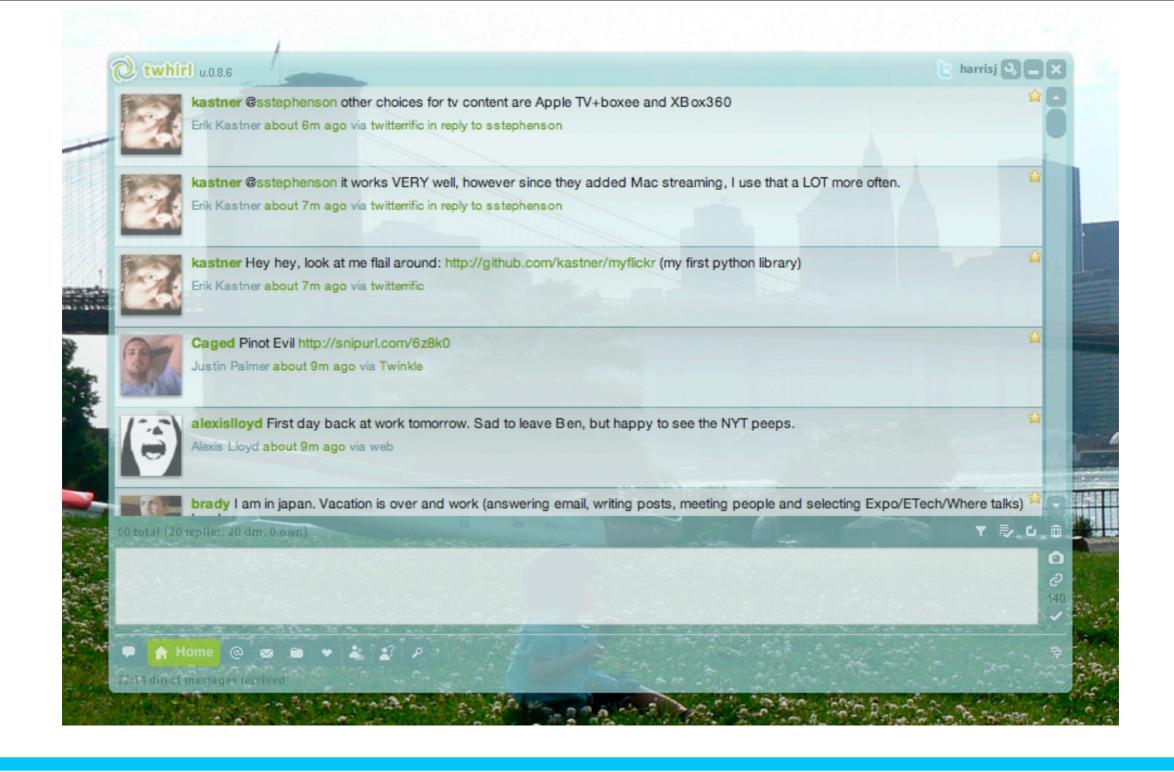
The other thing about Twitter is that it's more than the Website. Twitter was certainly not the only status-update site to emerge a few years ago, but it has managed to fend off all of its competitors (another one, Pownce, just folded this week) because it wasn't just friendly to users, it's friendly to developers too.

Here's a chart of how people post to Twitter made by the site ReadWriteWeb in April. We've talked about the website which garners the bulk of the traffic, and that little slice there is what remains of the SMS users, but note the big green slice. 31% of twitter's users use third-party applications or websites to read and post their twitter traffic, which is remarkable.

From very early on, Twitter has had a simple Application Programming Interface or API which allows computer programs to interact with it. This allows developers to make their own applications that can talk to twitter or their own programs that can post things on their own (more on that later)... here are a few.



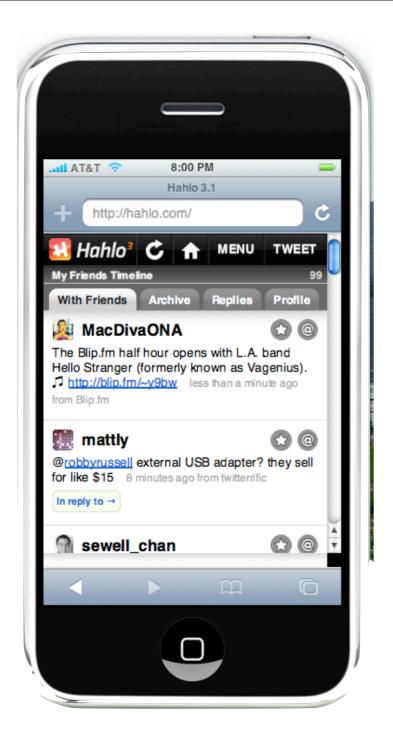
Here is the Mac application Twitterific which has contributes about 8% of the traffic. This is what I use on my machine.



Twhirl is another application that runs on Macs or PCs

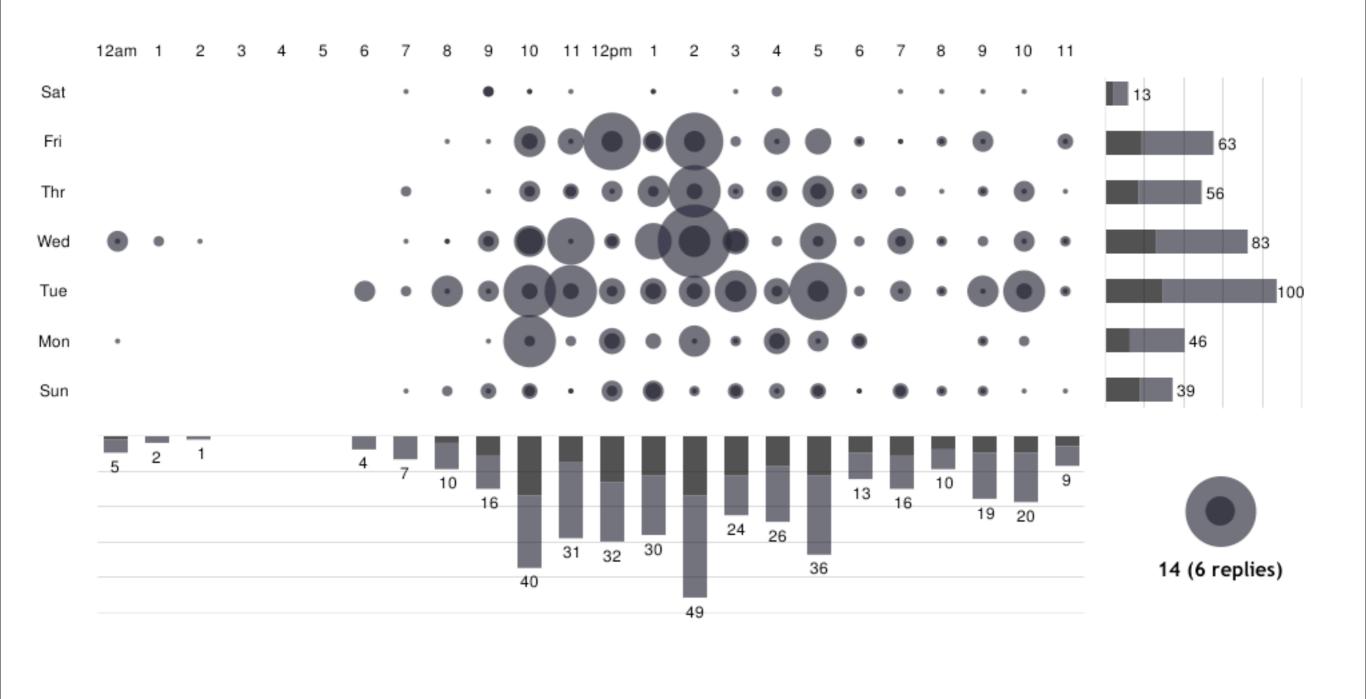


Here is an example of the TwitterFox plugin for Firefox

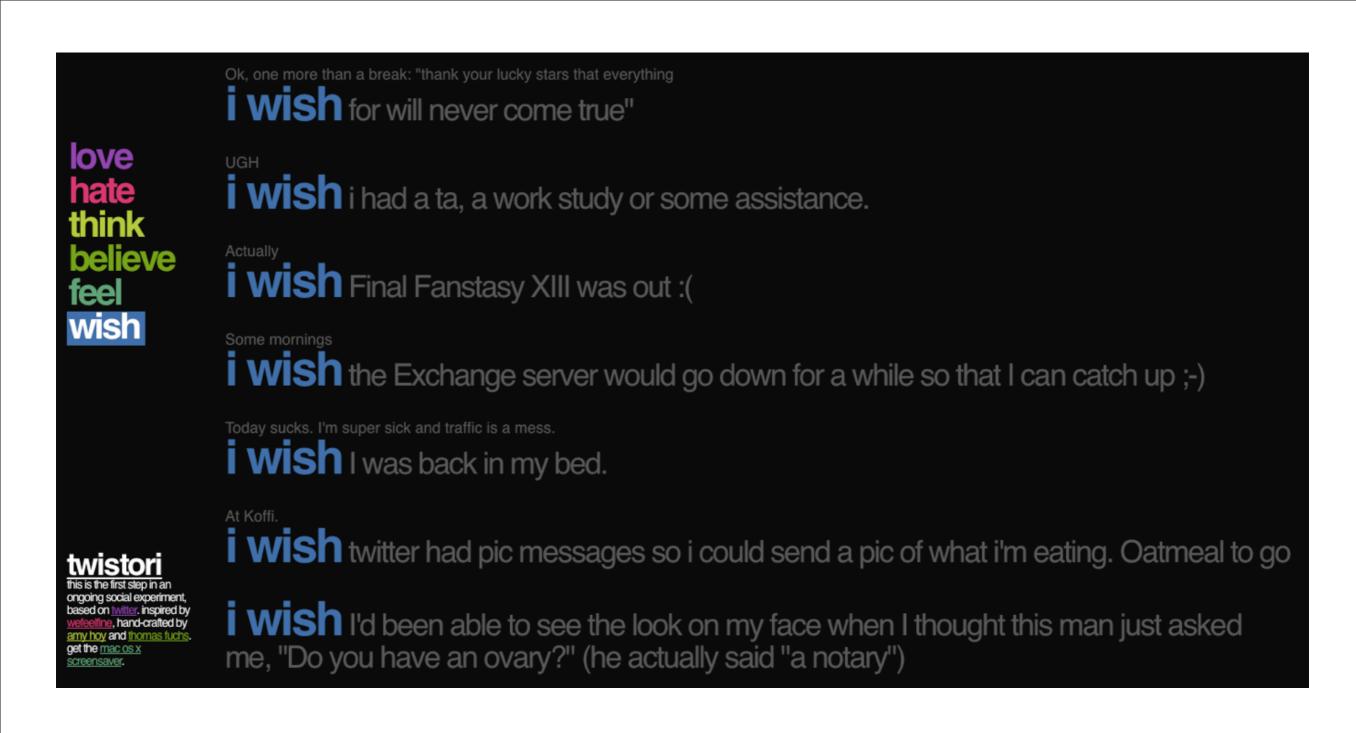




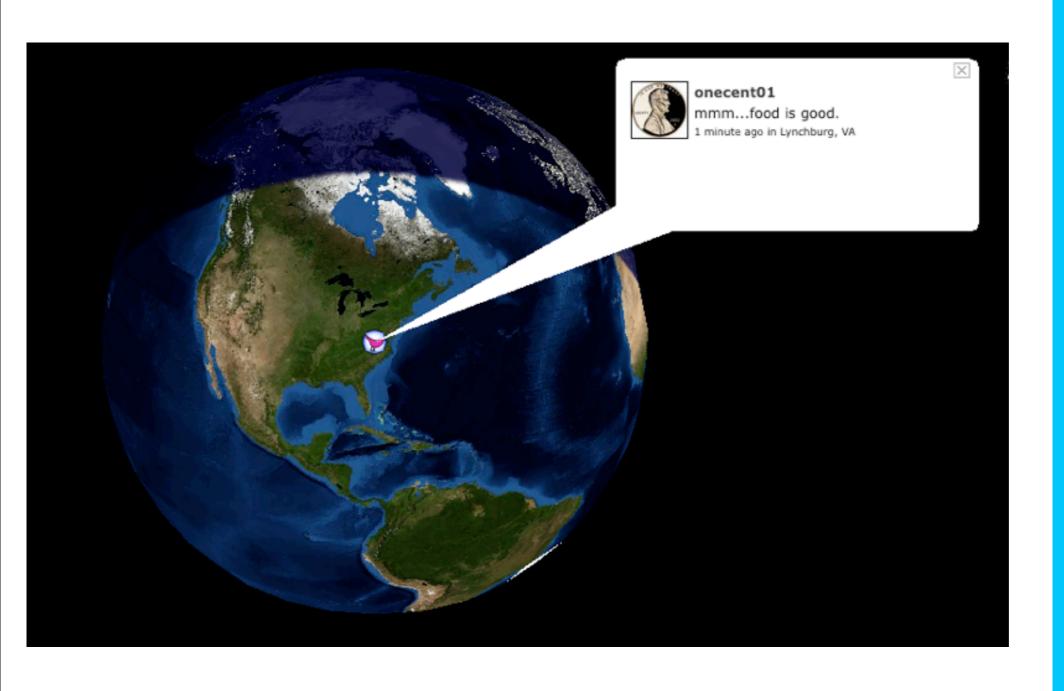
And of course there are applications for your mobile phones. On the iphone, there are both optimized websites and full-fledged applications. For the blackberry, there are at least 2 strong applications as well. And so on for your favorite smartphone.



And there are other interesting applications and websites that play with the Twitter API. Here's one of many that visualizes my personal Twitter usage pattern

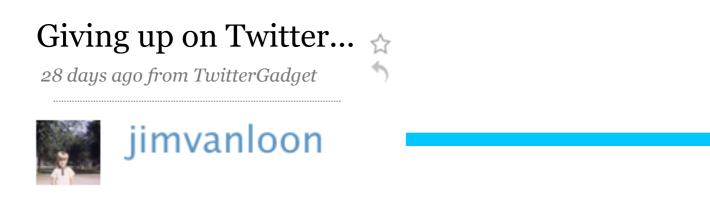


This site twistori displays a zeitgeist of sorts by showing you twit



Here is the site twittervision which uses the geographic information in people's profiles to plot where people are tweeting from.

But enough about how to use twitter, how do you get started?



Currently trying to explain Twitter to my Boomer parents. Their response: "Kelly, why would anyone but us care what you're doing?" touche.

12:49 PM November 26, 2008 from web



keidson

It's phenomenally easy to sign up and find a few friends. The biggest hurdle for most users is usually the soul searching that follows...

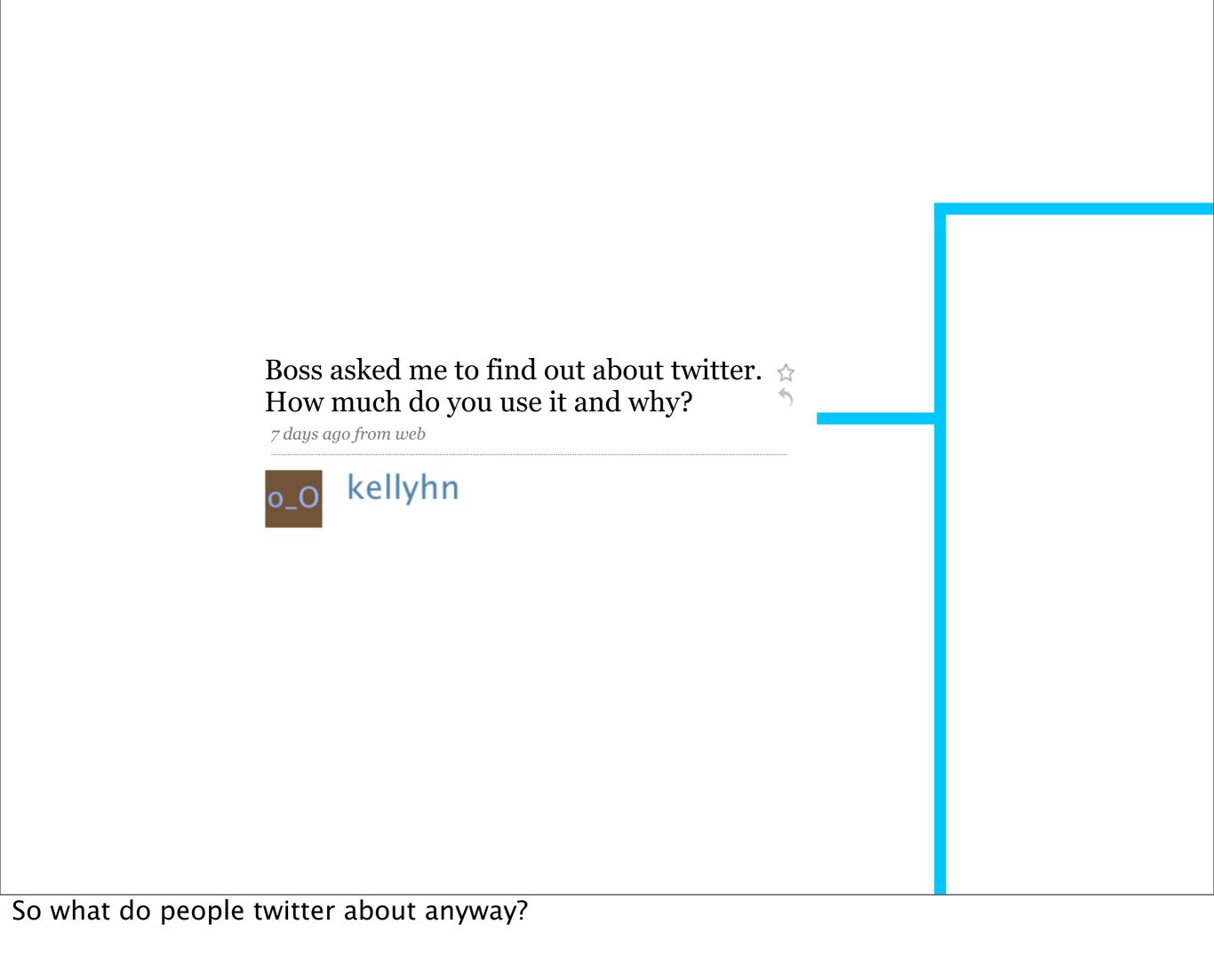
The first stage for many users is soul searching, or Why Bother?

This sort of existential malaise grips most newcomers to twitter, especially if many of their friends aren't on it. I am amused by how many tweets I'd see about "giving up on twitter" that were then followed by other messages...

Still it's a good question, why would the world care what you are twittering about? And the truth is, in most cases, the world doesn't! But I bring this is, because there is an interesting point here about twitter. But you're not twittering to the world, you're twittering to your friends and family. And they do care...

People who attack twitter for being mundane and banal are missing the point. It is mundane, but then again so is most of what I talk about during the day. When I'm talking to my friends we don't quote epigrams from Voltaire or compete to create choice bon mots. We make dumb jokes, we talk about the weather, what's on TV, our weird dreams whatever. The stupid and the trivial are the social glue of conversation.

I like to say that Twitter is stupid, but it's the right kind of stupid...





12:18 PM January 22, 2007 from web



 $12:16\,AM\,November\,25,2008\,from\,web$ 



To be honest, there are a lot of boring responses to the question "What Are You Doing Now?" That's my very first twitter on the left. Wow, I am exciting.

And of course, it makes a lovely electronic soapbox for rants

ProTip: You won't be able to turn that camera on without a battery. And by "You" I really mean "Me".

01:10 PM November 28, 2008 from twitterrific





I suspect that the CNN.com editorial staff consists of a precocious 12-year-old boy, a litter of Dalmatian puppies, and perhaps a coat rack.

03:42 PM November 20, 2008 from web



### hotdogsladies

It's a good place for making fun of yourself or others...

Getting in late. Decided to go sit in a dark corner of the bar with a pen, some napkins and an endless glass of Canadian Club.

☆ ¬

12:32 PM September 30, 2008 from web



"A Marketing Move the 'Mad Men' Would Love," Aug. 13, 2008
"Don\_draper Quits Twitter, Comes Clean," Nov. 17, 2008

Some people like to have fun pretending to be other people, sometimes even real ones. (Of course, you could argue everybody is pretending to be someone online, even if our online personas are ostensibly ourselves).

Good nite people, tune in tomorro same time same place, the shaq twitter show (use yo own theme music ) lol



01:43 AM November 30, 2008 from txt



THE\_REAL\_SHAQ

"The Real O'Neal Puts His Cyber Foot Down," Nov. 19, 2008

And of course there are real celebrities too.

### Several funny Shaq facts:

- 1. He set up a twitter account because there was someone pretending to be Shaq on Twitter already (in a good-natured parody way, not a malicious identity theft way).
- 2. He now has TKTK followers
- 3. He's one of the few people I've seen who's still using SMS for twitter

Police investigation 96th - 34th St, please expect delays in service on the 1, 2 and 3 trains. For more info visit <a href="https://www.mta.info">www.mta.info</a>.

about 3 hours ago from TwitterMail



Water me please. I'm thirsty, so very thirsty. 🖈

12:23 AM July 21, 2008 from web



nytplant

And there are automated programs that use the API to post messages, for things that are both big and small

The plant example is particularly funny. Someone sells a kit with a soil monitor that can post to twitter (via a computer interface). R&D bought one of these kits, so I was seeing how well they take care of their plants. Sadly, this tweet from July was one of the last tweets. I'm starting to get concerned....

Mumbai Blasts: Taj Hotel is a block from my house! Hostages still inside; still burning; smoke is pouring from windows; pics later

09:06 PM November 26, 2008 from web



Time delayed new images from SB Rd posted; Connecting Regal to Nariman Bldg; aka Colaba Causeway; <a href="http://budurl.com/jqzv">http://budurl.com/jqzv</a> #mumbai

06:17 AM November 28, 2008 from web



Citizen Journalists Provided Glimpses of Mumbai Attacks Nov. 29, 2008

And sometimes Twitter is a source for news. Here are some tweets made by an involved blogger about the recent terrorism in Mumbai. He also augmented his coverage with blog posts, flickr photographs, etc. The result was a compelling firsthand account of how things were unfolding, interspersed with the occasional personal tweets like "Getting lunch"

Twitter also broke personal accounts of Sichuan earthquake, etc.

Of course, there are drawbacks to calling this the new journalism. For starters, twitter doesn't reach where the Internet doesn't, whether bandwidth is scarce or censored. And there is the problem of verification... and volume...

#### Twitters mentioning "mumbai"



 $Max = \sim 100$  tweets a minute

Here is a chart of twitters mentioning Mumbai. At its peak, there were 100 tweets a minute. That's a lot of volume to keep up with! The problem is most of it wasn't news...

army should just storm in and hunt those mofos.. we dont want to know who they are/what they want, just kill those bastards #mumbai

03:44 PM November 26, 2008 from twitux



uj

RT @mumbaiupdates: Indian government is asking that the twitter search page #mumbai be shut down

06:54 AM November 27, 2008 from web



The bulk of the messages were tweets like this. Expressions of sympathy or rage, or Retweets of other user's messages.

This second message is particularly interesting because it's a rumor that was an utter fabrication with no basis in reality besides the idea that maybe the terrorists are reading twitter and we shouldn't tip them off... Fair enough, but the Indian gov't didn't say this. And most organizations (except the BBC) were smart enough to actually fact-check that first...

It wasn't until The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times offered up their reports that the whole time line and sequence of events started to make sense.... The future of media is being split into two streams: one that consists of raw news that comes like a torrent from sources such as Twitter, mobile messages and photos, the other, from old media. The eyewitness dispatches (and photos) via social media are an adjunct to the more established media — which needs to focus on providing analysis, context, and crucially, intelligence — in real time.

Om Malik, With Twitter, a Desperate Need for Context

And the biggest problem with the twitter stream is there was no way to see the big picture of what's happening. Even if every tweet were factual first-person perspectives, it's hard to figure out what was REALLY happening and how events were unfolding. It's hard to construct a high-level view from thousands of personal reports flooding in.

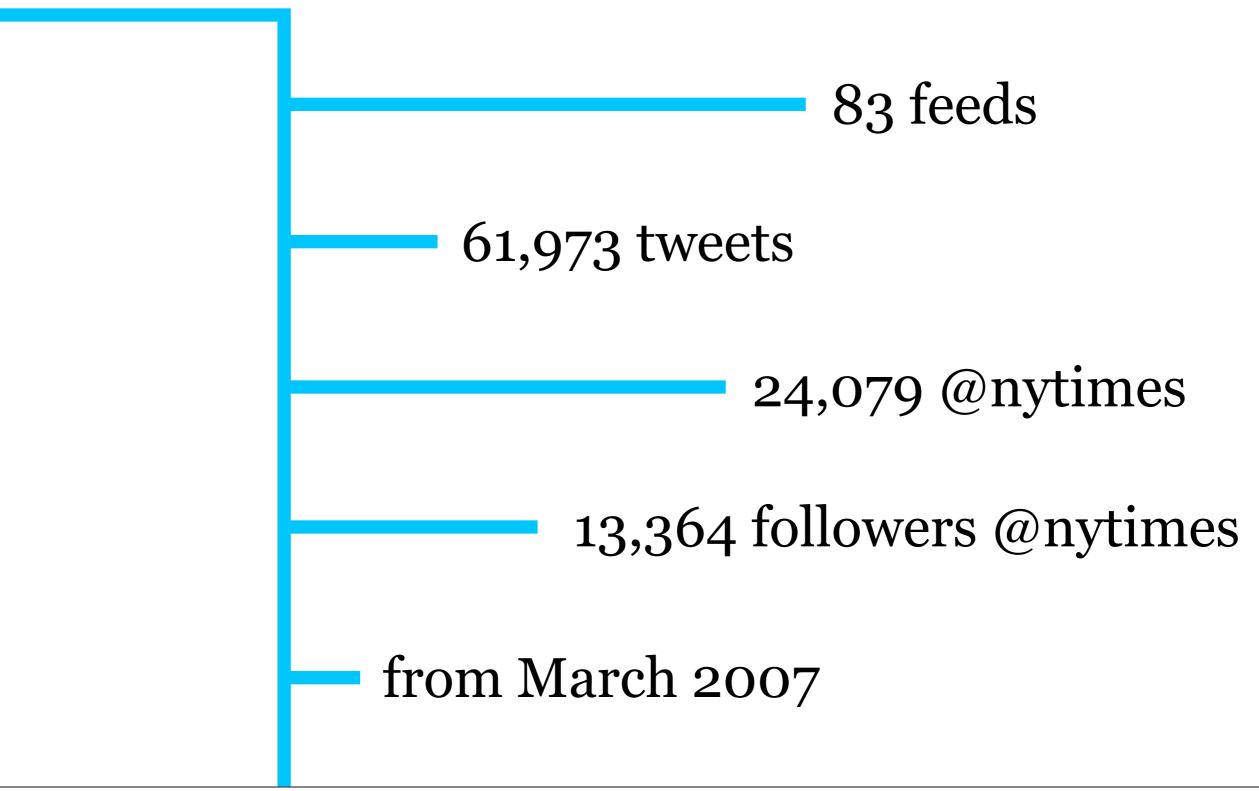
Your best bet there? You can guess...

At Least 16 Dead in India in Coordinated Attacks http://tinyurl.com/5pggch

03:39 PM November 26, 2008 from web



Of course, we are on twitter too... this is the first mention of the Mumbai attacks from the @nytimes twitter account, which is an automated feed of articles posted to the homepage. We also have similar automated accounts for all sections and many blogs. As the story developed on the website, further articles were also posted to the feed.



To give you an idea of numbers, here's information on how long the NY Times has been on twitter and what all our feeds have been doing.

## Mediator Says Ransom Deal Has Been Reached for Pirated Ukrainian Freighter <a href="http://tinyurl.com/699e3u">http://tinyurl.com/699e3u</a>



about 22 hours ago from web



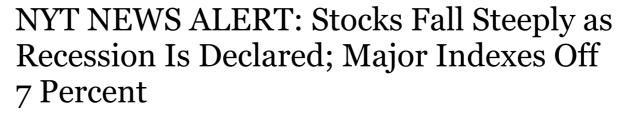
WNYC host Brian Lehrer will be taking reader questions on City Room this week. We'll start taking questions at 6:30 Monday.



about 22 hours ago from web



There are feeds for the newspaper and feeds for blogs.





about 6 hours ago from web



And we also recently added Breaking News Alerts. I like to see how we do against twitter user @cnnbrk, who actually doesn't work for CNN but reposts their email alerts.



3 hours ago from web



### kilpatrickk

Of all the stories to run about Wash. Heights, the NYTimes runs one on how the bus station is a seedy dump. SCORE! My rent will never go up!

11:31 AM October 05, 2008 from web



Still awake and typing - looks like it's only @Debalobo, @nytimes and myself still on twitter.

02:55 AM December 01, 2008 from twitterrific



What kind of feedback do we have?

Of course, people like to talk about us on Twitter and most of the feedback is pretty positive (we also see at least 40-50 retweets a day).

We've continued to fill out the automated feeds on Twitter, but there are a few other interesting directions we could explore

What might be next for the New York Times on Twitter?

### What might be next for the New York Times on Twitter?



10 seconds ago from inside the room



# The New York Times

In this talk, I'm going to tell you what twitter is, look at some of the ways people use it, and finally tell you about how we're using it here at the Times.