



From obscurity to Twitterity in one little tweet

A study of Twitter cites its 'pointless babble' and ends up going viral

By Wendy Marx

A one-day social media whirlwind shows not just how a self-proclaimed geeky company with no PR knowledge emerged from anonymity to become a media darling. It also illustrates how social media is changing how companies make news and how public relations is practiced.

Around 10 a.m. CDT on Aug. 12, Ryan Kelly, the founder and CEO of market insights and analysis firm [Pear Analytics](#) of San Antonio, posted the following on Twitter: "The Twitter Study we mentioned at [#bmprsa](#) is now available: <http://bit.ly/17htXE> interesting results..." Bmprsa is a San Antonio PR and social media group that Kelly had addressed a few weeks before, mentioning the upcoming study.

Almost immediately after he posted the tweet, a friend from sales and marketing company [Sales by 5](#) sent him a Twitter direct message: "Please let me know when you release it, and I'll send it to Mashable."

By 5 p.m. that day, Pear's study was featured on the front page of Mashable, one of the largest blogs discussing social media and technology. By 6 p.m., the study was the top two trending topics on Twitter. Later that evening, Kelly was interviewed by Robert Scoble, formerly of Fast Company and now an evangelist for Rackspace. And from there it went viral.

Do a Google search on Pear Analytics today, and you'll see some 500 articles from everyone from the BBC to CNET to NBC.com to outlets worldwide writing about its study. It's the sort of publicity a company would pay a big chunk of change to get.

Besides pointing out the phenomenal "make or break" quality of social media, there's a delicious irony to Pear's story. Its study's big news was that 40 percent of Twitter messages are what it cleverly called "pointless babble" with just 8.7 percent of tweets to be deemed of value with worthwhile news content.

Of course, without Twitter, Pear's study might have seen the fate of so many studies that end up unread and unreported. Nothing like soaring to prominence on a medium you're denigrating.

What's also fascinating about Pear's story is that the company followed none of the traditional PR practices. No press release. No outreach to media. No loud announcement.

So what's the secret to Pear's PR success?

"I can attribute its success to a few things," says Kelly, who was as surprised as anyone that the study took off. "I know nothing about PR. One, by analyzing the Twitter stream and categorizing the content, we did something no one else had done. Where, however, we really struck a chord was by labeling the most popular category, "pointless babble." I think if we would have named this something else, it may not have gone as far. Most of the news outlets used that phrase in their headlines.

"And lastly, I have to say we had a little luck that day in that no other major news happened that week—like Michael Jackson—that would have buried our news easily."

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