

# 2.0 watch

DISPATCHES FROM THE FRONT LINES OF WEB 2.0

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## A Little Birdie Told Me Taking our conversations online

By **Amanda** Etches-Johnson



This image is a screenshot of an update I posted to Twitter a couple of months ago. Yes, I am a tea drinker, and yes, having a thermos full of my favourite tea is tweet-worthy. But that's not what this article is about. This article is about what happened after I posted that update on Twitter.

### Conversation Happens

Soon after I published that tweet, one of my followers inquired about my favourite tea, to which I responded with as many details as I could in 140 characters. Not 10 minutes after the exchange, I received an email message letting me know that someone called "bigelowtea" was now following me on Twitter ("following" is the equivalent to "friending" or subscribing to someone's updates on Twitter). A quick review of bigelowtea's profile revealed that it was, indeed, the official Twitter profile for a specialty tea company that any tea drinker would instantly recognize: Bigelow Tea. My reaction? These Bigelow people are smart!

Bigelow Tea is not the only company trawling social media sites to see what their customers are saying about them specifically or about their product more generally. Andrea Wright, a colleague in the US, told me a similar story about complaining about her faulty Comcast connection on Twitter. Twitter user "comcastcares" contacted her immediately to ask if he could help. The user account "comcastcares" belongs to Comcast's Director of Digital Care; a quick look at his profile on Twitter displays an end-

less stream of interactions with other Twitter users, most of whom are taking their complaints about their cable service to Twitter. Andrea admitted to me that her back-and-forth exchange with comcastcares did not actually solve her cable problem, but it did make her feel better about the customer service she was getting from the company.

Another Twitter friend reported that Twitter user “zappos” began following her after she posted about the online shoe store, Zappos.com, just once. Yet another mentioned that his cell phone provider contacted him when he mentioned them by name in a Twitter update. I recently noticed that Jet Blue Airways (“JetBlue” on Twitter) responded to a distressed tweet from a frequent flier who left his iPod on a Jet Blue plane. And H&R Block (“HRBlock” on Twitter) uses its Twitter presence to jump in and respond to tax questions, queries, and tales of tax time woe from Twitter users.

### **Getting in on the Conversation**

While I have no particular loyalty to any of these companies (nor do I own their stock), I will admit that their social media outreach strategies are admirable. If you spend some time clicking around Twitter, you will see that corporate Twitter accounts are now common (GM, Honda, Kodak, and Southwest Airlines are just a few recognizable names), and most of those accounts have real people behind them. For example, Southwest’s Twitter bio notes, “Airplanes can’t type so Christi is responding/chatting with

you!” ([twitter.com/SouthWestAir](https://twitter.com/SouthWestAir)) and Starbucks’s profile is described as “Freshly brewed tweets from Brad at Starbucks in Seattle, WA” ([twitter.com/starbucks](https://twitter.com/starbucks)).

What these companies have realized is that Twitter is just another online channel to communicate with their customers. A few short years ago, we saw a proliferation of articles in the media discussing a new online format called blogs, and that forward-thinking companies were tapping into the potential to engage in conversations with their customers via blogs. The same is now true for Twitter.

### **Don’t Let the Conversation Happen without You**

In my last column I mentioned a few libraries that are starting to experiment with Twitter. Since then, many more libraries have taken to the service and I’ve been heartened as I’ve watched those libraries use the tool to not only talk, but to listen. The reply function in twitter (appending “@” before someone’s username lets them know that you are replying to their previous post) facilitates conversation quite effectively, so once your users start following you, make sure you follow them too and don’t be shy about engaging them in conversation. Additionally, you can make use of Twitter’s search feature ([search.twitter.com](https://search.twitter.com)) to find out what the Twitterverse is saying about your library/community (thank you, Bigelow Tea, for the lesson) and jump in where appropriate. If there’s a lesson to be learned from the corporate move to Twitter, it’s that there is no guarantee that you’ll like everything you hear people saying about you, but you’re better off being in on that conversation than ignoring it.

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