

Introduction

Microblogging is a similar publishing method to blogging, although in this case the content is generally very short. The best example is Twitter, which allows users to publish 140-character sentences as their posts. Users can follow each other, so they are updated whenever someone makes a new post. As this is really just a scaled down version of blogging, features such as rich text editors are not required which means that microblogging is generally more accessible. The smaller scale also means that microblogs can easily be accessed from mobile devices.

Considerations

- **If you are using Twitter it has a Captcha when registering.** The Captcha system for preventing spam is not accessible to screen reader users unless an alternative is offered. In some cases the audio version can be just as hard to use so support may be required for the initial login.
- **Accessible Twitter is an alternative to the main Twitter site** that provides a more accessible interface. It still uses the main Twitter service, but is optimised for screen reader and keyboard only users by providing features such as keyboard accessible links.
<http://www.accessibletwitter.com/>
- **Microblogging has no message threading.** This can make it very hard to follow a subject based discussion especially if other messages come in between. There is a search feature but it can bring up many random results. Be aware of the importance of keywords and context in all messages.
- **Extensive use of abbreviations and contracted language.** This can affect readability and issues for those using screen readers. Try to keep to conventional abbreviations wherever possible.
- **URLs should be recognisable if possible.** Try to keep to the full URL if possible, although in many cases a shortened one using a service such as TinyURL (<http://tinyurl.com/>) is the only way to complete the message within the 140 characters.
- **Be careful about advice on software tools that interface microblogging sites.** Although you may have chosen an accessible web tool for your microblog, there are many third party software tools that are used to interface with the microblog that are not as accessible. However, it is possible to use a tool such as Twinbox (<http://www.techhit.com/>) that works in Outlook which may be easier for some. Twiterrific (<http://iconfactory.com/software/twiterrific>) and Syrinx (<http://www.mrrsoftware.com/MRRSoftware/Syrinx.html>) are reported to be accessible for MAC, iPhone, and iPod users.

Additional Resources

- Web2Access can help you decide which microblogging service to use, based on accessibility tests.
<http://www.web2access.org.uk/activity/11/>
- Common Craft provide a screencast about Twitter, and how it can be used.
<http://www.commoncraft.com/twitter>
- Microblogging – USA government site provides an explanation of how microblogging can be used in organisations, as well as outlining some accessibility issues.
<http://www.usa.gov/webcontent/technology/microblogging.shtml>
- Making Twitter Tweet – AbilityNet Podcast with transcription on “understanding the limitations and requirements of user’s (user’s with disabilities) of assistive technology such as screen readers” by Steve Faulkner, The Paciello Group.
<http://www.abilitynet.org.uk/direct/podcasts.html>