

Missourians find their inner twitter

BY STEPHANIE HALL
News Editor

While Ashton Kutcher and CNN raced for 1 million followers on Twitter, it left many wondering, "What's the point?"

Twitter is a popular form of micro-blogging that prompts users to answer the question, "What are you doing?" Many people from Truman, Kirksville and other parts of Missouri have signed up to answer that question and follow others' responses.

With 140 followers, State Rep. Rebecca McClanahan, D-Kirksville, was one of the first in the Missouri House of Representatives to start Twittering.

"Well, you can't avoid the fact that it's fun," McClanahan said. "Actually what I think motivated me to get started was the opportunity to communicate with people that are constituents or other people that are interested in what we're doing here in the House of Representatives."

McClanahan said she makes an effort to tweet about a variety of subjects, from the actions in the House of Representatives to more personal observations.

"I think it's just one additional way of getting to know me, and when people know me, know what I care about and know what my passions are, I would hope people would feel more comfortable communicating with me in other ways," McClanahan said.

Because many politicians have started using Twitter, McClanahan said she tweets as a tool for learning as well.

"I've actually learned several things about the legislature and the process going on in the legislature from other legislators tweeting," she said. "Even finding out what they're doing, or issues they're working on or even their perspective of their debate on the floor."

Senior Casey Millburg, also known as the Kirksville Socialite, a local well-known blogger, has both a personal and professional Twitter for the Socialite.

"Well, first of all, I think it's just ridiculous fun," Millburg said. "... It gives me a chance to be online and keep in touch with what other people are doing."

For the Socialite, she uses Twitter to post stories from the blog and uses it as a source for blog topics, Millburg said.

"I usually try and keep my subscription feed to people who are in Kirksville or at Truman State, or if they pertain to Missouri in general, and so I have a few politicians," Millburg said.

She said she likes the tweets of State Sen. Jeff Smith, D-St. Louis, because they have the perfect balance of politics and personality.

"I look for individuality, I mean a willingness to be personal," Millburg said. "I

think there's a very clear way to be personal and professional at the same time. I mean the whole 140 characters thing limits the amount of info, but there needs to be a willingness to be more informal and to talk about things that you do daily."

A particular pet peeve of Millburg's is when people use Twitter as a form of therapy or to dictate their daily activities.

"It has to be something — it's not earth-shattering — but has a purpose other than tweeting for the sake of tweeting," Millburg said. "It can honestly range from the crazy squirrels that live outside my house to just learning that the rapper Rick Ross is actually a licensed corrections officer."

The Blue Note concert venue in Columbia has utilized Twitter for more than a year, but Marketing Promotions Manager Sean Allmeyer said that within the last month he has seen an increase in Twitter's popularity. He said The Blue Note recently has received 100 more followers on Twitter.

"We figure the more ways we can reach people and get them information, the more likely they are to buy tickets to our shows, which is the ultimate goal," Allmeyer said.

In addition to Twitter, The Blue Note has a MySpace page, a Facebook page and an e-mail list, but Allmeyer said he noticed an increase in hits on the Web site from Twitter.

"At first I thought [Twitter] was kind of trivial, but so was MySpace when it started, but I guess people just really like micro-blogging," Allmeyer said. "The responses we've been getting, we've been getting more here recently, so might as well keep doing it until the next big thing starts, then we'll probably jump on that one."

Todd Kuhns, web integration manager at Truman and Kirksville City Council member, said he considers tweeting a part of his job. He said he looks at new technology to see how it would benefit the University.

"I'm supposed to ... help the University leverage these technologies to attract students and make it easier for faculty to connect with students and students to connect with each other," he said.

Kuhns said using Twitter and other technology really opens up a window for younger people to communicate with each other. However, he said he has had trouble coming up with communications of his own.

"I sort of decided [that] if I focus on City Council issues, city issues and how my day goes in regards to how the city government's working, it doesn't feel as conceited to me and as selfish," Kuhns said.

He said he mainly tweets about city government issues, but he occasionally slips in more personal tweets.

"I'm amazed at the people that figure out I'm Twittering and follow me," Kuhns said. "That's been a weird experience. 'How did you [know] I was doing this? Why do you even care?' I'm flattered but a little disturbed."

Junior Kelley Seitter created a Twitter account two months ago to stay in touch with a friend.

"I had no idea what it was at first," Seitter said. "I didn't understand the point to it really because it's like Facebook status updates, which I've never understood the point of that either. I use it mainly to get information from other people, not to put my information out there. I don't know why anyone would be interested in following me."

Seitter said she uses Twitter to get her news by following CNN and NPR. She said she follows everyone from politicians like Claire McCaskill to celebrities like Jimmy Fallon, John Mayer and Rainn Willson.

She said the amount she tweets depends on the day, but her tweets usually are nerdy topics about her science classes.

"Some days where I hate everything, I'm going to complain about it through tweeting," Seitter said.

Communication Department Chair Elizabeth Clark said she started tweeting after a fellow professor told her about it.

"I'm always puzzled that people would take the time to write what things they are doing in a minute-by-minute way or a moment-by-moment way," Clark said. "I'm always curious about what kind of function that serves individually for people that do it — is it a means of catharsis, an informal diary, or is it their means of gaining their 15 minutes of fame because they're broadcasting in their own little way?"

Clark said some professional organizations have trouble integrating Twitter into their work. She said an example of this is when reporters were dispatched to the Democratic Convention to cover politics and ended up tweeting about celebrities' outfits.

"[This incident] was cited as one of the problems of people trying to incorporate new technology just to incorporate new technology when it had little to do with the work of reporting the news, so there is a lot of controversy about that," Clark said.

She said she doesn't tweet as much as her students but thinks Twitter reaches out to today's portable users.

"There's a cycle to every technology," Clark said. "At some point there will be something that comes in and replaces Twitter that we may have not thought of now, something that may not be on anyone's drawing board yet but that will better meet the needs or desires of consumers at that point, and it's hard to tell what that's going to be."

twitter

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