

YOU ARE WHAT YOU tweeet

Food Diaries gain popularity Online in 09
By Kim Thomas

A recent study published in the *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* found that people who keep a food journal lose twice the weight of those who rely on dieting and exercising alone.

Do you find yourself somewhat Internet-dependent these days? I know the symptoms, trust me. Sometimes it begins as simply the malady known as Blackberry thumb, then you find yourself trying to gently convince your Facebook friends to stop sending those pesky environmentally guilt-driven Lil' Green Patch requests, or adjusting your MySpace settings so your not-so-discreet friends? If you update your status on both MySpace and Facebook on an hourly basis, you might be a NetNeck. If you have had to block a family member because they will only RSVP through MySpace, then yes, that family member may too be a NetNeck?

I'll be the first to admit, I love being in touch this way. In fact, I have somehow formatted my \$19 phone so that, apart from texting, I can also access yahoo, MySpace and Facebook

with just a few touches (and waiting for 5 minutes that seem like forever) to connect. However, all this activity, which isn't really activity, per se, as it only involves exercising my fingers, is probably what has caused my stretch-denim jeans to be stressed to screaming at the seams, and my previously modest necklines to plunge into the abyss of never before seen cleavage only naturally found on nursing mothers.

With the challenge of finding flattering clothes, and knowing that I don't get up and walk or exercise nearly enough because I'm too busy seeing who's playing Twirl or has removed me from their Top Friends (sniff), it occurs to me that perhaps I just might have reached my Internet social networking point of saturation and mayhaps I should pare back my time spent at the keyboard and use that time to get myself up and running, jogging, walking, or heaven forbid, doing housework.

Just as my skinny jeans laughed at me and I was about to lose any motivation to rid myself of the extra poundage,

along comes (new to me/old to teens) Twitter.

This micro-blogging service, Twitter has emerged as a powerful tool for communication, networking, seeking out like-minded tweeters, and now, it appears that tweeting on twitter might even lead to...weight loss? It's true.

Twitter's new sidekick, TweetWhatYouEat, implements a free and easy tool to help users stick with their New Year's resolutions by tracking their calories. That's right! With TweetWhatYouEat.com, Twitter users can track their food intake and weight from their mobile phone, instant messaging, or the Web.

History

TweetWhatYouEat was founded and developed by New York native Alex Ressi, who describes himself as a "creative entrepreneur. After graduating from the University of Wisconsin, where he studied film as a Comm Arts major, he

went back to New York, where he worked in Product Development for web-based enterprises — primarily focusing on Games, community, and emerging technology — for the last 10 years.

Best of all, don't even have to know the calories of the food you're eating. TweetWhatYouEat's proprietary CrowdCal database will automatically fill calories in for you! While the CrowdCal database is unique, it's not all about the calories. Unlike other food diaries, you don't have to pick apart your food piece by piece. If you eat a cheeseburger, you enter cheeseburger in your TweetWhatYouEat diary, the database will figure out the rest. We wanted to remove the barriers that make food tracking difficult and this is as simple as it gets," says Ressi.

What's a Twitter, you may ask?

Twitter is a free social networking and micro-blogging service that allows its users to send and read other users' updates (otherwise known as tweets), which are text-based posts of up to 140 characters in length. Updates are displayed on the user's profile page and delivered to other users who have signed up to receive them. Senders can restrict delivery to those in their circle of friends (delivery to everyone being the default). Users can receive updates via the Twitter website, SMS, RSS, or email, or through an application such as Tweetie, Twinkle, TwitterFon, Twiterrific, Feedalizr, and Facebook. In September of 2008, Twitter had well over 5 million visitors which was a fivefold increase over the month of August.

You'll need a Twitter account to use Tweetwhatyoueat which you can register for free at www.twitter.com. Once you've created a Twitter account, follow the guided registration instructions on www.tweetwhatyoueat.com.

Tweet What You Eat (TWYE) suggests you can use your internet addiction to lose weight. Ressi says he came up with the concept in the summer of 2007, when he wanted to lose weight for his upcoming fall wedding. "I needed a simple tracking tool that would allow me to log my eating habits from just about anywhere. I wasn't interested in using any existing tool that would force me to pick apart my food entries piece-by-piece in order to figure out calorie values. I needed a simple food diary that I could use to track my eating so I could begin to make changes to my diet. I knew exactly what I was looking for, so rather than hunting around for something may or may not exist already, I set off to build it myself."

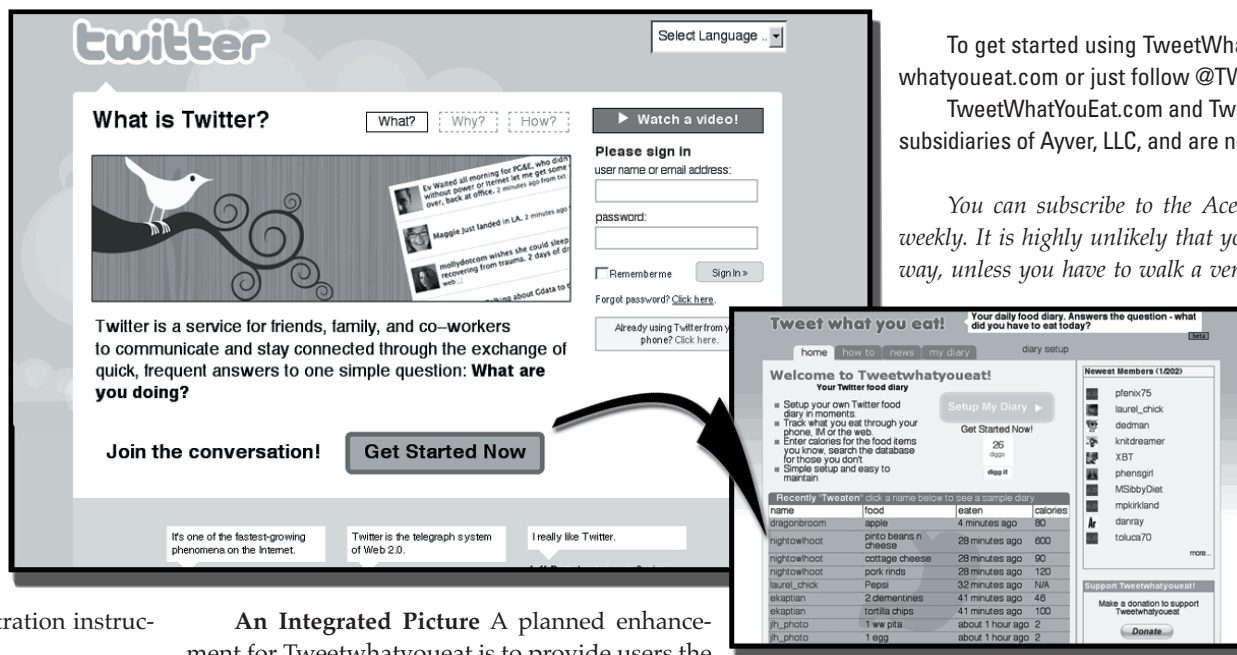
Ressi first heard of Twitter early in 2007. "Intrigued by the concept, I recruited a selection of friends to try it out with me. As I began to use the service, I immediately saw the value of Twitter as a messaging platform, and decided to build Tweetwhatyoueat using Twitter's platform. The primary reason for this choice was the accessibility Twitter's platform provided, allowing users to post updates from their mobile phones, IM or the web."

Alex claims that from start to finish it took about 6 months to produce Tweetwhatyoueat. "I was working on it in my spare time while working a full time job (though not at

Twitter). The folks at Twitter have been extremely helpful along the way, providing guidance and support. While I'm not affiliated with Twitter, I do keep in touch with the team there" and he says they're fans of the app.

According to Ressi, there are a number of reasons for using Tweetwhatyoueat to track your eating habits:

Privacy With Tweetwhatyoueat, you can choose to make your eating habits public, or keep them private. Tweetwhatyoueat allows you to send food diary entries via Twitter's direct message which means your followers won't see them. You can also log food entries publicly by adding @twye plus your food entry to your tweets. Tweetwhatyoueat allows you to maintain one Twitter account which you can use for all your Twitter activity, including privately tracking your food intake and weight along with your regular Twitter activities.



An Integrated Picture A planned enhancement for Tweetwhatyoueat is to provide users the ability to see their Twitter timeline juxtaposed with their food entries allowing them to easily identify different eating triggers and contextualize their food intake. This is something no other food diary can easily provide. Status updates are the core DNA of Twitter. Seeing your status updates (or Tweets) in-line with the food you eat will help you identify trends and triggers with your eating and weight.

Easy calorie values Tweetwhatyoueat makes calorie tracking simple through the internet's first crowd-sourced calorie database. TWYE's CrowdCal database uses the calorie values entered by other users to auto-populate uncaloried foods in their diary. The database uses the most popular value entered by other users as the default value for a food. If there's a food you eat frequently, you can enter the calorie value once, and subsequent entries for the same food will auto-fill with your selected calorie value without having to enter it again. This approach is much simpler than most food diaries, which force you to search through sometimes tens of thousands of entries to find the calories for your foods. The CrowdCal database is built in natural language using terms you use to describe your foods — so there are no confusing searches or ingredient lists to comb through.

Charting Tweetwhatyoueat also has charting tools that you wouldn't otherwise have access through on Twitter, so you can chart your weight, caloric intake over time, and other features to help you understand the full picture of your eating and weight.

Survey Says

One of the longer term goals of the site is to build up a community, which will include these types of surveys, contests, and other motivational tools for users. These types of enhancements are planned for Q2-Q3 2009. Alex says, "in the immediate future, I have some more site enhancements I'd like to add on, and will continue to focus on growing the TWYE user base to a point of critical mass for these types of features.

TweetWhatYouEat launched in January 2008, and has a number of planned enhancements including an iPhone application currently under development. ■

To get started using TweetWhatYouEat, go to www.tweetwhatyoueat.com or just follow @TWYE on Twitter.

TweetWhatYouEat.com and TweetWhatYouSpend.com are subsidiaries of Ayver, LLC, and are not affiliated with Twitter.

You can subscribe to the Ace twitter at twitter.com/ace-weekly. It is highly unlikely that you will lose any weight that way, unless you have to walk a very long distance to the computer. It is possible, however, that you might pick up a free movie pass or concert ticket.

Local Online Food Diary

In the spirit of keeping money in the local economy, you can also try Lexingtonian Justin Percy's popular website for a nominal fee at www.myfooddiary.com

They write:

"MyFoodDiary.com is not a crash diet; it does not promise that you will lose 10 pounds in 2 weeks; it does not push diet pills; and it does not force you to adopt a completely new menu of foods.

Diets are temporary. If you want to lose weight and keep it off, it is time to change your lifestyle

MyFoodDiary.com is not a diet.

It is a lifestyle tool.

Its tools are designed to give you the knowledge to tweak your existing lifestyle into a healthy one.

Such an approach is much easier to maintain over the long haul." ■