HOW TO: Use Twitter Lists

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UPDATE: you can get started with Twitter Lists by following the Mashable Team Twitter list at Twitter.com/mashable/lists

The just-launched Twitter Lists feature is a new way to organize the people you’re following on Twitter, or find new people. In actuality, though, Twitter Lists are Twitter’s long awaited “groups” feature. They offer a way for you to bundle together people into groups so that you can get an overview of what they’re up to. That’s because Lists aren’t just static listings of users, but rather curated Twitter streams of the latest tweets from a specified set of users.

In other words, you can create a list that groups together people for whom you care, or that contains all the people you follow for whom there is mutual interest. For example, you might have a list of your family, and then you can get a snapshot of what they are doing by looking at that list page, which includes a complete tweet stream for everyone on the list. Lists allow you to organize the people you’re following into groups, and they even allow you to include people you’re not following.

Why Would You Use Lists?
There are many reasons for creating lists, but here are a handful of ways that you can use the Twitter Lists feature. What other ways are you using Twitter Lists? Let us know in the comments.

Create a Group - Because Twitter Lists create grouped tweet streams of the people that are on them, you can use Lists to organize your tweeps into groups based on anything you want. For example, we've created a list of everyone at Mashable. By viewing or following this list, you can easily see what all of Mashable's employees are tweeting about. You could do the same thing with your co-workers, family, or friends, or just group Twitter users based on location, subject, or anything else you can think of.

Recommend Cool Tweeps - One of the other intended purposes of Twitter Lists is to allow people to recommend other users to follow. You can create a public list of people you think other Twitter users should follow, then anyone else can visit that list and follow the people on it (or follow the list).

Follow People You Aren't Following - When you follow a Twitter List, you're not actually following every user on the list, but following the entire list — those users' tweets aren't added to your main stream. You can then visit that list and view its tweet stream. That's why you can also use Lists to follow people without really following them. For example, if there are users whose tweets you'd like to follow, but whom you don't necessarily want in your main Twitter stream (perhaps they tweet too often for your liking), you can add them to a list and then check up on their latest tweets every once in a while by viewing your list.

Creating a List

Creating a new Twitter List is a simple process. When logged into Twitter you'll see a new "Lists" section right below the search box in the right side navigation, simply click on the "New list" link to begin creating a new list. After you click on that link, a window will pop up asking you two questions.

First, you’ll be asked to provide a name for your list (i.e., Family, Web Tech Tweeple, etc.). The name is also used for your list's URL, which will be "twitter.com/username/list-name." You'll also be asked if you want your list to be public or private.

Public Lists - These lists can be seen by anyone, and anyone can follow them. Public lists are ideal for lists of recommended follows.

Private Lists - When Twitter says private, they mean private. Only the creator of private lists will be able to see or subscribe to them — not even those on the list can see private lists. That means, for example, you could create a list of your competitors and keep an eye on them without them being any the wiser.

Once you've clicked the "Create list" button, you're ready to add users. After you create a new list, you'll be prompted to search for people to add to your list, but there are really two ways to add users to lists. First, you can add users from their profile page, by clicking the lists button and checking off the lists you want to add them to before the drop down menu. You can add a single user to multiple lists.

The other way to add people is from any "following" page (i.e., by clicking on either the "Followers" or "Following" links from any profile). You'll also see the lists button on these pages, and can add anyone to your lists by clicking on it.

You can add yourself to your lists by visiting your profile page. Keep in mind that each list is currently limited to 500 people, and users may create a maximum of 20 lists. These limitations could change in the future.

Managing Lists

Both the lists you've created and the lists you're following will appear in the "Lists" section in the right-hand navigation of Twitter. Private lists will be denoted by a small "closed lock" icon. When you click on a list, Twitter will load up the tweet stream of those on the list in the main body of the Twitter page - this is similar to how Twitter displays search results.

You'll also see a link to "View list page." Clicking on that link will bring you to your list's dedicated page. This is what other people will see when they visit the page of your list in public, with one major exception: in the top right corner you'll see links to "Edit" or "Delete" your list. The delete link is self-explanatory, while the edit link allows you to change the title of your list, or change its public/private status.

To remove users from your list, follow the same procedure you used to add them, but this time uncheck the box next to the user you want to remove.

Finding & Following Lists

When you follow a list, it will show up in the "Lists" section in the right-hand navigation of Twitter. Following lists is a great way to keep tabs on tweets from a large group of people without needing to add those people's tweets to your main stream. Here are some of the ways you can find lists to follow.

People You Follow - When you visit the profile page of anyone on Twitter, you'll be able to see any of the public lists they have created, or any of the lists they follow. (NOTE: you may have to click "View all" to see every list if the person has created or is following a large number of lists.) You can also see any of the lists that person appears on. Checking out the lists that your friends have created, follow, or appear on, is a great way to locate lists you might be interested in.

Listorious - Listorious is a third-party site that maintains a categorized directory of Twitter lists. You can search or browse through lists by category, and find the most popular lists.

TweetMeme Lists - Readers of Mashable will be familiar with TweetMeme, which exposes the most tweeted links on Twitter and powers the "retweet" buttons on all of our articles. Just like it does for links, TweetMeme also finds the most tweeted about Twitter Lists.

Once you find a list you want to follow, click the "Follow this list" button to follow the list. You can unfollow a list from the same page by clicking on the "Unfollow" link.

Lists You're On & Blocking Lists

Twitter shows you how many public lists you appear on. Clicking on the "Lists" link on your profile page, which appears next to your follower and following numbers, will bring you to a page that shows you every list on which you appear. Your lists page has two tabs: one that shows the lists that are following you, and one that shows the lists you're following.