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Twitter for Seniors

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The Retired Geek Technical Tips for the Non-Technical "Over 50" Crowd

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You've never used Twitter. You say you're too old for Twitter...it's only for kids, and you could care less about reading what Lady Gaga had for lunch today. So obviously, Twitter is not for you. Wrong! If these are your thoughts about Twitter, I can say with authority that Twitter is not what you think.

Twitter does not exist to tell you what a celebrity had for lunch, or what the thoughts are of the singer who was just voted this year's American Idol (though they might tweet this information). Twitter is a handy way to break news, share knowledge, and refer people to longer forms of communication.

Here's some great examples of how I use Twitter. Where we live, in Tellico Village (a golfing and boating community in East Tennessee), the demographic is very much retired and very much over the age of 60, and some of the most important information we receive each day comes via Twitter. Updates from our three golf courses regarding whether carts are on the path or not; what the flag positions are; are any holes under repair; status of last night's storm damage...and the list goes on. The golf course superintendents post these tweets very early in the morning so the hundreds of golfers here know what to expect as they start their day on the links.

Twitter is a free social networking and micro-blogging service that enables its users to send and read messages known as tweets. Tweets are text-based posts of up to 140 characters displayed on the author's profile page and delivered to the followers. That's why information on Twitter is short, to the point and effective.

More than half the people I talk to about Twitter think they have to have a smartphone to use it. Not so! You can access Twitter via Web, Desktop Applications and smartphones. It costs nothing to use and it's just one more social media source, like Facebook, that you won't know how much you needed it until you try it.

Twitter also has a built-in function for you to befriend and track the messages of other users. This is a simple way for you connect with like-minded people outside of your usual circle. A Twitter association can be developed into a long term acquaintance (if you desire).

If you do happen to have some famous folks you like (singers, actors, golfers, etc.), Twitter is a wonderful way to unobtrusively follow what they're up to. One of my personal favorites is Brandt Snedeker, the professional golfer from Nashville. His life is comedy of tweets that make me laugh almost every day. Recently, he's been trying to

figure out how to win a war with raccoons and his garbage can...and so far the raccoons are winning!

As an individual, you have a variety of interests that a single newspaper or magazine can't cover. With Twitter you create your own personal newsfeed. You can get small bites information on local events, celebrities, politicians, hobbies or interests, your favorite news sites, etc. Much like you read a newspaper by scanning the headlines, on Twitter you can see short headlines describing an article and you can decide if you want to click on the link to read the rest of the story.

News is published on Twitter the instant it happens and if something big happens you'll likely find out when someone you follow tweets about it. In fact, Twitter became more widely known after a user tweeted a link to a picture of the US Airways plane that successfully landed in the Hudson River.

Unlike traditional media where it is a one-way medium, you can be involved in Twitter. You can re-broadcast (re-tweet) the information you find valuable. You can comment on issues and share your own views (within the 140-character constraint, of course).

You can quickly and directly contact local politicians, celebrities and other people you don't know. You don't have to find out their address and compose a lengthy message, you can instantly let them know your opinion. These are people you will probably never meet in real life but now you can get daily updates on their lives and their interests.

Public figures tend to have hundreds of thousands, if not millions of followers and they may not respond to a tweet, but they often do read their (most important) messages because a 140 character tweet is easier to read quickly than a lengthy e-mail. Celebrities usually have an aide sift through tweets and pass on only the ones they think are worth reading.

You can also use Twitter to quickly inform friends and family about your daily life. You can tweet about things that aren't important enough for an e-mail but something you would mention to your friends if you bumped into them. You can also keep track of what they are up to by following them (if they're on Twitter, of course). You may also connect with other people with similar interests and strike-up an online friendship.

In any event, much like Facebook or Skype, don't be afraid to give Twitter a try. It's free, nothing tracks you or your actions, and you might just find that it's fun! If it isn't for you...that's what the DELETE key is for.