



Twitter: Tough Questions for Charities

It's been an uncertain time for Twitter since Elon Musk's takeover and charities may need to consider if the changes going on make it an appropriate space for them to maintain a presence on. Whilst we continue to monitor developments, we have some suggestions and advice so far from charity comms professionals which may help decision-making for your organisation.

Although many big names, including charities, have withdrawn from advertising on Twitter, journalists and other influential professionals are still active on the platform, so it remains a valuable arena. The bottom line current advice is to 'wait and see' as the situation is changing on a daily basis.

There are, however, protective actions you can take now and organisations need to consider how the changes at Twitter align with their own policies, mission and values.

Background:

Since Elon Musk took over, the platform has gone through a time of ever-increasing instability. Two of the main issues are staff cuts, many of which were roles in moderation and safety, and the new owner championing 'free speech'. This could open pathways for hate speech and less moderation due to weakened community guidelines. On top of this is the risk that previously barred individuals are now returning to the platform.

Musk also wishes to verify all users which could be a means to boost depleted revenue streams. As highlighted by Sarah Clarke quoting Matt Navarro, "*If everyone is verified, no one is verified.*" This raises concerns about cybersecurity and the spread of misinformation.

The intention to diversify income streams gives rise to another potential issue of pro-advert algorithms promoting divisive content with the aim of gaining and holding user attention.

Helen Olszowska, for [Charity Digital](#), writes:

"Two of the areas Musk has the significantly reduced team at Twitter working on are a broader interpretation of free speech and a new approach to verification on the platform. As Musk tightrope-walks the lines between profitability, misinformation, and free speech as part of these projects, charities consider whether they should maintain a presence on Twitter."

She goes on to cite [Network Contagion Research Institute](#) to demonstrate the seriousness of the issue:

“The use of the ‘n word’ increased 500% since Musk’s takeover of Twitter”.

For this reason, some charities may not feel that Twitter is any longer an acceptable platform.

Sam Burne James for [Charities Against Hate](#) underlines the point by stating:

“This may particularly affect those with particular identities or protected characteristics – it is after all a horrible irony that free speech policies can lead many to feel less freedom to speak, for fear of abuse. Charities must consider where else they could instead talk to such audiences.”

What Can You Do:

Fay Schofield, Claire Riley and Erin Chastney for [Charity Comms](#) suggest ‘watch and wait’ and:

- *“Continue posting organic content for any campaigns you have going. People are still using Twitter as ‘normal’ at the moment – so keep asking for your audience’s continued support.” Talk to your audiences on Twitter about what support they need from you as an organisation. Some organisations have been conducting polls on which alternative social media platforms their audience are fleeing to, to help them plan ahead. Checking in with audiences and communities to ask, as well as watching to see what they are saying and where they might be going is vital.*
- *“Keep an eye on what’s happening. The news on this takeover is turbulent with updates almost daily, so be prepared for the worst – even if we all hope that never comes.”*

Sam Burne James notes that “[Charities Against Hate’s Guide to Best Practice in Ethical Digital Marketing & Comms Practices](#) recommends that charities consider visibly engaging with abusive content, rather than hiding, removing or ignoring it. Doing so will strengthen your online community and trust in your brand.”

Sarah Clarke, for [Charities Against Hate](#), offers the most comprehensive list of advice to prepare for further changes:

- *If you’ve not already done so, you might want to set up two-factor authentication as an extra layer of security for your Twitter account.*
- *Think about backing up your organisation’s Twitter data. You can request an archive of your data by going to your Twitter settings and support > settings and privacy > your Account > download an archive of your data.*
- [ListFollowers](#) lets you capture your followers and those that you follow. If you are adding Chrome extensions to help you capture data, check out these tips to make sure that you’re still being secure.
- *If you just want to save a thread you can use Ctrl/P and click “save as PDF” to save a PDF of the thread (be sure to click “background graphics” in more settings). This*

will just save what's visible on the screen, but there are more tips on saving longer threads here.

- *As well as checking mentions of your charity and cause, be vigilant for any new accounts that might claim to be you or speak for your cause.*
- *You might also want to review any information attached to your Twitter account (such as credit cards for ad payment).*
- *Having internal processes in place will help if you do need to moderate more content or combat misinformation.*
- *Listen to what your audiences and communities need and keep them informed about what you're doing. Your audiences and the media have not all left Twitter yet, so it's important to maintain those relationships. Think about where else they might be and consider building up your profile on any other platforms you can reach them.”*

More detail on [‘How to back up your organisation’s Twitter data’](#) can be found in this linked Charity Digital Lab article.

Other advice includes to preserve contact lists, in that if you follow someone on Twitter, that’s a channel of communication.

As mentioned by Sarah Clarke, there are third party apps that will export contacts from Twitter, though to build on this, for key contacts it may be worth reaching out and asking if there are other ways to chat.

If an organisation benefits from regular contact with the media, it may be worth creating a Listserv. Pre-social media, Listservs were a common tool to reach the media and share information.

Going Forwards:

“A ‘wait and see’ mantra is one that seems to be common view in the charity sector, with 85.6% of people polled by CharityComms saying they are watching carefully before making any change to their Twitter strategy.” ([Sarah Clarke, Charities Against Hate, ‘Should I Stay or Should I Go?’](#))

Organisations must ultimately ask themselves: ‘Does Twitter align with our communications strategy and policy and our wider organisational mission?’

It is also worth considering that social media companies are not infallible and we could see this repeated on other platforms. The concept of ‘*rented land*’ is spoken about currently by social media experts (Amy Sample Ward, author of [‘The Tech That Comes Next’](#)), in that accounts on any platform are ultimately at the whim of the company. Current advice says to move away from being too reliant on one platform and to have answers to the above questions about policy, mission and values as a benchmark.

For now, the consensus seems to be that for news, campaigns and fundraising, charities still have a place on Twitter, though **any interaction with vulnerable services users is the area where real risk is emerging.**

Alternatives to Twitter:

Although current thinking is that there is no direct substitute for Twitter, some alternatives are being looked towards.

“Proving popular at the moment is Mastodon – a “decentralised social network” consisting of different communities built with a focus on privacy and safety.” (Fay Schofield, Claire Riley, Erin Chastney, [‘What now for charities after Elon’s ‘Twitter takeover?’](#)). However, Mastodon is seen as limited for now as the platform is comprised of different ‘servers’. This means that there is not the same open arena as offered by Twitter.

Other suggested alternatives include [Tribel](#), [Cohost](#) and [CounterSocial](#).

If your group is considering moving your online presence to a different group, the expert advice is to **get ahead and communicate early – tell your community ‘this is where we still are online’ with clear signposting to the platform of your choice.**

Further Reading & Resources

[What Could Elon Musk Have in Store for Twitter?](#) Sam Burne James, Charity Comms

[What now for charities after Elon’s ‘Twitter takeover?’](#) Fay Schofield, Claire Riley, Erin Chastney

[Guide to Best Practice in Ethical Digital Marketing & Comms Practices](#) Charities Against Hate

[How could Elon Musk’s Twitter takeover affect charity comms?](#) Sam Burne James, Charities Against Hate

[Should I Stay or Should I Go?](#) Sarah Clarke, Charities Against Hate

[Should charities stay on Elon Musk’s Twitter?](#) Helen Olszowska, Charity Digital

[How to Back Up your Organisation’s Twitter](#) Data Jean, Charity Digital Lab

[Third Sector PR & Comms Facebook Group](#) – will help you to find solutions to many day to day issues for charity comms professionals. Join this group by searching the above name on Facebook.

[Digital Charities Slack Workspace](#) – a great place to ask questions to fellow charity workers. Join this group by clicking the link in the name and completing the short form.

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