

# How to #Trend on Twitter



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It wasn't too long ago you could do one of two things to ensure you were a trending topic on Twitter: either be Justin Bieber, or be a celebrity and die.

Given the way that Twitter has tweaked its trending topics algorithm, only the latter technique still works. That's because [Twitter favors novelty over popularity](#). They're only interested in terms that spontaneously become popular rather than terms like "Justin Bieber" that stay consistently popular.

I've had a few great experiences with clients orchestrating trending hashtags, plus there's also plenty of public data as to why certain topics trend. While getting a topic to trend is such a big deal, I was surprised to discover there was so little information on how to actually do this. In general, most of my advice centers around launching hashtags at live events.

## What's a hashtag?

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A [hashtag](#) in relation to Twitter is a means to qualify a topic or relationship of a tweet. The format is a word or phrase with no spaces preceded by a # sign. Not all trending topics have to be hashtags. In fact, many aren't. But people still use them to follow a meme or conversation on a certain topic or a specific event (e.g., #oscars). When you use a hashtag you're telling others, "If you want to be part of this conversation and be seen as a part of this conversation, please append your tweet with this hashtag word or phrase." From here on in, the use of "hashtag" will refer to the entire word or phrase preceded by the # sign.

Here are ten techniques I've either used or witnessed to get hashtags to trend.

## 1: Start a creative meme that asks a question or poses a challenge

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At least half of all of Twitter's trending topics are memes that pose a question or challenge. It's kind of like Jeopardy. Your tweet is the answer, and the hashtag is the question or challenge, which usually comes at the end of the tweet.

For a hashtag to act like a meme and successfully trend, then it has to give the tweeter an opportunity to do one or more of the following:

- Be funny.
- Tell a personal story.
- Express an opinion.
- Recommend something they like or don't like.

For example, here's a list of some recently trending memes. I've appended each with the question or challenge they present:

- **#failedmcdonaldsproducts** – Be funny
- **#100factsaboutme** – Tell a personal story
- **#moviesilove** – Recommend something they like or don't like
- **#thatswhyyourmyex** – Express an opinion/  
Be funny
- **#iwasthekid** – Tell a personal story
- **#threewordstoliveby** – Express an opinion
- **#icantdateagirl** – Express an opinion/  
Tell a personal story
- **#thingsthedevilinvented** – Be funny

A good creative meme challenges the user to try to outdo the responses of other tweeters.

## 2: Work a line at a big event

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Whether it's your conference, a hot concert, or the release of the latest Apple product, there are often big events where you'll see people standing in line. These people are the most underutilized marketing force.

The advantage of approaching people waiting in line is they're not distracted, they're not working, they're not rushing off to do something else, and they're not being bombarded with a million other offers and opportunities. They're bored. In fact, they're extremely bored. And they're looking for any excuse to do anything except sit there and collect dust.

The line is ripe for behavior response. By asking people to participate via Twitter, you're not asking people to buy something. You're asking them to participate. Walk up and down the line with a giant sign or flyers broadcasting your hashtag. If it's a question or challenge meme, like previously mentioned, there will be no need for explanation. But other non-meme hashtags, e.g. the name of the event, will require some explanation on how to participate.

At SXSW, one of my clients, [Dice](#), asked hundreds of people waiting in line for the DiggNation show to tweet out "What makes you a #Geek4Life?" Even with the tons of Twitter activity going on at SXSW, the hashtag successfully trended in Austin, plus [CNN iReport picked up a companion video of people standing in line answering that question.](#)

### 3: Create a contest with a time limit

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Simply attach a contest to the hashtag. Give away a prize. iPads and XBOX's are still popular. On your sign or flyer simply explain that you'll pick your favorite tweet (or a lucky winner) that incorporates the hashtag. Explain that there's a time limit. If it's at a live event, end the contest within a couple of hours. Remind them they can enter as many times as they like.

### 4: Give away a prize for the most retweeted tweet

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Give away two prizes. One for your favorite (or lucky) tweet and one that gets the most retweets. Once again, they need to incorporate the hashtag. This will incentivize them to be really creative and get their friends to retweet.

### 5: Remind tweeters to ask their followers to "Please retweet"

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Believe it or not, but [two of the top five most common words that will get you a retweet](#) are "Please retweet" or "Please RT." In general, people who follow you like you, and they want to help you out. If you ask people on occasion to retweet something for you, they will. This technique is simple and effective. And it should always be incorporated with a prize for the most retweeted tweet. Use your signage and or flyer to remind people to ask their followers to "please retweet."

## 6: Post ever-present signage at a live event

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If you're hosting a live event, make sure your hashtag, contest rules, and "please retweet" requests are consistently visible and prominently displayed. That requires signage or constant projection of this information. To build interest beforehand, the hashtag should also be prominent in promotions and any other prior communications. Too often I see this being done as an afterthought and a speaker will mention the hashtag only once on stage. This never works. Constant signage does.

## 7: Display tweets at public event

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Publicly displayed tweets juice people to participate. There are tons of great services such as [Twitterfall](#), [Visible Tweets](#), [TweetWall Pro](#), [ParaTweet](#), and [Stream Twitter](#) that do a great job displaying tweets. You just queue up the hashtag, and the programs run by themselves.

For people to participate, make sure your event has free and open Wi-Fi and decent cell reception.

## 8: Pre-write tweets for your audience

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If you just have an event hashtag, not a meme hashtag, help people participate by giving them something to retweet. At one event I produced for a client, I simply took notes of what people said during a panel discussion. Each note I took was posted as a bullet point and displayed on a screen above the stage. As I watched the Twitter stream, I saw that people were just copying what I wrote. We successfully hit the top of the trending list in San Francisco, above #SFGiants on the night before the first game of the World Series.

## 9: Time your tweets for the most active tweeting

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There is a [ton of research on what's the best time to retweet](#). The advice really comes down to when is the highest activity on Twitter. In most cases, it's 4pm. That's assuming you're only looking to get retweets from people in your time zone. But if you're looking for maximum exposure across the U.S., you should make tweet pushes at 9am, 1pm, and 4pm Pacific time.

## 10: Pay for a Promoted Trend

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Weigh what it's going to cost you to pull off these techniques. Is it worth it for you to jump through all these hoops, or would it be easier to simply be an advertiser of Twitter and purchase a [promoted trend](#)? The advantage is you don't have to do all this legwork, and you'll be placed at the top of the trending topics list. The disadvantage is if the idea is bad enough you'll promote something that simply won't trend even though you're listed.

Lastly, when you initiate a hashtag, make sure you go to the site ["What the Trend?"](#) and enter your hashtag along with an explanation.

These are some techniques that I've seen work. What are your recommendations?

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David Spark is the founder of [Spark Media Solutions](#), a media consulting and production firm. For more than 16 years, Spark has worked as a journalist and producer reporting on the tech industry in print, radio, TV, and online. His articles and advice have appeared in more than 30 media outlets including eWEEK, Wired News, PC Computing, PC World, Smart Computing, and TechTV. He's also worked as an analyst for The Guidewire Group and Gerson Lehrman Group.

In addition, Spark squandered more than a dozen years working as a stand-up comedian and comedy writer for Second City comedy troupe in Chicago.

Today, Spark is a regular contributor to Mashable, Socialmedia.biz, Technologizer, and KQED's "This Week in Northern California."

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